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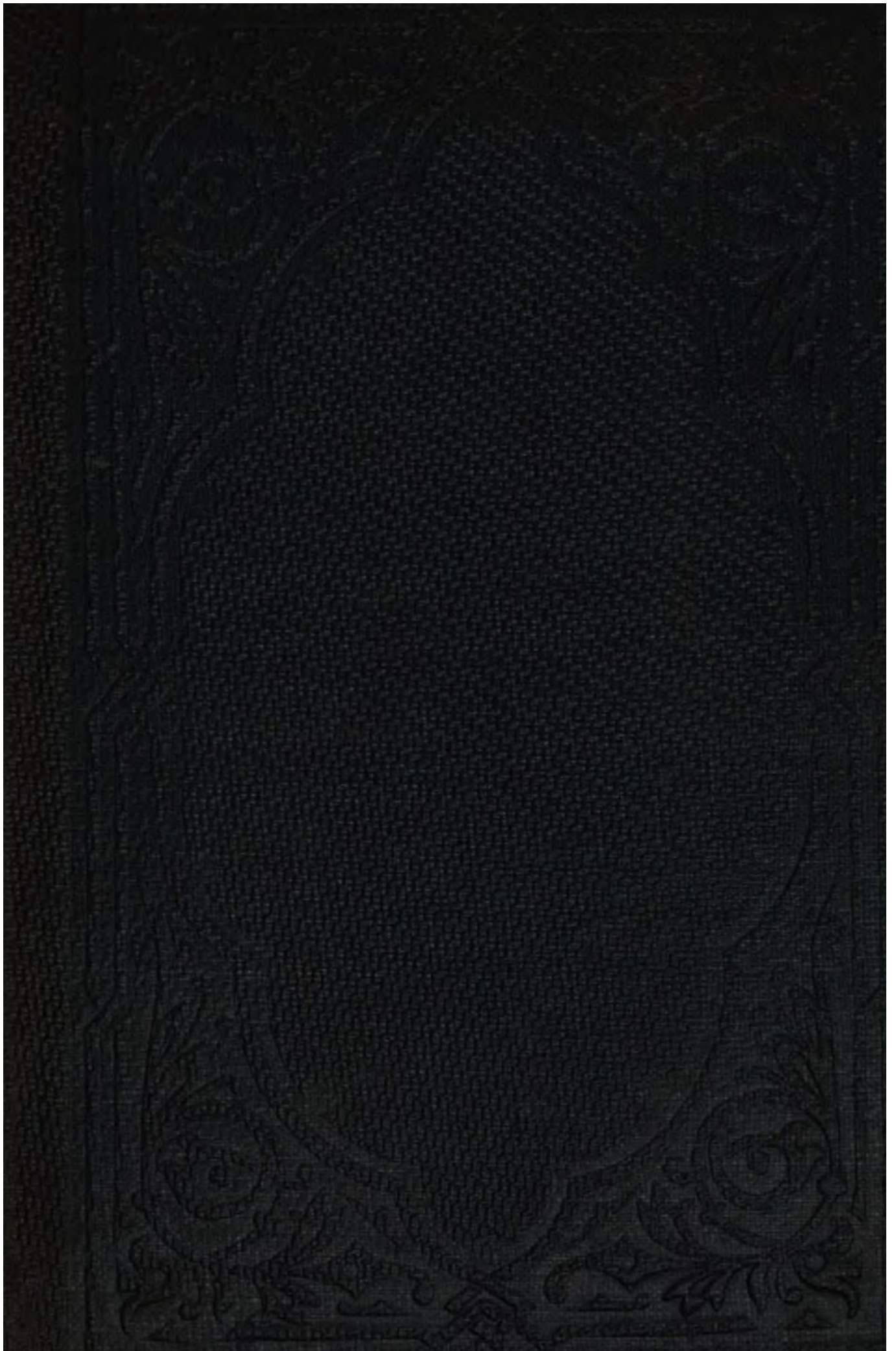
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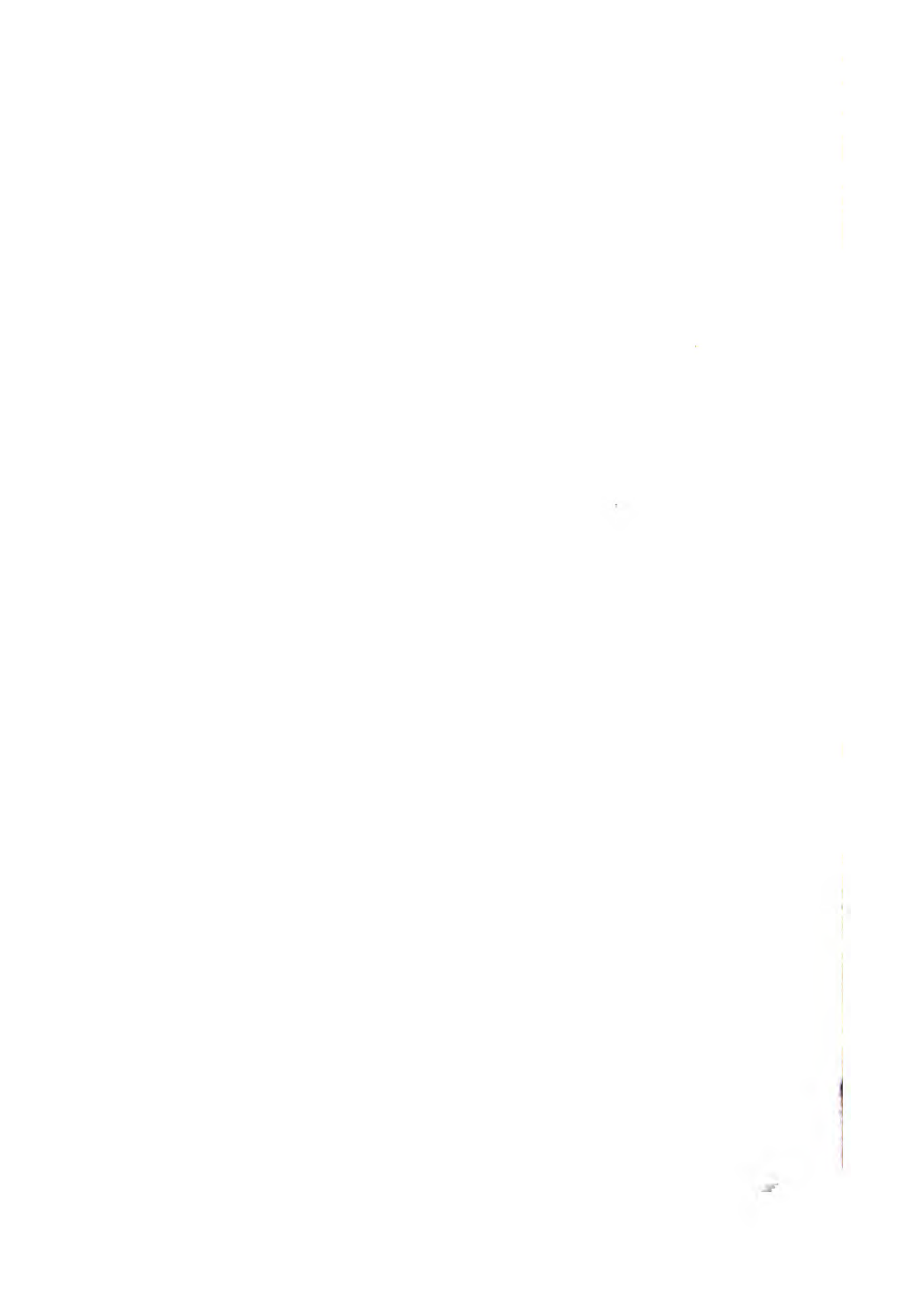
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CAMPBELL'S
SUMMARY OF THE EVIDENCES.

LESLIE ON DEISM.

WATSON'S
APOLOGY FOR THE BIBLE.

WITH PREFACE

BY

REV. JOHN G. LORIMER, D.D.

GLASGOW AND LONDON: W. R. M'PHUN,
BOOKSELLER AND PUBLISHER TO HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS
THE PRINCE CONSORT.

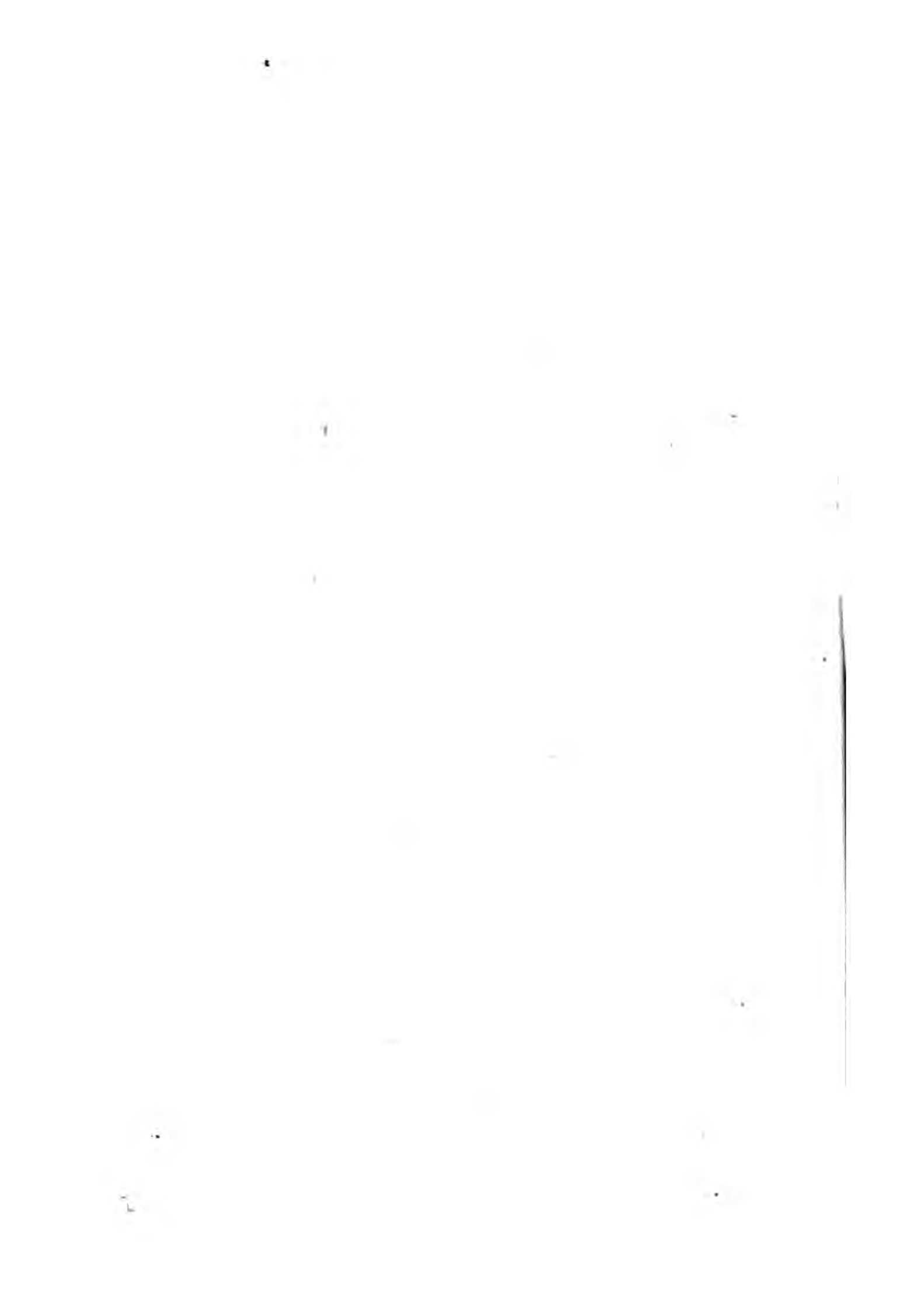
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PREFATORY ESSAY.

ON

MODERN INFIDELITY.

WHEN one considers what is the nature of true Christianity, and what are the benefits which it has conferred upon the world, even in its enfeebled and corrupted forms; how it has raised the female sex—one half the species—from the lowest social degradation; how it has abolished or mitigated slavery—humanized war—strengthened the intellect of man—promoted literature and freedom—purified morals; how, from being the religion of a poor despised Jew, it has moved onward till it has become the religion of the most enlightened, powerful, free, and civilized nations of the earth, dis-

tinguished in science and art; when it is remembered what systems of darkness and superstition and cruelty and blood it has successfully encountered and overthrown in its progress; what hopes it has awakened respecting the future; how many death-beds it has irradiated and gladdened;—one would imagine Christianity would be universally hailed as the Benefactor of mankind, and that men would as soon think of attempting to blot out the sun from the firmament as desire to deny its claims or check its advancement. What better system of belief and practice can be substituted in its room? But, strange to say, in almost all ages, there have been not a few who have denied its Divine authority, and proved its bitter enemies, treating it as if it were the foe of human happiness; and, what increases the surprise, men of superior intellect and attainments have not unfrequently been the most prominent in this unhappy class.

At the present day, infidelity has descended from a limited number in the higher or more intelligent circles of society, to a large class of the uninstructed and the poor. In Popish countries, the absurd and indefensible aspects under which Christianity has been presented; and in Protestant countries, the coldness and indifference, the divisions and the errors and ungodliness, of too many professed Christians, together with the want of adequate means of religious instruction, whether for old or young, have all powerfully contributed to this melancholy result. Perhaps

in our own country, the principles of infidelity were never more widely spread among all, and especially the humbler, classes of society, than at the present day. In all departments—in literature and science—in views of education and civil government and national happiness—we meet with the principles of unbelief, often unknown to those who hold and propagate them; while in prints and regular publications, and public meetings and lectures, we find abundant evidence that many of the poor and hard-wrought, who, of all men need the consolations and hopes of true religion most, have abandoned themselves to infidel teaching, and are bringing up their children according to the same miserable model. It is bad enough that such infidel principles are in high repute and acceptance, as that—in religion there is no finding out the truth; and that man is not responsible for his belief; and that he may attain to perfectibility in a present life, by the mere force of knowledge and political institutions;—but it is still worse, when horrible prints are circulated, caricaturing the Jehovah of the Scriptures; when the *Age of Reason* is drawn forth from its obscurity, publicly proclaimed, and set above the Bible; and when men are not ashamed to publish themselves as the Enemies of God and to advocate Atheism. And yet all who are acquainted with the state of the larger manufacturing towns, must be aware, that such things exist and prevail among a certain class of their people.

Nor is a denial of Revelation, leading onward to the

denial of a God, to be met with only in this country; traces of the same spirit appear in various parts of the world. Even in the United States of America, which are Protestant like ourselves, Atheists hold meetings for the public worship of nature,* and have regular organized congregations in various quarters; three in the city of New York. The Rev. Dr Beecher, one of the most eminent ministers of the Presbyterian Church, said, in the course of a speech before its General Assembly, two years ago—

“ It used to be alleged that there were no Atheists among us. It is too late now to sing that song in our ears. They are now in the midst of us, and on every side. They swarm like the frogs of Egypt. They go up upon our tables, and into our chambers, to pollute and destroy. And they are different from the Atheists of former days. Formerly they were men of speculation—insulated men—here and there indulging their theory, like David Hume, in his study. But now they are open, active, organized—laborious—proselytizing. Instead of looking into the airy regions of mere fanciful speculation and theory, their maxim seems to be, like that of Cromwell to his soldiers, “ Fire low.” They aim at the mass of mankind. They prepare contamination and death for our working men. They scatter the materials of political combustion among those who are our strength—the bone and sinew of our nation—where a touch will blow us into atoms. The prevalence of corruption in our cities, however lamentable, would be comparatively a trifle, so long as our farmers and the yeomanry of the land kept steady.

* See Church of Scotland Magazine, *Atheism in America*, vol. ii. p. 68

Your theorists and abstract speculators may float like balloons on the moral atmosphere, and we may gaze upon them as objects rather of curiosity than alarm; but corrupt the people, and all is lost. This is what they are now attempting to do, by the printing and circulating of tracts, by the publication of newspapers, and by a combined application of ingenuity and industry worthy of a better cause."

As the fruit of this state of things, he records the melancholy facts, that there is a practical denial of accountability, and a growing spread of licentiousness, and a disposition to look upon all law as a tyrant. It is recorded, that at the period of the French Revolution, 14,000 copies of Paine's deistical works were sent over to the United States. We are grieved to learn, that the infidels of America, in their turn, have of late years been sending large supplies of the same works to India, and that Paine is read on the banks of the Ganges by young men whose minds are only opening to consider the claims of Christianity. We need say nothing of the continent of Europe. In popish France, in the course of twelve years, ending 1829, nearly six million copies of the writings of four of the most eminent French infidels were sold and circulated. Less than 100,000 copies of the Scriptures—many of them given gratuitously—were disseminated in the same time. In popish Spain, no literature is more current than French infidel literature. Volney and Voltaire are wide spread.

This prevalence of infidelity, both at home and

abroad, is most affecting, and the guilt of those who listen to its temptations is serious and aggravated indeed. But it is well to remember that it does not come by chance, nor is it any matter of real surprise to the friends of Revelation. If the Bible speak true, this world is fallen and apostate; and if so, then it is not to be expected that the holy principles or the imperative claims of Christianity can be relished. Scripture expressly prophesies that a class of men will oppose and reject its authority even to the end. Did they not appear in the persons and character of infidels, the Scriptures would not be true; the evidence of prophecy would here be invalidated. Not a few eminent writers, such as Sir Isaac Newton, Lavater, Dr Hartley, &c., have been impressed, from the study of prophecy, with the conviction, that previous to the millennial triumphs of Christianity, there is to be a wide diffusion, if not a reign, of infidelity over Christendom. If this idea be well-founded, we may lay our account with the temporary ascendancy of infidelity; but it is only to make the glory of the Gospel, in rising superior to all its enemies, the more conspicuous. In addition to these things, we have to consider, that in the Providence of God, important ends are answered by the permission of infidelity: that the opposition of unbelievers has, in every age, been overruled for good, for guarding the truths and evidences of Revelation, by provoking care and discussion. There is nothing, then, strange or wonderful in the existence or progress of infidelity. This is what the friends of Christianity

might have anticipated. But while Christians are not taken by surprise, and while the whole success of infidelity is known before hand, and is at least limited and temporary, preparatory to the more glorious triumph of the Gospel, still it is the duty of Christians to use earnest and persevering means for exposing its fallacies and counteracting its influence. Very ample is the provision which has been made for this purpose.

The works on the Evidences of Revelation are immensely numerous and exceedingly varied. Men of all bodies professing Christianity—in all countries and ages—of all stations and professions—the layman as well as the minister of religion—have put forth books in defence of the Divine authority of the Scriptures. When the Christian church was too cold and dead to publish almost any thing else, she published on the Evidences. Of course the success of the writers has varied with their own qualifications, and the favourable or unfavourable position in which they stood for defending Christianity. One position is much more advantageous than another: the ground of a Protestant is far stronger than that of a Roman Catholic—that of an Evangelical Christian than that of a Socinian. Still there can be little doubt that good has been wrought by all in their respective spheres. In this country, I allude more particularly to Scotland, not a few important works have been published, from time to time, in defence of Divine Revelation. I cannot enumerate them all, but record those which at present occur—there may be some unknown to me. Many of the discourses which,

throughout a century, have been preached before the *Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge*, and afterwards published, have been directed to the Christian Evidences. Professor Haliburton, of St Andrew's, wrote *On the Insufficiency of Reason*; Dr Beattie, of Aberdeen, *On the Evidences*; Dr Campbell, of Aberdeen, *Essay on Miracles*; Dr M'Knight, of Edinburgh, *Gospel Harmony*; Dr Findlay, of Glasgow, *Vindication of the Old Testament*, against Voltaire; Dr Gerard, of Aberdeen, *Dissertations on the Genius and Evidences of Christianity*; Sir H. Moncrieff, an early volume of *Discourses*; Dr Hill, of St Andrew's, *Lectures on Divinity*, vol. i.; Dr George Cook, *On the Resurrection of Christianity*; Dr John Cook, *On the Books of the New Testament*; Dr Brewster, *Testimonies of Distinguished Laymen to Revelation*; Dr Keith, *On the Evidence of Prophecy, and Demonstration, &c.*; Dr Chalmers, *On the Evidences*, besides two volumes additional in the new edition of his works; Dr Ranken, *Institutes of Theology*; Rev. Mr Wilson, of Irvine, *On the Reasonableness of Christianity*; Dr Wilson, one of the General Assembly's Missionaries at Bombay, a *Comparison of Heathenism and Christianity*, in various works; Dr Dewar, of Aberdeen, a recent *Text-Book on the Evidences*. Among laymen, the works of Lord Dalrymple Hailes, *Inquiry*, in answer to Gibbon; Robert Haldane, Esq., *On the Evidences of Revelation*; R. Ainslie, Esq., *Father's Gift to his Children*; Thomas Erskine, Esq., *On the Internal Evidence*—may be men-

tioned, besides many others. These different authors have all written ably and well in the department of the Evidences. Of late various smaller works have appeared; and, among others, a *Course of Lectures* by the Ministers of Glasgow, last winter. Much, however, as has been written and published, a good deal remains to be done in the way of application. Though there are new illustrations of the argument, with the progress of particular sciences, such as Astronomy and Geology, still, it is believed, considerable and important use may be made of old materials—materials which retain all their force, and which are fresh to many. In this publication, it is proposed to collect together, and reprint, at a cheap rate, a series of valuable Tracts on the subject, for the most part inaccessible to the general reader. So far as I am aware, they have never been collected, at least in this form, before. A few notes and illustrations are added, which, by bringing down the argument to the present day, and giving some account of the writers, and of the circumstances in which their works were written, it is hoped, may not prove uninteresting or uninstrucive. All the Tracts are very able; more than one of them celebrated. The argument in each is conclusive; the combined force of the whole must, with every candid mind, be satisfactory indeed.

Before introducing the reader to these Tracts, in their appropriate order, it may not be amiss shortly to estimate the pretensions of infidelity, as a whole, at the present day. It puts itself forward in various im-

portant aspects and characters. Formerly, it was contented to be associated with the quiet speculations of literary or scientific men. Religion was thought a good thing for the body of the people; necessary at once for their restraint and comfort. Infidelity made no claims to general or exclusive usefulness; but now the case is altered, and unbelievers stand forward, contending that religion is the great evil in society, and that they are the great friends of *knowledge*, of *freedom*, and of *social happiness!* It is these pretensions which it is desirable for a moment to consider.

I. According to infidels, Christianity is the enemy of KNOWLEDGE: they are its devoted advocates. That some men professing Christianity, that a whole apostate church, are opposed to knowledge, may be true; but this does not affect the honour of true Christianity. She is not responsible for the errors and sins of mere nominal adherents. In her own nature, and according to her genuine operation upon her real disciples, she is the grand Friend and Advocate of knowledge; not every new and empirical notion, which may be dignified with the name, but of the great and established acquisitions of true knowledge. She has nothing to fear from science; she has much to hope from it. Not only has there ever been a crowd of the most learned men who have made a fair profession of Christianity, thus showing that there is no inconsistency between the two; but there is every reason to believe, that, apart from true religion, the great body of a people will never be edu-

cated. While education promotes religion, true religion is the direct promoter of education. It is when men are impressed with the conviction, that the Bible is the word of God, and contains the knowledge of the only way to eternal life, and that, as a matter of duty, it must be daily read; it is when parents are impressed with these things, that they will generally exert themselves, and make sacrifices that their children may be able to peruse the Scriptures; and when this is gained, and habits of reading formed, they will naturally turn to other departments of knowledge also. The grand impulse, however, towards a universal education, is a sense of the value and imperative claims of the Bible, as a revelation from heaven. We may safely say, that nothing but this, or some very peculiar national institutions, will persuade men to submit to the drudgery of teaching themselves or teaching others. These views are borne out by facts. What have been the countries of most education and knowledge? Where have the people been most universally instructed? They are those countries where Christianity has been most prevalent, and where the educational institutions have arisen out of the Christian church. Witness Switzerland, Holland, Scotland, New England. What party, at the present day, has done, or is doing most for popular education? Who are making the greatest sacrifices of trouble and money, rearing the greatest number of schools, &c.? The answer must be, It is the religious party, under the influence of Christianity. Infidelity boasts of its

love of knowledge and education ; but what has it accomplished on this field ? What sacrifices has it made ? What schools has it reared ? What comparison could it bear with the educational services of our Scottish forefathers, of pious memory ? The unbelievers of France may have expended large sums of money, in their contest with Christianity, and in the diffusion of their infidelity ; but what have they actually expended for the benefit of the great body of the people—to educate their families, and make them useful in society ? If their claim to being the grand friends of knowledge be well founded, they should be able easily to refer to cases of illustrious service. I need scarcely say, there are no such cases ; and that while infidelity so miserably fails as a substantial supporter of knowledge and education, it is that very Christianity, which she denounces as the patron of ignorance, which is the active, and unwearied, and self-sacrificing promoter of the cause of knowledge, among all classes of society. The friends of Christianity in Glasgow, in connexion with the Established church alone, have, in the course of a few years, raised and expended a sum of £20,000 for the instruction chiefly of the poor. What has infidelity done in the same way, and in the same space of time, in any country under heaven ? The truth is, that whatever may be her boasting, she is a stranger to the best, and indeed only motives to persuade one to diffuse abroad the blessings of education. What is here said of infidelity, is true also of all the

latitudinarian systems of education, which are based, without many perhaps being aware of it, on infidel principles. They are radically defective in power and system. So much for the claims of infidelity in comparison with those of Christianity, in the matter of knowledge, and the love and diffusion of it.

May we not add, among the proofs how little she is animated by the sincere and candid love of knowledge, that infidels themselves have discovered the most perverse *ignorance* in their treatment of Christianity? Could they have done this, at least to the extent with which they are chargeable, had they possessed the least love of true knowledge? Dr Beattie, Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Aberdeen, who himself wrote well on the Evidences, and was repeatedly brought into contact with unbelievers, remarks, "From several conversations, which it has been my chance to have with unbelievers, I have learned, that *ignorance* of the nature of our religion, and a disinclination to study both it and its conclusions, are to be reckoned among the chief causes of infidelity." It would not be so wonderful that this should hold true of a few desperate partisans. Such persons are to be found among all classes. But it appears conspicuously among the very leaders and patrons of unbelief, who boast of their literature and love of knowledge. The ignorance of *Voltaire* is almost incredible. The letters of certain Jews to him, and the learned "*Vindication*" of the Rev. Dr Findlay of this city, establish a degree of ignorance

on his part, respecting the Old Testament, of which a Sabbath-school scholar might well be ashamed. *Gibbon*, so remarkable for his learning, does not seem, so far as one can gather from his *Memoirs* and *Diary*, to have ever read any judicious exposition or able defence of Christianity. We need wonder less at his conversion to Popery, and reconversion, and ultimate termination in infidelity. *Hume*, in a letter to the Rev. Dr Blair, a literary friend, says, "I have long since done with all inquiries on such subjects (religious), and am become incapable of instruction, though, I own, no one is more capable of conveying it than yourself." Does this state of mind argue the presence of any real love of knowledge? It is stated, on the authority of Dr Samuel Johnson, well known for his scrupulous veracity, that Hume acknowledged to a clergyman in the diocese of Durham, he had never read the New Testament through with attention. Is this love of candour, or love of truth? And yet Hume wrote against the Scripture miracles, and endeavoured to show that a miracle does not admit of proof? As to *Paine*, any one who has read his work will be at a loss to decide, whether ignorance or malice predominate more in its pages. He acknowledges that he determined to write against Christianity, and then procured a Bible and Testament, that he might know what he should write against. If such were the ignorance and want of candour of the champions, what may we believe is the state of things among men of the same sentiments, but of inferior note? Had literature or

science been treated in the same way in which Christianity has been, where would have been their success and prosperity? Does not such hard treatment of revelation indicate, that the opposition proceeds, not from want of evidence, but from the fact that there is too much evidence to allow the guilty heart to remain at peace; therefore does the infidel endeavour to get rid of the subject, by reckless unprincipled resistance.

II. Another of the pretences of infidelity at the present day is, that she is the great friend and advocate of FREEDOM, while Christianity is the ally and encourager of despotism. This pretence will be found as vain as the preceding. That some systems, calling themselves Christian, have been associated with priestcraft and civil despotism—I allude more particularly to the Church of Rome—is what no one acquainted with the history of the world will deny, and far less an enlightened Christian. In this the latter sees a fulfilment of prophecy, and so a confirmation of the Divine truth of his holy faith; but nothing can be more unfair than to make true Christianity responsible for the spirit and the deeds of Popery—a spirit and deeds which she denounces and abhors. How would Deists like to be made responsible for the conduct of Pagans or of Atheists? We must look to the nature of true Christianity, as unfolded in the Scriptures, and in the genuine history of its operation; and, tried by this standard, we shall find her the warmest friend, and most successful supporter of freedom, civil and religious. The great commandment.

to love our neighbour up to the same measure and degree in which we love ourselves; the picture of Christian love exhibited in the 13th chapter of 1st Corinthians; the tenderness which is repeatedly recommended in behalf of the scruples of less informed brethren; these are all inconsistent with the selfishness of despotism, and lie at the root of the generosity of true freedom. And bating the atrocities of Popery, what has been the history of Christianity, but the history of human liberty? The humanity inspired by the Gospel, and a sense of the value of the soul of man, led to the abolition of slavery, which previously had been almost universal; while the representative councils of the Christian church, seem to have led the way to representative forms of civil government, the freest of all forms. Compare Protestant Christendom with Paganism, ancient or modern: is there any real comparison in point of civil freedom? Nay more, turn to the great struggles for freedom throughout Christendom in modern times—who were the men who made the noblest sacrifices—who spent and endured most? Were they the scholar, the man of literature, the philosopher? No. Had *they* been the only supporters, the cause of freedom would have perished. It was religious men of all ranks—men deeply imbued with Christianity who wrought out the liberties of Europe. Nay, what is very striking, it could be proved from the history of Britain, that every increase of liberty was preceded by an increase of religious knowledge and feeling; in

short, that Christianity was the parent of British liberties. Turning to Scotland, who needs to be reminded, that it was to the Christian men of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, that our country is indebted for the present free constitution under which we have the happiness to live? What infidel or Pagan can point to such sacrifices in behalf of freedom as they cheerfully endured? Where are the martyrs of infidelity; yea, where would have been the liberty which infidels now so often abuse, had it not been for the men of the Covenant, whom they profess to scorn?

Unbelievers often taunt Christians with their persecutions, and tell us how tolerant the ancient Pagans were, and how tolerant they are. The animosity and violence which have prevailed among Christians, are indeed much to be deplored. Nothing can be more opposite to the spirit of the Gospel; but if the Church of Rome, and those parties whom she more immediately infected with her spirit, be left out of the account—and in justice they must be so—from any estimate of the operation of genuine Christianity, the sum of persecution which can be laid to the score of Christians is very much abridged; and the extreme importance which is properly attached to Scripture principles and doctrines, mitigates, if it do not justify, a zeal in pressing them upon others, which would be absurd and unwarrantable in inculcating and diffusing any thing else. It is, however, a gross historical error to

imagine that the ancient heathen were tolerant toward Christianity. On the contrary, they persecuted its adherents with the most unrelenting cruelty; and Roman emperors, eminent for literature and mildness in every other department, were among the foremost of the persecutors. Jerome states that the Roman emperors of the three first centuries were estimated in that space of time to have cut off not less than 1,820,000, or nearly two millions of Christians. Of course the brunt of the persecution was confined to, comparatively speaking, a few years, which makes the results the more appalling.

With regard again to the tolerant character of modern infidelity, the claim is equally unfounded. There is nothing in its principles to teach men generosity, to regard the rights and privileges of others. Its spirit is essentially selfish; a consistent infidel has no motive to show respect or kindness to others; and what then can he be but selfish, and in the same degree where he has the power, overbearing and despotic? These reasonings are borne out by facts. Have leading infidels been eminent for their love of liberty? They may in some cases have been employed as instruments in the providence of God, in sapping and hastening the overthrow of the superstitions of Popery, misnamed Christianity; but what were the principles to which they gave utterance in doing so, and what was the system which they substituted in the room of Popery? Did they breathe of true freedom? Far from it. *Rousseau*, immediately after denouncing persecution, in a letter to D'Alem-

bert, thus speaks of fanaticism, which many would describe by the more honourable name of true religion:

“Fanaticism is not an error, but a blind, a senseless fury, which reason can never keep within bounds. The only way to hinder it from spreading, is to *restrain* those who broach it. In vain is it to demonstrate to madmen that they are deceived by their leaders, still will they be as eager as ever to follow them. I see but one way to stop its progress, and that is, to combat it with its own weapons. Little does it avail either to reason or convince. You must lay aside philosophy, shut your books—*take up the sword and punish the knaves.*” Why should religious men, fanatics though they be, in the estimation of Rousseau, be persecuted at all, and much more upon principle? If they are so miserable as the infidel represents them, that is the stronger reason why they should be pitied. How would the infidel have liked had Christians thought that scepticism was a species of fanaticism, which could be restrained only by taking up the sword and punishing the knaves, and had begun by applying it to Rousseau himself? *Voltaire*, it is well known, instead of sympathizing, as every lover of freedom ought to have done, with the persecuted Protestants of France, denounces them as “weak and obstinate men,” because they suffered so much, rather than give way to the usurpations of the Church of Rome. *Hume*, it is equally well known, in his *History of England*, uniformly takes the side of the oppressor, and does all that lies in his power to blacken and misrepresent the

character of the persecuted, though to them we are in a great degree indebted, under God, for our civil and religious liberties. Does this indicate any thing like an alliance between infidelity and the love of freedom? With regard to *Gibbon* again, in spirit and character he was intensely selfish. An able writer who has examined his *Diary and Journals* with care, declares, that "from the beginning to the end of his life, there is not one noble generous sentiment expressed." This holds out but a poor prospect for so generous a feeling as the love of liberty. Accordingly, we need not wonder to learn, that *Gibbon*, when a member of Parliament, was a silent supporter of measures adverse to freedom; and that in 1779, after denouncing the existing administration as little short of traitors, in fifteen days he accepted office under them; in other words, he was bribed into a change of sentiment. Does this speak much for his patriotism or love of freedom? As to *Paine*, whatever may have been the success with which his political pamphlets were attended, though they may have had an influence in shaking off despotic principles, and in giving currency to more liberal institutions, yet who does not know that, in his own spirit and conduct, he was an utter stranger to true toleration? What are the terms in which he speaks of Christian men, and especially Christian teachers? Are they not those of unmeasured abuse and violence? Does he not incessantly impute the worst motives to them, and what

does this indicate? Does it indicate the presence of that toleration and liberty of which he speaks so much? If Christians are so ignorant, superstitious, and deceived, as he represents them to be, he should feel for them the deeper compassion. Is this his spirit or his tone? Does he not rather show the temper of the persecutor?

Impressive facts proclaim that infidelity, so far from being tolerant, is intensely persecuting. It is not unknown to the student of history, that many of the most atrocious persecutors in the Church of Rome, were infidels under the guise of ecclesiastics. They persecuted the saints of God to the death, for not believing what they themselves did not believe. And when infidelity actually came forth from its concealment, and appeared openly at the head of the government of France, forty years ago, what was the character which she manifested to the world? One would have expected that, after all her outcry about toleration and freedom, she would have been remarkable for the tenderness, ability, and success, with which she upheld the cause of liberty—bearing with the ignorant, and protecting the weak; but what is the fact? She stood forth as the very demon of persecution, under the name of freedom, and persecuted not only the Roman Catholics, but the Protestants—in short, Christianity; shutting up the churches, abolishing the sacraments and sabbath, with a virulence and blood thirstiness hitherto unknown in the history of the world. French infidelity, while denouncing the

Gospel as cruel, butchered two millions of the people of that unhappy country in seven short years. The pagan emperors of Rome, could boast of nothing like this; and yet infidels would have us to believe that they are tolerant, and the only true friends of freedom! Let them not only disown and abominate the conduct of their brethren of France, but change their own tempers and dispositions when speaking of Christianity and of Christians, before they expect to receive any credit for such idle assertions. I subjoin a statement of the numbers who fell by the hands of infidelity, from the work of one of themselves.

Prudhomme, a republican, gives the following table .

Guillotined by Sentences of the Revolutionary Tribunal.

Nobility of both sexes	2028	
Wives of labourers and artisans	1467	
Priests	1135	
Religieuses	350	
Common persons	13,633	
	<hr/>	18,603
Women died of premature child- birth	3,748	
Women killed in La Vendee	15,000	
Children do. do.	22,000	
Men slain do. do	900,000	
Victims at Nantes	32,000	
Killed at Leon	31,000	
	<hr/>	1,003,748
		<hr/>
		1,022,351

Of course, the loss of life, as a whole, was far greater

than these figures describe ; 20,000 persons are estimated to have died of famine ; and in ten years, not less than three millions perished in France alone : 800,000 by civil war. During the Convention, the guillotine struck off a thousand heads per day. The reader will now be able to judge with what truth infidelity represents Christianity as the friend of despotism, and herself as the great pillar of freedom ! The claim is not only not true, but it is the very reverse of the truth.

III. There is still another pretension which we must shortly consider ; and it is this, that infidelity conducts to human HAPPINESS AND PERFECTIBILITY, while, to say the least, Christianity can establish no such claim. It is well known that there is a class of speculators, many of whom avow no hostility to revelation, who dream that, by the spread of general knowledge, the improvement of arts and sciences, and well-poised political institutions, our race, apart from religion, may be conducted to a state of perfectibility and happiness on earth. Of course this theory proceeds upon a denial of the most obvious truths of revelation, such as the depravity of man, and may therefore justly be called infidel in its character, whether men are aware of it or not. Of the good which such influences as those to which we have referred, may be able to work out for the race of man, we do not pretend to judge. It is very probable that in some respects they would improve his outward condition ; but we hold, that infi-

delity, whatever character it may assume, is utterly inadequate to meet the circumstances and the wants of man, and therefore can never lead him to that happiness of which it boasts. We shall show that the most eminent infidels, so far from being happy in their own minds, have been miserable; and that the only certain approximation which is made to happiness in this world, is through the medium of genuine Christianity. We have seen that infidelity is neither the friend of knowledge nor the friend of freedom: that its influence is hostile to both. It is obvious that this must stand very much in the way of that millennium of bliss of which it speaks. Two important elements, conducive to human happiness, do not acknowledge infidelity; they disown it. But, as a matter of fact, consider what has been the prevailing state of mind on the part of unbelievers, and say whether it be desirable it should be universal, or whether, if it really were so, the general happiness would thereby be promoted. We have seen how selfish some of the most distinguished unbelievers were—that they had no motives to be generous. Now it is in the exercise of the more generous dispositions, those which point to the welfare of others, that our true happiness lies. So far then infidelity leaves men strangers to abiding enjoyment; but let us refer to particular cases. The following is Voltaire's view of human life. Does it argue the presence of happiness? Does it point to the perfectibility of man?

“Who,” says Voltaire, “can without horror consider the whole world as the empire of destruction? It abounds with wonders; it also abounds with victims. It is a vast field of carnage and contagion. Every species is without pity pursued and torn to pieces through the earth, and air, and water. In man there is more wretchedness than in all the other animals put together. He loves life, and yet he knows that he must die. If he enjoys transient good, he suffers various evils, and is at last devoured by worms. This knowledge is his fatal prerogative, other animals have it not. He spends the transient moments of his existence in diffusing the miseries which he suffers; in cutting the throats of his fellow-creatures for pay; in cheating and being cheated; in serving that he might command; and in repenting of all he does. The bulk of mankind are nothing more than a crowd of wretches, equally criminal and unfortunate; and the globe contains rather carcasses than men. I tremble at the review of the dreadful picture, to find that it contains a complaint against Providence itself: AND I WISH I HAD NEVER BEEN BORN.”

What a contrast is this view of human life, to that entertained by Haliburton! an eminent Professor of Theology at St Andrew's, one of the earliest writers on the Evidences in Scotland. If all men could honestly make use of such language as the following, might it not well be said, that our race had reached the perfection of earthly happiness?—

“I shall shortly get a very different sight of God from what I have ever had, and shall be made meet to praise him for ever; oh! the thoughts of an incarnate Deity are sweet. Oh! how I wonder at myself, that I do not love him more, that I do not admire him more. What a wonder that I can enjoy such compo-

sure under all my bodily pains, and in the view of death itself! What a mercy that, having the use of my reason, I can declare his goodness to my soul! I long for his salvation. I bless his name. I have found him, and die rejoicing in him. O, blessed be God that I WAS BORN! O that I was where he is! I have a father and mother, and ten brothers and sisters in heaven, and I shall be the eleventh. Oh! there is a telling in this providence, and I shall be telling it for ever! If there be such a glory in his conduct toward me now, what will it be to see the Lamb in the midst of the throne! BLESSED BE GOD THAT EVER I WAS BORN."

These are not peculiar cases. Turn to the experience of Hume. I do not refer to the affected merriment of his death-scene, and its real misery and awfulness—a death-scene of infidelity which the nurse, who witnessed it, declared she would, on no consideration, attend again; I refer to his own state of mind, as declared in his *Treatise on Human Nature*, between thirty and forty years before his death, when he was in full health and vigour.

"When I look abroad, I see on every side dispute, contradiction, anger, calumny, and detraction; when I turn my eye inward, I find nothing but DOUBT AND IGNORANCE. All the world conspires to oppose and contradict me; though, such is my weakness, I feel my opinions loosen and fall off of themselves when unsupported by the approbation of others. Every step I take is with hesitation, and every new reflection makes me dread an error and absurdity in my reasoning; for, with what confidence can I enter on such bold enterprises, when, besides those numberless infirmities peculiar to myself, I find so many that are com-

mon to human nature? The intense view of manifold contradictions, the infirmities in human reason, have so worked upon my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more likely and more probable than another. Where am I, or what? From what causes do I derive my existence, and to what condition shall I return? Whose favour shall I court, and whose anger shall I dread? What beings surround me, and on whom have I any influence, or who have any influence on me? *I am confounded by all these questions, and begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable; environed with the deepest darkness, and utterly deprived of the use of every member and faculty.*"

It is unnecessary to remind the reader of the degraded life of Paine, or his wretched death; but I beg to quote two sentences from a letter of Franklin to his brother infidel, on showing him in manuscript his *Age of Reason*, and requesting his opinion of it. This letter is little known, and unbelievers have denied its authority; but its genuineness has recently been established beyond all question. Franklin's remarks are, "I would advise you not to attempt unchaining the tiger, but to burn this piece before it is seen by any other person." "If men are so wicked *with* religion, what would they be *without* it?" Here the sagacious but sceptical Franklin confesses infidelity to be a tiger—a description which the scenes of the first French revolution afterwards showed to be fearfully correct. He acknowledges also its inability to restrain wickedness. What prospect, then, does unbelief hold out, of conducting to the perfectibility of our race? where

the social millennium under the auspices of infidelity?

The *Age of Reason* reminds me of the *Goddess of Reason*—the unhappy profligate young woman who, in France, consented to be publicly recognised as the personification of infidelity. Surely she should be a picture of happiness—an emblem of the glories of infidelity when universal. The following is the account of her, taken from the Paris papers of 1st August, 1817:—

“Died, within these few days, in the hospital for pauper lunatics at Salpetriere, where she had lived unpitied and unknown for many years, the famous Theroigne de Mericourt (the Goddess of Reason), the most remarkable of the heroines of the Revolution. She, who was taught publicly to blaspheme her Creator and to dishonour her sex (for she appeared in public nearly naked), was, for the last twenty years of her miserable life, subject to the greatest of human calamities—the deprivation of reason. She repented very severely of her horrible crimes, and her few lucid intervals were filled up by the most heart-rending lamentations. She died at the age of 57.”

Righteous was the moral retribution of heaven—the Goddess of Reason for twenty years bereft of reason!

I might quote the last words of the chief of the Utilitarian School, Jeremy Bentham, who, I understand, belonged to the same unhappy class of infidels. Shortly before his death, he said to one of his disciples, who was watching over him, “I feel that I am dying; our care must be to *minimize* the pain. Do not let any of the servants come into the room, and keep

away the youths; it will be distressing to them, and they can be of no service. Yet I must not be alone. You will remain with me, and you alone; and then we shall have reduced the pain to the least possible amount." What a contrast between the dying infidel and the dying Christian! Would the latter, in such circumstances, say, that the chief care was to diminish the pain, and to keep his family from him? Would it not rather be to glorify God, by meekly bearing the appointed suffering? and would it not be his earnest desire to see his children, in the prospect of separation, and give them those counsels which, with the Divine blessing, might bring them to the same eternal blessedness which stretched out before him?

I shall conclude these illustrations, which might be greatly enlarged, by quoting the case of Lord Byron, and contrasting with it the case of Henry Martyn, the late eminent Christian missionary to Persia. Both were men of first-rate talent and accomplishment, and both were called to the experience of the severest trials. The one was an infidel, the other was a decided Christian. Let us see their respective state of feeling in life, and judge whether unbelief leads to the perfectibility of man. On the death of one of his early friends, Byron thus writes:—

“My friends fall around me, and I shall be left a lonely tree before I am withered. I have no resource but my own reflections; and they present no prospect here or hereafter, except the selfish satisfaction of surviving my betters. I am indeed most wretched.”

On another occasion, he gave a more comprehensive view of the state of his mind:—

“Why, at the very height of desire and human happiness—worldly, amorous, ambitious, or even avaricious—does there mingle a certain sense of doubt and sorrow—a fear of what is to come, a doubt of what is? If it were not for hope, what would the future be? A hell! As for the past, what predominates in memory? Hopes baffled! From whatever place we commence, we know *where it must all end*; and yet what good is there in knowing it? It does not make men wiser or better. If I were to live my life over again, I do not know what I would change in my life, unless it were for, *not to have lived at all*. All history, and experience, and the rest, teach us that good and evil are pretty equally balanced in this existence, and that what is most to be desired is, *an easy passage out of it*. What can it give us but years? and these have little of good *but their ending*.”

On one of the anniversaries of his birth, he thus writes:—

“At 12 o'clock I shall have completed thirty-three years. I go to bed with a heaviness of heart, at having lived so long, and to so little purpose. It is now three minutes past 12, and I am thirty-three.

‘Eheu fugaces Posthume, Posthume,
Labuntur anni.’

But I do not regret them so much for what I have done, as for what I might have done.”

Poetically he thus describes his own career:—

“A wandering mass of shapeless flame,
A pathless comet and a curse,
The menace of the universe,
Still rolling on with innate force,
Without a sphere, without a course—
A bright deformity—on high
The monster of the upper sky.”

How different the feeling of Martyn! On the death of one most dear to him, he says,—

“Can it be that she has been lying so many months in the cold grave? Oh, my gracious God! what should I do without thee! There is nothing in the world for which I could wish to live, except it may please God to appoint me some work to do. O thou incomprehensibly glorious Saviour! what hast thou done to alleviate the sorrows of life!”

On another occasion he writes:—

“I like to find myself employed usefully in a way I did not expect or foresee. The coming year is to be a perilous one; but my life is of little consequence, whether I finish the Persian New Testament or not. I look back with pity on myself, when I attached so much importance to my life and labour. The more I see of my own works, I am the more ashamed of them; for coarseness and clumsiness mar all the works of man. I am sick when I look at the wisdom of man; but am relieved by reflecting, that we have a city, whose builder and maker is God. The least of his works is refreshing. A dried leaf, or a straw, makes me feel in good company; and complacency and admiration take the place of disgust. What a momentary duration is the life of man! *Labitur et labetur in omne volubilis ævum*, may be affirmed of the river; but men pass away as soon as they begin to exist. Well, let the moments pass,

‘They waft us sooner o’er
This life’s tempestuous sea;
Soon we shall reach the blissful shore
Of blest eternity.’”

The last record from his dying hand was in these words—“I sat in the orchard and thought with sweet

comfort and peace of my God—in solitude my company—my Friend—my Comforter.”

Such is a brief illustration of the pretension of infidelity to secure the perfection of man. I have not taken inferior men. I have drawn my examples from the most noted of their class. Suppose that all men were infidels—that society was entirely made up of such persons as Voltaire and Hume and Paine and Byron, would its general happiness be advanced? would we be making an approximation to social perfectibility? Would we not rather be decidedly frustrating the hope of both? It is, comparatively speaking, the small number of infidels, and their conformity to Christian usages and institutions where they do exist, which render them tolerable. On the other hand, suppose that true Christianity were universal—that the world were filled with such men as Haliburton or Martyn—who can doubt that the happiness would be universal, and that we would be upon the high road to the perfectibility of society? It is vain to urge the unhappy and immoral lives and wretched deaths of many professed Christians; these things will not prove infidelity to be the source either of personal or social happiness; the important point to mark is, that where Christians are wretched, as regards their comfort and hope, this is owing either to their not really being Christians, or to their falling far short of their rights and privileges as Christians. In no case is it owing to Christianity, but to the want of it; whereas, in the case of unbelievers, their disquietude and wretchedness

can be traced directly to their infidelity, and so it is justly held responsible for them.

While I have thus endeavoured to expose the false claims of modern infidelity to the character of the friend of knowledge, the friend of freedom, and the friend of social happiness, I have been indirectly recommending the Evidences of Christianity, by proving *her* to be the true friend of all these great interests. I desire to remind the reader, in taking leave of him, that it is not enough to study and be satisfied with the Evidences of the Divine authority of the Scriptures. A man may be convinced, from various external and other marks, that a letter has come from above, and yet be quite indifferent or hostile to the contents of that letter. He may receive the letter as from God, and still perish in his sins. It is indispensable that he receive the contents of the letter into his heart, so as to influence and regulate his life, as well as the outward letter into his hands; and this can be attained only through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Let every reader, then, clearly see the way, and the only way, in which he can partake of the real benefits of Christianity. Let him remember that it is through the faith of the Gospel, as a message of mercy to his own soul as a sinner, conveyed by the Spirit, that he can alone attain to the most conclusive of all proofs that the Bible is Divine, even the proof of a personal experience—the proof of its marvellous adaptation to his circumstances and necessities—at once bestowing peace and purity and hope; and let him therefore pray to

the Father of Lights while he reads his word. And let Christians not be contented to know the truth for themselves: let them be zealous and unwearied in spreading abroad its proofs among others. The enemies of Revelation are active; let not the friends be remiss. "Truth is great and will prevail;" but in a fallen world it will only do so if appropriate means are perseveringly applied. I cannot better conclude, than in the solemn words of the great Andrew Fuller, spoken above forty years ago, but remarkably applicable to the present day. They should strike a note of warning into every Christian heart, and awake the faithful to new zeal and devotedness against infidelity in all its forms.

"The human heart," says he, "has ever been averse from the Gospel of Christ, but the turn or temper of the present age is peculiarly favourable to infidelity. In much the same manner as in former ages men were violently attached to a persecuting superstition, they are now verging to the opposite extreme, and are in danger of throwing off all religion. Our temptations, and those which will attend our posterity after us, are likely, therefore, to be widely different from what they have hitherto been. Hitherto nominal Christianity has been no reproach, but reproach has attached itself to the other side. The case, in this respect, may soon be altered. Men grow bold in avowing their contempt of Christianity, and many among the dissipated part of the youth are following their example. Now, if characters of this description should spring up in sufficient numbers, not only to keep each other in countenance, but to turn the tide of reproach against Christians, as a company of wrong-headed enthusiasts, we shall soon see which side the mass of mankind will take. Their characters being

loose and profligate, they have long felt themselves condemned by the Gospel, and this is a matter that does not sit very easy upon them. Nothing has kept them from rejecting it before, but the disgrace that would follow upon their becoming open infidels. Whenever, therefore, this disgrace shall be removed, we may expect them to go off in great companies. The slightest observation of human nature must convince us, that the greater part of mankind, even in religious matters, are governed by fashion. They go with the course of the world. So great an influence has the tide of public opinion upon them, that even where it is not altogether agreeable to their own views and inclinations, they are nevertheless frequently carried away by it; but if it be thus where public opinion and private inclination are at variance, it must, of course, be much more so in those cases wherein they are agreed. This will be a union of the wind and tide; and the vessel which is carried along by such a joint influence, can scarcely have any thing left to impede its progress. * * * * It is not unlikely that almost all our religious controversies will soon be reduced to one, upon which the great body of men will divide. Is Christianity true or false? Is there a God? Is there a heaven and a hell? or is it all a fiction? Agitated by these important questions, the greater part of the inhabitants of Europe, and perhaps of America, including our own posterity, may rank either as real Christians or as open infidels." Vol. vii. pp. 141, 142.

Can any parent who loves Christianity, or loves his children, read these solemn sentences and not be aroused to the warfare against infidelity? Earnestly do I pray that the God of Truth may bless the present publication, and use it as armour which shall do good service, in defence of his own cause. He often honours the humblest means.

It may be noticed, that the writers of the following excellent Tracts belonged to different denominations of professed Christians. Their perfect concurrence here is the more valuable. Principal Robertson, Principal Campbell, of Aberdeen, Dr Campbell, of Edinburgh, Mr Bonar, of Perth, were all ministers of the Church of Scotland. Mr Leslie was a minister of the Church of England; and Mr Carson, who is still alive, is a Dissenting minister in Ireland, of the Congregational body.

JOHN G. LORIMER

THE
CHRISTIAN'S ARMOUR
AGAINST
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SUMMARY OF THE EVIDENCES.

BY THE

LATE REV. JOHN CAMPBELL, D.D.,
One of the Ministers of the Tolbooth Church, Edinburgh.

THOUGH the single argument handled in each of the Tracts, now for the first time collected together, would, by itself, establish the Divine truth of Christianity; yet it is desirable to have a brief but comprehensive summary of the whole question of the Evidences. We begin with a general outline of the entire field—an outline drawn by the pen of the late Rev. Dr Campbell of the Tolbooth church, Edinburgh. I am not aware that there is any shorter, or more correct and full, and beautiful statement, in the English language. In the original paper, he supports every position of importance by numerous learned notes, which it is not necessary to quote.

* * * * *

THE Scriptures contain strong *internal characters of divinity.*

Certain books are put into our hands, confessedly of high antiquity, and purporting to have been given

by inspiration of God. Though written by different penmen, at distant periods, and on various subjects, a wonderful uniformity of design pervades the whole. The style employed by the several writers, is remarkably simple, majestic, and awful. These books contain authentic records of ancient transactions, which perfectly harmonize with the best accounts of profane historians. They inculcate a pure and sublime morality; exemplified by a character of perfect excellence, the conception and delineation of which, by the writers of the life of Jesus, seems no less to transcend the power of man, than any of the wonders they record. They communicate most important information, respecting both the duty and the happiness of man. They give descriptions of the character and perfections of God, which, though nature could never have discovered, do well accord with the best principles of right reason. They remove the vail, which hides the spiritual and eternal world from our view, and open most interesting prospects, into which our unassisted faculties could never have penetrated, respecting the counsels and dispensations of God, the origin and destiny of the human race. And withal, in those instances in which they are received as true, they acquire an authority over conscience, possessed by no other writings, which fails not to produce a most beneficial change in the character, sentiments, and pursuits of men. Blessed indeed is that man, who resigns himself, without reserve, to the influence of these inestimable writings! *He hath the witness in himself*, and wants no other evidence of their heavenly origin. This *experience* of the truth of Scripture, is not only more satisfying to the mind than any other species of proof, but indeed, is indispensably necessary to the attainment of its ultimate design, *the end of our faith, the salvation of the soul*. Nay, the essential truths of revelation, seem to have their foundation so deeply laid, in the original

principles and sentiments of the human mind, that their power has often been felt and confessed by men, who have professed to reject or disregard the gospel. In moments of serious reflection, conscience, even in wicked men, sometimes joins its testimony to that of Scripture, with an authority, which neither the sophistry of scepticism, nor the blandishments of sensuality, are able to silence. * * * *

It must be owned, however, that the minds of avowed unbelievers, cannot be expected to possess that impartiality, and freedom from prejudice, which is in some degree necessary to discern the proper import and value of the *internal evidence* of Christianity. Other proofs, therefore, more extrinsic and palpable, were offered to the world on its first promulgation. And here it is impossible not to admire the infinite wisdom of God, displayed in the specific nature of that evidence, on which our assent to the gospel is claimed. It is that of *supernatural facts*, accredited by proper *testimony*; a species of evidence, which, precluding as well the impositions of fancy, as the subtleties of reasoning, lies open to investigation, is less liable to mistake, and seems well adapted to produce conviction on the minds of those to whom they are exhibited. These facts regard the character and ministry of Jesus Christ; the wonderful circumstances of his life, and death, and resurrection; the miracles performed by himself, and afterwards by his apostles in his name. If these can be disproved, or if it can be shown, that the grounds on which they are believed, are insufficient to sustain the conclusions that are built upon them, then our "faith is vain,"* and the Christian cause must fall to the ground. On the other hand, if the evidence offered in support of the miracles of the gospel, appear sufficient to authorize our belief of them, then it follows, that the gospel must be true, because "no man can do *such* miracles, except God be with him."† If

* 1 Cor. xv. 17.

† John iii. 2.

it were reasonable for the first Christians to believe, it must be reasonable for us to do so now. The whole argument, then, resolves itself into these two questions: **Are we, at this distant period of time, possessed of the same documents** on which the ancient Christians received the gospel; and if we are, is there reason to believe that the wonderful *facts contained in them are true?* Here a fair ground of discussion is opened, both to the friends and foes of Christianity. To enter fully into the detail of the argument, would be quite impracticable. But it may not be unuseful to recapitulate the leading points of evidence, which are largely established by many advocates of the Christian cause.

Let it then be recollected, that the *circumstances* relative to the personal history of Jesus Christ, the miracles performed by Himself during his life, and by his apostles after his departure from the world, *are delivered in certain books*, purporting to have been written by persons who had witnessed these transactions, or who had been intimately connected with such original witnesses; that these histories were soon published to the world, and in the country where the events which they record are understood to have happened; that from the very beginning, they were quoted with great respect, by a succession of Christian writers, and publicly read and expounded in their religious assemblies; that after the most scrupulous investigation, they were received by the early Christians as genuine and authentic; that catalogues of the canonical books are given by many of the writers of those times, in all of which the historical books are included, and when the canon of the New Testament was finally settled, it contained precisely the same books which belong to it at this day; that these were uniformly appealed to by the primitive Christians, as the ground and standard of their faith, in all their controversies with their enemies, and with one another;

nay, that they were explicitly acknowledged and appealed to as such, by acute and learned adversaries, who made them the object of their attack: all these things are clearly ascertained by indubitable testimony. It therefore follows, that these sacred books were indeed written by the persons to whom they are ascribed, and that they contain faithful records of those facts and doctrines, which were *most surely believed* by the primitive Christians. We are therefore in possession of the *same documents*, on which the gospel was at first believed.

If we proceed to attend to the nature of the apostolic testimony, and the circumstances in which it was delivered, we shall also find abundant reason to conclude, that the testimony which they give is *true*.

They could not be *deceived* as to the facts which they reported. Whatever difficulty there may be in giving such a definition of a miracle, as will obviate all the exceptions of a subtle and captious adversary, there can be no difficulty in perceiving when a man that was born blind, receives the faculty of sight; when one that was deaf and dumb, is enabled to hear and to speak; or when one that had been dead for several days, is restored to life. This requires no superior endowments of mind. In such cases, a plain, illiterate fisherman, is as well qualified to judge, as the most learned and ingenious philosopher.

There appears no reason to call in question the *integrity* of the apostles. The design in which they were engaged, might well preclude the suspicion of dishonesty. They were attempting to reform a degenerate world, and calling men to the love of truth, and the practice of universal goodness. Nor was there any thing in their character or conduct, that seemed unsuited to the views which they avowed. Their writings indicate an unaffected simplicity. They con-

ceal nothing, however unfavourable to themselves or their brethren, and faithfully record their own imperfections and errors. They were actuated by no selfish views, but were uniformly moved by a strong disinterested benevolence. Their most inveterate enemies found it impossible to fix the smallest imputation on their character. Could such men propagate falsehood, to subserve the cause of truth, and relinquish all pretensions to integrity, in order to lead men to purity and virtue?

They could have no *interest* in attempting to impose on the world. The considerations of interest indeed, lay altogether on the opposite side. Had they quietly submitted to the prohibition of the Sanhedrim, and preached no more in the name of Jesus, they might have lived at home, in security, and ease, and credit. By persevering in their testimony, they renounced every prospect of advantage in the world, and exposed themselves, not to a doubtful, but certain prospect of sufferings and death. What could induce them to this, but the fullest conviction of the truth and importance of the things which they testified? And therefore, when the Sanhedrim endeavoured to intimidate them, by threatening grievous penalties, if they should continue to "teach in the name of Jesus," they made no other reply, than the artless but unanswerable apology, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

But though the apostles had been willing, it was not in their *power* to impose on the world. If infidels insinuate that they were either wild enthusiasts, or designing impostors, will they also affirm, that it was in their power to make thousands of other men enthusiasts and impostors too? The observations that have been already made deserve regard, though the testimony of the apostles had related to facts, of which they themselves and their associates had been the o-

witnesses. But it must be remembered, that the ministry of Jesus had been very public, and the miracles which he performed, "were not done in a corner."† Multitudes had seen them, throughout the cities and villages of Judea, and some of the cases had become the subject of judicial investigation. By publishing these things, (if the cause had been bad,) they furnished their adversaries with every advantage. Could they persuade their countrymen, that several thousands of men and women had, on two different occasions, been fed with a few loaves and fishes; that a blind man, cured by Jesus, had been strictly examined, and afterwards, through envy, excommunicated by the Sanhedrim; or that Lazarus of Bethany had been raised from the dead? These things could never have been advanced and insisted on, if they had not been true. If they were certainly false, the detection was easy, and must have inevitably ruined the cause of the apostles. The enmity of those who then opposed the gospel, must surely have disposed them to manifest the alleged imposition, had it been in their power. This, however, was never done, nor attempted to be done.

But the apostles were not merely the witnesses of the life, and miracles, and resurrection of Jesus. *They themselves* were endowed with the *power of working miracles*, and performed many no less signal than those that had been done by their Lord. This power they ascribe altogether to Him.‡ And they were enabled also to impart it to others.§ These miraculous gifts were exercised with great publicity, and proved effectual for converting many to the faith of Christ. Accounts of them were speedily communicated to the world;|| and the apostles in some of their letters to Christian churches, refer to the exercise of such gifts,

§ Acts viii. 15.

† Acts xxviii. 26. ‡ Acts ii. 33.
|| Acts ii., iii., *et passim*.

as well known and uncontroverted facts.* Let the reflecting mind pause on these amazing circumstances ; and consider, if it be possible to account for them on the principles of enthusiasm or imposture.

These considerations are greatly strengthened by observing, that though the miraculous facts undoubtedly form a principal part of the history of the New Testament, they do by no means occupy the whole of it, but are interwoven with multifarious details, both of *domestic and national history*. They do not appear in insulated narratives, which might easily be extracted from the rest, and yet a consistent series of ordinary occurrences be still preserved. The whole must stand or fall together. The circumstances of time and place in regard to particular transactions, are minutely specified ; the names of individuals, both in public and private life, are mentioned ; and many incidents related, which must have been well known, not only to smaller circles, but to the whole Jewish nation. Thus, the birth, and ministry, and death of the Baptist John ; the circumstances that preceded the birth of Jesus ; the visit of the Magi ; the inquiries and consternation of Herod ; his massacre of the children at Bethlehem ; the testimonies of Simeon and Anna ; the baptism of Jesus ; his various intercourses both with friends and enemies ; the individuals and families with whom he was wont to associate ; his public ministrations in the temple, and throughout all the cities and villages of Judea ; his last solemn entrance into Jerusalem ; especially the circumstances of his death ; the treachery of Judas, and his engagement with the chief priests and rulers ; the examination of Jesus before Caiaphas, and the council, and Pilate ; the dream and message of Pilate's wife ; the governor's testimony to his innocence ; the crucifixion and burial of Christ ; the sub-

* 1 Cor. xii., xiv.

ornation and testimony of the soldiers; the events of the day of Pentecost; the cure of the lame man by Peter and John; the imprisonment of the apostles; the deliberations and proceedings of the Sanhedrim. It were endless to pursue the specification. Was it possible that these things could have been published to the world, and believed, on the spot, and soon after they are stated to have happened, had they been untrue? The argument would appear in all its force, were we to transfer the history to our own country, and our own time. It is unnecessary to particularize it. Every mind, at all capable of reflection, must perceive the absolute impossibility of procuring credit to narratives far less wonderful, which are supposed to have had no foundation in fact.

Thus did the testimony of the apostles pass from one country to another, confirmed by additional miracles performed by themselves; and "multitudes every where believed the gospel." Men renounced at once idolatry and vice, their corrupt passions, and their worldly interests. They voluntarily shared in the fortunes of their teachers, and joyfully submitted to all the afflictions that attended the profession of the name of Jesus. In these circumstances, surely, the success of the gospel is an irrefragable attestation of its truth. The effect is accounted for by an adequate cause; on the opposite hypothesis, it is altogether inexplicable. It has been maintained by a subtle sceptic, that miracles being contrary to experience (as he understands the phrase), it is more improbable that they should be true, than that the testimony by which they are supported should be false. The fallacy of this principle has been well exposed by many able writers. But may not the observation, in so far as it seems capable of any proper meaning, be justly retorted on the advocates of infidelity? That men should be deceived with respect to such miraculous

facts as are recorded in the New Testament, or believe the report of them without evidence, and under this conviction, change their religion, and course of life, and willingly expose themselves to obloquy, tortures, and death itself, is not all this utterly repugnant to reason and experience; a marvellous phenomenon without any assignable cause or end; and infinitely more incredible, than any miracle or mystery connected with Christianity?

On these grounds, then, it is reasonable to believe that the facts contained in the Christian history are *true*, and therefore that the Christian religion is *Divine*.

It remains that we consider, how the Providence of its great Author, is manifested in the *transmission* of that evidence, by which these facts are established, from age to age.

This eminently appears in the preservation of the *Books of Scripture*, and in their transmission, *entire and uncorrupted*, through many generations, even to the present times. These, as we have seen, contain strong internal characters of Divinity. They are the authentic records of the History of Revelation, and the infallible standard of revealed truth. The possession of them, therefore, genuine and pure, is of infinite importance to the evidence of the gospel. Let us for a moment imagine that these books, many ages ago, had irrecoverably perished. Under what disadvantages must we now have laboured, when called to vindicate the truth of our religion! How would the enemies have insulted and said, "*Where is now your God? where is the evidence and rule of the faith of Christians? Let them produce those books on which they allege that their religion is founded, that we may know whether they are indeed Divine.*" These books are now produced, and the world is left to judge of their credibility. That this fact, however, may have its full weight, it is certainly necessary, that the w-

tegrity of the *Canon*, and the *purity* of the *Text* of Scripture be sufficiently ascertained. It is of great importance to know, that no inspired book has been excluded from the sacred volume. It is of still greater importance to be assured, that no uninspired book has been admitted into it; and that the text itself has undergone no material alteration. It must therefore be highly satisfactory to Christians to perceive, that more abundant evidence is offered for the integrity and purity of the Scriptures, than can be produced in behalf of any other ancient book whatever. They were held in high veneration, preserved with great care, publicly read in the churches, and early and extensively circulated amongst the ancient Christians. Of the scrupulous accuracy with which they judged of the pretensions of all writings which claimed admission into the sacred canon, their rejection of various spurious books is an incontestible proof; and the specimens of those that have come down to us, abundantly serve to justify their decision. The character of the primitive disciples of Jesus, precludes all suspicion of their attempting to corrupt these writings, or of their suffering them to be corrupted by others. When copies were multiplied, this indeed became impracticable; as any attempts to vitiate the text, must have been speedily detected by the collation of copies.* The dissensions that soon arose amongst Christians, naturally led to a mutual jealousy, and consequently to an inviolable care of those inspired writings, to which they all appealed as the common standard of their faith. Numerous *manuscript copies* are still extant, older by many ages than the invention of printing. Some of them indeed ascend to very high antiquity. By these, as well as by the *ancient versions* which have come down to us, the integrity of the canon, and

* Dr Doddridge's *Lectures*. 4to. p. 269.

purity of the text of the New Testament, may be ascertained with great precision. Thus the watchful care of our Divine Lord conspicuously appears, in the preservation and transmission of these invaluable monuments of the Christian history and faith, to the times in which we live.

Next to the Sacred Books, it is of great importance, that so many of the *writings* of the *ancient Christians* have been preserved to our times. By men of different views indeed, the *Fathers* have been extolled or depreciated beyond all reasonable bounds. But whatever we may think of their judgment in matters of opinion or reasoning, it were certainly unjust in the extreme, to suspect their integrity, when relating facts with respect to which they could not be deceived. For they entered deeply into the spirit of the religion which they professed, and many of them died for its sake. Their testimony, therefore, concerning those books which constitute the Sacred Canon, is entitled to high regard. So numerous are their quotations from them, that it is believed, that though all the entire existing copies were destroyed, the substance of the New Testament might be recovered from the writings of these ancient Fathers.* They also serve to throw much light on the early history of Christianity, as they describe the spirit and conduct of believers, the practice of the churches, the progress of the gospel, and the sufferings which Christians endured from their heathen persecutors. Though the apologies which were published by some of them, are not constructed on principles calculated to obviate all the exceptions of modern Deists, yet they seem well adapted to the circumstances in which they were written. They could not reply to objections which were not then thought of, but they solidly repel such as had

* Dr Doddridge's *Lectures*, p. 269.

actually been advanced. They nobly defend their religion in their own times, and authenticate the memorials of its origin and progress, for the benefit of succeeding ages.

Nor are we indebted to the writings of friends alone. *Contemporary historians*, both *Jewish* and *Heathen*, corroborate that historic testimony which supports the credibility of the gospel history. The works of *Josephus* are of great value. In his *Antiquities of the Jews*, he bears ample testimony to the history of the Old Testament. He was no friend to the Christian cause; yet he could not have been unacquainted with the remarkable circumstances that had recently occurred in his own country, respecting Jesus Christ and his apostles, and the progress of their doctrine, not only in Judea, but throughout the world. The omission of these subjects in his history, must certainly have been designed. It is most naturally accounted for by supposing, that he did not choose to narrate facts, the tendency of which he did not approve, but the truth of which he could not deny. "Perhaps he did not know how to represent the business, and disposed of his difficulties by passing it over in silence."† Viewed in this light, his silence has all the force of an indirect testimony. But his relation of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, affords a strong confirmation to the evidence of the gospel; and its importance in this connexion, we shall soon have occasion to perceive. Considering "the obscure and distant view," which the character, situation, and prejudices of the philosophers and historians of those times, led them to take of a new Jewish sect, "every where spoken against," we cannot reasonably expect from them, copious accounts of the affairs of Christians. Yet even in their writings, we meet with references to some circumstances in the history of Christ, as well

† Paley's *Evidences of Christianity*, vol. i. p. 122.

as to the number, sufferings, and innocence of his followers.* All that they deliver harmonizes with the Christian history; and nothing contradictory to it can any where be discovered. The preservation of these writings, therefore, is of great use in supporting the evidence of the gospel.

But it is still more material to remark, that the truth of the Evangelical history is confirmed even by the *labours* of its most *inveterate enemies*. In the earliest ages, attempts were made to depreciate the excellence, and discredit the evidence of Christianity, by men possessing all the advantages, which eminent talents and learning, as well as local situation, could afford. It now becomes an interesting subject of inquiry, to discover on what specific grounds their opposition was stated. It is a remarkable fact, that though the works of these adversaries are lost, yet no inconsiderable portions of them are preserved in the writings of those Christians by whom they were refuted. From these we are not only enabled to collect with certainty, the general grounds of their opposition, but are even acquainted with many of the particular objections, which they thought proper to advance. *Celsus*, the first of these, lived somewhat later than the middle of the second century. In his book, which was entitled, *The True Word*, he ascribes the miracles of Christ to magic, and objects to many passages of the New Testament, which he treats with the most abusive ridicule. Yet his references to the facts contained in it, are so numerous and explicit, that an abridgement of the life of Christ may be extracted from them. *Porphyry*, who flourished a century later, wrote *against the Christians* in fifteen books, in which (besides his attack upon the book of *Daniel*) he brought forward many objections against the writings of the New Tes-

* *Paley's Evidences of Christianity*, vol. i., part i., chap. 2; vol. ii., part iii., chap. 4.

tament, which he also treated with great contempt. *Hierocles*, another writer who lived about the same period, charged the books of Scripture, with inconsistencies and contradictions; and attempted, especially, to depreciate the miracles of Jesus, by contrasting them with those, which were alleged to have been performed by *Apollonius of Tyana*. The emperor *Julian*, who lived nearly a century later, had been originally educated in the profession of Christianity, which he afterwards thought proper to renounce. Though not so sanguinary a persecutor, as some preceding emperors had been, he was, however, a bitter enemy to Christians. He wrote a long work against them, in which, he went over much of the same ground that had been occupied by former adversaries, directing the most poignant satire against the religion of Christians, and those books which were held by them as Divine. All these writers seem to have been well acquainted with the books of Scripture, especially those of the New Testament, as well as the history and affairs of Christians. Most of their objections are extremely trifling, and even the most plausible of them admit of easy refutation. By directing the force of their attacks against the Scriptures of the New Testament, they afford undoubted testimonies to the existence and antiquity of these books, and to their authority amongst Christians, as constituting the foundation of their faith. Their numerous quotations from them, and references to particular passages, confirm the genuineness and authenticity of the canonical books, and show, that they were essentially the same with those which are at present in our hands. Nothing could have served their cause so much, as to disprove the facts contained in the gospel history, had it been in their power to do so. This, however, they have not attempted; but endeavour to account for them,

on principles that will not be adopted by modern infidels. The facts then, must now be held as established, by the concessions of those early adversaries, who wanted neither opportunity nor inclination to overthrow the evidence on which they stand. This testimony to the gospel, is precious beyond all calculation. The observation which is made, by a late laborious and able advocate of Christianity, with respect to the emperor *Julian*, may be justly applied to each of these ancient adversaries. "Upon the whole, he has undesignedly borne witness to the truth of many things, recorded in the books of the New Testament. He aimed to overthrow the Christian religion; but has confirmed it. His arguments against it are perfectly harmless, and insufficient to unsettle the weakest Christian. He justly excepts to some things introduced into the Christian profession, by the late professors of it, in his own time, or sooner. But he has not made one objection of moment against the Christian religion, as contained in the genuine and authentic books of the New Testament."* Whilst labouring with so much zeal to subvert it, how far were these men from imagining, that they were actually confirming its evidence, and furnishing materials for its support and vindication, in ages long to come! "Who can forbear adoring the depth of Divine wisdom, in laying such a firm foundation for our faith in the gospel history, in the writings of those who were so inveterate enemies to it, and so indefatigable in their attempts to overthrow it!"† "Where *then* is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God: For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the

* Dr Lardner's *Heathen and Jewish Testimonies*, vol. iv. p. 94.

† Dr Doddridge in Lardner's *Heathen and Jewish Testimonies*, vol. ii. p. 350.

wise that they are vain."* Thus the Christian religion is established by the opposition of enemies: enemies themselves, become undesignedly the witnesses of its truth.

The historic evidence of Christianity, is not only preserved in the written testimonies, both of friends and foes, but is still more conspicuously exhibited, in those *positive Institutions*, which have originated from itself, and in those *changes in the state of society*, which it has been instrumental in producing. The rites of *Baptism* and the *Lord's Supper*, are coeval with the gospel; they can be traced no higher; and have not ceased to be celebrated amongst Christians, from its commencement to the present times. The occasion and design of these institutions are clearly laid down in the evangelical records; and their appointment is connected with some important circumstances in the life of Christ. The *Sabbath* too, changed from the seventh to the first day of the week, is a perpetual memorial of the resurrection of Jesus. If the facts to which they are supposed to refer are untrue, let unbelievers inform us, what was the origin of these institutions; what is their use; and how came they to be generally received and observed in the world? The gospel, by the authority of its precepts, and the gradual diffusion of its spirit, effectuated many important *changes in the state of human society*. It abolished idolatry and polytheism, together with those impure, unnatural, and sanguinary usages, that were not only tolerated by the laws, but sanctioned by the religion of the ancient Gentiles. It has provided greatly for the comfort of private life, by prohibiting polygamy, restraining divorces, and discouraging domestic slavery. In all those countries which assumed the Christian

* 1 Cor. i. 20; and iii. 19, 20.

name, crimes that were formerly neither uncommon nor disreputable, were suppressed by legislative authority, or repudiated by public opinion. The spirit of Christianity, to a great degree, insinuated itself into the prevailing sentiments, character, and habits of men, so as to produce effects highly favourable to public virtue and happiness. In those places where the gospel is professed, even vicious extravagancies which escape judicial cognizance, are frequently punished with the forfeiture of reputation; and in general, the practice of humanity, and decency of manners, are supported by the testimonies of public approbation. That these effects are to be ascribed to the positive or indirect influence of the Christian religion, cannot be doubted, if we compare the state of society in those nations where it is professed, with the situation of those countries which have been unacquainted with it, whether in ancient or modern times. The present state of visible religion indeed, in those nations which are called Christian, will not bear to be tried with the perfect standard of Scripture. But without attempting at all, to palliate the lamentable degeneracy of modern times, let us reflect on the state of society in Greece and Rome, in the periods of their highest refinement; or let us attend to the situation of those Pagan countries at this day, where civilization is most considerably advanced, but where true Christianity is altogether unknown. A view of human society is there exhibited, from which we turn away with disgust or with horror. Even the most corrupted form of Christianity restrains, or discountenances, at least, crimes, to which in Pagan countries, public sentiment attaches no criminality. But where evangelical truth is generally known, there the power of the gospel is proportionably seen, in promoting private virtue and comfort, as well as public order and prosperity. The influence of the religion of Jesus, in meliorating the

condition of society, has often been justly stated, as illustrating its excellent nature and genius. In this view, it properly belongs to the *internal evidence* of the gospel. But in the present argument, the beneficial changes that have been produced by it, are only adduced as *public and permanent monuments*, which corroborate the history of its introduction, preservation, and influence in the world.

Thus the evangelical facts are established by a mass of historic testimony, which no other facts can pretend to rival. They are not now to be overthrown by the subtilities or sarcasms of modern infidels. They are incorporated with the annals of society. They form an essential part of the history of the world, and cannot now be overlooked by historians, however disaffected to the Christian cause, who undertake to relate the transactions of those times. If one of this description, presume to misrepresent material facts, the original authorities are at hand, and his errors are detected with ease. If, departing from the proper sphere of history, he choose to philosophize on his subject, and refer the progress of Christianity to causes, independent of its native truth and excellence, and of the power of its Divine Author, we are entitled to canvass his reasonings; nor has it been found difficult, to expose the fallacy of those principles, on which such erroneous conclusions are built.

Though the facts relating to the introduction and propagation of the gospel, were only considered as original and independent, altogether unconnected with any previous arrangement or design of Providence, yet supported as they are by such a body of historic evidence, they do certainly amount to a full proof of the truth of our religion. But this evidence receives a vast accession of strength, when the same facts are viewed as connected with a precedent Divine Revela-

tion, and as the completion of *ancient prophecies*. "God at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake to the fathers by the prophets." The Divine authority of the books of the Old Testament, is supported not only by the testimony of the New, but by indubitable independent evidence. On this argument, however, I am not at present to enter. A series of prophecy is contained in these books, which commences almost with the beginning of the world, and reaches forward to the end of time. Many of these predictions relate to the Jewish people, and the neighbouring nations; and their accomplishment is verified, by the testimony of profane historians. The correspondence between the prophecies in the book of *Daniel* particularly, respecting the four great empires, and the events to which they refer, is wonderfully exact and striking. The force of this evidence, the acute mind of *Porphyry* was unable to evade in any other way, than by assuming, without proof, that the prophecy must have been written posterior to the history. The advent of *Messiah*, his character, and a great variety of particular circumstances relative to his life, and death, and resurrection, are foretold with all the minuteness of historical precision. And in the evangelical biography, they appear to have been verified with the utmost punctuality. These ancient oracles "testify beforehand," *not only* "the sufferings of Christ," *but* "the glory that should follow," in the effusion of the Spirit, the calling of the Gentiles, the success of the gospel, and its beneficial effects on the characters of men, and the condition of society. The remarkable agreement between the predictions and the events, must be perceived by every one, who compares the writings of Moses and the prophets, with those of the evangelists and apostles. And the existence of the *Septuagint version* of the Old Testament, almost three hundred years before the birth of Christ, entirely pre-

cludes the suspicion, that these prophecies might have been written at a period subsequent to the events to which they refer.

Nor are the Scriptures of the New Testament to be considered only as *records* of the accomplishment of former prophecies. They contain *additional predictions* which have been fulfilled in the history of succeeding times. Our Lord foretold the *destruction of Jerusalem* forty years before it happened; not in general terms, but with a minute specification of circumstances, awful beyond example, most unlikely to happen, which a sagacity merely human could never have imagined. The three gospels which record the prophecy, were incontestibly written long before the event. And *Josephus*, who cannot be suspected of partiality to the Christian cause, could not have narrated the details of that awful catastrophe with more exactness, if he had really intended to comment on the predictions of Jesus. The *rejection and dispersion of the Jews*, and that they should *continue distinct* from the rest of the nations, till the "times of the Gentiles be fulfilled," are also explicitly foretold. And do they not remain to this day, conspicuous monuments of the truth of sacred prophecy. The *grand apostasy of the Christian Church*, the specific corruptions that should take place, the wide extent to which they should spread, the rise and progress of *Papal Antichrist*, are all described in such graphical characters, as leave no room to doubt of the object to which they refer. Of these, the history of the Church of Rome affords the best explanation. And in its present state, who does not clearly perceive the predicted symptoms of its approaching fall?

It has been suggested, that whatever credibility may be considered as due to the miraculous facts, in the ancient history of Christianity, it were desirable that a succession of these should take place; or at least that specimens of them should occasionally be repeated,

for the satisfaction of men in future ages. Without staying to discuss the precarious principle which this demand assumes, is it not sufficient to observe, that, though it be not complied with in the way which unreasonable men presume to dictate, its object is substantially attained, in a manner no less adapted to silence the ravils of infidelity? "The Spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus." If prophecies be accomplished, then that testimony is established for ever. Let history then decide the controversy. In the events of former ages, and even in the present situation of the world, a variety of facts present themselves to view, which appear to be the completion of sacred prophecy. Must not these therefore possess all the force of perpetual miracles, in confirming the truth of Christianity? The faithful accomplishment of prophecies in the past and present times, authorize us assuredly to conclude, that those relating to periods yet future, shall also be fulfilled in their season. And thus the evidence of the Divine origin of the gospel remains not merely unimpaired. It is not a stationary but a germinant demonstration. It keeps pace with time itself; and advances progressively in strength, with the history of society. "Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them. Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise from the end of the earth: ye that go down to the sea, and all that is therein; the isles and the inhabitants thereof. Let the wilderness, and the cities thereof, lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar doth inhabit: let the inhabitants of the rock sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains. Let them give glory unto the Lord, and declare his praise in the islands. The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man; he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war; he shall cry aloud; *he shall shout amain*; he shall prevail against his enemies."

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THE
VARIETY AND DISSIMILARITY OF THE EVIDENCES,
A PROOF
OF THE
TRUTH OF DIVINE REVELATION.

SUCH is the title which may appropriately be given to the following paragraphs, extracted from the very able work of DAVISON *On Prophecy*. They form a good conclusion to the excellent sketch of Dr Campbell; proving, as they do, that the very number and diversity of the lines of proof, to which he refers, is an evidence that the Scriptures are Divine. It is only truth which could stand so severe a test.

THERE is one quality or condition comprehended in these mixed and various evidences of our religion, which deserves to be further considered by itself; a condition highly characteristic of its truth, and indeed replete with the strongest confirmation of it. The condition is this, that its evidences are so exceedingly dissimilar in their several descriptions. They are not necessarily connected in their origin; they are independent in their principle; they do not infer each the other; they are connected only in the subject which they conspire to attest. This independence of the component members of the argument is a material consideration. Perhaps it has not been urged in the defences of Christianity, with the force it is entitled to. It affords, however, a very decisive criterion of truth, as the following remarks may serve to show.

If man's contrivance, or if the favour of accident,

could have given to Christianity any of its apparent testimonies; either its miracles or its prophecies, its morals or its propagation, or, if I may so speak, its Founder, there could be no room to believe, nor even to imagine, that all these appearances of great credibility could be united together by any such causes. If a successful craft could have contrived its public miracles, or so much as the pretence of them, it required another reach of craft and new resources, to provide and adapt its prophecies to the same object. Further, it demanded not only a different art, but a totally opposite character, to conceive and promulgate its admirable morals. Again, the achievement of its propagation, in defiance of the powers and terrors of the world, implied a new energy of personal genius, and other qualities of action, than any concurring in the work before. Lastly, the model of the life of its Founder, in the very description of it, is a work of so much originality and wisdom, as could be the offspring only of consummate powers of invention; though to speak more fairly to the case, it seems, by an intuitive evidence, as if it could never have been even devised, but must have come from the life and reality of some perfect excellence of virtue, impossible to be taken from, or confounded with, the fictions of ingenuity. But the hypothesis sinks under its incredibility. For each of these suppositions of contrivance, being arbitrary, as it certainly is, and unsupported, the climax of them is an extravagance. And if the imbecility of art is foiled in the hypothesis, the combinations of accident are too vain to be thought of. The genuine state of the Christian evidence is this: There is unambiguous testimony to its works of miraculous power; there are oracles of prophecy; there are other distinct marks and signs of a Divine original within it. And no stock but that of truth could, in one subject, produce them all, or can now account for their existence.

The whole compass and system of the Christian Evidence unquestionably has nothing like it, nor approaching to it, in the annals of the world. It is a phenomenon standing alone. I assert this, on the concession of those who have exalted it, beside their intention, by the impotent comparisons through which they have sought to slander and traduce it. For what has been done? Its Miracles have been forced into a sort of parallel with some wild unauthenticated relations in the cloudy romance of a Pagan sophist (in the case of Apollonius Tyaneus); or with the vague and insulated pretences of a better history (in the case of Vespasian); or the mask of a detected and defeated imposture among a Roman Catholic sect. Its Prophecies have undergone the violence of a similar comparison with the oracles of Heathenism, long ago put to silence, or the legends of a more recent superstition. Its Divine morals have been represented as little better than might be derived from the philosophy of a Grecian or an Eastern teacher, Socrates or Confucius. Its wonderful progress and propagation, carried without any of the instruments of human power, and in opposition to them, have been matched with the success of the Mahometan heresy effected by the power of the sword. Thus all ages, and countries, and creeds, have been explored, with an industry greater than the success, to furnish the *separate materials* of such comparisons as the objectors have been able to produce: whilst the conspicuous and uncontested fact, that Christianity *unites within itself* the signs and indications which no other system, philosophic or religious, does, nor is pretended to do, leaves it in possession of a character which repels the indignity of all comparison, by the distant and incommensurate pretensions of the things attempted to be put in resemblance with it.

THE SITUATION OF THE WORLD

AT

THE TIME OF CHRIST'S APPEARANCE.*

BY

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Principal of the University of Edinburgh.

THE next Tract which I shall lay before the reader, is from the pen of the celebrated Principal ROBERTSON, one of the most eminent historical writers in the English language. It was originally preached as an Anniversary Sermon, before the *Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge*. It is the only discourse which Dr ROBERTSON ever published; and what is remarkable, it is his first production; published several years before he went to Edinburgh, and before any of the great historical works on which his fame rests. The nature of the subject being somewhat historical, gives scope for his peculiar powers. The style reminds us of one of the purest and most musical writers, of his own, or of any other age. The discourse has gone through various editions, and has, I believe, been translated into various foreign languages. It may be interesting to the reader to be informed, that the Society, before which it was preached, is a very important institution; and at that period was the only one in Scotland which laboured at once to diffuse Christian education in the Highlands and Islands, and to send the gospel to heathen lands. The number of its schools, at that date, was about one hundred and eighty. The number of children taught between six and seven thousand. It can now boast of double that number.

* Preached before the *Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge*, January 6th, 1750.

THERE is no employment more delightful to a devout mind, than the contemplation of the Divine wisdom in the government of this world. The civil history of mankind opens a wide field for this pious exercise. Careful observers may often, by the light of reason, form probable conjectures with regard to the plan of God's providence, and can discover a skilful hand directing the revolutions of human affairs, and compassing the best ends by the most effectual and surprising means: but sacred history, by drawing aside that veil which covers the councils of the Almighty, lays open his designs to the view of his creatures; and we can there trace the steps which he taketh towards accomplishing them, with more certainty, and greater pleasure. The facts which inspired writers relate, are no less instructive than the doctrines which they teach. The latter inform us, that God is powerful, and wise, and good; the former discover those perfections brought forth into action, and confirm speculative opinions, by real and striking examples.

The publication and establishment of Christianity in the world, is a remarkable event of this kind, and contributes greatly to illustrate, as well as to magnify the Divine power and wisdom. From beginnings the most inconsiderable, and by instruments the most unlikely, the Almighty, with incredible facility, raised that glorious fabric of his church, which hitherto hath withstood all the rage of his enemies; and "the gates of hell," we believe, "shall not prevail against it."* According to our Saviour's beautiful image, "the least of all seeds grew up, and waxed a great tree, and spread out its branches, and filled the earth."† The hand of God sheltered this feeble plant from the storm, and by his care it was reared, and cultivated, and brought to maturity. The wisdom and power of men united to oppose the doctrine of God: but it confounded the former, and

* Matt. xvi. 18.

† Mark iv. 32.

overcame the latter. Neither the bigotry of the Jews, nor the superstition of the heathen, could resist its progress; and in vain "did Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and people of Israel, gather themselves together against the Lord and his Anointed."*

Many circumstances concurred in procuring for Christianity such a favourable reception and firm establishment in the world. Whoever reflects upon the situation of mankind at the time when it was published, will find abundant reason to admire the Divine wisdom, which disposed these circumstances with so much art, and improved them with such skill and success. The text naturally leads me to consider the conduct and administration of Providence in this particular light: "The word of God," saith the apostle, "the mystery hid from ages, and from generations, is now made manifest to his saints." Why was the gospel of Christ so long concealed from the world? Why was it published at that time? What do we find in that particular juncture to render the discovery of the Christian religion more necessary, or the propagation of it more successful?

In the following discourse, I shall endeavour to account for this part of the Divine economy, by selecting some remarkable circumstances, in the situation of mankind, which prove, that God "manifested the mystery of the gospel" at a time when the world stood most in need of such a revelation, and was best prepared for receiving it.

The appearance of Christ in so late an age, was an objection raised by his ancient adversaries, against the truth of his mission; and modern infidels have not failed to revive and to urge it, with their usual confidence and triumph. But if we can establish the truth of our general proposition, this cavil falls to the ground, and the Divine conduct is fully vindicated.

* Acts iv. 27.

I. About the time of Christ's appearance, there prevailed a general opinion, that the Almighty would send forth some eminent messenger to communicate a more perfect discovery of his will to mankind. The Supreme Being conducts all his operations by general laws. It seems to be one among these, that no perfection of any kind can be attained of a sudden. The motion by which his works advance towards their final and complete state, is gradual and progressive. This holds with regard to all the productions in the natural, and all the changes in the moral world. The same principle appears to have regulated the dispensations of religion. The light of revelation was not poured in upon mankind all at once, and with its full splendour. The obscurity of the dawn went before the brightness of the noon-day. The will of God was at first made known by revelations, useful indeed, but dark and mysterious. To these succeeded others more clear and perfect. In proportion as the situation of the world made it necessary, the Almighty was pleased further to open and unfold his scheme. And men came by degrees to understand this progressive plan of Providence, and to conceive how systems temporary and incomplete might serve to introduce that concluding and perfect revelation which would "declare the whole council of God to man."

The dignity of the person employed to publish this revelation, the virtues of his character, the glory of his kingdom, and the signs of his coming, were described by the ancient prophets with the utmost perspicuity. Guided by this "sure word of prophecy," the Jews of that age concluded the period, predetermined by God, to be then completed; and that the "fulness of time" being come, the promised Messiah would suddenly appear. Devout persons among them "waited day and night for the consolation of Israel;" and the whole nation, groaning under the Roman yoke,

and stimulated by the desire of liberty, or of vengeance expected their deliverer with the most anxious impatience.

Nor were these expectations peculiar to the Jews. By their dispersions among so many nations, by their conversation with the learned men among the heathens, and by the translation of their inspired writings into a language almost universal, the principles of their religion were spread all over the East: and it became the common belief, that a prince would arise at that time in Judea, who should change the face of the world, and extend his empire from one end of the earth to the other.

In this "due time" did the wisdom of God send forth his Son; not to assume any strange character, or to claim any new and unknown dignity, but to fulfil "all that had been spoken by the mouth of his holy prophets since the world began." While the eyes of men were employed in search of the promised Messiah; while they watched every sign that could indicate his coming, and observed every circumstance which could lead them to discover him; "while the earnest expectation of all creatures waited for the revelation of God;" at that happy and favourable juncture was "the mystery hid from ages" manifested to the world. No wonder the Jews should receive our Saviour, on his first appearance, not only without prejudice, but even with eagerness and applause; § no wonder the Gentiles should "gather together unto him," who had so long been "the desire of all nations." ||

§ This statement needs to be taken with qualification. On some occasions it is declared, that "the common people heard him gladly;" but, from the very outset, he met with keen opposition. His outward appearance seemed inconsistent with his claims; and the moment his true character came to be known, the Jews could not endure him.—EDITOR.

|| Gen. xlix. 18; Hag. ii. 7.

Had Christ been manifested at a more early period, the world would not have been prepared to meet him with the same fondness and zeal. Had his appearance been postponed for any considerable time, men's expectations would have begun to languish, and the warmth of desire, from a delay of gratification, might have cooled, and died away.

II. But it is not only from circumstances peculiar to the Jews, and neighbouring nations, that we conclude the Christian religion to have been published at the most proper time: we propose to bring a further confirmation of this truth, from a survey of the condition and circumstances of mankind in general. Let us venture then into this large field, and take a view of the political, of the moral, of the religious, and of the domestic state of the world.

We begin by considering the political state of the world, about the time of our Saviour's appearance. The world, in the most early ages, was divided into small independent states, differing from each other in language, manners, laws, and religion. The shock of so many opposite interests, the interfering of so many contrary views, occasioned the most violent convulsions and disorders. Perpetual discord subsisted between these rival states; hostility and bloodshed never ceased during that turbulent and restless period. Commerce had not hitherto united mankind, and opened the communication of one nation with another. The world may now be considered as one vast society, closely cemented by mutual wants; each part contributing its share towards the subsistence, the pleasure, and improvement of the whole. But in those more simple ages, the intercourse between nations was extremely inconsiderable. Voyages into remote countries, in quest either of wealth or of knowledge, were very rare. Men moved in a narrow circle, little acquainted with any thing beyond the limits of their own small

territory, and utter strangers to the condition and character of distant nations.

At last the Roman ambition undertook the arduous enterprise of conquering the world, and conducted it with such refined policy, irresistible courage, and inimitable perseverance, as, in the end, crowned the attempt with success. "They trode down the kingdoms," according to Daniel's prophetic description, "and by their exceeding strength, they devoured the whole earth."* However, by enslaving the world, they civilized it; and while they oppressed mankind, they united them together. The same laws were every where established, and the same languages understood. Men approached nearer to one another in sentiments and in manners. The intercourse between the most distant corners of the earth was rendered secure and agreeable. Satiated with victory, the first emperors abandoned all thoughts of new conquests. Peace, an unknown blessing, was enjoyed throughout all that vast empire; or, if a slight war was waged on an outlying and barbarous frontier, far from disturbing the tranquillity, it scarcely drew the attention of mankind.†

Such was the political state of the world when Christianity made its first appearance; and, from this representation of it, many circumstances occur to justify the Divine wisdom, in choosing that particular conjuncture, for publishing it. During the period, which I first described, the propagation of any new religion must have been extremely slow and uncertain. How could it have forced its way through innumerable difficulties, arising from the unsettled state of the

* Dan. vii. 7, 23.

† A remarkable proof of the peace which then reigned in the world, is to be found in the fact, that the temple of Janus was then shut. This was a public emblem of peace, and had not occurred for 700 years before.—EDITOR

world, from the fierceness and animosity of hostile and divided nations? The power of God, no doubt, could have surmounted all these obstacles: but it is observable, that this power is never exerted but on the most necessary occasions. The Almighty seldom effects, by supernatural means, any thing which could have been accomplished by such as are natural. And, were we to judge by maxims merely human, the propagation of Christianity, in those circumstances, would have proved not only a dangerous, but an impossible enterprise.

But, favoured by the union and tranquillity of the Roman empire, the disciples of Christ executed their commission to great advantage. The success and rapidity with which they diffused the knowledge of his name over the world, are astonishing. This epistle to the Colossians was written about thirty years after our Saviour's ascension; and, even then, the apostle could assert, that the gospel had been "preached to every creature which is under heaven,"* *i. e.* through the whole extent of the Roman empire. Nations were then accessible, which formerly had been unknown. Under this situation, into which the providence of God had brought the world, the "joyful sound" in a few years, reached those remote corners of the earth, into which it could not, otherwise, have penetrated for many ages.†

* Col. i. 23.

† One cannot help thinking, that all the amazing facilities of communication with the most remote parts of the world, which are opening up at the present day, are designed for a similar purpose. We cannot believe, that so much talent, and enterprise, and wealth, are all expended merely for promoting the interests of a perishable commerce. It is more natural to believe, that the connexion of Great Britain with India, and Australasia, and Africa, and the growing facilities of intercourse with so many other parts of the world, are intended to carry the gospel into the heart of the vast regions of the East, and generally to promote its propagation over the earth.—EDITOR.

This view of our subject presents to us an idea of the Christian religion, equal to the greatest and most magnificent conception of the human mind. The noblest people, that ever entered upon the stage of the world, appear to have been only instruments in the Divine hand, for the execution of wise purposes concealed from themselves. The Roman ambition and bravery paved the way, and prepared the world for the reception of the Christian doctrine: they fought and conquered, that it might triumph with the greater ease. "Howbeit, they meant not so, neither did their heart think so; but it was in their heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few." By means of their victories, the over-ruling wisdom of God established an empire, that really possesses the perpetuity and eternal duration, which they vainly arrogated to their own: He erected "a throne which shall continue for ever;" and "of the increase of that government there shall be no end."

III. Let us consider the state of the world with regard to morals. We cannot expect to find pure and undefiled virtue among those people who were destitute of the instructions, the promises and assistance of Divine revelation. Unenlightened reason often errs: undirected virtue frequently deviates from the right path. But, even in those less favoured ages, righteousness had not altogether "perished from the earth; and the nations which had not the law, did by nature the things contained in the law." Those virtuous but feeble efforts of the human mind, were encouraged and seconded by several happy circumstances in the situation of the world, owing in appearance to the sagacity of men, but ordained in reality by the wisdom of God. One of these was of a singular nature, and well deserves our particular attention.

We have already mentioned the early division o.

the world into small independent states. These states, unbroken by the refinements of luxury, and animated with the noblest of human passions, struggled for liberty and obtained it. Lawgivers, intimately acquainted with human nature, deep politicians, and lovers of mankind, arose in different places, and founded those equal and happy governments, which have been the admiration and envy of all succeeding ages. Temperance, frugality, decency, public spirit, love to their fellow-citizens, magnanimity, were the virtues which flourished under such wise institutions. At the same time, in those small commonwealths, the conduct of every citizen was subjected to the eye of the magistrate, and the nature of the government obliged him to inspect their manners with severity. The smallest crimes could not escape observation: Even dangerous virtues were exposed to censure. On this foundation of public liberty, did ancient virtue rest; an effect of government little known in modern times, wherein the views of legislators are confined to inferior objects. But from this source were derived all those splendid actions among the heathens, which, on the one hand, have been so invidiously displayed by infidels, as a reproach to our holy religion, and, on the other, so justly celebrated by Christians, in order to rouse the zeal and emulation of a degenerate age.*

* This picture of the high moral character of the ancient republics, is greatly overdrawn; but it was a current error of the literary men of Dr Robertson's time. That these republics were free from many of the gross vices of a more luxurious or despotic age, is probable enough; but they were far indeed from being either religious or moral, in the right sense of the terms. The apostle Paul, in his awful account of the heathen world, in the 1st chapter of Romans, makes no exception on behalf of the ancient republics either of Greece or Rome; and the more minute and accurate investigations of recent historians have not lightened but darkened the picture. If men were as good and virtuous, without revelation, as the writer represents, the argument for the necessity of Christianity would seriously be lessened. Heathenism would deserve no small praise; but I beg to remind the reader, that, in these much

Virtue, however, did not long enjoy this temporary and precarious support. Those wise institutions were the works of men, and, like their authors subject to decay. Some of them perished by the malignity of internal diseases: and, if a vigorous constitution, or more skilful management, prolonged the period of others, they yielded at last to the violence of external injuries. It was impossible either to divert or resist the torrent of Roman power: It gathered strength from opposition, and bore down all nations before it. But, by subduing the world, the Romans lost their own liberty. Many causes, which it is not our present business to explain, concurred in producing this effect: Many vices, engendered or nourished by prosperity, delivered them over to the vilest race of tyrants that ever afflicted or disgraced human nature.

The alliance between morals and government was now broken; an influence hitherto so friendly to virtue, became altogether malignant, and was exerted, with most fatal effect, to poison and debase the human mind. Together with despotic power, entered all those odious vices, which are usually found in its train: and in a short time, they grew to an incredible pitch. The colours are not too strong, which the apostle employs in drawing the character of that age. Contem-
 applauded republics, the most intolerable slavery prevailed. In the small state of Attica alone, there were not less than 400,000 slaves. In Athens, where they were better treated than in many other quarters, 20,000 deserted during a single war; so intolerable did they feel the oppression. In Sparta, 2000 poor slaves were murdered in cold blood. The youth were taught expertness by surprising and killing slaves. The Roman writers are full of accounts of the most wanton cruelty, practised upon slaves. Indeed, slaves do not seem to have been treated as human beings. It may be added, the vice of slavery always indicates and draws along with it, a crowd of other evils. Were it necessary to enlarge the proof of crime, one might refer to shameful cruelties in war—fearful conjugal infidelity in Athens, where, at one time, 5000 of the citizens were illegitimate—Ostracism, or the exile, perhaps death, of the man who had distinguished himself for his public virtues—the destruction, by law, of weak or deformed children, among the republicans of Sparta—and many others.—EDITOR.

porary historians justify him, when he describes it "to be alienated from the life of God, walking in vanity through blindness of mind; to be past feeling, given up to lasciviousness, and to work all uncleanness with greediness."

In this time of universal corruption, did the wisdom of God manifest the Christian revelation to the world, not to re-establish virtue upon the same insecure foundation of civil government, but to erect it upon the eternal and immoveable basis of a religion, which teacheth righteousness by the authority of God. What the wisdom of men could do for the encouragement of virtue in a corrupt world, had been tried during several ages; and all human devices were found, by experience, to be of very small avail: so that no juncture could be more proper for publishing a religion, which, independent on human laws and institutions, explains the principles of morals with admirable perspicuity, and enforces the practice of them by most persuasive arguments. Had not Christianity appeared to check and to mitigate the pernicious effects of despotic unlimited empire, it is hard to say how far they might have gone towards extinguishing the name and exercise of virtue among men. This we know, that, in a most dissolute age, and under the worst government, the primitive Christians attained to an eminence in every virtue, of which there is no example in the history of mankind. The spirit of their religion, superior to the corrupt genius of the age, continued pure and vigorous; and men saw with admiration, that, when every other foundation of virtue was overthrown, "the foundation of God stood sure," immoveable amidst "the floods which came, the rains that descended, and the winds that blew and beat upon it."

IV. Let us consider the world with regard to its religious state. The national character of the Jews

seems to have been deeply tinged with superstition. Their early education in Egypt, the example of neighbouring nations, the influence of the climate, but, above all, the perverseness of their own disposition, rendered this impression indelible. Obstinate against all the endeavours employed by the Divine Lawgiver to repress or to extirpate it, this superstitious spirit broke out on every occasion. Delighted with the ceremonial prescriptions of the law, the Jews utterly neglected the moral: and, fond of such rites as please the imagination, they undervalued those duties which improve the heart. This unhappy bias was greatly increased by the doctrine of the Pharisees, which reduced the prejudices of their countrymen into a regular system of superstition. By their vain traditions, they added to the load of ceremonies: by their wretched interpretations of the law, they abridged the number of moral precepts. They openly preferred the former before the latter; and substituted observances frivolous and insignificant, in the place of "the weighty matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith."

While the Pharisees undermined religion on one hand, their rivals the Saducees carried on a more bold and impious attack against it, from another quarter. By denying the immortality of the soul, they wounded religion in a vital part; and overturned the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, which hath been, and must ever be, the chief foundation of virtuous obedience. The practice of these two contending sects, was perfectly suitable to their principles. The followers of the one were scandalous libertines; the disciples of the other, notorious hypocrites: and, between them, the knowledge as well as power of true religion were entirely destroyed. It was high time then for the wisdom of God to vindicate his injured law, and to revive languishing and decayed religion among his

ancient people. To recall the Jews from their former wanderings, the Almighty had with success employed the ministry of his holy prophets: but the malignant distempers of that age would not have yielded to any common remedy: a conceited and perverse generation would have listened to no inferior messenger: and therefore, the great prophet was sent forth in this due time, to explain, to extend, and to perfect the law, "and to fill Zion with judgment and righteousness."* †

But the deplorable situation of the heathen world with regard to religion, called still more loudly for an immediate interposition of the Divine hand. I shall not mention the characters of the heathen deities, infamous for the most enormous crimes; nor describe their religious worship, consisting frequently in the vilest and most shameful rites. Certain it is, the more any man honoured such gods, the worse he himself was; and the oftener he served them, the more wicked he would become.

The spirit and genius of heathenism, according to the apostle's observation, were "in all things too much superstitious." ‡ Stately temples, expensive sacrifices, pompous ceremonies, magnificent festivals, with all the other circumstances of show and splendour, were the objects which false religion presented to its votaries: but just notions of God, obedience to his moral laws, purity of heart, and sanctity of life, were not once mentioned as ingredients in religious service. Superstition never prevailed among any people, but at the expense of morals. The heathen superstition, far from giving any aid to virtue, seems not to have had the least con-

* Isaiah xxxiii. 5.

† Of course the writer does not mean, in this statement, to exclude the priestly office and character of Messiah. Important as is the prophetic, the atoning and the priestly is not less indispensable. Without the latter, comparatively speaking, the coming of Christ would have been vain.—EDITOR.

‡ Acts xvii. 23.

nexion with it. No repentance of past crimes, no future amendment of conduct, are ever prescribed by it, as proper means of appeasing their offended deities. "Sacrifice a chosen victim; bow down before an hallowed image; be initiated in the sacred mysteries; and the wrath of the gods shall be averted, and the thunder shall drop from their hands." Suitable to these sentiments, is the behaviour of Balak king of Moab, described by the prophet Micah. That prince had provoked the God of Israel; and, in order to regain his favour, thought of the same means, which superstition employs to mitigate the rage of its false gods. "Wherewith," says he, "shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? —To do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God," were acceptable services, which made no part in the system of heathen religion.

Happily, the wisdom and simplicity of ancient government checked the progress of this infectious principle, and corrected, in some degree, its poisonous and destructive qualities. But no sooner had the tyranny of the Roman emperors removed this restraint, by subverting liberty, than superstition made its advances on the world by sudden and mighty steps, and exercised an uncontrolled dominion in every corner of the earth. Tyranny and superstition, like those other destroyers of mankind, famine and pestilence, are nearly allied. Superstition breaks the spirit, and prepares it for servitude. Tyranny, for this reason, encourages superstition, and employs it as an useful auxiliary to illegal power. Accordingly, Rome adopted the gods

of almost every nation whom she had conquered; and opened her temples to the grossest superstitions of the most barbarous people. Her "foolish heart being darkened, she changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds and four-footed beasts, and creeping things."* †

At this time, therefore, did a good God, in pity to his deluded creatures, publish the Christian revelation. By it, the God of truth was made known; "and the idols of the nations were moved at his presence." ‡ Rational and sublime in its doctrines, humane and beneficent in its precepts, pure and simple in its worship; Christianity was better calculated than any other religion, to repress the inroads of superstition, and to establish an acceptable and manly devotion, consisting "in spirit and in truth." § No period can be mentioned, when instruction in these important articles would have been more seasonable or necessary. The absurd fictions, and abominable practices of superstition, had gone near to extinguish the natural sentiments of the human mind, concerning the Supreme Being, and to banish his name and worship from the earth. No wonder, men, under these circumstances, should listen with joy to the Christian revelation, which delivered them from that hateful yoke, and taught them "to serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him." || ¶

* Rom. i. 21, 23.

† The eminent author seems here to overrate the influence of simple forms of ancient government, as guards against superstition. Where men are not blessed with the light of revelation, they become the slaves of superstition, whatever may be the form of their political government, whether simple or complex. In many countries of the world, where the forms of government are simple, the superstition is most gross and abominable. The countries of savages are a proof of this. Rome, doubtless, adopted the gods of all the nations of the earth, as a matter of policy, to please all parties, like the advocates of modern liberalism; but this proceeded, in the first instance, from her ignorance of Divine truth, and hatred to it. She did not receive Christianity into her favour. She persecuted its disciples with merciless cruelty.—EDITOR.

‡ Isa. xix. 1.

§ John iv. 24.

|| Luke i. 74.

¶ The statement, that men listened with joy to the Christian

V. Let us consider the world with regard to its domestic situation; a view, perhaps, less extensive and magnificent than those which hitherto have engaged our attention, but not less important. The private and domestic situation of mankind is the chief circumstance which forms their character, and becomes the great source of their happiness or misery. Any poison in this fountain, communicates itself to the manners of men; any bitterness there, infects all the pleasures of life. Many circumstances, of the most fatal influence on domestic virtue and happiness, occur to attentive observers of the period under review.

Domestic society is founded in the union between husband and wife. Among all civilized nations this union hath been esteemed sacred and honourable; and from it are derived those exquisite joys or sorrows, which can embitter all the pleasures, or alleviate all the pains in human life. In the ancient world, there prevailed two practices, equally pernicious to the peace and happiness of the married state. From the most early times, polygamy seems to have been universal among the Eastern nations; and men married as many wives as their fancy wished for, or their fortune could maintain. Now, this practice not only appears to be contrary to the intention of the Almighty, who at first created but one person of each sex, and hath since preserved an admirable proportion between the number of males and females whom he sends into the world; but by it likewise were banished from domestic life all those enjoyments which sweeten and endear it. Friendship, social intercourse, confidence, and the mutual revelation, as a deliverance from the yoke of superstition, is only true to a certain extent. No doubt, those who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, received the gospel, rejoiced in their deliverance; but the great body of men, so far from gladly embracing the Christian revelation, hated and persecuted it for its holiness.—EDITOR.

care of children, were in a great measure unknown. On the one hand, rigour, voluptuousness, jealousy; on the other, subjection without love, fidelity, or virtue. One half of the human species became the property of the other; and the husband, instead of being the friend and protector of a wife, was no better than the master and tyrant over a slave. The envy and discord which were introduced into the families of Jacob and Elkanah by a plurality of wives, are but imperfect pictures of the enormities occasioned by the same practice under masters less virtuous, and in ages more dissolute and luxurious. Wherever the Christian religion is established, an end hath been put to an institution so inconsistent with the felicity of domestic life. Marriage, suitable to the ordinance of God, is rendered a friendly and indissoluble alliance between two persons; and tranquillity, confidence, and joy, bless an union begun and cemented by mutual love.

In the western parts of the world, the maxims with regard to marriage were more conformable to nature. One man was confined to one woman; but, at the same time, their laws allowed a practice which introduced the most fatal disorders into domestic life. The Almighty, "because of the hardness of their hearts," permitted the Jews, on certain occasions, "to give a writing of divorcement to their wives." According to their usual custom, the Jews stretched this indulgence to most extravagant lengths; and, defining the cases in which they pretended divorces to be lawful with a minute and over-curious nicety, they altogether perverted the institution of God. Their doctors permitted divorces for causes so trivial and ridiculous, as cannot be mentioned in a grave discourse. The utmost dissolution of manners was the effect of such licentious opinions; and our Saviour found the abuses to be grown so enormous as to render the strictest and most

precise limitations of the Mosaic precepts absolutely necessary.

Nor was this matter on any better footing among the heathen nations. Divorces, on very slight pretences, were permitted both by the Greek and Roman legislators. And though the pure manners of those republics, restrained, for some time, the operation of such a pernicious institution; though the virtue of private persons seldom abused the indulgence which the laws allowed them: yet no sooner had the progress of luxury, and the establishment of despotic power, vitiated the taste of men, than the law with regard to divorces was found to be among the worst corruptions which prevailed in that abandoned age. The facility of separation rendered married persons careless of obtaining or practising those virtues which render domestic life tranquil and delightful. The education of children was neglected by parents, who often met together with a scheme of separation in both their thoughts. Marriage, instead of restraining, added to the violence of irregular desire; and, under a legal name, became the vilest and most shameless prostitution. From all these causes, the married state fell into disreputation and contempt; and it became necessary to force men, by penal laws, into a society where they expected no secure or lasting happiness. Among the Romans, domestic corruption grew, of a sudden, to an incredible height; and perhaps, in the history of mankind, we can find no parallel to the undisguised impurity and licentiousness of that age. It was in a good time, therefore, that our Saviour abolished a practice which had been one of the most fertile sources of those disorders. The bonds of the marriage union were rendered by him almost indissoluble; and the "cords of love," were drawn as close as possible. Political projectors may please themselves

with imaginary advantages resulting from the liberty of divorces; but reason, as well as the experience of mankind, justify the wisdom of the Divine decree concerning them. If the manners of men be not extremely pure and simple, the least indulgence in this article hath always proved fatal to the peace and virtue of domestic life; and whatever remains of these we now find in a dissolute age, must be entirely ascribed to that regulation in the gospel,* which superficial reasoners represent as a grievance, though it be in truth the greatest blessing to mankind.†

If the lives of those who are at the head of domestic society needed reformation, the sufferings of those who were subject to them merited relief.

So many are the wants of human society, that far the greater part of mankind is condemned to constant toil and labour in order to supply them. In the ancient world, the condition of this numerous and useful race of men, differed widely from that wherein they are now placed. They were not freemen, but slaves, who occupied the inferior, though necessary, station in human life. Their labour was not a voluntary duty to the society, which entitled them to a reward; it was an hard task, imposed without their consent, and exacted with the utmost rigour. The number of persons reduced to this unhappy condition, was immense. In those parts of the world whose history and situation are best known, above two-thirds of the whole inhabitants are computed to have been in a state of slavery. The persons, the goods, the children of these slaves, were the property of their masters, disposed of at pleasure, and transferred, like

* Matt. v. 32.

† It might have been added, that the moral restraint which the gospel imposes, is a striking proof of its Divine origin. Nothing like it is to be met with in any of the religions of men, especially those which originated in the East.—EDITOR.

any other possession, from one hand to another. No inequality of condition, no superiority in power, no pretext of consent, can justify this ignominious depression of human nature, or can confer upon one man the right of dominion over the person of another. But not only doth reason condemn this institution as unjust; experience proved it to be pernicious both to masters and slaves. The elevation of the former inspired them with pride, insolence, impatience, cruelty, and voluptuousness: the dependent and hopeless state of the latter, dejected the human mind, and extinguished every generous and noble principle in the heart. Were I to mention the laws and regulations of the most civilized states among the ancients, concerning those unfortunate sufferers; were I to relate the treatment which they met with from persons most renowned for their virtue; maxims so inhuman, and actions so barbarous, would excite the strongest pity and indignation, in an age which never beheld the tyranny of the oppressor, nor heard the groans of the captive. †

It is true, while men enjoyed those wise institutions of government which we formerly described, the state of servitude did not become altogether intolerable; many expedients were used for mitigating the rigour of command, and lightening the yoke of obedience; but upon establishing despotic government in the

† Even in the time of Justinian, one of the Christian emperors of Rome, after the influence of Christianity had made considerable progress, the *law* upon the condition of slaves ran in these words:—"Slaves are in the power of their masters, which power is founded in the law of nations; for *among all nations alike*, we may observe, that masters have the power of life and death over their slaves, and whatever the slave gets belongs to the master." Another part of the same code is in these words:—"No law has reference to the slave." In other words, slaves are beyond the protection of any law, and what then must have been their condition with such ignorant, selfish, ungodly masters as those who ruled over them? We have already shown, in a former note, that the exception which the writer, in the next paragraph, makes in behalf of the mild treatment of the slaves of the ancient republics, is greatly exaggerated.—EDITOR.

Roman empire, domestic tyranny rose, in a short time, to an astonishing height. In that rank soil, every vice which power nourishes in the great, or oppression engenders in the mean, thrived and grew up apace.

Here then is an object worthy the attention of that merciful God, "who delivereth the soul of the afflicted from violence, who heareth the cry of the needy, and him who hath no helper."* 'The groans of such an innumerable multitude of his reasonable creatures, bereaved of the noblest privilege of their nature, liberty and independence, would not, we may believe, be uttered in vain. He could not always "keep silence, and be still," when he beheld their wretched situation, so destructive of happiness, and so fatal to virtue. At last the Divine wisdom interposed; and when the evil had become intolerable, and seemed to be past cure, the promulgation of Christianity brought an effectual and timely remedy.

It is not the authority of any single detached precept in the gospel, but the spirit and genius of the Christian religion, more powerful than any particular command, which hath abolished the practice of slavery through the world. The temper which Christianity inspired, was mild and gentle; and the doctrines it taught, added such dignity and lustre to human nature, as rescued it from the dishonourable servitude into which it was sunk. All men, of every condition, are declared to be the offspring of the same God, and the heirs of the same heavenly inheritance.† Our Saviour redeemed them from iniquity by his death, and one Spirit worketh powerfully in their hearts. Wher-

* Ps. lxxii. 12.

† Christianity does not say that all men are the heirs of the same heavenly inheritance. This is a loose and injurious mode of speech. The gospel offers salvation to all men, Jew and Gentile alike, but we are assured that some only will actually participate in the blessing.—EDITOR.

ever such opinions prevail, no human creature can be regarded as altogether insignificant and vile: even the meanest acquire dignity; exterior distinctions disappear; and men approach nearer to that original equality in which they were at first placed, and are still viewed by their impartial Creator.

What a wonderful and blessed change hath Christianity produced in the face of the world? Together with the knowledge of it, liberty, humanity, and domestic happiness, diffused themselves over every corner of the earth. It is deemed a virtue, to admire and to praise those illustrious personages who delivered mankind from the rage of tyrants, and vindicated the violated laws and constitution of their country. And is no admiration due to the generous spirit of that religion which restored liberty, not to one nation or society alone, but rescued from the worst servitude far the greater number of the human race, and acquired for them that happy freedom which they still enjoy? † When we behold Christianity making its progress through the world, and working every where such an important alteration in the condition of mankind, we may well apply to a temporal deliverance what the prophet spoke concerning a spiritual salvation:

† The permission of slavery in our American colonies, is a specious, not a real objection against the reasoning under this head. The genius and tendency of any religion are known by the operation of its vigorous, not of its declining age; and if, in a degenerate world, avarice hath revived an institution which Christianity had utterly abolished, this, like many other vices which prevail among Christians, must be charged upon the corruption of the human heart, not upon that religion which testifies against it.*

* The sentiment of this note is just and good. Happily, since the day of Principal Robertson, slavery has been abolished in the British dominions; and, it may be safely said, in a chief degree, through the exertion of Christians. Some men may have lent their influence from political or party motive, but Christianity has had the largest share in the victory. Mr Wilberforce, and others, who first set the movement on foot, and who maintained it for so many years, was an eminent Christian, and acted in the question from Christian motives; and it is the Christian men and churches of the United States of America, who seem destined, in the Providence of God, to abolish the wide-spread and abominable slavery of that great republic.—EDITOR.

‘ Behold, the acceptable year of the Lord is come ! Liberty is proclaimed to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. They shall rest from their sorrow, and from their fear, and from the hard bondage wherein they were made to serve.’”

The abolition of domestic slavery was the occasion of another change in the manners of men, which is no less remarkable. Captives taken in war, were, in all probability, the first persons subjected to perpetual servitude ; and when the necessities or luxury of mankind increased the demand for slaves, every new war recruited their number, by reducing the vanquished to that wretched condition. Hence proceeded the fierce and desperate spirit with which wars were carried on among ancient nations. While chains and slavery were the certain lot of the conquered, battles were fought and towns defended, with rage and obstinacy, which nothing but horror at such a fate could have inspired ; but, by putting an end to the cruel institution of slavery, Christianity extended its mild influence to the practice of war ; and that barbarous art, softened by its humane spirit, ceased to be so destructive. Secure, in every event, of personal liberty, the vanquished resisted with less obstinacy, and the triumph of the victor became less cruel. Thus, humanity was introduced into the exercise of war, with which it appears to be almost incompatible ; and it is to the merciful maxims of Christianity, much more than to any other cause, that we must ascribe the little ferocity and bloodshed which accompany modern victories. Even where the passions of men are fiercest, and most highly inflamed, the powerful genius of our religion interposes, restrains the fury of war, and sets bounds to its destroying rage. The benevolent spirit of the gospel delivereth the captive from his fetters, “ looseth those who were appointed to death ;” “ and

saith to the sword that is ready to devour, Return to thy scabbard, and be still."

It hath become a fashionable topic among political reasoners, to celebrate the mildness and humanity of modern manners, and to prefer the character of present times, in that respect, before the ancient. To what cause shall we ascribe this important revolution in the sentiments and dispositions of mankind? Not to the influence of better instituted governments; for in legislative wisdom the ancients far excelled us; not to the effects of a better directed education; that duty, shamefully neglected by us, was, among them, an object of chief attention; nor to our superior refinements in elegant and polite arts; there we must be content to equal, without pretending to surpass the ancients. The Christian religion, "hid from ages, but now manifested to the world," is the only cause capable of producing so great an effect: "That wisdom which is from above, is pure and peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy." Genuine Christianity is distinguished above all other religions by the mildness of its spirit; the enemy of every practice which hardens the heart; the encourager of every virtue which renders the character humane. Wherever it hath been established in purity, and practised with zeal, "kindness, long-suffering, meekness, charity," are the graces which accompany it. Even the vices and inventions of men, which have mingled themselves with the truths of God, have not been able entirely to destroy their effects. Under all disadvantages, the genius of the gospel exerts itself, civilizing the fiercest and most barbarous nations, and inspiring a gentleness of disposition, unknown to any other religion. Together with the best spiritual blessings, the most valuable temporal mercies have been communicated to the world by Christianity. It not only sanc-

tifies our souls, but refines our manners; and while it gives the promises of the next life, it improves and adorns the present. That happy change which the wisdom of man could not effect, God in his good time accomplished, by "manifesting to the world the mystery hid from ages and generations."

* * * * *

[IN the preceding Tract, the writer has well shown the peculiar fitness of the coming of Christ, to the circumstances of the world, at the time in which he appeared; that he did not come at random, or arbitrarily, but at the most appropriate season; and that this is an argument for the Divine truth of Christianity. But in addition to these views, various considerations might be suggested, still farther illustrative of the subject. It is often asked, Why was Christianity so late of being introduced to the world? One reason might be to give ample scope for the depravity of man to display itself. It is on this very depravity that the gospel proceeds as a first principle. Another reason might be to show forth the weakness of human wisdom, the utter inability of man to heal himself, and therefore the necessity of a Divine interposition. A third reason might be to afford opportunities for the development of the argument from prophecy, and so the better to establish the Evidences of Revelation. A farther reason might be to afford the world time to be full of people, that Messiah might have a more glorious triumph for his kingdom, in their rapid conversion.—EDITOR.]

* The wonderful moral revolution which has taken place in a number of the islands of the South Seas, and the interesting fact, that, in the island of Antigua, thirty thousand slaves were safely emancipated in 1834, in a moment, without any of that preparation which was adopted in other islands, are striking testimonies to the power of the gospel. In both cases, the result was owing to the influence of a widely-spread and living Christianity.—EDITOR.

A SHORT AND EASY METHOD WITH THE DEISTS.

BY THE

REV. CHARLES LESLIE, M.A.

THE Rev. CHARLES LESLIE, M.A., the celebrated author of the following Tract, was the son of an Irish Bishop, and was himself appointed to a charge in Ireland, during the trying period of 1687, when Popery was fast gaining the ascendancy in Great Britain. He was a determined Protestant, and held repeated public discussions with Papists. He published nearly thirty different tracts and pamphlets, chiefly controversial. Indeed, so highly was he reputed as a polemic, that he was sent over to the Continent by some gentlemen of England, to endeavour to convert the son of James II. to the Protestant faith, an undertaking, however, in which he failed. The most celebrated of his works is his *Short and Easy Method with the Deists*. The following interesting account of the origin of the publication is taken from the preface to the edition published by the Rev. Mr Jones of Nayland. It need scarcely be added, that the work has gone through a great variety of editions, though still it is far from being so generally known or possessed, as its value justly claims.

“Every reader, to whom the *Short Method* is new, will be induced to think more highly of it, if I tell him its history, as I received it from Dr Delany, Dean of Down, in Ireland; who told me he had it from Captain Leslie, a son of the author. It was the fortune of Mr Leslie to be acquainted with the Duke of Leeds of that time; who observed to him, that although he was a believer of the Christian religion, he was not satisfied with the common methods of proving it; that the argument was long and complicated; so that some had neither

leisure nor patience to follow it, and others were not able to comprehend it; that as it was the nature of all truth to be plain and simple, if Christianity were a truth, there must be some short way of showing it to be so; and he wished Mr Leslie would think of it. Such a hint to such a man, in the space of three days, produced a rough draught of the *Short and Easy Method with the Deists*; which he presented to the Duke, who looked it over, and then said, 'I thought I was a Christian before, but I am sure of it now; and as I am indebted to you for converting me, I shall henceforth look upon you as my spiritual father.' And he acted accordingly; for he never came into his company afterwards, without asking his blessing. Such is the story; very nearly as Dr Delany himself would tell it, if he were now alive. The circumstances are so memorable, that there must have been something very extraordinary at the bottom to account for them. And so thought Dr Middleton; though the work affected him in a very different manner. Feeling how necessary it was to his principles that he should some way rid himself of Mr Leslie's argument, he looked out for some false fact, to which the four marks might be applied, and this he did for twenty years together, without being able to find one. This I learned from the late Dr Berkeley, son to the celebrated Bishop of Cloyne, who conversed much with the world, and I believe would not have reported such a thing, but upon good authority.

"To those who take Mr Leslie's tracts into their hands, I have only this short advice to give. I beseech them to remember, that if Christianity be true, it is tremendously true. All the great things this world can show are as nothing in comparison of it. Heaven and hell are the issue. Its facts yet to come are as certain as those that are past. The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised; the heavens shall

be on fire, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the angels shall gather the elect of God from the four winds; all men shall be called upon to give an account of their words and actions; and they who now deny Jesus Christ, and hold him in defiance, shall see the heaven and earth fly away before his face. A man must be stupefied if he can think on these things, without fleeing from the wrath to come; and there is no way but in the belief of Christianity, which this book teaches."

SIR,

I. IN answer to yours of the 3d instant, I much condole with you in your unhappy circumstances, of being placed among such company, where, as you say, you continually hear the sacred Scriptures, and the histories therein contained, particularly of Moses and of Christ, and all revealed religion, turned into ridicule, by men who set up for sense and reason. And they say that there is no greater ground to believe in Christ, than in Mahomet; that all these pretences to revelation are cheats, and ever have been among Pagans, Jews, Mahometans, and Christians; that they are all alike impositions of cunning and designing men, upon the credulity, at first, of simple and unthinking people, till, their numbers increasing, their delusions grew popular, came at last to be established by laws; and then the force of education and custom gives a bias to the judgments of after ages, till such deceits come really to be believed, being received upon trust from the ages foregoing, without examining into the original and bottom of them. Which these, our modern men of sense (as they desire to be esteemed) say that they only do, that they only have their judgments freed from the slavish authority of precedents

and laws, in matters of truth, which, they say, ought only to be decided by reason; though by a prudent compliance with popularity and laws, they preserve themselves from outrage, and legal penalties; for none of their complexion are addicted to sufferings or martyrdom.

Now, Sir, that which you desire from me, is some short topic of reason, if such can be found, whereby, without running to authorities, and the intricate mazes of learning, which breed long disputes, and which these men of reason deny by wholesale, though they can give no reason for it, only suppose that authors have been trumped upon us, interpolated and corrupted, so that no stress can be laid upon them, though it cannot be shown wherein they are so corrupted; which, in reason, ought to lie upon them to prove, who allege it; otherwise it is not only a precarious, but a guilty plea: and the more, that they refrain not to quote books on their side, for whose authority there are no better, or not so good grounds. However, you say, it makes your disputes endless, and they go away with noise and clamour, and a boast, that there is nothing, at least nothing certain, to be said on the Christian side. Therefore you are desirous to find some one topic of reason, which should demonstrate the truth of the Christian religion, and at the same time, distinguish it from the impostures of Mahomet, and the old Pagan world: that our Deists may be brought to this test, and be obliged either to renounce their reason, and the common reason of mankind, or to submit to the clear proof, from reason, of the Christian religion; which must be such a proof, as no imposture can pretend to, otherwise it cannot prove the Christian religion not to be an imposture. And, whether such a proof, one single proof (to avoid confusion) is not to be found out, you desire to know me.

And you say, that you cannot imagine but there must be such a proof, because every truth is in itself clear, and one; and therefore that one reason for it, if it be the true reason, must be sufficient; and if sufficient, it is better than many; for multiplicity confounds, especially to weak judgments.

Sir, you have imposed an hard task upon me, I wish I could perform it. For though every truth is one, yet our sight is so feeble, that we cannot (always) come to it directly, but by many inferences, and laying of things together.

But I think, that in the case before us, there is such a proof as you require, and I will set it down as short and plain as I can.

II. First, then, I suppose, that the truth of the doctrine of Christ will be sufficiently evinced, if the matters of fact, which are recorded of him in the gospels, be true; for his miracles, if true, do vouch the truth of what he delivered.

The same is to be said as to Moses. If he brought the children of Israel through the Red Sea in that miraculous manner which is related in Exodus, and did such other wonderful things as are there told of him, it must necessarily follow, that he was sent from God: these being the strongest proofs we can desire, and which every Deist will confess he would acquiesce in, if he saw them with his eyes. Therefore the stress of this cause will depend upon the proof of these matters of fact.

1. And the method I will take, is, first, to lay down such rules, as to the truth of matters of fact in general, that where they all meet, such matters of fact cannot be false. And then, secondly, to show that all these rules do meet in the matters of fact, of Moses, and of Christ; and that they do not meet in the matters of fact of Mahomet, and the heathen deities, or can possibly meet in any imposture whatsoever.

2. The rules are these: 1st, That the matters of fact be such, as that men's outward senses, their eyes and ears, may be judges of it; 2d, That it be done publicly in the face of the world; 3d, That not only public monuments be kept up in memory of it, but some outward actions to be performed; 4th, That such monuments, and such actions or observances be instituted, and do commence from the time that the matter of fact was done.

3. The two first rules make it impossible for any such matter of fact to be imposed upon men, at the time when such matter of fact was said to be done, because every man's eyes and senses would contradict it. For example: Suppose any man should pretend, that yesterday he divided the Thames, in presence of all the people of London, and carried the whole city, men, women, and children, over to Southwark, on dry land, the waters standing like walls on both sides: I say, it is morally impossible that he could persuade the people of London that this was true, when every man, woman, and child, could contradict him, and say, that this was a notorious falsehood, for that they had not seen the Thames so divided, or had gone over on dry land. Therefore I take it for granted (and I suppose, with the allowance of all the Deists in the world), that no such imposition could be put upon men, at the time when such public matter of fact was said to be done.

4. Therefore it only remains that such matter of fact might be invented some time after, when the men of that generation, wherein the thing was said to be done, are all past and gone; and the credulity of after ages might be imposed upon, to believe that things were done in former ages, which were not.

And for this, the two last rules secure us as much as the two first rules, in the former case; for when-

ever such a matter of fact came to be invented, if not only monuments were said to remain of it, but likewise that public actions and observances were constantly used ever since the matter of fact was said to be done, the deceit must be detected, by no such monuments appearing, and by the experience of every man, woman, and child, who must know that no such actions or observances were ever used by them. For example : Suppose I should now invent a story of such a thing done a thousand years ago, I might perhaps get some to believe it ; but if I say, that not only such a thing was done, but that, from that day to this, every man, at the age of twelve years, had a joint of his little finger cut off ; and that every man in the nation did want a joint of such a finger ; and that this institution was said to be part of the matter of fact done so many years ago, and vouched as a proof and confirmation of it, and as having descended, without interruption, and been constantly practised, in memory of such matter of fact, all along, from the time that such matter of fact was done : I say, it is impossible I should be believed in such a case, because every one could contradict me, as to the mark of cutting off a joint of the finger ; and that being part of my original matter of fact, must demonstrate the whole to be false.

III. Let us now come to the second point, to show that the matters of fact of Moses, and of Christ, have all these rules or marks before mentioned ; and that neither the matters of fact of Mahomet, or what is reported of the heathen deities, have the like ; and that no impostor can have them all.

1. As to Moses, I suppose it will be allowed me, that he could not have persuaded six hundred thousand men, that he had brought them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea ; fed them forty years, without bread, by miraculous manna, and the other matters of fact

recorded in his books, if they had not been true. Because every man's senses that were then alive, must have contradicted it. And therefore he must have imposed upon all their senses, if he could have made them believe it, when it was false, and no such things done. So that here are the first and second of the above-mentioned four marks.

From the same reason, it was equally impossible for him to have made them receive his five books, as truth, and not to have rejected them, as a manifest imposture; which told of all these things as done before their eyes, if they had not been so done. See how positively he speaks to them, Deut. xi. 2, to verse 8: "And know you this day, for I speak not with your children, which have not known, and which have not seen the chastisement of the Lord your God, his greatness, his mighty hand, and his stretched-out arm, and his miracles, and his acts, which he did in the midst of Egypt, unto Pharaoh the king of Egypt, and unto all his land, and what he did unto the army of Egypt, unto their horses, and to their chariots; how he made the water of the Red Sea to overflow them as they pursued after you; and how the Lord hath destroyed them unto this day: and what he did unto you in the wilderness, until ye came into this place; and what he did unto Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliah, the son of Reuben, how the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their households, and their tents, and all the substance that was in their possession, in the midst of all Israel. But your eyes have seen all the great acts of the Lord, which he did," &c.

From hence we must suppose it impossible that these books of Moses (if an imposture) could have been invented and put upon the people who were then alive, when all these things were said to be done.

The utmost therefore, that even a suppose can stretch to, is, that these books were wrote in some age after Moses, and put out in his name.

And to this, I say, that if it was so, it was impossible that those books should have been received as the books of Moses, in that age wherein they may have been supposed to have been first invented. Why? Because they speak of themselves as delivered by Moses, and kept in the ark from his time. "And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished, that Moses commanded the Levites who bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee." Deut. xxxi. 24—26. And there was a copy of this book to be left likewise with the king. "And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book, out of that which is before the priests the Levites: and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes to do them." Deut. xviii. 18, 19.

Here then you see that this book of the law speaks of itself, not only as an history or relation of what things were then done, but as the standing and municipal law and statutes of the nation of the Jews, binding the king as well as the people.

Now, in whatever age after Moses, you will suppose this book to have been forged, it was impossible it could be received as truth; because it was not then to be found, either in the ark, or with the king, or any where else: For when first invented, every body must know, that they had never heard of it before.

And therefore they could less believe it to be the

book of their statutes, and the standing law of the land, which they had all along received, and by which they had been governed.

Could any man, now at this day, invent a book of statutes or acts of parliament for England, and make it pass upon the nation as the only book of statutes that ever they had known? As impossible was it for the books of Moses (if they were invented in any age after Moses) to have been received for what they declare themselves to be, viz., the statutes and municipal law of the nation of the Jews: and to have persuaded the Jews, that they had owned and acknowledged these books, all along from the days of Moses, to that day in which they were first invented; that is, that they had owned them before they had ever so much as heard of them. Nay, more, the whole nation must, in an instant, forget their former laws and government, if they could receive these books as being their former laws. And they could not otherwise receive them, because they vouched themselves so to be. Let me ask the Deists but one short question: Was there ever a book of sham-laws, which were not the laws of the nation, palmed upon any people, since the world began? If not, with what face can they say this of the book of laws of the Jews? Why will they say that of them, which they confess impossible in any nation, or among any people?

But they must be yet more unreasonable. For the books of Moses have a further demonstration of their truth than even other law-books have: For they not only contain the laws, but give an historical account of their institution, and the practice of them from that time: as of the passover in memory of the death of the first-born in Egypt: and that the same day, all the first-born of Israel both of man and beast, were by a perpetual law dedicated to God: and the Levites

taken for all the first-born of the children of Israel. That Aaron's rod which budded, was kept in the ark, in memory of the rebellion, and wonderful destruction of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; and for the confirmation of the priesthood to the tribe of Levi. As likewise the pot of manna, in memory of their having been fed with it forty years in the wilderness. That the brazen serpent was kept (which remained to the days of Hezekiah, 2 Kings xviii. 4) in memory of that wonderful deliverance, by only looking upon it, from the biting of the fiery serpents, Num. xxi. 9. The feast of Pentecost, in memory of the dreadful appearance of God upon Mount Horeb, &c.

And besides these remembrances of particular actions and occurrences, there were other solemn institutions in memory of their deliverance out of Egypt, in the general, which included all the particulars. As of the Sabbath, Deut. v. 15. Their daily sacrifices, and yearly expiation; their new moons, and several feasts and fasts. So that there were yearly, monthly, weekly, daily remembrances and recognitions of these things.

And not only so, but the books of the same Moses tell us, that a particular tribe (of Levi) was appointed and consecrated by God, as his priests; by whose hands, and none other, the sacrifices of the people were to be offered, and these solemn institutions to be celebrated. That it was death for any other to approach the altar. That their high priest wore a glorious mitre, and magnificent robes of God's own contrivance, with the miraculous Urim and Thummim in his breast-plate, whence the Divine responses were given. That at his word, the king and all the people were to go out, and to come in. That these Levites, were likewise the chief judges, even in all civil causes, and that it was death to resist their sen-

tence. Now, whenever it can be supposed that these books of Moses were forged in some ages after Moses, it is impossible they could have been received as true, unless the forgers could have made the whole nation believe, that they had received these books from their fathers, had been instructed in them when they were children, and had taught them to their children; moreover, that they had all been circumcised, and did circumcise their children, in pursuance to what was commanded in these books: that they had observed the yearly passover, the weekly sabbath, the new moons, and all these several feasts, fasts, and ceremonies commanded in these books: that they had never eaten any swine's flesh, or other meats prohibited in these books: that they had a magnificent tabernacle, with a visible priesthood to administer in it, which was confined to the tribe of Levi; over whom was placed a glorious high-priest, clothed with great and mighty prerogatives: whose death only could deliver those that were fled to the cities of refuge. And that these priests were their ordinary judges, even in civil matters: I say, was it possible to have persuaded a whole nation of men, that they had known and practised all these things, if they had not done it? or, secondly, to have received a book for truth, which said they had practised them, and appealed to that practice? So that here are the third and fourth of the marks above-mentioned.

But now let us descend to the utmost degree of supposition, viz., that these things were practised, before these books of Moses were forged; and that those books did only impose upon the nation, in making them believe, that they had kept these observances in memory of such and such things, as were inserted in those books.

Well then, let us proceed upon this supposition,

(however groundless) and now, will not the same impossibilities occur, as in the former case? For, first, this must suppose that the Jews kept all these observances in memory of nothing, or without knowing any thing of their original, or the reason why they kept them. Whereas these very observances did express the ground and reason of their being kept, as the passover, in memory of God's passing over the children of the Israelites, in that night wherein he slew all the first-born of Egypt, and so of the rest.

But, secondly, let us suppose, contrary both to reason and matter of fact, that the Jews did not know any reason at all why they kept these observances; yet was it possible to put it upon them, that they had kept these observances in memory of what they had never heard of before that day, whensoever you will suppose that these books of Moses were first forged? For example, suppose I should now forge some romantic story, of strange things done a thousand years ago, and in confirmation of this, should endeavour to persuade the Christian world, that they had all along, from that day to this, kept the first day of the week in memory of such an hero, an Appollo-nius, a Barcosbas, or a Mahomet; and had all been baptized in his name; and swore by his name, and upon that very book, (which I had then forged, and which they never saw before) in their public judicatures; that this book was their gospel and law, which they had ever since that time, these thousand years past, universally received and owned, and none other. I would ask any Deist, whether he thinks it possible that such a cheat could pass, or such a legend be received as the gospel of Christians; and that they could be made believe that they never had any other gospel? The same reason is as to the books of Moses; and must be, as to every matter of fact, which has all the

four marks before mentioned; and these marks secure any such matter of fact as much from being invented and imposed in any after ages, as at the time when such matters of fact were said to be done.

Let me give one very familiar example more in this case. There is the Stonehenge in Salisbury-plain, every body knows it; and yet none knows the reason why those great stones were set there, or by whom, or in memory of what.

Now, suppose I should write a book to-morrow, and tell there, that these stones were set up by Hercules, Polyphemus, or Garagantua, in memory of such and such of their actions. And for a further confirmation of this, should say in this book, that it was wrote at the time when such actions were done, and by the very actors themselves, or eye witnesses. And that this book had been received as truth, and quoted by authors of the greatest reputation in all ages since. Moreover that this book was well known in England, and enjoined by act of parliament to be taught our children, and that we did teach it to our children, and had been taught it ourselves when we were children. I ask any Deist, whether he thinks this could pass upon England? And whether, if I, or any other should insist upon it, we should not, instead of being believed, be sent to Bedlam?

Now, let us compare this with the Stonehenge, as I may call it, or twelve great stones set up at Gilgal, which is told in the fourth chapter of Joshua. There it is said, verse 6, that the reason why they were set up, was, that when their children, in after ages, should ask the meaning of it, it should be told them.

And the thing in memory of which they were set up, was such as could not possibly be imposed upon that nation, at that time when it was said to be done: it was as wonderful and miraculous as their passage through the Red Sea.

And withal, free from a very poor objection, which the Deists have advanced against that miracle of the Red Sea: thinking to salve it by a spring-tide, with the concurrence of a strong wind, happening at the same time; which left the sand so dry, as that the Israelites being all foot, might pass through the oozy places and holes, which it must be supposed the sea left behind it: but that the Egyptians, being all horse and chariots, stuck in those holes, and were entangled, so as that they could not march so fast as the Israelites: and that this was all the meaning of its being said, that God took off their (the Egyptians) chariot wheels, that they drove them heavily. So that they would make nothing extraordinary, at least, nothing miraculous, in all this action.

This is advanced in Le Clerc's *Dissertations upon Genesis*, lately printed in Holland, and that part, with others of the like tendency, endeavouring to resolve other miracles, as that of Sodom and Gomorrah, &c., into the mere natural causes, are put into English by the well known T. Brown, for the edification of the Deists in England.

But these gentlemen have forgot, that the Israelites had great herds of many thousand cattle with them; which would be apter to stray, and fall into those holes and oozy places in the strand, than horses with riders who might direct them.

But such precarious and silly supposes are not worth the answering. If there had been no more in this passage through the Red Sea than that of a spring tide, &c., it had been impossible for Moses to have made the Israelites believe that relation given of it in Exodus, with so many particulars, which themselves saw to be true.

And all those Scriptures which magnify this action, and appeal to it as a full demonstration of the miracu-

lous power of God, must be reputed as romance or legend.

I say this, for the sake of some Christians, who think it no prejudice to the truth of the Holy Bible, but rather an advantage, as rendering it more easy to be believed, if they can solve whatever seems miraculous in it, by the power of second causes: and so to make all, as they speak, natural and easy. Wherein, if they could prevail, the natural and easy result would be, not to believe one word in all those sacred oracles. For if things be not as they are told in any relation, that relation must be false. And if false in part, we cannot trust to it, either in whole or in part.

Here are to be excepted, mistranslations and errors, either in copy or in press. But where there is no room for supposing of these, as where all copies do agree; there we must either receive all, or reject all. I mean in any book that pretends to be written from the mouth of God. For in other common histories, we may believe part, and reject part, as we see cause.

But to return. The passage of the Israelites over Jordan, in memory of which those stones at Gilgal were set up, is free from all those little carpings before-mentioned, that are made as to the passage through the Red Sea. For notice was given to the Israelites the day before, of this great miracle to be done. Josh. iii. 5. It was done at noon-day, before the whole nation. And when the waters of Jordan were divided, it was not at any low ebb, but at the time when that river overflowed all his banks, verse 15. And it was done, not by winds, or in length of time, which winds must take to do it; but all on the sudden, as soon as the "feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, then the waters which came down from above, stood and rose up upon an heap, very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan:

and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off: and the people passed over, right against Jericho. The priests stood in the midst of Jordan, till all the armies of Israel had passed over. And it came to pass, when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord were come up, out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lift up upon the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks as they did before. And the people came out of Jordan, on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal on the east border of Jericho, and those twelve stones which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal. And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then shall ye let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. For the Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over: as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over. That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever." Chap. iv. from verse 18.

If the passage over the Red Sea, had been only taking advantage of a spring tide, or the like, how would this teach all the people of the earth, that the hand of the Lord was mighty? How would a thing no more remarkable have been taken notice of through all the world? How would it have taught Israel to fear the Lord, when they must know, that notwithstanding of all these big words, there was so little in it! How could they have believed, or received a book, as truth which they knew, told the matter so far otherwise from what it was?

But, as I said, this passage over Jordan, which is here compared to that of the Red Sea, is free from all those cavils that are made, as to that of the Red Sea, and is a further attestation to it, being said to be done in the same manner as was that of the Red Sea.

Now, to form our argument, let us suppose, that there never was any such thing as that passage over Jordan. That these stones at Gilgal were set up upon some other occasion, in some after age. And then, that some designing man invented this book of Joshua, and said, that it was wrote by Joshua at that time. And gave this stonage at Gilgal for a testimony of the truth of it. Would not every body say to him, we know the stonage at Gilgal, but we never heard before of this reason for it? Nor of this book of Joshua? Where has it been all this while? And where, and how came you, after so many ages, to find it? Besides, this book tells us, that this passage over Jordan was ordained to be taught our children, from age to age: and therefore, that they were always to be instructed in the meaning of that stonage at Gilgal, as a memorial of it. But we were never taught it, when we were children; nor did ever teach our children any such thing. And it is not likely that could have been forgotten, while so remarkable a stonage did continue, which was set up for that and no other end!

And if, for the reasons before given, no such imposition could be put upon us as to the stonage in Salisbury plain; how much less could it be to the stonage at Gilgal?

And if where we know not the reason of a bare naked monument, such a sham reason cannot be imposed, how much more is it impossible to impose upon us in actions and observances, which we celebrate in memory of particular passages? How impossible to make us forget those passages which we daily com-

memorate; and persuade us, that we had always kept such institutions in memory of what we never heard of before; that is, that we knew it, before we knew it!

And if we find it thus impossible for an imposition to be put upon us, even in some things which have not all the four marks before mentioned; how much more impossible is it, that any deceit should be in that thing where all the four marks do meet!

This has been showed in the first place, as to the matters of fact of Moses.

2. Therefore I come now (secondly) to show, that as in the matters of fact of Moses, so likewise all these four marks do meet in the matters of fact, which are recorded in the gospel of our blessed Saviour. And my work herein will be the shorter, because all that is said before of Moses and his books, is every way as applicable to Christ and his gospel. His works and his miracles are there said to be done publicly in the face of the world, as he argued to his accusers, "I spake openly to the world, and in secret have I said nothing," John xviii. 20. It is told, Acts ii. 41, that three thousand at one time; and Acts iv. 4, that above five thousand at another time, were converted, upon conviction of what themselves had seen, and what had been done publicly before their eyes, wherein it was impossible to have imposed upon them. Therefore here were the two first of the rules before-mentioned.

Then for the two second: Baptism and the Lord's Supper were instituted as perpetual memorials of these things; and they were not instituted in after ages, but at the very time when these things were said to be done; and have been observed without interruption, in all ages through the whole Christian world, down all the way from that time to this. And Christ himself did ordain apostles and other ministers of his gospel, to preach and administer the sacraments; and

to govern his church: and that always, even unto the end of the world. Accordingly they have continued by regular succession, to this day: and, no doubt, ever shall, while the earth shall last. So that the Christian clergy are as notorious a matter of fact, as the tribe of Levi among the Jews. And the gospel is as much a law to the Christians, as the book of Moses to the Jews: and it being part of the matters of fact related in the gospel, that such an order of men were appointed by Christ, and to continue to the end of the world; consequently, if the gospel was a fiction, and invented (as it must be) in some ages after Christ; then, at that time when it was first invented, there could be no such order of clergy, as derived themselves from the institution of Christ; which must give the lie to the gospel, and demonstrate the whole to be false. And the matters of fact of Christ being pressed to be true, no otherwise than as there was at that time (whenever the Deists will suppose the gospel to be forged) not only public sacraments of Christ's institution, but an order of clergy, likewise of his appointment to administer them: and it being impossible there could be any such things before they were invented, it is as impossible that they should be received when invented. And therefore, by what was said above, it was as impossible to have imposed upon mankind in this matter, by inventing of it in after ages, as at the time when those things were said to be done.

3. The matters of fact of Mahomet, or what is fabled of the deities, do all want some of the aforesaid four rules, whereby the certainty of matters of fact is demonstrated. First, for Mahomet, he pretended to no miracles, as he tells us in his Alcoran, c. 6, &c., and those which are commonly told of him pass among the Mahometans themselves, but as legendary fables: and, as such, are rejected by the wise and learned

among them; as the legends of their saints are in the Church of Rome. See Dr Prideaux his *Life of Mahomet*, page 34.

But, in the next place, those which are told of him, do all want the two first rules before-mentioned. For his pretended converse with the moon: his mersa, or night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, and thence to heaven, &c., were not performed before any body. We have only his own word for them. And they are as groundless as the delusions of the Fox or Muggleton among ourselves. The same is to be said (in the second place) of the fables of the heathen gods, of Mercury's stealing sheep, Jupiter's turning himself into a bull, and the like; besides the folly and unworthiness of such senseless pretended miracles. And moreover the wise among the heathen did reckon no otherwise of these but as fables, which had a mythology, or mystical meaning in them, of which several of them have given us the rationale or explication. And it is plain enough that Ovid meant no other by all his *Metamorphoses*.

It is true, the heathen deities had their priests: they had likewise feasts, games, and other public institutions in memory of them. But all these want the fourth mark, viz., that such priesthood and institutions should commence from the time that such things as they commemorate were said to be done; otherwise they cannot secure after ages from the imposture, by detecting it, at the time when first invented, as hath been argued before. But the Bacchanalia, and other heathen feasts, were instituted many ages after what was reported of these gods was said to be done, and therefore can be no proof. And the priests of Bacchus, Apollo, &c., were not ordained by these supposed gods: but were appointed by others, in after ages, only in honour to them. And therefore these

orders of priests are no evidence to the matters of fact which are reported of their gods.

IV. Now, to apply what has been said. You may challenge all the Deists in the world to show any action that is fabulous, which has all the four rules or marks before-mentioned. No, it is impossible. And (to resume a little what is spoke to before) the histories of Exodus and the gospel never could have been received, if they had not been true; because the institution of the priesthood of Levi, and of Christ; of the Sabbath, the passover, of circumcision, of baptism, and the Lord's Supper, &c., are there related, as descending all the way down from those times, without interruption. And it is full as impossible to persuade men that they had been circumcised or baptized, had circumcised or baptized their children, celebrated passovers, Sabbaths, sacraments, &c., under the government and administration of a certain order of priests, if they had done none of these things, as to make them believe that they had gone through seas upon dry land, seen the dead raised, &c. And without believing these, it was impossible that either the law or the gospel could have been received.

And the truth of the matters of fact of Exodus and the gospel, being no otherwise pressed upon men, than as they have practised such public institutions, it is appealing to the senses of mankind for the truth of them; and makes it impossible for any to have invented such stories in after ages, without a palpable detection of the cheat when first invented; as impossible as to have imposed upon the senses of mankind, at the time when such public matters of fact were said to be done.

V. I do not say, that every thing which wants these four marks is false: but, that nothing can be false, which has them all.

I have no manner of doubt that there was such a

man as Julius Cæsar, that he fought at Pharsalia, was killed in the senate house, and many other matters of fact of ancient times, though we keep no public observances in memory of them.

But this shows that the matters of fact of Moses and of Christ, have come down to us better guarded than any other matters of fact, how true soever.

And yet our Deists, who would laugh any man out the world as an irrational brute, that should offer to deny Cæsar or Alexander, Homer or Virgil, their public works and actions, do, at the same time, value themselves as the only men of wit and sense, of free, generous and unbiassed judgments, for ridiculing the histories of Moses and of Christ, that are infinitely better attested, and guarded with infallible marks, which the others want.

VI. Besides that the importance of the subject would oblige all men to inquire more narrowly into the one than the other: for what consequence is it to me, or to the world, whether there was such a man as Cæsar, whether he beat, or was beaten at Pharsalia, whether Homer or Virgil wrote such books, and whether what is related in the Iliads or Æneids be true or false? It is not twopence up or down to any man in the world. And therefore it is worth no man's while to inquire into it, either to oppose or justify the truth of these relations.

But our very souls and bodies, both this life and eternity are concerned in the truth of what is related in the holy Scriptures; and therefore men would be more inquisitive to search into the truth of these, than of any other matters of fact; examine and sift them narrowly; and find out the deceit, if any such could be found: for it concerned them nearly, and was of the last importance to them.

How unreasonable then is it to reject these matters

of fact, so sifted, so examined, and so attested as no other matters of fact in the world ever were; and yet to think it the most highly unreasonable, even to madness, to deny other matters of fact, which have not the thousandth part of their evidence, and are of no consequence at all to us whether true or false!

VII. There are several other topics, from whence the truth of the Christian religion is evinced to all who will judge by reason, and give themselves leave to consider. As the improbability that ten or twelve poor illiterate fishermen should form a design of converting the whole world to believe their delusions; and the impossibility of their effecting it, without force of arms, learning, oratory, or any one visible thing that could recommend them! And to impose a doctrine quite opposite to the lusts and pleasures of men, and all worldly advantages or enjoyments! And this in an age of so great learning and sagacity as that wherein the gospel was first preached! That these apostles should not only undergo all the scorn and contempt, but the severest persecutions and most cruel deaths that could be inflicted, in attestation to what themselves knew to be a mere deceit and forgery of their own contriving! Some have suffered for errors which they thought to be truth, but never any for what they themselves knew to be lies. And the apostles must know what they taught to be lies, if it was so, because they spoke of those things which they said they had both seen and heard, had looked upon and handled with their hands, &c.

Neither can it be, that they, perhaps, might have proposed some temporal advantages to themselves, but missed of them, and met with sufferings instead of them: for, if it had been so, it is more than probable, that when they saw their disappointment, they would have discovered their conspiracy, especially when they

might not have only saved their lives, but got great rewards for doing of it. That not one of them should ever have been brought to do this.

But this is not all: for they tell us that their Master bid them expect nothing but sufferings in this world. This is the tenure of that gospel which they taught; and they told the same to all whom they converted. So that here was no disappointment.

For all that were converted by them, were converted upon the certain expectation of sufferings, and bidden prepare for it. Christ commanded his disciples to take up their cross daily, and follow him; and told them, that in the world they should have tribulation; that whoever did not forsake father, mother, wife, children, lands, and their very lives, could not be his disciples; that he who sought to save his life in this world, should lose it in the next.

Now, that this despised doctrine of the cross should prevail so universally against the allurements of flesh and blood, and all the blandishments of this world; against the rage and persecution of all the kings and powers of the earth, must show its original to be Divine, and its protector Almighty. What is it else could conquer without arms, persuade without rhetoric; overcome enemies; disarm tyrants; and subdue empires without opposition!

VIII. We may add to all this, the testimonies of the most bitter enemies and persecutors of Christianity, both Jews and Gentiles, to the truth of the matter of fact of Christ, such as Josephus and Tacitus; of which the first flourished about forty years after the death of Christ, and the other about seventy years after: so that they were capable of examining into the truth, and wanted not prejudice and malice sufficient to have inclined them to deny the matter of fact itself of Christ: but their confessing to it, as likewise

Lucian, Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian the apostate; the Mahometans since, and all other enemies of Christianity that have arisen in the world, is an undeniable attestation to the truth of the matter of fact.

IX. But there is another argument more strong and convincing than even this matter of fact; more than the certainty of what I see with my eyes; and which the apostle Peter called a more sure word, that is proof, that what he saw and heard upon the holy mount, when our blessed Saviour was transfigured before him and two other of the apostles: for having repeated that passage as a proof of that whereof they were eye witnesses, and heard the voice from heaven giving attestation to our Lord Christ, 2 Pet. i. 16—18, he says, verse 19, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy,” for the proof of this Jesus being the Messiah, that is, the prophecies which had gone before of him from the beginning of the world, and all exactly fulfilled in him.

Men may dispute an imposition or delusion upon our outward senses. But how that can be false, which has been so long, even from the beginning of the world, and so often by all the prophets in several ages foretold; how can this be an imposition or a forgery?

This is particularly insisted on in the *Method with the Jews*. And even the Deists must confess, that that book we call the Old Testament, was in being in the hands of the Jews long before our Saviour came into the world. And if they will be at the pains to compare the prophecies that are there of the Messiah, with the fulfilling of them, as to time, place, and all other circumstances in the person, birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of our blessed Saviour, will find this proof what our apostle here calls it, “a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts.” Which God grant. Here is no possibility of deceit or imposture.

Old prophecies (and all so agreeing) could not have been contrived to countenance a new cheat: and nothing could be a cheat, that could fulfil all these.

For this, therefore, I refer the Deists to the *Method with the Jews*.

I desire them likewise to look there, Sect. 11., and consider the prophecies given so long ago, of which they see the fulfilling at this day with their own eyes, of the state of the Jews for many ages past and at present, without a king or priest, or temple, or sacrifice, scattered to the four winds, sifted as with a sieve, among all nations; yet preserved, and always so to be, a distinct people from all others of the whole earth. Whereas those mighty monarchies which oppressed the Jews, and which commanded the world in their turns, and had the greatest human prospect of perpetuity, were to be extinguished, as they have been, even that their names should be blotted out from under heaven.

As likewise, that as remarkable of our blessed Saviour, concerning the preservation and progress of the Christian church, when in her swaddling clothes, consisting only of a few poor fishermen. Not by the sword, as that of Mahomet, but under all the persecution of men and hell; which yet should not prevail against her.

But though I offer these as not to be slighted by the Deists, to which they can show nothing equal in all profane history, and in which it is impossible any cheat can lie; yet I put them not upon the same foot as the prophecies before-mentioned of the marks and coming of the Messiah, which have been since the world began.

And that general expectation of the whole earth, at the time of his coming, insisted upon in the *Method with the Jews*, Sect. 5., is greatly to be noticed.

But, I say, the foregoing prophecies of our Saviour

are so strong a proof, as even miracles would not be sufficient to break their authority.

I mean, if it were possible that a true miracle could be wrought, in contradiction to them: for that would be for God to contradict himself.

But no sign or wonder, that could possibly be solved, should shake this evidence.

It is this that keeps the Jews in their obstinacy; though they cannot deny the matters of fact done by our blessed Saviour to be truly miracles, if so done as said. Nor can they deny that they were so done, because they have all the four marks before mentioned. Yet they cannot yield! Why? Because they think that the gospel is in contradiction to the law; which, if it were, the consequence would be unavoidable, that both could not be true. To solve this, is the business of the *Method with the Jews*. But the contradiction which they suppose, is in their comments that they put upon the law; especially they expect a literal fulfilling of those promises of the restoration of Jerusalem, and outward glories of the church, of which there is such frequent mention in the books of Moses, the Psalms, and all the prophets. And many Christians do expect the same, and take those texts as literally as the Jews do. We do believe and pray for the conversion of the Jews. For this end they have been so miraculously preserved, according to the prophecies so long before of it. And when that time shall come, as they are the most honourable and ancient of all the nations on the earth, so will their church return to be the mother Christian church as she was at first; and Rome must surrender to Jerusalem. Then all nations will flow thither; and even Ezekiel's temple may be literally built there, in the metropolis of the whole earth; which Jerusalem must be, when the fulness of the Gentiles shall meet with the conversion of the Jews. For no nation will then contend with the Jews, nor church with Jerusa-

lem for supremacy. All nations will be ambitious to draw their original from the Jews, "whose are the fathers, and from whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came."

Then will be fulfilled that outward grandeur and restoration of the Jews and of Jerusalem, which they expect, pursuant to the prophecies.

They pretend not that this is limited to any particular time of the reign of the Messiah. They are sure it will not be at the beginning; for they expect to go through great conflicts and trials with their Messiah (as the Christian church has done) before his final conquest, and that they come to reign with him. So that this is no obstruction to their embracing of Christianity. They see the same things fulfilled in us, which they expect themselves; and we expect the same things they do.

I tell this to the Deists, lest they may think that the Jews have some stronger arguments than they know of, that they are not persuaded by the miracles of our blessed Saviour, and by the fulfilling of all the prophecies in him, that were made concerning the Messiah.

As I said before, I would not plead even miracles against these.

And if this is sufficient to persuade a Jew, it is much more so to a Deist, who labours not under these objections.

Besides, I would not seem to clash with that (in a sound sense) reasonable caution used by Christian writers, not to put the issue of the truth wholly upon miracles, without this addition, when not done in contradiction to the revelations already given in the holy Scriptures.

And they do it upon this consideration, that though it is impossible to suppose, that God would work a

real miracle, in contradiction to what he has already revealed; yet, men may be imposed upon by false and seeming miracles, and pretended revelations (as there are many examples, especially in the Church of Rome), and so may be shaken in the faith, if they keep not to the holy Scriptures as their rule.

We are told, 2 Thess. ii. 9, "of him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders. And Rev. xiii. 14; xvi. 14; and xix. 20, of the devil, and false prophets working miracles. But the word, in all these places, is only *σημεία*, *Signs*, that is, as it is rendered, Matt. xxv. 24, which, though sometimes it may be used to signify real miracles, yet not always, not in these places. For though every miracle be a sign and a wonder, yet every sign or wonder is not a miracle.

X. Here it may be proper to consider a common topic of the Deists, who when they are not able to stand out against the evidence of fact, that such and such miracles have been done, then turn about, and deny such things to be miracles, at least that we can never be sure whether any wonderful thing that is shown to us be a true or a false miracle.

And the great argument they go upon is this, that a miracle being that which exceeds the power of nature, we cannot know what exceeds it, unless we knew the utmost extent of the power of nature; and no man pretends to know that, therefore that no man can certainly know whether any event be miraculous: and, consequently, he may be cheated in his judgment betwixt true and false miracles.

To which I answer, that men may be so cheated, and there are many examples of it.

But that though we may not always know when we are cheated, yet we can certainly tell, in many cases, when we are not cheated.

For though we do not know the utmost extent of the

power of nature, perhaps in any one thing ; yet it does not follow that we know not the nature of any thing in some measure ; and that certainly too. For example, though I do not know the utmost extent of the power of fire, yet I certainly know that it is the nature of fire to burn ; and that when proper fuel is administered to it, it is contrary to the nature of fire not to consume it. Therefore, if I see three men taken off the street, in their common wearing apparel, and without any preparation cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace, and that the flame was so fierce that it burnt up those men that threw them in, and yet that these who were thrown in should walk up and down in the bottom of the furnace, and I should see a fourth person with them of glorious appearance, like the Son of God. And that these men should come up again out of the furnace, without any harm, or so much as the smell of fire upon themselves, or their clothes, I could not be deceived in thinking that there was a stop put to the nature of fire, as to these men ; and that it had its effect upon the men whom it burned, at the same time.

Again : though I cannot tell how wonderful and sudden an increase of corn might be produced by the concurrence of many causes, as a warm climate, the fertility of the soil, &c., yet this I can certainly know, that there is not that natural force in the breath of two or three words, spoken to multiply one small loaf of bread so fast, in the breaking of it, as truly and really, not only in appearance and show to the eye, but to fill the bellies of several thousand hungry persons ; and that the fragments should be much more than the bread was at first.

So neither in a word spoken, to raise the dead, cure diseases, &c.

Therefore, though we know not the utmost extent

f the power of nature; yet we certainly know what is contrary to the nature of several such things as we do know.

And, therefore, though we may be cheated, and imposed upon in many seeming miracles and wonders; yet there are some things wherein we may be certain.

But further, the Deists acknowledge a God of an Almighty power, who made all things.

Yet they would put it out of his power to make any revelation of his will to mankind. For if we cannot be certain of any miracle, how should we know when God sent any thing extraordinary to us?

Nay, how should we know the ordinary power of nature, if we knew not what exceeded it? If we know not what is natural, how do we know there is such a thing as nature? That all is not supernatural, all miracles, and so disputable, till we come to downright scepticism, and doubt the certainty of our outward senses, whether we see, hear, or feel; or all be not a miraculous illusion!

Which, because I know the Deists are not inclined to do, therefore I will return to pursue my argument upon the conviction of our outward senses, desiring only this, that they would allow the senses of other men to be as certain as their own; which they cannot refuse, since without this they can have no certainty of their own.

XI. Therefore, from what has been said, the cause is summed up shortly in this: that though we cannot see what was done before our time, yet by the marks which I have laid down concerning the certainty of matters of fact done before our time, we may be as much assured of the truth of them, as if we saw them with our eyes; because whatever matter of fact has all the four marks before-mentioned, could never have been invented and received but upon the conviction of the outward senses of all those who did receive it, as

before is demonstrated. And therefore this topic which I have chosen, does stand upon the conviction even of men's outward senses. And since you have confined me to one topic, I have not insisted upon the other, which I have only named.

XII. And now it lies upon the Deists, if they would appear as men of reason, to show some matter of fact of former ages, which they allow to be true, that has greater evidence of its truth, than the matters of fact of Moses and of Christ; otherwise they cannot, with any show of reason, reject the one, and yet admit of the other.

But I have given them greater latitude than this, for I have shown such marks of the truth of the matters of fact of Moses and of Christ; as no other matters of fact of those times, however true, have, but these only: and I put it upon them to show any forgery that has all these marks.

This is a short issue. Keep them close to this. This determines the cause all at once.

Let them produce their Apollonius Tyanæus, whose life was put into English by the execrable Charles Blount,* and compared with all the wit and malice he was master of, to the life and miracles of our blessed Saviour.

Let them take aid from all the legends in the church

* The hand of that scorner, which durst write such outrageous blasphemy against his Maker, the Divine vengeance has made his own executioner. Which I would not have mentioned (because the like judgment has befallen others), but that the Theistical Club have set this up as a principle, and printed a vindication of this same Blount for murdering of himself, by way of justification of self-murder; which some of them have since, as well as formerly, horridly practised upon themselves. Therefore this is no common judgment to which they are delivered, but a visible mark set upon them, to show how far God has forsaken them; and as a caution to all Christians to beware of them, and not to come near the tents of these wicked men, lest they perish in their destruction, both of soul and body.

of Rome, those pious cheats, the sorest disgraces of Christianity; and which have bid the fairest of any one contrivance, to overturn the certainty of the miracles of Christ and his apostles, and whole truth of the gospel, by putting them all upon the same foot: at least they are so understood by the generality of their devotees, though disowned and laughed at by the learned, and men of sense among them.

Let them pick and choose the most probable of all the fables of the heathen deities, and see if they can find in any of these, the four marks before-mentioned.

Otherwise, let them submit to the irrefragable certainty of the Christian religion.

XIII. But if, notwithstanding all that is said, the Deists will still contend that all this is but priestcraft, the invention of priests for their own profit, &c., then they will give us an idea of priests, far different from what they intend: for then we must look upon these priests, not only as the cunningest and wisest of mankind, but we shall be tempted to adore them as deities, who have such power as to impose at their pleasure, upon the senses of mankind, to make them believe that they had practised such public institutions, enacted them by laws, taught them to their children, &c., when they had never done any of these things, or ever so much as heard of them before: and then, upon the credit of their believing that they had done such things as they never did, to make them further believe, upon the same foundation, whatever they pleased to impose upon them, as to former ages: I say, such a power as this must exceed all that is human; and consequently make us rank these priests far above the condition of mortals.

2. Nay, this were to make them outdo all that has ever been related of the infernal powers: for though their legerdemain has extended to deceive some unwary beholders, and their power of working some

seeming miracles has been great, yet it never reached, nor ever was supposed to reach so far, as to deceive the senses of all mankind, in matters of such public and notorious nature as those of which we now speak, to make them believe, that they had enacted laws for such public observances, continually practised them, taught them to their children, and had been instructed in them themselves, from their childhood, if they had never enacted, practised, taught, or been taught such things.

3. And as this exceeds all the power of hell and devils, so is it more than ever God Almighty has done since the foundation of the world. None of the miracles that he has shown, or belief which he has required to any thing that he has revealed, has ever contradicted the outward senses of any one man in the world, much less of all mankind together. For miracles being appeals to our outward senses, if they should overthrow the certainty of our outward senses, must destroy with it all their own certainty as to us; since we have no other way to judge of a miracle exhibited to our senses, than upon the supposition of the certainty of our senses, upon which we give credit to a miracle, that is shown to our senses.

4. This, by the way, is a yet unanswered argument against the miracle of transubstantiation, and shows the weakness of the defence which the Church of Rome offers for it, (from whom the Socinians have licked it up, and of late have gloried much in it amongst us) that the doctrines of the Trinity or Incarnation, contain as great seeming absurdities as that of transubstantiation: for I would ask, which of our senses it is which the doctrines of the Trinity or incarnation do contradict? Is it our seeing, hearing, feeling, taste or smell? Whereas transubstantiation does contradict all of these. Therefore the compari-

son is exceedingly short, and out of purpose. But to return.

If the Christian religion be a cheat, and nothing else but the invention of priests, and carried on by their craft, it makes their power and wisdom greater than that of men, angels, or devils; and more than God himself ever yet showed or expressed, to deceive and impose upon the senses of mankind, in such public and notorious matters of fact.

XIV. And this miracle, which the Deists must run into to avoid these recorded of Moses and Christ, is much greater and more astonishing than all the Scriptures tell of them.

So that these men who laugh at all miracles are now obliged to account for the greatest of all, how the senses of mankind could be imposed upon in such public matters of fact.

And how then can they make the priests the most contemptible of all mankind, since they make them the sole authors of this the greatest of miracles?

XV. And since the Deists (these men of sense and reason) have so vile and mean an idea of the priests of all religions, why do they not recover the world out of the possession and government of such blockheads? Why do they suffer kings and states to be led by them; to establish their deceits by laws, and inflict penalties upon the opposers of them? Let the Deists try their hands; they have been trying, and are now busy about it. And free liberty they have. Yet have they not prevailed, nor ever yet did prevail in any civilized or generous nation. And though they have some inroads among the Hottentots, and some other the most brutal part of mankind, yet are they still exploded, and priests have and do prevail against them, among not only the greatest, but best part of the world, and the most glorious for arts, learning and war.

XVI. For as the devil does ape God, in his institu-

tions of religion, his feasts, sacrifices, &c., so likewise in his priests, without whom no religion, whether true or false, can stand. False religion is but a corruption of the true. The true was before it, though it be followed close upon the heels.

The revelation made to Moses is elder than any history extant in the heathen world. The heathens, in imitation of him, pretended likewise to their revelations: but I have given those marks which distinguish them from the true: none of them have those four marks before-mentioned.

Now the Deists think all revelations to be equally pretended, and a cheat; and the priests of all religions to be the same contrivers and jugglers; and therefore they proclaim war equally against all, and are equally engaged to bear the brunt of all.

And if the contest be only betwixt the Deists and the priests, which of them are the men of the greatest parts and sense, let the effects determine it; and let the Deists yield the victory to their conquerors, who by their own confession carry all the world before them.

XVII. If the Deists say, that this is because all the world are blockheads, as well as those priests who govern them; that all are blockheads except the Deists, who vote themselves only to be men of sense; this (besides the modesty of it) will spoil their great and beloved topic, in behalf of what they call Natural Religion, against the Revealed, viz., appealing to the common reason of mankind: this they set up against revelation; think this to be sufficient for all the uses of men, here or hereafter, (if there be any after state) and therefore that there is no use of revelation: this common reason they advance as infallible, at least as the surest guide, yet now cry out upon it, when it turns against them; when this common reason runs after revelation (as it always has done), then common

reason is a beast, and we must look for reason, not from the common sentiments of mankind, but only among the beaux, the Deists.

XVIII. Therefore, if the Deists would avoid the mortification (which will be very uneasy to them) to yield and submit to be subdued and hewed down before the priests, whom of all mankind they hate and despise; if they would avoid this, let them confess, as the truth is, that religion is no invention of priests, but of Divine original; that priests were instituted by the same Author of religion; and that their order is a perpetual and living monument of the matters of fact of their religion, instituted from the time that such matters of fact were said to be done, as the Levites from Moses, the apostles and succeeding clergy from Christ, to this day; that no heathen priests can say the same; they were not appointed by the gods whom they served, but by others in after ages; they cannot stand the test of the four rules before-mentioned, which the Christian priests can do, and they only. Now the Christian priesthood, as instituted by Christ himself, and continued by succession to this day, being as impregnable and flagrant a testimony to the truth of the matters of fact of Christ, as the sacraments, or any other public institutions: besides that, if the priesthood were taken away, the sacraments and other public institutions, which are administered by their hands, must fall with them: therefore the devil has been most busy, and bent his greatest force in all ages against the priesthood, knowing that if that goes down all goes with it.*

* In this and the succeeding paragraph, the writer seems to give utterance to sentiments, in which only High Church Episcopalians will sympathize with him. At least they are not entertained by the great body of Christians of any denomination, and so it is hazardous to attempt to rest any serious argument in behalf of Christianity upon them. There can be no question that the Lord

XIX. With the Deists, in this cause, are joined the Quakers and other of our Dissenters, who throw off the succession of our priesthood (by which only it can be demonstrated), together with the sacraments and public festivals. And if the devil could have prevailed to have these dropt, the Christian religion would lose the most undeniable and demonstrative proof for the truth of the matter of fact of our Saviour, upon which the truth of his doctrine does depend. Therefore we may see the artifice and malice of the devil, in all these attempts. And let those wretched instruments whom he ignorantly (and some by a misguided zeal) has deluded thus to undermine Christi-

Jesus Christ established the office of the Christian ministry as a permanent office in his church; and that in all ages, through all periods of darkness and corruption, there have, agreeably to his promise, been a body of faithful men taught by Christian ministers. He has always had a church to glorify and serve him; but whether the ministers of that church have succeeded each other by regular ordination, is a very different and very inferior question. Scripture, which speaks so certainly of a succession of the truth—a succession of faithful men in every age, says nothing of a succession of ordination, far less that the validity of the sacraments, and of the church's testimony to Christianity, depend upon the unbroken regularity of that succession. As a matter of fact, it is impossible to show that the alleged apostolic succession among Episcopalians, has not often been broken. It is certain that in many cases it has been broken; and that the eminent Christian churches of the Waldenses and Albigenses—the only churches which, for centuries, held the pure light of Christianity—could never boast of that succession in ordination, of which so many idle and foolish things are at present spoken. However desirable a regularly ordained ministry may be, descending by uninterrupted order from the apostles, the validity of the sacraments does not stand or fall with it. The succession may be broken, or the ministry may become so corrupt as to lose the character of the ministry of Christ; and still Christianity may live, and its ordinances be effectively administered by others. It would be hard, as well as dangerous, to make the promise of Christ responsible for more than it actually contains—to burden it with a succession of ordination, where he meant only to secure a succession of truth. It would be difficult to see what virtues men notoriously ignorant, ungodly, and profane, as multitudes of the ordained in the Church of Rome have been, could communicate to others. How can the enemies of gospel truth be the lawful and effective dispensers of its ordinances—in many cases, its *only* lawful and elective dispensers? The pretence is absurd — *ΕΥΤΑΧ*

anity, now at last look back and see the snare in which they have been taken: for if they had prevailed, or ever should, Christianity dies with them. At least it will be rendered precarious, as a thing of which no certain proof can be given. Therefore let those of them who have any zeal for the truth, bless God that they have not prevailed; and quickly leave them; and let all others be aware of them.

And let us consider and honour the priesthood, sacraments, and other public institutions of Christ, not only as means of grace and helps to devotion, but as the great evidences of the Christian religion.

Such evidences as no pretended revelation ever had, or can have. Such as do plainly distinguish it from all foolish legends and impostures whatsoever.

XX. And now, last of all, if one word of advice would not be lost upon men who think so unmeasurably of themselves as the Deists, you may represent to them what a condition they are in, who spend that life and sense which God has given them, in ridiculing the greatest of his blessings, his revelations of Christ, and by Christ, to redeem those from eternal misery, who shall believe in him, and obey his laws. And that God, in his wonderful mercy and wisdom, has so guarded his revelations, as that it is past the power of men or devils to counterfeit: and that there is no denying of them, unless we will be so absurd as to deny not only the reason but the certainty of the outward senses, not only of one, or two, or three, but of mankind in general. That this case is so very plain, that nothing but want of thought can hinder any to discover it. That they must yield it to be so plain, unless they can show some forgery which has all the four marks before set down. But if they cannot do this, they must quit their cause, and yield a happy victory over themselves: or else sit down under all that ignominy, with which they have loaded the priests, of being, not

only the most pernicious, but (what will gall them more) the most inconsiderate and inconsiderable of mankind.

Therefore, let them not think it an undervaluing of their worthiness, that their whole cause is comprised within so narrow a compass: and no more time bestowed upon it than it is worth.

But let them rather reflect how far they have been all this time from Christianity; whose rudiments they are yet to learn! How far from the way of salvation! How far the race of their lives is run before they have set one step in the road to heaven. And therefore, how much diligence they ought to use, to redeem all that time they have lost, lest they lose themselves for ever; and be convinced by a dreadful experience, when it is too late, that the gospel is a truth, and of the **last consequence.**

OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
CONDUCT AND CHARACTER OF JUDAS ISCARIOT,

BY THE
LATE REV. JOHN BONAR,
One of the Ministers of Perth.

THE next important Tract on the Evidences, to which I beg leave to direct the reader's attention, is entitled, "*Observations on the Conduct and Character of Judas Iscariot, in a letter to the Rev. Mr James Primrose, by the late Rev. John Bonar, one of the Ministers of Perth.*" The author was one of a long line of able and faithful ministers of the Church of Scotland. His grandfather was the excellent Mr Bonar of Torphichen, who bore a part in the distinguished revival of religion in the West of Scotland, with which God was pleased to bless the church, towards the middle of last century. He has had many worthy descendents, both ministers and laymen. At present there are not less than four of them ministers of the Church of Scotland, and all in character and talent not inferior to their ancestors. The Tract was first published about the middle of the last century, when infidelity was fast spreading among the higher classes of the community. The argument I believe to be original. Many would naturally think, that

the case of Judas was adverse to the claims of Christ. Mr BONAR shows that it is the very reverse—that he is a distinguished witness in favour of Christianity. Dr Doddridge, who himself thought and wrote not a little upon the Evidences, was much struck with Mr BONAR'S view; and, in his *Lectures*, strongly recommends the Tract, “as setting in a most just and beautiful light,” the important testimony of the apostate Judas to the innocence of his Master. The publication was reprinted in 1822, and is noticed in some works on the Evidences, but still is comparatively little known. While the argument founded on the case of Judas is in itself complete, it is interesting to consider that it does not stand alone, but is, after all, only an illustration of a great principle on which God conducts the administration of his church, viz., to make enemies do the work of friends. To an infinite mind this is easy, and finely shows forth the Divine power and wisdom. In all ages, God has made the wrath of man to praise him. Heretics, persecutors, infidels, have all unwittingly rendered the most important services in the defence, vindication, and diffusion of the gospel. Had it not been for early errors and abuses, we never would have had various books of Scripture which were written to meet and remove them. Had it not been for infidelity, the Evidences never would have been scrutinized so thoroughly, nor the truth advanced in so satisfactory a form as it now stands; and had it not been for the violence of persecution, it is to be feared the primitive church would have kept the gospel to herself, and not gone forth, or at least not gone forth in so zealous and effective a spirit, for the conversion of the world. How different are God's ways from man's ways!—who would have thought of enlisting enemies in behalf of his cause?—but oftentimes their opposition has been overruled to do more good than all the zeal of friends. So vain is it for man to attempt

to fight with God! It may be doubted whether, in various respects, Judas may not be a better witness in behalf of Christianity, than any of the faithful apostles. Without meaning to anticipate the statements of Mr BONAR'S paper, I cannot better conclude these preliminary remarks than in the words of a recent and excellent article of the Rev. Dr Easdale of Perth, in the *Scottish Christian Herald*—a publication which cannot be too warmly encouraged, for its valuable services in behalf of Christianity. (Oct. 20, 1838.) Speaking of the apostles, he says:—

“Unbelievers can get the better of the evidence of the martyrs only by alleging that they were enthusiasts, and that the delusion which they had cherished through life, clung to them till the last moment of existence; but, if ever there was unimpeachable evidence in the world, it is that of Judas, who neither lived nor died a Christian—who died convicted but not converted—esteeming it a lighter evil to suffer punishment with kindred reprobate spirits, than to endure the righteous, the withering scorn of those with whom he had not a high sentiment in common, and whose holy hopes and virtuous feelings would have been gall and wormwood to his corrupted soul.”

Again,—“In this then, we have a peculiar kind of evidence as strong if not stronger than that of the holy apostles, inasmuch as various reasons might be assigned for men adhering to opinions and statements which they had once openly avowed; decided boldness and the pride of consistency have often made men persist in statements which the world refuses to believe, though they scrupled not to die in confirmation of their word. Such scenes the world has witnessed; but, did we ever hear of any one who, having successfully maintained a falsehood for a long time, at last comes forward and declares the truth, and then puts himself to death,

because the world will not believe him? Here, then, we have the evidence, not of an interested partisan, not of a visionary enthusiast, not of a weak and superstitious bigot, but we have the evidence of one whose interest it was to have believed the gospel to be a forgery, and whose character was concerned to prove it to be so. Yet the conscience of this hardened villain, which had carried him through so long, at last turned against him, and drove him to desperation at the recollection of his last and greatest crime."

SIR,—COULD I have forced you from that retirement, in which you studiously labour to conceal the fruits of an excellent genius and unwearied application, the following argument, of which you suggested the first hint, had appeared with superior strength and advantage. But, since all my endeavours to that purpose have been ineffectual, I have ventured to send abroad the result of my own reflections on that head, rather than that any thing, which tends to support Christianity, should remain unobserved in an age of so much scepticism and infidelity.

When you first mentioned the conduct of JUDAS as a proof of the Christian religion, the newness of the fancy struck me: for new it was to me. Nor can I yet find any one writer who has sufficiently attended to it;* though I must own, that the more I reflect upon it, the more am I convinced of its strength and solidity.

Nothing, perhaps, contributed more to the uncom-

* "The testimony of Judas is briefly touched upon by Dr Benson, in the *History of the Life of Jesus Christ*, and by Dr Craig, in his *Essay on the same subject*. In the *Theological Repository*, vol. iii. no. 2, is an *Essay on the History and Character of Judas*. See also vol. ii. no. 14."—Note to *Doddridge's Lectures*, vol. ii. p. 5.

mon applause and success of Mr Lyttleton's late ingenious performance, than the compendiousness of his proof, and its depending entirely upon one chain of facts. But however favourable its reception, no man was surprised to find the apostle Paul adduced as an evidence for Christianity. But to find Judas Iscariot forced into the same service, will doubtless seem whimsical to some, and absurd to others; yet, as people generally allow the testimony of an enemy to be less suspicious than that of a friend, so possibly the setting this matter in a just light, may help to remove the prejudices of those who will credit nothing that comes from the friends of JESUS.

If ever there was an enemy to Christ in the world, Judas was that enemy; if ever there was an apostate from the faith, Judas was that apostate; and if ever there was a traitor, he too was the man. And yet to find this malicious, this traitorous, this apostate Judas, instead of disproving Christianity in any point, proving it in every one—sealing a testimony to the truth of it even with his blood, and giving solemn evidence against himself; this, sure, is a phenomenon pretty surprising, and what even the warmest friends of Christianity could scarce have expected. If the infidel suspects the integrity of Paul, let him now hear the testimony of Judas: if the one has no weight with him, surely the other will.

The following observations, therefore, claim a fair and dispassionate hearing. This is all the favour that they ask; and, it is hoped, it is all that they need.

As it is from the writings of the evangelists that we have any knowledge of the character and conduct of Judas Iscariot, we must beg leave to quote these as genuine records of the events they pretend to relate—an honour which I hope our adversaries will not deny them; or, if they should, they must be sensible, that as strong proof can be brought in favour of Luke and

the other New Testament writers, as of any who wrote at an equal distance of time.*

Taking this, therefore, for granted, I beg leave to transcribe what we find concerning Judas in these ancient records.

The first time Judas is mentioned in the New Testament, is when Christ chooses twelve from the multitude that attended his ministry, and appoints them to be apostles, or particular messengers, for propagating his religion. We have the catalogue of these apostles given us by three evangelists, who all conclude it with the name of "*Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.*" † Matt. x. 4; Mark iii. 19; Luke vi. 16.

Some short time after, we find him, together with the other eleven, receiving from his great Master power over all unclean spirits, diseases, nay, death itself; and commissioned to go and preach the gospel to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. See Luke ix.

After this we hear nothing of him till a little before the third passover of Christ's public ministry, when many of his disciples left him, upon his declaring, in the synagogue of Capernaum, that he was the "bread of life, which came down from heaven." On this occasion Christ puts the question to the apostles, "Will ye also go away?" Whereupon they all reply by the mouth of Simon, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe, and are

* See Conybeare's *Defence of Revealed Religion*, cap. 9; Campbell *On the Four Gospels*, vol. ii. p. 180, sect. 9; Lardner's *Credibility of the Gospel History*.

† Here one cannot but be struck with the spirit of forbearance and charity in which the sacred writers speak of Judas. We might have expected, after his atrocious crime, and the deep dishonour which he had brought upon the whole company of the apostles, that they would have spoken of him with severity, and denounced him as a wretch and a villain. But there is nothing of this. They simply speak of him, to distinguish him from others, as the Judas who betrayed or delivered him up. What a change in the temper of the disciples, from the day when they would have called down fire from heaven, to consume a Samaritan village, because due respect had not been shown to their Master!—EDITOR.

sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." In answer to which, Christ assures them, that although he had chosen them twelve, yet one of them was a "devil," or should prove his accuser; as the Greek word *Διάβολός* literally signifies; † which the Evangelist assures us he spoke of Judas. John vi. 70.

The next time we find him spoken of, is on the Sabbath immediately preceding the passion-week; when Christ, being arrived at Bethany, is invited, with his disciples, to an entertainment in the house of Simon the leper.—During which entertainment a box of very precious ointment is poured out upon Christ's head. Upon which the historian remarks, that some present had indignation; and that Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, expressly said, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? and this he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and *bare*§ what was put therein." John xii. 4; Matt. xxvi.; and Mark xiv.

On the third day of the passion-week, he entered into the infamous contract with the high-priest and rulers of the Jews, to deliver his Master into their hands. Of which the Evangelists give us this account:—

"Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, into the palace of the high-priest, who is also called Caiaphas; and consulted how they might take Jesus by subtilty, and put him to death. But they said, Not on the feast-day, lest there be an uproar among the people. Then entered Satan into Judas, surnamed Iscariot, one of the twelve; and he went his way, and communed with

† It is so used 1 Tim. iii. 11; 2 Tim. iii. 3; Titus ii. 3.

§ I have no doubt that the proper rendering of *ἔβαρταζεν* is far stronger, and that it should be translated, *carried off*, or *stole* what was put therein. What a view does this give us of Christ's superiority to the world—that he gave the charge of all that he had of it to one whom he knew to be a *thief*! Little, surely, had he cared about the world!—EDITOR.

the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them; and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money; and covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And he promised; and from that time sought opportunity to betray him unto them in the absence of the multitude." Compare Matt. xxvi.; Mark xiv.; and Luke xxi.

Towards the evening of the fourth day of the passion-week, Jesus comes with his disciples from Bethany to Jerusalem; and having ordered the passover to be prepared, at the appointed time sits down to eat it with the twelve. During which solemnity, he takes occasion to let them know that he was thoroughly acquainted both with the treachery and the traitor. For, being troubled in spirit, he said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me; for the hand that betrayeth me, is with me on the table. Then the disciples were exceeding sorrowful, and looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake; and began every one by turns to say, Lord, is it I?— Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom, one of the disciples whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter, who probably sat on the other side of the table, therefore beckoned unto him, that he should ask who it was of whom he spoke. He then leaning himself down on Jesus' breast, saith unto him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered with a low voice, so that none of the rest heard, "He it is to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it." And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas; who, just as he was reaching out his hand to take it, says, "Lord, is it I?" To which Jesus replied, "Thou hast said." And immediately after the sop, Satan entered into him; and, fired with indignation, he rose from the table. Upon which Christ says, "What thou dost, do quickly." But none of the disciples, ex-

cept John, seem to have known with what intent he said so. John xiii.

“After the paschal supper, and the institution of the eucharist, Jesus goes out with his disciples to a garden at the foot of the Mount of Olives; a place Judas was well acquainted with, and where he knew his Master was to spend part of that night. Having therefore received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, he came thither with lanterns, torches, and weapons; and having given them this as a sign whereby they should know the person whom they were to apprehend, he goes up to Christ, and, kissing him, saith, ‘Hail, Master.’ Whereupon Jesus saith, ‘Man, wherefore art thou come?—Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?’ Upon which it appears that he shrunk back again amongst the crowd: for immediately, when Christ by a word strikes them all to the ground, it is observed that Judas also stood with them.” John xviii.

“Jesus being thus taken, and next day condemned by Pilate to be crucified, Judas repented of what he had done, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, ‘I have sinned, in that I have betrayed innocent blood;’ and, casting down the pieces of silver in the temple, he went and hanged himself.” Matt. xxvii.

Luke, in his history of the acts of the apostles, has added one circumstance more—that “falling headlong, Judas burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.” Acts i. 15.*

* It may be proper to observe, that amongst other instances from which Mr Tindal endeavours to overthrow the credit of the gospel history, this of the conduct of Judas is one.—*Christianity as Old as the Creation*, p. 245.

And it seems a little odd, that the learned Dr Conybeare, in his elaborate *Reply*, should leave his adversary in full possession of this objection; saying nothing in answer to it, but that it will be time enough to allege the miscarriages of Judas, when we build any thing on his evidence.—*Defence of Revealed Religion*, p. 446.

This is all the account that the Evangelists give of Judas: and the argument thence arising in favour of Christianity, seems to be this:—Here is a man of sense and ability, thoroughly acquainted with the most secret conduct and views of Jesus, and therefore capable to detect any fraud or imposture that might be carrying on by him; a man, not only able to inform against Jesus, but highly willing; engaged from principles of honour, interest, and self-preservation; tempted by reward, by avarice, by ambition, by resentment, to make the discovery; yet this man, after having delivered up Christ through the strength of these temptations, no sooner reflects on what he had done, than his conscience, taking the alarm, makes him in the strongest manner retract, and attest his Master's innocence, before those very rulers to whom he had sold him but a few hours ago; and finding all had no effect, in an excess of grief and remorse he expires almost in their very presence.—“I have sinned,” cried he, “in that I have betrayed innocent blood:”—an attestation of the innocence of Christ, so circumstantiated, that it is scarce possible to suppose a stronger; and which nothing but the most thorough conviction could have extorted.

If by “innocent blood,” Judas meant no more than that Christ was a person who had done nothing worthy of death, sure this is the very lowest sense in which the words can be taken. However, taking them no higher, they plainly seem to intimate,

1. That Judas believed that Jesus was the true Messiah, and Son of God, as he all along affirmed himself to be: for, otherwise, Christ could not have been a man of truth and veracity, if he laid claim to a character which in no ways belonged to him. In that case, too, he would have been guilty of blasphemy, and consequently worthy of death by the Jewish law.*

* That Judas knew Christ to be the true Messiah, seems also evident from Matt. xxvi. 49, and Luke xxii. 48, where Christ says to him upon receiving the treacherous kiss, “Judas, betrayest

2. As he hereby declares his belief that Jesus was the true Messiah, so he in effect declares, that, in as far as he could discern, his miracles were all true, his doctrine Divine, and his life pure and holy : for it was from these things that he must have been convinced that Jesus was the Messiah.

3. Judas hereby declares, that, for his part, he was privy to no design formed by Christ of erecting a temporal kingdom ; otherwise he must have reckoned, that he ought to have suffered death, if not by the Jewish, at least by the Roman law.

4. By this expression, Judas strongly declares his opinion, that Christ was innocent of the crimes laid to his charge by the Sanhedrim ; particularly, of deceiving the people by pretended miracles ; stirring them up to sedition against Cæsar, saying, " that he himself was a king ;" and casting out devils by magic, or Beelzebub the prince of the devils : and consequently, he hereby declares, in the strongest manner, his total and profound ignorance of those frauds and collusions, of which some quick-sighted modern Deists have made surprising discoveries.

But one is apt to think, that the words *innocent blood* imply somewhat more than all this. They seem to point out, that Judas was convinced, not only that Jesus was an innocent man, but a beneficent one ; one

thou the Son of Man?" *i. e.* the person whom thou knowest to be the Son of Man, or Messiah.* Which interpretation gives the words a force and spirit, which I have not seen attended to by any but the devout and learned Dr Doddridge.—*Family Expositor*, vol. ii. p. 507.

* It is worthy of notice, that when the question is put to Judas, he does not deny. He does not say, "No; I am not betraying the Son of Man; I am only exposing an unprincipled impostor." This would have been the time to vindicate himself and accuse Christ, had either been possible.—**EDITOR.**

constantly employed in doing good ; and particularly that he was a man remarkable for meekness of temper of a merciful, compassionate, and harmless disposition void of ambition, innocent, and quiet.

Now, if it can be made appear, that the person giving such a strong attestation to the innocence of Christ, was one well acquainted with his most secret views ; was one able to form a just judgment of them ; was one who would have been fond to find out and expose any fraud ; and was one who could have no worldly interest to serve by adhering to Christ, but, on the contrary, had every inducement to detect his design : if, I say, these things can be made appear, will it not strongly conclude, that Jesus was what he professed himself to be, the true Messiah, the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world ?

This is an argument founded on the few simple facts above set down ; which it requires no depth of thought to comprehend, and no abstract reasoning to discover. The consequence, I apprehend, is undeniable, provided the premises are able to support such a fabric. It must therefore be the business of the following pages, to examine these with becoming accuracy.

And here the leading inquiry will be, Whether the person giving such a strong attestation to the innocence of Jesus, in these peculiar circumstances, was one of sense and ability ; able to form a just opinion of Christ and his designs ? For unless we can be assured of his capacity, his testimony will have very little weight ; since it is impossible to draw any argument from the freakish inconsistencies of conduct into which a man of a weak mind may run ; whereas, when a man of sense changes his conduct, we are naturally led to inquire into the grounds upon which he proceeds.

We are not indeed able to trace out the birth and education of Judas, which lies in equal obscurity with that of the other apostles. He is called the son of

Simon, and Judas Iscariot; but neither of these epithets give much light into the matter. They are probably added, to distinguish him from the other Judas, who was faithful to the death. Some have supposed him the son of Simon the leper, in whose house Jesus was so elegantly entertained a few days before he suffered. The ingenious Mr Fleming concludes him the son of Simon the Canaanite. But both opinions are merely conjectural; though either of them seems more probable than the fancy of those who will have him a native of Corcyra, where his house and posterity, say they, may yet be seen;* or the notion of the Cainites, who make him the head of a considerable family in the tribe of Issachar.†

I should not have mentioned these uncertain conjectures, did they not seem to intimate a general notion that prevailed very early in the church, that Judas was some considerable person; which I scarce know how to account for, but by supposing, that, by birth or education, he was somewhat conspicuous in the college of the apostles. For, why should the earliest writers, by a sort of general consent, in this manner aggrandize the traitor, while they speak of the other apostles in a different style?

As to his name Iscariot, some refer it to the office of purser, which he bore in Christ's family, from a Hebrew word of much the same sound, and correspondent meaning. But the opinion of those seems better founded, who, deriving it from the place of his birth, read Judas Ish-Carioth, *i. e.* Judas a man of Carioth, a small town beyond Jordan.‡

But it is much more to the present purpose to

* Petrus a Valle, in itineribus suis, pars 1. Turcicæ, epist. 1.

† Calmet's *Dictionary*, art. *Judas*.

‡ The different conjectures as to the meaning and derivation of the name, may be seen in Bartoloccii *Bib. Rab.* tom. 3. p. 24.

observe, that this person was made choice of by Jesus to be one of his apostles and constant attendants; which will sufficiently warrant our concluding him a man of good natural sense and ability.* For although Christ made choice of men in low life to be his apostles; yet I can see no reason why we must conclude them fools too, unless we will say that good sense is only to be found among the sons of learning and fortune. So that Judas being of the number of the apostles, gives a strong presumption in his favour; since there is the very best reason to conclude them all men of sound minds and good understandings, though not brought up at the feet of Gamaliel.

To this we must add, that Judas was raised by Christ to a sort of superior station in the family. He was appointed treasurer; a place which would doubtless be given to the man of greatest activity, and acquaintance with the world. In this office he not only had the custody of what presents were made to Jesus and his disciples, which required a person of reputed honesty; but also he had the laying out of that money for their daily maintenance and support, which called for a man of activity and discretion. Nay, it appears, that to him Jesus had been in the practice of leaving the distributions for the poor; which supposes a high opinion of his judgment and prudence—qualifications essentially necessary to the prudent conferring of charity.

And if we may build any thing upon the opinion of those who had best access to know him, his fellow-disciples and apostles, he seems to have been in no small repute among them: for when the plainest intimations were given by Christ, as we have seen above, that one

* That the apostles were men of superior sense to the bulk of people in their station, will scarce be denied by the Deists; who, upon that very supposition, build all the phenomena of Christianity, which, according to them, was contrived by Jesus Christ and these twelve cunning impostors.

of them should betray him, nay, that Judas was the person, yet no man suspected him; which doubtless would have been the case, had they judged him either a deceitful or a weak man, capable of acting such a base and dishonourable part.

The manner, too, in which he conducted the treachery from first to last, gives no bad specimen of his abilities.

That he commenced a disciple of Jesus from worldly views and prospects, will scarce be denied. With the rest of the Jews of that time, he had long expected the promised Messiah, hoping to find him a temporal monarch, who should rescue their nation from the oppression of the Romans, and raise it to the highest pitch of grandeur.—The fame of Jesus had reached his ears; and possibly the miracle wrought on the lame man at the pool of Bethesda, made him conclude that certainly he must be the person; for it is soon after this miracle that he is numbered with the apostles.†

As these views made him commence a disciple, the same views soon made him resolve to abandon that way. Covetousness was the reigning passion of his soul. He found in Christ's family nothing to gratify it, nor any prospect of the matter mending in that respect; and therefore he resolved to abandon his new profession, but in such a way as he might make something by the bargain. Knowing the hatred of the Jewish rulers to his Master, he resolved to deliver him into their hands, hoping they would generously reward such a service. But, that he might make the most possible of his treachery, he resolved to delay the execution of it, until there should be something consider-

† It appears from the history, that Christ did not make choice of the twelve till some weeks after the second passover; for, though there is mention made of his calling Philip, Nathanael, Peter, James, John, and Andrew, long before, yet it was only at the above period that they were appointed to be apostles, or messengers.

able in the bag; which he shrewdly enough conjectured might be the case, when his Master should go up to Jerusalem to the passover; where the very sacrifices they were to offer, and the other necessary expenses, would require a larger stock than was necessary in their country retirement.* And this, I think, will naturally account for delaying the execution of his design so long after he had formed it; for it is beyond all question, from the plain intimations that our Lord gives long before of the intended treachery, that there was such a design in head.†

But however Judas had formed such a design, he so artfully concealed it, that none but the All-searching eye could penetrate the disguise. Often do the other disciples betray their expectations of a worldly kingdom; but we never hear a syllable to this purpose drop from the lips of Judas. Two forward disciples may pray down fire from heaven, to consume the Samaritans, who would not receive and honour their Lord; but Judas discovers no such imprudent zeal. The sons of Zebedee may solicit to sit, one on the right hand and the other on the left, in his kingdom; but Judas betrays no such ambitious weakness. And when we find him reproving Mary for anointing Jesus, it is under the specious pretence of giving to the poor. As to the perpetrating the treachery, how artfully is it managed! His agreement with the priests is privately made, and the most private opportunity taken to put it in execution. Nay, when he gave the treach-

* For it is pretty evident, that the apostles never attended Christ to Jerusalem till the last passover. They were not appointed till after the second passover: our Lord went not up to the third: so that this fourth was the first they attended in company with him. And it is probable, that our Lord did not choose to appear with such a retinue until his time should be fully come; that so he might not too much alarm the Jewish rulers.

† See *Apostolic Constitutions*, book 5. chap. 14, where we find these words, *Ἐκ πολλοῦ μὲν διαστράφεις.*

erous kiss, he seems to have hoped to pass undiscovered. He came in the dark, went at some distance before the multitude, and afterwards mingled with the crowd. In short, a design could not have been better laid, more artfully carried on, or cautiously executed, than this of Judas betraying Christ; which shows him master of no small address and cunning.

I might conclude this head, with observing, that to his natural sagacity there was added superior powers by Jesus, when he sent him out with the other apostles, and gave him power over all unclean spirits, † diseases, and death itself; from which moment he must be considered as a person endued in a very extraordinary manner.

So that, upon the whole, the first observation made, viz., That Judas was a man of sense and ability, and sufficiently able to judge if Christ was carrying on any fraud, is abundantly evident.

But as this is the basis upon which all the subsequent argument rests, I must not dismiss it till I have obviated one objection that seems to lie against this part of Judas' character, as a man of sense and sagacity; and that is, his selling his master for such a trifle as thirty pieces of silver, little more than L.3 15s., or, according to Dean Prideaux, L.4. 10s. of our money: which seems rather to represent him as a greedy fool, who knew not how to make use of the opportunities which offered of gratifying his covetousness; as none can doubt but that the Jewish rulers would have given a much greater sum rather than allowed Jesus to have escaped them.

† It seems to me an excessive refinement, to distinguish unclean spirits from other evil spirits which might possess men, supposing the word only to signify such kind of spirits as drove men to dwell among tombs, by which they became ceremoniously unclean; for it is evident, that unclean and evil spirits are generally used as synonymous, referring to the moral impurity and malignity of their natures. Compare Matt. xii. 13; Luke xi. 24; and Rev. xvi. 13, 14.

I frankly own, that there has been no part of his conduct for which I have found it so difficult to account, as this. Once I was in hopes of finding, that a piece of money might be applied to other coins as well as to the shekel, so that the sum might be greater than what interpreters generally fix it. And in this I thought myself not a little supported, by what the Evangelist assures us, that with that money they were able to purchase a field in Jerusalem for a burying-place to strangers. But I am now convinced, that it is not to be accounted for in this way. For,

1. I cannot find, that a piece of silver, or a silvering, is ever applied to any Jewish coin but to the shekel; whereas to that it is very often applied in the Old Testament.

2. Nor would increasing the value of the pieces of silver at all agree with what we find in the prophet Zechariah concerning this very transaction, of the price given by the Jews for Jesus; where the thirty pieces of silver given to the prophet as his hire, is spoken of as a sign of the contempt in which they held him and his services.* A goodly price (says he) at which they have valued me. It was the very price which a slave was to give for his liberty, and at which slaves were bought among them.

3. And as to the purchasing a field with these thirty pieces of silver, which seems to intimate a much greater sum; it may not be difficult to account for that, especially if we grant the place which is at present shown to travellers, to be the very spot; for it is not above thirty yards long, and fifteen broad.† And when the Evangelist calls it the potter's field, he gives

* Zech. xi. 12. Ignatii epist. ad Philip. ὃν ἐτιμησάντο ἀπο ἑνὸς Ἰσραήλ. This whole prophecy is set in a very clear light, in Dr Doddridge's *Family Expositor*, vol. ii. p. 590.

† Maundrel's Travels, p. 101.

us a reason why it might be such a cheap purchase, as having been employed formerly in making and burning earthenware, it must have been marred for any valuable use.

For these reasons, I apprehend we cannot reasonably increase the value of the thirty pieces of silver; but must endeavour to account for Judas' conduct in selling his Master for such a trifle, in some other way. And to this the history itself seems to give us a key. For, however covetousness might have been the reigning passion of his soul, yet it is very evident, that resentment pushed him on to the immediate execution of his design. He judged himself affronted by Jesus, when at the last supper he pointed him out as the ungrateful person who was to betray him. The discovery seems to have exasperated him to the last degree: for he instantly sprung from the table; and, leaving the room, went directly to the chief priests, to conclude the infamous bargain about which he had formerly treated with them. And if we attend to the then temper of his mind, we shall find the part which he acted, a natural consequence of covetousness and resentment. His covetousness would not allow him to give up Jesus for nought; whereas, on the other hand, his resentments were so keen and pungent, that he had not coolness enough to make the most advantageous bargain, but impatient for revenge, accepted what they offered. For which this further reason may be assigned, That, as his design was now known, he must either immediately accept of the offer that had been made him, otherwise the opportunity was forever lost. And as for the Jewish rulers offering no higher a bait, it may naturally enough be accounted for, from that contempt in which they professed to hold Christ and his adherents; whereas had they offered a much greater sum, it would have convinced others, that these very rulers judged him more formi-

dable than they were willing to own. Wherefore, I cannot see, that from this part of his history any objection can be brought against what was formerly alleged in favour of his sense and sagacity.*

But it will not be sufficient to our present purpose, that Judas was a man of good understanding, perfectly capable of penetrating into the most secret designs of Jesus and his disciples, unless we can also show, that he had sufficient opportunities of informing himself as to these. This therefore, in the second place, must be canvassed and examined.

Various reasons have been assigned by those who comment upon Christ's life and history, for his making choice of Judas to be an apostle, while yet he was thoroughly acquainted with the badness and insincerity of his heart; as if he thereby intended to teach us only to judge by the external conduct: that ordinances derive not their virtue and efficacy from the administrator; and that even in the purest societies upon earth we must expect a mixture of good and bad men.

These indeed are pious instructions; but they seem far from containing the whole of the case. The scheme now under consideration, suggests, in my apprehension, a still more important reason, namely, that by choosing Judas into his family, who should afterwards prove a traitor, Christ would show the world, that he was not afraid to have his most secret conduct witnessed by his enemies; and lest they should suspect that there was some fraud privately carrying on, he would venture to initiate one of their own party into all the mysteries of his religion: a conduct which, I dare say,

* To these considerations it may be added, that the smallness of the sum was matter of prophecy, intended, in the providence of God, to exhibit the contempt in which his beloved Son was held by men, and that, moreover, avarice is proverbially blind and inconsistent.—EDITOR.

every man must be convinced, stands clear of the least suspicion of imposture.

I apprehend it will readily be granted, that, upon the supposition that Jesus was carrying on a fraud, this could not have been done without accomplices. It was an imposture of that nature, as could not have been managed by one man alone. Jesus aspired to nothing lower than being thought the Messiah; in consequence whereof he not only pretended to work miracles himself, but to give the power of doing so to others.

Now, if accomplices were necessary, none, I dare say, will be thought so proper for this purpose as the twelve apostles; nay, our adversaries will not scruple to grant that these were the very persons. They were pitched upon from the whole multitude of his disciples, to be stated and constant attendants upon him; they were present at his public teachings; they were the companions of his most private hours: so that if he held any esoteric or secret opinion, if he carried on any private design which he artfully disguised from the world, it must certainly have been known to them.

Judas was one of this number; and, by the whole of the history, appears to have been admitted into as great confidence and familiarity as the other apostles. And, however it may be pretended that the eleven, deeply tinctured with enthusiasm, might easily be imposed upon; yet this cannot be alleged of Judas, who afterwards made it evident, that he had never so fully entered into their designs. Free then from this bias, with all his senses alert, nay, as will appear, with the design of quitting their party full in his eye, and therefore watching every occasion against them; was he not able to discover in their most free and private conversation the bottom of the plot? Must he not have known whether Jesus lived as he taught; or if, while he recommended the strictest morality to others, he

indulged himself in any private crimes? which would certainly have been the case had he been an impostor.

To which I must add one very strong consideration on this head, of Judas' opportunities of knowing if any fraud was carrying on by Christ and his disciples; and that is, that Christ not only pretended to work miracles himself, but also pretended to give the same power to his disciples: "Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases: and they departed, and went through the towns preaching the gospel, and healing everywhere." And lest we should suspect that Judas was not so highly endued, the evangelist Matthew takes care, immediately after this commission, to subjoin a complete catalogue of the apostles who received these powers, in which Judas is particularly mentioned.

Judas heard his Master pretend to give him such powers; and, in consequence thereof, he goes and makes the experiment on the first diseased person he meets. Must he not then immediately have known whether the effect followed, and whether the lame and the blind received their sight and strength? If he saw this undeniably the case, what a strong conviction must it have wrought in his mind that his Master was the Messiah? And how naturally does it account for that anguish he afterwards endured, upon his basely betraying him? Whereas, on the other hand, had Judas discovered all to be trick, had he discovered that the pretended cures were only the effect of a collusion betwixt the persons who feigned the disease and Christ, would he have failed to lay open the cheat? Especially if we add, that in case there was any fraud carrying on by Jesus and his disciples, Judas had every supposable inducement to make the discovery: which,

joined to what has already been said of his knowledge and opportunities, will, in my apprehension, go a great way to make the argument conclusive.

This will hold true, whatever the personal character of Judas is supposed to be. Was he a man of conscience and honesty, who waited for the consolation of Israel, and had commenced a disciple of Jesus, in hopes of finding in him the long-wished-for Messiah; we may easily be convinced what part he would have acted, upon finding his hope disappointed, and that, instead of a prophet, he was following an impostor. Regard to truth, and the glory of God, would not have allowed him to hesitate one moment. He must not only have abandoned the party himself, but have fairly laid open their frauds and secret practices to others. Regardless of whatever reflection the dishonest or unthinking part of mankind might throw upon him, as having once been of the party, he would labour to undeceive the multitude, and wish to confront the impostor himself.

Regard to the religion of his country would greatly have strengthened such a resolution. It is well known how zealous the bulk of the Jews were on this head; which alarmed them the more at the pretensions of Jesus to be the Messiah, while his doctrine tended so evidently to set aside their numerous rites and ceremonies: so that, as a good son of the church, Judas would have been led to use the utmost care to prevent the dangerous infection.

All the principles of benevolence and love to mankind would have awaked in his breast, in order to induce him to a speedy discovery, that so others might be prevented from falling into the snare in which he was well nigh caught. And this too would he have judged the best return of gratitude to that God who had saved him from being entirely led aside by the error of the wicked.

In fine, to such a speedy discovery he would have been strongly excited by the powerful motive of love to his country. ——— It was one reason why the more politic Jews gave so little regard to the various circumstances that concurred to prove Jesus the Messiah, lest by seeming to acknowledge any other king than Cæsar, they should give a handle to the Romans, under whose yoke they lay, to take away their city and nation. The force of which argument was the greater, as they could not yet have forgot the many inconveniences which two pretenders to that character had brought upon them a few years before: instances, which, as they happened in Judas' own time, must have been more than enough to overbalance any argument that might be brought to the contrary by the false shame of commencing informer.

By such views and motives must Judas have been actuated, had Jesus been an impostor, and he a man of integrity and conscience.

But supposing, what indeed is the fact, that this Judas was a man of a very opposite character, was an abandoned wretch, destitute of honour, conscience, and love to his country; yet, even in that case, interest, powerful private interest, must soon have determined him to make a discovery of the fraud, if any such was carrying on.

A man of such a character must certainly have commenced disciple from worldly views, concluding that Christ was to erect a temporal kingdom. He hoped, by joining him so early, to merit the highest preferments in that future monarchy. But finding himself disappointed, and that there was neither honour, riches, nor fame to be got in his service; nay, that the very Master himself seemed, by some unaccountable conduct, always to decline any advantages that were thrown in his way, and whimsically talked of a spirit-

ual kingdom; observing this to be the case, would not rage at his disappointment naturally lead him to divulge the secret? which, too, would have been a sufficient apology for abandoning a sect which he had once espoused.

If covetousness was the chief bent of his mind, this was most likely to be gratified by a discovery. He knew how inveterate the chief priests and rulers were against Jesus, and with what malice and keenness they sought his ruin: so that he might reasonably expect to be well paid for what discovery he should make to them.

Nor can it be alleged that such a discovery would either have subjected him to odium or danger.

To odium or reproach it could never have exposed him with any man of sense and reflection; for his discovering such a fraud, stood justified by every motive and consideration which can have weight in such a case. So that instead of reproach, his uncommon honesty would have merited universal applause. Nay, we may go one step farther, and affirm, that the applauses which he merited would have been liberally conferred upon him; immediately he must have become the darling of all the rulers; and this fully obviates the other part of the objection, That possibly he might have been deterred through fear from making the discovery. But of whom, pray, was he to be afraid? Of Jesus and his followers? A very inconsiderable party indeed, without either number, power, or influence; who, so far from being able to injure others, could not even defend themselves.

Ere I dismiss this head, it will be proper to add, that the manner in which Jesus all along treated his followers, and the apostles themselves, makes it evident, that he was never afraid of what discoveries they could make.

It is the interest of every impostor, not only to gain

partisans, but also to manage those whom he may have gained with the utmost delicacy and address, lest, forsaking his party, they should work his ruin: an observation which stands confirmed by the practice of all impostors that have yet appeared in the world. But instead of this address and management, we find Jesus always treating his disciples with the greatest plainness and freedom. When two of them, incensed at the conduct of the Samaritans, would have prayed down fire from heaven upon those despisers of their Master, instead of applauding their zeal, Jesus tells them, that they knew not what spirits they were of. How oft in presence of the multitude, does he blame the twelve for their dulness and incredulity? And when, from the tenderest affection, Peter had declared himself unwilling to hear of his sufferings and death, he receives the sharp rebuke, "Get thee behind me, Satan; for thou savourest not of the things which be of God."

But not to insist on these, and many instances of the same kind which occur in the gospel with regard to the other disciples, let us observe the behaviour of Jesus towards this very Judas, and we shall find it such as naturally tended to irritate and provoke him to a discovery, if he had any discovery to make.

If Judas had conceived a design of betraying his Master some considerable time before he put it into execution, we find Jesus speaking of it even then as a thing he was well acquainted with. "Behold, I have chosen you twelve, and one of you shall prove my accuser." This he repeats at sundry times. And though, as afterwards appears, he was as well acquainted with the person of the traitor, as the treachery in general; yet he by no means observes any particular delicacy of conduct towards him. When he was to be transfigured, he keeps him back from the honour of that glorious transaction. When this Judas animadverted upon Mary's anointing his Master's feet,

we find Jesus soon silencing him, by openly vindicating the woman, and condemning the reflection thrown out against her. But as if all this had not been sufficient, at the last paschal supper, we find him pointed out by Jesus as the ungrateful monster who, though he dipped with him in the dish, should in a few hours betray him. Then too does he hear the most dreadful judgments denounced against himself, which immediately filled his mind with the keenest desires of revenge; so that in fury he springs from the table. But Jesus, instead of being alarmed at this, as he must certainly have been had not all his conduct been fair and honest, puts him, as it were, to the defiance; bids him go do what he intended; and that, instead of flying from him, he would even so far countenance his design as to retire to the private garden of Gethsemane, a place with which the traitor was well acquainted, and where he might apprehend him without disturbance.

To all which I may add, that, knowing the covetous temper of Judas, he had before committed the bag to him, that he might always have it in his power to run off with advantage.

Now, let any man say if he discerns ought in such a conduct that can give the least suspicion of imposture? Nay, does not the fair and open part which Jesus acts, strongly argue the contrary?

Thus I have endeavoured to show, that Judas was thoroughly acquainted with the most secret designs of Jesus; that he had sufficient capacity to discover any fraud that might be carrying on; and that he had all possible inducements to lead him to make such a discovery: so that it only remains that we inquire in fact what part this Judas acted.

Does he, in consequence of having got to the bottom of the plot, go to the rulers of the Jews, and make the discovery? Sure, nothing could have so much ingra-

stated him into their favour. Such a discovery would have been of far greater importance to them than the death of the impostor. Hereby should they have been enabled effectually to oppose his designs, and ruin his credit with the people. Hereby should they have been furnished with a just ground of accusation against him; an accusation not founded on matters of doubtful disputation, or questions of their law, but on the reason of things—on common justice and equity.

This too would have most successfully gratified Judas' revenge against Christ, and fully exonerate him in forsaking a party he had once espoused.

How wide of this was the part he acted! From covetousness and revenge he resolves to deliver his Master into the hands of the Jewish priests. This resolution he executes in the manner above mentioned: yet he has not the effrontery to allege any one crime of which he was guilty; although I think it pretty evident from the history, that the Jewish Sanhedrim had examined Judas very particularly about Jesus—about his miracles, his doctrine, and his predictions; and that he had told them every thing he knew about these.*

Had Judas made any discoveries to the prejudice of Christ, which no doubt he would have done, had he been able, it would not long have remained a secret. Our Lord had been twitted with it at his trial; it had been thrown up to Judas when he came, saying, "I have betrayed innocent blood;" and it would have been objected to his apostles afterwards when brought to a trial for propagating the same religion. But in none of these cases was there the least insinuation to his purpose; but, on the contrary, after all they could

* It seems probable, that it was Judas who informed the Sanhedrim of what Christ had said about his resurrection on the third day; otherwise, I cannot see how they came to be so distinctly informed about it, as they tell Pilate they were; for, so far as I can recollect, Christ never spoke of his resurrection plainly to any but the apostles.

expiscate, we find them entirely at a loss how to lay their accusation against Christ, or how to prove it even after it was laid.

And as for Judas, no sooner does he see what the consequences of his treachery would be, and that the Jews were actually proceeding to put Christ to death, than his conscience takes the alarm, and drives him in despair to be his own executioner. For it is the same thing as to the present argument, whether, according to our translation, we make Judas to have hanged himself, or, as the Greek words might be rendered, that, falling down on his face, he was suffocated through the excess of his grief, and burst asunder in the middle. Only, if we take this last to be the fact, it is worth observing, that the Talmudists make such a suffocation the punishment which God was wont to inflict on such persons as bore false witness against their neighbour.†

Now, let any man attempt to account rationally for this excess of grief and remorse, upon the supposition that Jesus was an impostor, and that Judas knew him to be such. In which case, his discovery would have stood justified by the most rational arguments, and no foundation could have been laid for such anguish of mind. But allowing the fact as it stands, and this to have been the end of Judas, does it not strongly conclude, that after Judas, a man of sense and ability, had been thoroughly acquainted with Christ's life and doctrine, and for a considerable time had watched

† What it was that drove Judas to despair, rather than to ask forgiveness of this meek and merciful Lamb of God, I shall not determine. But it seems to me evident, that two things contributed greatly to it:—1st. A conviction that he had betrayed the true Messiah; and 2dly. A remembrance of those awful warnings that Christ had formerly given him. "The Son of Man," saith Christ, "goeth, as it is written of him; but wo unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed: good were it for that man that he had never been born."

every occasion against him, and at last, from covetousness and revenge, had delivered him into the hands of his enemies ; yet he was firmly persuaded that Jesus was an innocent person, and the true Messiah ; whose religion we are bound to receive as a revelation sent from God.

Having thus observed the consequences of Judas treachery with regard to himself, it may not be improper, before I shut up the argument, to show what influence it had on Jesus and his apostles.

As to Jesus himself, I am persuaded every man who reads the gospels, must be charmed with his behaviour in this last period of his life. Whether Jesus was the Messiah or not, this will be allowed, that he was one betrayed by a pretended friend ; than which, no circumstance can tend more to sour the mind, and ruffle the temper, and every one must know what bitter reproaches such traitors receive, and ought to receive. But Jesus, superior to all trials, meets this horrid treachery with a heroic fortitude, and reproaches the traitor in no harsher terms than these, “ Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss ? ”

As to the disciples of Jesus, especially the eleven, notwithstanding this horrid treachery of one of their number, and the crucifixion of their Master which happened thereupon ; yet they continue firmly united in carrying on the design of Christ, and establishing his religion in the world ; which it was impossible for them to do had they been carrying on a fraud, or aggrandizing an impostor. For the case is the same here as in common life. If any twelve persons were engaged in a conspiracy, and one of them should go and discover the plot, this would at once put an end to the designs of the other eleven, and render it impossible for them any longer to carry them into execution.

That union and harmony which is the very soul of combination, would henceforward be broken; and to that would succeed a mutual jealousy and distrust, every one suspecting that his neighbour might also become a traitor. The same must have been the case with the disciples of Jesus, had they not been entirely honest in their views. But as they were only adhering to truth, neither the treachery of Judas, nor the denial of Peter, in the least influenced them to abandon the cause in which they were engaged.

Thus I have endeavoured to state an argument in favour of Christianity from the conduct and character of Judas the traitor. I have examined it with all the attention I am capable of, and have endeavoured to show that it is conclusive: though I am far from laying the stress of the whole cause upon it. No; blessed be God, we have a cloud of witnesses attesting the innocence of Jesus, and the truth of our holy religion, upon which all our hopes for time and eternity are founded; witnesses whose characters have been canvassed, and their evidence illustrated, not only by those of former times, but also by the most masterly writers of this and the preceding age, laymen as well as clergy.* Against whom, I may safely say, the advocates for infidelity have maintained a very unequal conflict; since, notwithstanding their keenest efforts for these hundred years, they have not been able to weaken the smallest pillar by which the noble fabric stands supported.

Would to God I could say, that they had succeeded

* Besides the observations on the conversion of St Paul, already referred to, I have in mine eye Mr West's elegant and striking remarks on the evidences of Christ's resurrection, and the present Bishop of London's (Sherlock) *Trial of the Witnesses*—a book which, I am persuaded, will stand the test of ages, notwithstanding the ungentle insinuation which Dr Middleton has lately thrown out against it.

no better against the life and practice of religion. As a heart-love to wickedness is at the bottom of their opposition to the gospel, their impiety has still kept pace with their infidelity; and, as the most effectual way to debauch our principles, they have laboured hard to debauch our practice: and what melancholy success they have had in this respect, every one who hath eyes or ears can tell. While on the other hand, many of the friends of Christianity have been more careful to preserve our principles, than to reform our lives. But, sure it is now high time to awake, and to stand in the gap against impiety, as well as infidelity. Nor can we hope with success to discourage the latter, unless we shall be able to suppress the former. For so long as men are vicious, they will have a strong propensity to throw off those restraints which Christianity would lay upon their passions, and free themselves from that dread which it naturally inspires into the wicked.—I am

Sir,

Your's &c.

THE SUCCESS
OF
THE FIRST PUBLISHERS OF THE GOSPEL
A
PROOF OF ITS TRUTH.

BY
GEORGE CAMPBELL, D.D.,
Principal of Marischal College, Aberdeen.

PASSING from the striking testimony of Judas, who, I have no doubt, was placed in the Saviour's family for the express purpose of being able afterwards to bear witness that there was not the most distant approach to collusion, or fraud, or vice, in any part of his proceedings, even the most secret and confidential; let us now turn to the consideration of the testimony of the apostles, as a whole. We have heard the evidence of a prejudiced enemy, let us now hear the evidence of honest and impartial friends. This and many other important considerations, are brought out in a very able statement by the late Rev. Dr CAMPBELL of Aberdeen, entitled, *the Success of the First Publishers of the Gospel, a Proof of its Truth.* The publication, appearing in the form of an Annual Sermon before the *Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge,*

is little known. Its excellence, however, is such as to merit universal circulation. It is scarcely necessary to remind the reader, that Dr CAMPBELL was one of the most acute and learned men of a period in the history of Scotland eminent for intellectual power and accomplishment. He was the celebrated antagonist of Hume, and published a most conclusive work in answer to his objection to the Scripture miracles; besides many others, which give him a first place among the scholars and philosophers of his native, or of any other country. Hume, in a letter written after Dr CAMPBELL'S publication, expresses himself in a way which leaves no room to doubt that he *felt himself* defeated, though he does not acknowledge this in as many words. Perhaps too much ado has been made about Hume's objections to miracles. It is certain, however, that they have drawn forth a crowd of most able defenders, and none more original or successful than the Rev. Dr Chalmers, in his recent volumes on the evidences. The objection, that miracles do not admit of proof, is not new. It was from a Jesuit that Hume first picked it up. It appears from Richard Baxter's work on the Evidences, published in 1655, that one Clement Writer of Worcester, a fanatical Seeker, of the age of the Commonwealth, had previously started the very same objection on which Hume afterwards prided himself so much. As soon as propounded, it was demolished by Baxter. The Rev. Dr Duff of Calcutta stated, a few years ago, that the same metaphysical objections were urged by some of the young Hindoos attending the General Assembly's Institution, though they had never heard of Hume or his works. The invention of Infidelity, it would seem, does not embrace, with all its boasting, a very comprehensive field. But I must not detain the reader from the present work of Dr CAMPBELL, which as conclusively shows, that miracles *must have been* wrought in the primitive

times of Christianity, as his other work shows that in themselves, miracles are perfectly credible.

* * * * *

“ The human and natural means originally employed for the propagation of the gospel, would, without the Divine interposition, have proved both foolish and weak, and therefore utterly incapable of answering the purpose. The purpose was nevertheless by these means fully answered. Consequently they must have been accompanied with the Divine interposition, and our religion is of God, and not of man.” I shall first endeavour to evince the truth of the first proposition, and show the utter inability of the natural means employed in promulgating the gospel, to effect the end. I shall next evince the truth of the second, pointing out the rapid and unexampled success of the means that were employed.

I begin with the unfitness of the means, that is, the natural and ordinary means, admitted by infidels, as well as Christians, to have been employed; for it is of such means only I am here speaking. Let it be observed, that under this I comprehend the genius of the doctrine taught; because, whether supernatural in its origin or not, it may have in it a natural fitness for engaging attention and regard; or, on the contrary, a natural tendency to alienate the minds of men, and render them inattentive and averse. In this view the spirit and character of the institution itself ought to be regarded as natural means, either of promoting, or of retarding, its propagation. Let us then examine briefly the two principal circumstances already suggested, the doctrine, and the publishers. It is to the

former that the term *foolishness* is more especially applied, as *weakness* is to the latter.

The doctrine of the cross, in particular, the great hinge of all, was, in every view, exposed to universal dislike and derision. Considered as an article of faith in this new religion, as exhibiting the expiation of sin, and consequently as the foundation of the sinner's hope of Divine pardon and acceptance, to men principled as they were, it both shocked their understanding, and was humiliating to their pride. Considered as a practical lesson, and a warning of the treatment which the disciples might expect, when such horrible things had befallen their Master, to follow whom in suffering they were specially called, nothing could tend more powerfully to alienate their will, being opposed by all their most rooted passions, love of life, aversion to pain, and horror of infamy. And even considered only as a memorable event in the history of Him whom all the proselytes to this institution were bound to acknowledge as their Lawgiver and King, it was exceedingly disgusting, being contradictory to all the notions to which from infancy they had been habituated, in regard to the protection of Providence, and the marks whereby Heaven distinguishes its favourites destined for honour and authority.

Paul, accordingly, takes particular notice of the bad reception which this doctrine met with from both Jews and Gentiles, in consequence of the inveterate prejudices entertained against it. "The preaching of the cross," says he, "is to them that perish," to them who reject and despise the gospel, "foolishness; but to us who are saved," who by faith give it a grateful reception, "it is the power of God." However much the Jews and the Greeks differed from each other, in their religious principles, as well as customs, they concurred in a most hearty detestation of this,

which made so fundamental an article of the Christian dispensation. They viewed it differently, according to their different national characters; but the effect, an indignant rejection, was the same in both. Our apostle, who perfectly understood the difference, has marked it with the greatest accuracy. "The Jews require a sign," an evidence of the interposition of Omnipotence, which may overpower their minds, and command an unlimited assent; "and the Greeks seek after wisdom," the elaborate productions of oratory and ingenuity, which may at once convince their reason, and gratify their curiosity: "but we preach Christ crucified;" a doctrine so far from suiting the inclinations of either, that "to the Jews it is a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness." Both agree to reprobate this doctrine, but differently according to their different tempers. To the Hebrew, it is an object of abhorrence; to the Grecian, of contempt. He adds, "but to them who are called," those who are divinely instructed, "both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."

Nor can we justly wonder that so strange a doctrine as this of the cross, so repugnant to flesh and blood, should, upon the trial, prove so unwelcome to carnal men. If we inquire but ever so little, into the circumstances of the case, we shall find, that its reception could not have been any other than it was. The Jewish nation was at that time split into sects, which in many things entertained opinions opposite to one another. Nevertheless, all who expected the Messiah, of whatever sect, concurred in the belief that he would be, what the world calls, an illustrious prince, a mighty conqueror, who would subdue kingdoms, and establish for himself a new universal monarchy, or secular empire (for of a spiritual kingdom they had no idea), wherein his own nation would be exalted above all the

nations of the earth. From these sentiments, the Samaritans (however much they differed from the Jews in other respects) seem not to have dissented; in these sentiments all our Lord's disciples had been brought up; and to these sentiments, in spite of the manifest tendency of his instructions and example, they, by their own account, firmly adhered during his life, and even for some time after his resurrection. Nor do they seem ever to have relinquished these sentiments, till the descent of the Holy Ghost, after the ascension, on that memorable day of Pentecost, on which the promulgation of the evangelical economy may properly be said to have commenced.

But it is not enough to say that the Messiah held forth to this people in the gospel, and that which the glosses and traditions of the Rabbis had taught them to expect, were personages widely different. They were, in most respects, the reverse of one another. The people had not yet learnt, that God, though not in the tempest, the earthquake, nor the thunder, may yet be found in the small and feeble voice. Their heads were occupied with ideas of grandeur and majesty merely human. When they were thinking of the royal palace, their attention was called to the shop of the artificer. "Is not this the carpenter?" say they, with a mixture of astonishment and contempt. Instead of riches and splendour, behold poverty and humility: for a potentate and warrior, they had only a peaceful citizen. In lieu of one whose undertakings were, in the sight of all mankind, to be crowned with glory and success, they were presented with a man incessantly haunted by misfortune from his cradle to his grave; whose friends were few, and enemies innumerable; one, who in their eyes, had nothing desirable; or, to adopt the expression of the prophet, had "no form nor comeliness;" one who accordingly, from his

first appearance in public, was by all the men of power and influence, hated, derided, defamed, persecuted, dishonoured, and at last cruelly murdered. But the stone which the builders rejected, soon became the head of the corner.

Prosperity and adversity have, in all ages, and in all nations, had some influence on the judgments of men, in regard to Divine favour and aversion; but on no nation had these external things a greater influence than on the Jewish; and under no dispensation or form of religion, true or false, more glaringly, than under the Mosaic. There was something in that institution, it must be acknowledged, which naturally led the attention to these outward distinctions between man and man. The promises and threatenings of the law, interpreted according to the letter, are of things merely temporal. That under these are couched the eternal things of the gospel, is not to be denied; things which were also typified by the established ceremonies and carnal ordinances. But it must be observed, that the literal is the most obvious sense; the spiritual was perceived by those only whose faith or spiritual discernment put them in a capacity of seeing through the veil of symbolical language and ritual observances. For it ever did, and ever will hold, that "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." But in regard to the generality of the people (I may almost say the whole, the exceptions are so few), that outward happiness or misery were the standard by which they determined whether a person were the object of the love or of the hatred of heaven, is a fact that might be evinced, if necessary, from numberless passages, both of the Old Testament and of the New. And if this holds in regard to what may be called the general tenor of a man's life, it holds more especially of his death. To be adjudged to the death of a male-

factor by the supreme tribunal of the chosen people, they considered as an infallible mark of reprobation. How much more, when the very sort of death, suspension upon a tree, had a special malediction pronounced on it, which, as an indelible stigma, had been engrossed in the body of their law? "He that is hanged is accursed of God." The Jews, accordingly to this day, distinguish our Saviour by the name of **THE HANGED MAN**, as the most disgraceful they can employ. We cannot then wonder, that to those whose minds were blinded through sensual affection and obdurate prejudices, and in respect of whom, to adopt the apostle's similitude, the veil which covered the face of Moses, too splendid for their weak organs, remained unremoved, (we cannot, I say, wonder, that to them) the Messiah's cross should prove a stumbling-block. It in reality did so. The undoubted fact confirms the reasoning. And the reasoning is, from their avowed principles, so unquestionable, as to be equivalent to the clearest testimony of the fact.

Nor were the prepossessions of Pagans less impregnable, though built on different grounds. Of all nations, the Jewish was the most contemned and hated by both Greeks and Romans. That their contempt and hatred were unreasonable, I readily allow. But it is only with the fact I am here concerned; and that is incontrovertible. It were easy, however, to account for it, from several peculiarities in the Jewish constitution, which made them be reckoned by others, superstitious, unsociable, intolerant, self-opinioned, and untractable. Their refusal of all intercommunity with those of other nations in matters of religion, a thing unexampled amongst idolaters, their distinction of meats into clean and unclean, and their laws in regard to ablutions, which very much interrupted even their civil intercourse with Gentiles, con

spired in alienating the minds of strangers. Though not deficient in courage and natural sagacity, their being but little acquainted with the arts of war and government, made them appear inconsiderable in the eyes of the Romans; their ignorance of philosophy and the fine arts, rendered them despicable to the Grecians. It would not have been easy to make the people of either nation expect great benefits of any kind from a Jew. But to talk to them of such a one as their Messiah or Saviour, that is, as the terms were explained by the preachers, the purchaser of the remission of sins, of Divine favour, of eternal life and happiness; nay, as the person constituted by the Deity judge of all the earth, could, to men so ill affected to that people, hardly appear otherwise than as absolutely ridiculous. How much then was the ridicule enhanced, when they were further informed, that this Messiah, this man of circumcision, of the race of Jacob, had, like a common felon, and in company with common felons, suffered under a Roman procurator the infamous death of crucifixion?

It is not easy for us, at this distance, to enter perfectly into the sentiments and feelings of men, whose manners, opinions, education, and customs, were so totally different from ours. It is more difficult on this subject, on which our minds have been so long preoccupied, than on any other. The death of Christ, whom we venerate as our Sovereign, our High Priest, and Teacher in Divine things, hath, to us Christians, ennobled the cross, the instrument of an event of such ineffable moment to the human race. We can no longer behold it with the same eyes. It is for this reason, that, in Christian countries, the use of it in punishing is universally abolished. We are inclined to consider it as too honourable a destiny, for any after Jesus Christ, of the posterity of Adam, to undergo.

But in order to judge of the appearance and effect of a new doctrine, published in a remote period, we must, as much as possible, enter into the opinions and prepossessions that prevailed at the time. Considered in this view, it is but just to observe, that crucifixion was then, in the Roman empire, incomparably more disgraceful than any kind of death known in these days in any part of Christendom. No citizen of Rome, how atrocious soever were his guilt, how mean soever were his station, though the lowest mechanic, or the poorest peasant, could be subjected to it. If a man was not a slave, as well as a criminal, it was not in the power of any magistrate to dishonour him so far as to consign him to so ignominious a punishment. And though the privilege of Romans did not extend to every free subject of the empire, so far did the Roman sentiments prevail in regard to this mode of punishing, that it was held universally as in the last degree opprobrious. Conceive then the emotions which would naturally arise in the minds of such people, when a man (a miserable culprit in their account), who had been compelled publicly to submit to so vile an execution, so degrading, so shocking to humanity, was represented to them as the Son of the Most High God, and the Redeemer of the world. If to men so prepossessed as were the Jews, this doctrine could not fail to appear impious and execrable (and for a time it did so even to the apostles); to men so prepossessed as were the Gentiles, it could not fail to appear nonsensical and absurd.

Nay, it is manifest from the writings of the early apologists for Christianity, in the second and third centuries, that this doctrine continued long to be a principal matter of offence to the enemies of our religion, and was regarded by such as an insurmountable objection. They treated it as no better than madness, to place confidence in a man whom God had abandon-

ed to the scourge of the executioner, and the indelible reproach of the cross. Yet this doctrine was, from the beginning, so far from being taught covertly by the apostles, as one would have thought that a small share of political wisdom would have suggested; it was so far from being dissembled, and palliated, that it appeared to be that particular of their religion, of which, in spite of the utter abomination it raised in others, in spite of all the obloquy it brought upon themselves, they were chiefly ostentatious. With our apostle "the cross of Christ" is a phrase in familiar use for denoting the whole of this new economy. The foes of the gospel he calls "enemies of the cross of Christ."* To the Corinthians, he says, he determined to know nothing among them, save "Jesus Christ and him crucified."† The offence taken against Christianity, he styles, "the offence of the cross."‡ And the grand object of his glorying, was what to others appeared the greatest scandal, "the cross of Christ."§ So much in general (for your time does not admit my entering into particulars) of the foolishness of the doctrine.

Let us next consider the weakness of the instruments, the first missionaries of this new religion. What were they? We should certainly think, that a trust of this kind, requiring the most consummate skill and address to manage properly, could not, with the smallest hope of success, be committed to any, but men, who to great natural shrewdness, and acquired knowledge, had all the advantages that result from being acquainted with the world, and conversant in public life. If to these, wealth, nobility, and authority, were added, so much the better. But were the first publishers of the gospel men of this sort? Nothing can be conceived more opposite. A few fishermen of

* Philip. iii. 18. † 1 Cor. ii. 2. ‡ Gal. v. 11. § Gal. vi. 14

Galilee, and some others of the lowest class of the people, poor, ignorant, totally unacquainted with the world; without any visible advantages natural or acquired; men who, before they received this extraordinary mission, had been obliged to drudge for bread within the narrow limits of a toilsome occupation, and had probably never dared to open their mouth in places where men of condition (their betters, as we familiarly express it) were present. Such were the agents employed in effecting the greatest revolution ever produced upon the earth. Was it in a rude and unlettered age that this religion was first broached? or was it only to the illiterate that its promulgators were charged to communicate it? It was at the time when Rome was in the zenith of her power; it was at the time when all the Grecian arts and sciences shone forth in their meridian glory. It was then that these plain, unexperienced men, were commissioned, not cautiously to impart this doctrine in a whisper, to persons of a particular stamp, but to proclaim it to all indiscriminately, as from the house-tops, to "preach the gospel to every creature." These lowly ministers of Jesus did accordingly publish it to the Jews in the temple and in the synagogues, and to the Gentiles in the forums of their cities, and in other places of public resort. Their undaunted spirit and freedom, considering what they were, did indeed amaze their superiors, and all who heard them. When the high priest, and other members of the Sanhedrim, "saw the boldness of Peter and John," in the spirited and pertinent reply they made, and perceived "that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled."

How different is the policy of Heaven—pardon the expression—from that of earth! How truly is the matter represented in my context: "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise."

and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in his presence." The apostles were very sensible of their defects, in respect of natural talents, rank, and education; they knew well, that by men of fashion, men of the world, they were counted "as the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things." But as their zeal was kindled solely in behalf of the cause of their Master, they never affected to conceal or extenuate these defects. They neither disdainfully undervalued those acquired advantages which they had not, but which were possessed by many of their antagonists, nor vainly arrogated to themselves any merit from the success that attended their preaching. Their humble language was, "we have this treasure," the doctrine of the gospel, the inestimable riches of Christ, "in earthen vessels;" not vessels of gold or silver, as men of eminence among the great and learned might be called, but vessels of the very coarsest materials, those denominated the dregs of the people, "that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

We are apt to attend but carelessly to the report of facts to which our ears have been long familiarized. Such is that of the low condition of those who were the first heralds of the gospel of peace. Besides, to us the very title APOSTLES conveys certain ideas of respect and dignity, which, as it were, hide from us the meanness and obscurity of their outward state. In order, therefore, to rouse our attention to this circumstance, of the utmost importance to the right understanding of my argument, let us consider what would

be, I say not probably, but certainly, the effect of such an attempt in our own age and nation, made by such ill-provided, and, as we should say, despicable instruments unaided from above, in opposition to all the established powers, religion, laws, and learning of the country. Yet we have no reason to believe, that our fishermen are, in any respect, inferior to the fishers of those days on the lake of Gennesaret. It would not perhaps be difficult to prove, that in point of education, in this part of the island at least, they are even superior. But to render the parallel complete, and to make it tally perfectly with the infidel hypothesis about the promulgation of the gospel, we must conceive something still more marvellous; namely, that a few such men in this country, so wretchedly accoutred, so unfurnished with human means, friendless and penniless, unacquainted with every language but their mother-tongue, of which they can speak only a provincial and barbarous dialect, form the vast project of traversing Holland, France, Germany, and the other countries on the continent, in order to make converts abroad, to impose on all mankind, and to publish throughout the world, a scheme of doctrine they had previously concerted among themselves. With the least reflection, we see the absolute impracticability of such a plan, when brought home to ourselves. Indeed, it is so glaringly impracticable, that it is not easy for us to conceive that such an extravagance could ever enter into the heads of men in their senses. Yet not one jot better equipped were the apostles, if we abstract from supernatural aid, than such projectors as I have now supposed. In point of language, a most essential circumstance, they could be no way superior.*

* The speech of the common people has always most of the peculiarities of the province. We have no reason to think that the dialect of any of the twelve was preferable to that of Peter. Yet he was detected at Jerusalem by a servant maid, from his un-

Now, the nature of things, my brethren, was the same then that it is at present, and means which we perceive now to be perfectly inadequate, must have been always so. I do not talk of the improbability that such sort of men should, at the risk of peace, liberty, life, and every thing valuable, and without any imaginable motive, have conceived a project so fantastic, because so totally beyond their sphere, as that of subverting all the religious establishments on the face of the earth, of extirpating at once opinions, ceremonies, laws, which had subsisted for many centuries, and even whole orders in society, by substituting in lieu of all these, a new theory of theirs, founded on a false story of their own devising. Nor do I talk of the absurdity of imagining, as some have done, that men who were neither fools nor mad (and if they had been either, their success would not have been less unaccountable) should, in a matter entirely subjected to the testimony of their senses, have imposed upon themselves, and thought they were promoting truth, if it was not so. But I talk at present of the impossibility of such agents succeeding by natural means, in such a design, however formed. To account for the success, therefore, we must necessarily admit the Divine original of the whole, and have recourse to the concurrence of Him who "calleth the things that are not, as though they were,"† and who alone can "destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." With such an Almighty assistant, and nothing less will account for it, they might well be superior to fear and apprehension, and might boldly challenge all human opposition, and say, "Where is couth idiom and accent, to be a Galilean; at a time when, we may believe, he would gladly have concealed his country, by disguising his tongue, if it had been in his power. Matt. xxvi. 73.

† Rom. iv. 17.

the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?"*

But it will perhaps be urged, that the apostle Paul ought to be considered as an exception from the general remark I have been explaining. Was not he a man of letters, bred up at the feet of Gamaliel, a famous Jewish doctor, and instructed in all the Scriptural and traditionary learning of the Jews? Nay, does it not appear, that he was not altogether unacquainted with the writings of the Grecian poets? It is indeed true; and as we judge of every thing by comparison, so when he is compared with his brethren in the apostolate, he may be denominated *learned*. But it ought to be observed, that as his learning consisted chiefly, I might almost say solely, in the Scriptures, and the Rabbinical doctrine of the Pharisees, it is notorious in how little esteem that kind of erudition was among the Gentiles, of whom he was eminently the apostle. Of whatever account, therefore, this knowledge might have been, had his mission been only or chiefly to the Jews; I must think, it was of very little, if any at all, to the Greeks and Romans. To them all Jewish literature appeared no better than unintelligible, and therefore insignificant, jargon; or, as Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, contemptuously styled it, "questions of words and names, and of their law."† Whatever use Paul might have made of his learning, in disputing with the Jewish doctors, it could be of no service in his disputes with the philosophers of Greece, and the *literati* of Rome. It is remarkable, therefore, that the only man among the first preachers of the gospel, who was in any degree qualified to cope with the learned men of Judea, was not sent to them, but to nations amongst whom his Hebraistic knowledge

* 1 Cor. i. 19, 20.

† Acts xviii. 15.

could give him no advantage. Whereas Peter, who is by way of eminence styled the apostle of the circumcision, as the other is of the Gentiles* (Peter, I say), though of their own country, was but one of the untaught rabble, who, on account of the meanness of their birth and station, as well as their ignorance, were by the haughty scribes and rulers accounted the refuse of the earth. "This people," say they, "who know not the law are cursed."† Nor could Paul, in respect of rank, claim great superiority over the rest. He was only a handicraftsman, having been bred a tent-maker; a business which he occasionally exercised, for the support of himself and his attendants, during his apostleship.

Ay, but had not this man all the advantages resulting from the Grecian arts of logic and rhetoric? Did he not speak their language with elegance and purity? I know the apostle has had some strenuous and well-meaning advocates, especially among the moderns, not infidels, but Christians, who, with more zeal than judgment, have maintained the affirmative. I am far from denying, that this eminent servant of our Lord possessed considerable talents, in respect of natural eloquence, depth of thought, strength of reasoning, and nervousness of expression. But that his Greek diction was pure and classical, or that in composing he followed the rules laid down by rhetoricians, we have the greatest reason to deny. His works that are extant, do, to every able and candid judge of these matters, show the contrary. The contrary was admitted by the best critics and orators among the Greek Fathers, who must be allowed more capable of judging of propriety, fluency, and harmony, in their native tongue, than any modern can be in a dead and foreign language.‡ Further, the contrary is frankly

* Gal. ii. 7, 8.

† John vii. 49.

‡ Such were Origen and Chrysostom.

owned by the apostle himself. Nay, he insists, that according to the Divine counsel it must be so, this being of a piece with all the other natural means God had employed in the work. Thus he was "sent to preach the gospel," as he tells us in the context, "not with wisdom of words." Why? "Lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect."* Shall we then maintain his oratorical talents in spite of himself, and in spite of the irrefragable reason he adduces from the analogy of the Divine procedure, in this whole dispensation? It would be paying him but a bad compliment, to extol his elocution at the expense of his veracity; for we are under a necessity of denying one or other. It appears, that his enemies made a handle of the rudeness and inelegance of his style, to injure his reputation, especially at Corinth, where oratory was much in vogue. But though he vindicates himself from their other censures, he invariably admits the truth of this. "Though rude in speech," says he, "yet not in knowledge."† And, "I came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom."‡ And, "the things of God we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth."§ Again, "My speech, and my preaching, was not with enticing words of man's wisdom." He assigns the reason, the same in import with that given formerly, "that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."|| Speaking of their sentiments concerning him, "His letters, say they, are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible."¶ The power ascribed to his letters, undoubtedly refers to the sense conveyed in them, and the ardour of spirit by which they are animated. That they did not conceive any part of their merit to be the purity or harmony of the style, is manifest from the latter part

* 1 Cor. x. 17.

‡ 1 Cor. ii. 13.

† 2 Cor. xi. 6.

|| 1 Cor. ii. 4, 5.

‡ 1 Cor. ii. 1.

¶ 2 Cor. x. 10.

of the character, especially when compared with what is repeatedly acknowledged in other places. Paul, therefore, had neither the graces of person, nor the ornaments of elocution, to recommend or enforce his doctrine. His language to Greek ears must have appeared idiomatical, not to say barbarous. And as his sort of learning was but ill adapted to the people of Greece, Italy, or Asia Minor, amongst whom his mission chiefly lay, he did not possess that superiority over the other apostles which is commonly imagined. Justly, therefore, might we apply to a Christian who should zealously assert the classic purity of our apostle's style, the rebuke which our Lord once gave to Peter, on an occasion not unsimilar: "Thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men."* The weakness, the infirmity, or, if you will, the insufficiency of these messengers of the new covenant, was their glory, and their boast. Their motive was, "That the power of Christ might rest upon" them,† and be manifested by them. To men of the world, indeed, the doctrine appeared not more foolish, than the ministry was weak.

I have now, as I purposed in the first place, shown the inability of the natural means employed in promulgating the gospel, to effect the end.

I proceed to consider, secondly, the rapid and unexampled success of the means that were employed. As to the rapidity of the success, need I use many words to evince a point so evident, and so universally acknowledged? The canon of Scripture was not finished, that generation had not passed, when Jesus Christ had disciples and churches in Judea, Samaria, Syria, Phœnicia, Mesopotamia, Arabia, the countries of Asia Minor, Greece, Macedonia, Italy, Egypt, and as far as Ethiopia. This we learn, partly from the books of

* Mat. xvi. 23.

† 2 Cor. xii. 9.

the New Testament, partly from the authentic remains of the apostolic fathers. Whilst the faith of the gospel was deeply rooted in all those who professed it; whilst nothing but faith could induce any one to make the profession; whilst the professors themselves were harassed on every side with the most violent persecutions,—the church of Christ, in spite of all opposition, and every species of discouragement, increased daily. In less than three centuries, for I reckon not from the birth of Christ, but, as in a computation of this kind we ought to reckon, from the first publication of the gospel at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (in less than three centuries), Christianity having pierced into Gaul, Spain, Britain, and the African countries lying on the Mediterranean, became the predominant religion of the Roman empire, which comprehended the greater and better part of the then known world. Nor was its extent limited by the empire. It did indeed, with wonderful celerity, overspread the most populous countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Since its establishment by human laws, it hath been put on so different a footing, and the methods taken for propagating it, have been, on some occasions at least, so completely altered, and so little warranted by the spirit and precepts of that religion, that the success or want of success of these methods can hardly affect our present argument.*

* While there was ample success in the propagation of the gospel in primitive times, to prove its Divine truth; while the success is inexplicable, except from the presence and the power of miracles; there is, at the same time, a danger, speaking popularly, of exaggerating the progress which was actually gained. Gibbon, who is generally accurate in his facts, however prejudiced and perverse in his spirit, contends that, even in the most prosperous times, the Christians were in the minority. The vacillation of Constantine seems to have sprung, in part, from a consciousness of the same kind. The circumstance, that the word "paganus" means both a heathen and a countryman, seems to intimate that, whatever progress the gospel had made in the towns and cities, the country gen-

Now, as it is admitted on all hands, that the success of the first preachers of the gospel was great and rapid, I maintain that it still remains unexampled. I do not mean to state a comparison between conversion and conquest; between subduing the mind by persuasion, by what our apostle emphatically calls "the foolishness of preaching,"† and conquering the body by the sword. In the one, both the reason and the will are gained by teaching; in the other, a feigned assent is sometimes extorted by violence, and maintained by terror. It does not therefore in the least concern my

erally remained pagan. But we have still more direct evidence than this. The reader may be surprised to learn, but it is true, that in some of the largest towns and congregations of primitive times, such as Antioch, Rome, and Carthage, the Christians had but a single place of meeting, for three hundred years after Christ. No doubt several congregations may have assembled successively under the same roof on the same Lord's day. But this is certainly an indication of a far more limited progress on the part of Christianity, than is commonly imagined. Till the middle of the fourth century, all the Christians of Alexandria were not too numerous to assemble in one place. My authority for these statements is Lord Chancellor King's able work *On the Primitive Church*. Had the gospel been as prevailing as it was in after times, it is impossible to believe there would not have been, as in modern days, a greater number of places of worship. Mr Ballantine, a keen and able dissenting writer, says, "The primitive church for nearly three hundred years acted under this system (the Voluntary system), and all things considered, its success was certainly extensive; *but there seems no reason to believe she had the means of instructing the great body of the people, till established by law.*" Besides, it is certain that, early in the second and third centuries, Christianity was greatly corrupted in doctrine, and spirit, and practice, beyond the corruption of many parts of modern Protestant Christendom. Dr Campbell speaks of the "establishment of Christianity by human laws," and of unwarrantable methods of propagation: I presume he refers to the atrocities of the Popish method of spreading Popery by persecution. There can be no question, that the civil establishment of the Church of Scotland was, three several times, in the history of this country, crowned with a moral and religious success, far deeper and more pervading than can be alleged of any country in primitive times; and that Christianity, left entirely to itself in modern days, has never been able to reach the same results. Miracles must have made a very important distinction between primitive and present times—a distinction perhaps not sufficiently attended to.—EDITOR.

† 1 Cor. i. 21.

argument, what the success was of the Mahometan, I say not doctrine, but arms. Their engine was war, not preaching. The weapons of their warfare were carnal, those of the gospel, spiritual. Their aim was submission, not belief; the external profession of the mouth, not the internal conviction of the understanding. When the like methods came to be adopted by Christians (for too soon, alas! they were adopted, a sure sign that the religion of Jesus was then grossly corrupted and debased), the success is doubtless to be accounted for in the same manner. Every candid person will admit, that the success of Charlemagne over the Saxons, is no more an evidence of Divine favour, than that of Mahomet over the Arabs.

But when all attempts of this kind are set aside, one will perhaps be at a loss what to bring into comparison with the first promulgation of the gospel. It is not, however, for want of numerous and repeated trials, even in the way of preaching; but when the effect is inconsiderable, or not correspondent to the expectation raised, the attempt itself comes gradually to be either quite forgotten, or little minded. Crusades, wars, and massacres, have not been the only methods employed by Rome, not over-scrupulous about the means, when the advancement of the hierarchy, that is, the extension of her empire, is the end. She knows how to employ preachers, as well as inquisitors, executioners, and soldiers. Nay, it is no more than doing her justice to acknowledge, that no church whatever, no state, no society, hath done half so much in this way as she hath done. But with what effect? Has there appeared, in any part of the world, even where her missionaries have been most numerous, any fruits of their missions which bear a resemblance to the fruits so quickly produced every where by the apostles of our Lord? Let the most sanguine vota-

ries of that church, who know any thing of the matter, say so, if they dare.

What then is the reason of the difference? Had the latter, the apostles of our Lord, any advantages (observe I speak of human and natural advantages) which the former, the Popish missionaries, had not? Quite the reverse. Every such advantage has been on the side of the missionary, not one on the side of the apostle. They are not ignorant artificers of the lowest class, whom Rome engages in such a business. She hath too much worldly wisdom (notwithstanding her arrogant and not very consistent pretence to miracles) ever to employ such messengers. Neither do her apostles go without the utmost preparation, that not only a learned education, according to the times, can give them, but such particular instructions, study, and discipline, as will serve best to qualify them to accommodate themselves to those to whom they are sent, to gain upon the people, and to bear with fortitude the difficulties and hardships they may be obliged to encounter. It is plain, therefore, that she puts no confidence in her supernatural powers, and acts precisely as though she were conscious she had none. Indeed, since the establishment at Rome of the congregation *de propaganda fide*, no attention, no pains, no expense, have been spared, that could serve for procuring all necessary information, in regard to the languages, arts, manners and customs, of the different nations and tribes to whom it is judged proper to send preachers; that they may be furnished, as much as possible, with every human and natural assistance for the work in which they are engaged. Yet what has been the success hitherto? If one were to judge by the exaggerated accounts that have sometimes been given by the missionaries themselves, we should think them wonderful indeed. But if we judge by the more impartial representations given by

others, or by, what is still a better criterion, the remaining effects of their missions, we must pronounce them inconsiderable. In many places, there is not now a vestige of their labours. In other places, the traces that have been left are, I may say, equivocal, as well as few. Father Charlevoix, one of their own people, in his account of the North American savages, observes, that the missions had been very unsuccessful among them; and, what is more surprising, mentions one missionary, who had ingratiated himself so far with one of their tribes, that they would even have chosen him for their chief, who nevertheless had not been able to persuade one single person among them to embrace Christianity.*

Well, but if the attempts have not proved so successful in the West, what wonders in the way of conversion have not been performed by a Saint Francis Xavier and his associates in the East? Indeed, there is no man in these latter ages who has been so much, and I believe so deservedly, celebrated for his labours in this way, as this friar, whom Rome hath dignified with the title of *the Apostle of the Indies*. He was certainly a most zealous promoter of a cause which he doubtless believed to be the cause of God. His pious intentions deserve the commendation of those who can pity his errors and absurdities. Regard to the voice of conscience, even though a misinformed conscience, is still respectable. But is it not well known, that this famous missionary was not only a man of learning, the best that was then to be had, but, along with his companions, acted under the auspices of the viceroy of Goa, the metropolis of the Portuguese settlements in India? and where, for the greater security of the faith, they soon thought proper to establish the inquisition. Is it not evident, that in most places

* Letter xxxi

where the missionaries exercised their function, they were under the protection of the victorious fleets and these had not reached, the terror of their name had reached, and was of no little service to these itinerant teachers. How unlike the case of the poor fishermen of Galilee! Miracles indeed, stupendous miracles, were pretended to by them, and those of their party. For we have only the representations of one side. It is surprising they were so often at a loss for one miraculous power, the gift of tongues, so common in the primitive church, which would have been of greater service to them than all the rest together. This however they laudably supplied the best way they could, by the use of interpreters, as well as by study and application.

An eminent French preacher of the last century has affirmed, in a panegyric sermon on this apostle of the Pope, that he spread the light of the gospel through more than three thousand leagues of country, and subjected no less than fifty-two kingdoms to Jesus Christ. These are big words: but where, I pray, is that country? and where are those kingdoms? This is rather too violent an hyperbole, even for an orator. The conquests made by the Portuguese arms, in like manner as those made since by other European powers, Protestant as well as Popish, are not surely to be called kingdoms converted by preaching the gospel. Yet, abstracting from these settlements, or, if ye will, usurpations, it would be difficult to point out so much as one of those fifty-two kingdoms subdued to Christ. Of the same kind is that other assertion in the same discourse, that Xavier has more than repaired in the East, all the hurt done to Rome by Luther, and Calvin, and the other Reformers (heresiarchs, as he terms them) in the West. Can there be a clearer demonstration of the little regard that is due to the word of a panegyrist and party man? At this day, even in

the East, those Reformers have more disciples than Rome has. But, alas! it is not by what the apostle calls "the foolishness of preaching," that disciples have been gained there to either side. The greater part have been transplanted from Europe, or are the descendants of those who were first transplanted thither. The rest are the effects more of conquest than of conversion.

But what shall be said of the wonderful success of Xavier in the islands of Japan? It was indeed as signal as it has proved transitory. Nothing could be more promising than the appearances were for some time. But there was a latent seed of corruption in the doctrine which those missionaries unknowingly misnamed the gospel, that, springing up, produced a plentiful crop of its ordinary fruits, pride, ambition, violence, and faction. These provoked a persecution, which quickly terminated in the total extinction of that infant church. Francis Solier, a Jesuit, who writes the ecclesiastic history of Japan, expresses his astonishment, that God should have permitted the blood of so many martyrs to be shed, without serving (as in the first ages of Christianity) as a fruitful seed for producing new Christians. But this can be no matter of wonder to the intelligent believer. The truth is, the cause was not more different at that time (though under the same name), from what it had been, than were the usual methods by which it was propagated. "The Christianity of the sixteenth century," says a late writer, "had no right to hope for the same favour and protection from God, as the Christianity of the three first centuries. The latter was a benign, gentle, and patient religion, which recommended to subjects submission to their sovereign, and did not endeavour to raise itself to the throne by rebellion. But the Christianity preached to the infidels of the sixteenth century was far different. It was

a bloody, murtherous religion, that had been inured to slaughter for five or six hundred years. It had contracted a very long habit of maintaining and aggrandizing itself, by putting to the sword all that resisted it. Fires, executions, the dreadful tribunal of the inquisition, crusades, bulls exciting subjects to rebellion, seditious preachers, conspiracies, assassinations of princes, were the ordinary methods employed against those who refused submission to its orders."*

The ingenuous confession of a Spaniard, more honest, it would appear, than wise, may be pleaded in justification of the sanguinary precautions taken by the Emperor of Japan. Being asked by the king of Tossa, one of the Japanese isles, and probably one of the fifty-two kingdoms mentioned by Bourdaloue, How the king of Spain got possession of so great an extent of country in both hemispheres? he answered frankly, That he used to send friars to preach the gospel to foreign nations; and that, after having converted a considerable number of heathens, he sent his forces, who, joining with the new converts, conquered the country. The Christians in that island (such Christians as they were) paid dear for this indiscreet confession. Poor then, if we may judge by the present effects, has been the success of their missions among barbarians. Have they succeeded better in civilized nations? Their missions in China, it is true, have subsisted for centuries. But will the candid and judicious, even of that communion, say, that the consequences have been proportioned to what might have been expected from the assiduity, labour, and expense bestowed on them? Most Roman Catholics themselves, consider the greater part of the Chinese proselytes, as more than half Pagans still. What will Protestants then reckon them?

I know not any thing done by Romanists in modern

* General Dictionary, Article *Japan*, Note E.

times, that appears more favourable, than what has been effected by some Jesuits in the inland parts of South America, in the country called *Paraguay*. But of this, I am afraid, we have not as yet sufficient knowledge to enable us to form a judgment that can be depended on. Some things, however, will deserve our notice, that we may be satisfied that there is no similarity in this case to the primitive publication of the gospel. In the first place, those Jesuits are to be considered more as the founders of a polity than as the publishers of a religion. Religion, indeed, makes an essential part of their establishment; still it is but a part. Nothing could be more opposite to the conduct of the apostles, whose sole object was to preach the doctrine and law of Christ, and, without interfering in the least with the rights of civil governors, to bring men every where to the obedience of the faith. I observe, secondly, that instead of those poor, illiterate, and obscure men, who first promulgated to the world the everlasting gospel of the Son of God, we have here some select members of an opulent, learned, and political society, who were careful to be previously instructed in the language, manners, and religious observances of the people whom they were to teach; men who had most attentively studied the policy of the ancient South American states, particularly of the Incas of Peru, and the arts they had successfully employed in subduing the ferocity of their neighbours. I observe, thirdly, that it was more by insinuation, and indirectly, than by open and professed teaching, that the knowledge of Christianity was introduced by them. Their direct and only object long appeared to be to teach those savages agriculture, the most necessary manufactures, the art of building, and the other arts most conducive to civilization; and when in this way they had sufficiently recommended themselves to

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their confidence, to take occasion of inculcating, especially on the children intrusted to their care, their religious principles. The method of the apostles was much shorter; they did not find the least necessity for such artificial management.*

Nor was it only in South America that the Popish missionaries found it convenient to recur to these arts. Of how much consequence it has been for promoting

* I have examined the pretensions of the Foreign missions of the Church of Rome at great length, in a Lecture (the 12th) in the series delivered in Glasgow in 1836-37, entitled "*The Truths of Protestantism Contrasted with the Errors of Popery*;" and I have there shown that, for the most part, the statement as to the success of the Popish missions is grossly exaggerated; that supposing the success to be real, it is not worth having; and that very many of the missions have, in the course of a few years, turned out miserable failures. With regard more particularly to Paraguay, I showed, on the authority of the new edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and the *Modern Traveller*, "That when the Jesuits were withdrawn, the fabric soon fell into ruins, and the Indians relapsed into their idolatry and savage habits, just as boys drop their tasks the moment they are liberated from school." Again: "When the Jesuits fell, as at the death of a magician all his spells are said to be reversed, all his enchantments are broken, so the effects of their labours melted away, and have left few traces behind. They built upon the sand." Page 75, *Lecture 12th*.—EDITOR.

Since writing the above two years ago, I have learned from a French Roman Catholic journal, some curious facts strikingly illustrative of the decline and almost extinction of Popish Missions. The date of the information is little more than four years ago. According to a French priest, there are 180,000 adherents of the Church of Rome in Tonking, on the borders of China, for the instruction of whom, there are only two aged and infirm priests, one of them above ninety years of age. What sort of Christians must these be—without a Bible too! So of Cochin China, among 80,000 Roman Catholics, there are only two Bishops, and two Grand Vicars, one of the latter is paralytic, the other is never at home! In Siam, there is only one French priest, in a country from which, in the reign of Louis the Fourteenth, a strong representation came, that the monarch wished to be converted and all his people!! At Pondicherry, the alleged number of the flock is 140,000; the instructors, one Bishop, and five priests, on a coast of two hundred leagues!! Similar facts as to other quarters are given. The priest concludes with a statement, from which it appears that since 1791, the Popish missionaries had been reduced *one-half*. How different the history of Protestant missions.—*Vide New York Observer, September. 1834.*—EDITOR.

the success of the Chinese mission, that those charged with it were able mathematicians, astronomers, geographers, physicians, and natural philosophers; and how much their knowledge in the sciences conduced to procure them the attention and respect of the natives, all the world knows. Where was the man of these modern apostles, who could say, as the apostle Paul, the poor Hebrew artisan, did to the Corinthians, "I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified?" Short, we may believe, would have been their abode in China, and in other places too, had they proceeded on this plan. But Paul needed not to depend on any human supplements or assistances whatever. Nothing indeed could be more unlike, or rather greater contrasts, in all respects, than the first ambassadors and the last, those of Jesus Christ, and those of the Roman Pontiff. The last were possessed of those accomplishments which preserved them from appearing despicable to any; the manifest superiority of their knowledge in the elegant, as well as in many of the useful arts, made them be respected as almost a superior order of beings, even by those whom they could not persuade to turn Christian. The first, on the contrary, on account of their low rank, and ignorance of the arts of civilized life, were acknowledged to be, in many respects, but weak and contemptible instruments, even by those who were converted by their ministry. This was evidently the case of him, who of them all, had the best pretensions to knowledge and education. Not to mention the pageantry, even the rich sacerdotal vestments used by the Romish clergy in their worship, are naturally fitted to make an impression on the senses, not only of barbarians, but of the weak and superstitious even of polished nations. How different must the ordinary and homely garments of the primitive preachers have

appeared, worn constantly in their peregrinations! for they were not permitted to carry with them so much as a change of raiment.* Nor is this so trivial a circumstance as to some perhaps, on a superficial view, it will appear. Yet after all, with every human and natural advantage, what have been the fruits of the last labourers compared with those of the first? Have we not gotten ample reason, in this view also, to adopt the apostle's words, and, on contrasting Christ's humble delegates to the accomplished ambassadors of Rome, to say, "Where *now*, is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For God hath chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise, the weak to confound the mighty, the base and the despised, yea and things that are not to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." If riches and learning, and the most refined policy, with the countenance and support of the secular powers, cannot, though combined, accomplish what, in opposition to all these, is effected with ease by poverty and illiterate simplicity, can we hesitate a moment in pronouncing, "This is the finger of God."†

* Matt. x. 10; Luke ix. 3.

† While this argument is most conclusive, and plainly shows that miraculous agency must have been employed, and that to a great extent in primitive times, it must not be imagined that all methods of propagating Christianity apart from miracles are vain. At the time that Dr Campbell wrote, little had been attempted by the Protestant church towards the diffusion of the gospel. Since then various efforts have been made, and with very encouraging success, in different parts of the heathen world. Still, even where most successful, the contrast between primitive and present results is such as must convince every impartial mind that there were influences at work in the former, which we cannot command in the latter. In other words, that God revealed himself to the primitive teachers in miraculous power.—EDITOR.

THE
TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL DEMONSTRATED
FROM THE
CHARACTER OF GOD MANIFESTED IN THE ATONEMENT;

A LETTER TO MR RICHARD CARLILE,

BY

ALEXANDER CARSON.

THE last Tract on the Evidences, to which I shall call the attention of the reader, is entitled, *The Truth of the Gospel Demonstrated from the Character of God Manifested in the Atonement; a Letter to Mr Richard Carlile, by Alexander Carson, 1820.* The author of this most excellent Tract, is, as I have already noticed, a Dissenting minister in Ireland. He is favourably known to the Christian world, by his able services in the Apocrypha controversy; his exposure of German Neology, and his vindication of the law of Christ, in the matter of tribute paying. The person to whom his letter is addressed, is the unhappy Richard Carlile, who has for many years laboured assiduously, and but too successfully, through the press and the print shop, to spread the poison of unblushing infidelity. While, like Mr CARSON, I pity the man from the bottom of my

soul, I cannot at the same time help strongly condemning him, and charging guilt home upon his conscience. It is not by mere commiseration that infidels are to be reclaimed. Scripture condemns them as loving the darkness in preference to the light, and this should be held prominently before them.

One great charm of Mr CARSON's paper is, that it contains a clear declaration of the gospel method of salvation ; and proves that the gospel itself supplies one of the best evidences of its own Divinity. Many works on the Evidences do not proceed so far. They may be said to be limited to externals. At least they never venture on the experimental. As far as they go they are conclusive, and render men inexcusable ; but they do not go far enough ; and by not bringing out the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, they lose a great part of their proof of the Divine origin of the Scriptures. 'To a man who understands and receives the gospel into his own heart, there is no evidence half so satisfactory, as just its adaptation to his circumstances and necessities as a fallen creature ; but without actually experiencing this, one may see such beauty and harmony in the character of God set forth in the gospel, as shall convince him it could not have originated with man, but must have come from heaven. This is the view of the Evidences which Mr CARSON's letter presents ; and, rightly understood, it is more wonderful than the morality of the Scriptures, which Rousseau confessed touched his heart. It is interesting to observe, that writers on the evidences are dwelling more and more upon the *Gospel itself*, as a proof of the Divinity of Christianity. The Rev. Dr Chalmers, and Robert Haldane, Esq., in their valuable works on the Evidences, may be mentioned as peculiarly distinguished in this department of the Christian Proof.

The only addition I could wish were made to Mr

CARSON'S Tract, is a more express acknowledgment of the work of the Holy Spirit, both in persuading a man to receive the gospel at first, and enabling him to hold by it, and to grow in spiritual fruitfulness through the use of it, afterwards. I have no doubt that the writer holds this doctrine as strongly as I do; but it is well to bring it out, and to remember that, beautiful as the gospel is in itself, and finely adapted to our wants, and established on the most irresistible evidence, still such is the depravity of man, he will not receive it, except constrained by the Almighty power of the Spirit of God.

SIR,

YOUR late conspicuous opposition to the Scriptures, has induced me to suggest to you a few thoughts on the evidence of the gospel. Though I consider you a most determined enemy to Jesus my Lord, my hope and my glory, you shall from me meet with none of that illiberal abuse, with which you are sometimes treated: I view you on the verge of eternal misery, and would gladly be the means of showing you the refuge of the guilty. Jesus died for his enemies, and Richard Carlile cannot be more hostile to the doctrine of the cross, than was Saul of Tarsus. Jesus has the hearts of all men in his hands; and should he open your eyes, your rebellion would be instantly subdued, and instead of reviling his word, your language would be, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" It could not then serve my purpose to undervalue your understanding, or endeavour to bring your motives into suspicion. Should you even die in blaspheming the truth, a Christian has no disposition to revile you.

From my soul I pity the man who loses both worlds by his error.

Permit me then, Sir, to bespeak your candid attention to what I shall submit. You must grant, that to determine correctly on this subject is a matter of the utmost importance. If the gospel is true, eternal damnation is the inevitable doom of all who believe it not. It is not then the part of a rational man to neglect to examine its pretences, or to reject it on slight consideration. To enter on the investigation of the subject determined to oppose, manifests the highest temerity. Yet, Sir, permit me to observe, that in the writings of all the infidels with which I am acquainted, there is a total want of candid discussion. Their rancorous hatred of the God of the Scriptures, urges them to endeavour to prove them untrue.

Yet there is a timid acquiescence in the truth of Christianity as little to be approved. Many declaimers against infidelity cry out, "Why rob us of our pleasing hopes, even though vain? Why awake us from our dreams of future felicity? Let us enjoy our consoling delusions. It is cruel to deprive us of the only alleviation of human misery." This is not the language of any man who understands the evidence of the gospel: it is not the language of reason. The belief of imposture can never be useful: to expose imposture cannot be criminal. If the Scriptures are a forgery, let them by candid reasoning be proved to be such. The God of truth cannot need the assistance of lies in the management of his empire.

It is not my intention to undertake a defence of Christianity from all the sources of its evidence. No truth ever communicated to the world recommends itself by such a variety of means of proof. Each of these is worthy of full exhibition by those who have leisure for the task. But of all proofs the most satisfactory to a Christian are found in the Scriptures

themselves. These are open to the inspection of all, and level to the meanest capacity. I shall not, however, attempt to exhibit the general evidence that appears in the Scriptures, attesting their Divine original. Even this branch of the subject would require volumes to do it justice. I shall confine myself to a single point. I undertake to prove the gospel to be true from its own nature. I maintain that the way of salvation which it proclaims, gives such a character of God, as to demonstrate its own truth; and that, were it to be found in an island, without any other testimony, it is entitled to acceptance with the fullest confidence. Those who should reject it, even in these circumstances, would reject it to their own just condemnation. No man who candidly examines the witness now at the bar, and discerns the import of his testimony, can withhold his conviction, that said witness is acquainted with the true God, and commissioned to declare him to the world.

All the attributes of the Divine character are displayed in the Scriptures, in a manner infinitely more glorious than the representations of them by the wisest of the human race. Granting that the ancient philosophers had some glimmerings of the unity, power, and immensity of God, they never gave the slightest hint for the illustration of those Divine attributes which most concern the happiness of man. The God that philosophy now boasts has been principally stolen from the Scriptures. But we need not rest any thing on what, it appears from their writings, philosophers did not know; we are warranted in asserting, that the Scriptures give views of the Divine character, perfectly rational, yet utterly unattainable from a view of the works of creation. Not only were some parts of the Divine character previously unknown; they are still to be seen in no other light than that of the gos

pel. On the knowledge of these attributes depends the happiness of man. I shall begin with justice.

JUSTICE.

The infinite justice of God is to be seen in no other view than in the redemption of sinners through the atonement. No other plan of salvation has ever attempted to show God to be perfectly just. Every system, so far as it admits guilt in men, must view God as deficient in justice, if he saves them. Now, if all the human race are finally to be happy without atonement to justice, God must be unjust in proportion to the aggregate amount of human guilt. Do you believe yourself to be in any measure guilty before God? How do you expect to free yourself from your guilt? Do you believe that the good you have done will compensate for the evil? Granting that your whole life had been a course of the highest virtue, with a single slight exception, all your goodness could not make amends for that single exception. I do not now speak from the authority of the Scriptures: I speak from reason. Is not the Author of your existence entitled to your perfect obedience? Can you do more than your duty? When you have done all, are you not an unprofitable servant? The best actions have nothing to spare for the covering of the sin. Would this pay a debt to any earthly creditor? Should any one produce to you nine good shillings with one bad one, would you accept it in payment for ten shillings? Should this person urge that as there were so many good shillings, and but a single bad one, you ought to receive the latter for the sake of the former, would you not think him either a knave or a fool? And will you venture to meet God on similar ground? You hope to escape punishment though you are not sinless; your God then is unjust. But, perhaps you will say, that as God is merciful as well as just, mercy will temper

justice, and make it abate something of its demands. Granting for a moment that this is the case, I say again, your God is unjust. So far as his mercy bears down his justice, there is an inconsistency and opposition in his attributes, and the former robs the latter of its right. Your God is at war with himself, and the quarrel among his attributes, can be settled only by compromise. Will you say, that temporary punishment on yourself, either here or hereafter, will atone for your guilt? Where do you learn this? Is it a self-evident truth? But granting it to be true, if your God exacts full punishment from all, he is a God without mercy. The God of the Scriptures is the only God who is perfectly just, while he has mercy upon sinners. Now, Sir, I entreat you to consider how illustriously justice shines in the salvation of guilty men through the atonement made by the blood of Jesus Christ. Every scheme of salvation devised by human wisdom, leaves the sinner in arrear to justice. The claims of this Divine attribute are never perfectly respected. Here is a plan of salvation that gives infinite justice all its own. Instead of derogating from justice, the redemption of sinners by Christ, has magnified the law, and made it honourable. The eternal damnation of all mankind would not have done such honour to the law of God, nor have rendered his justice so illustrious. In the atonement of Christ, justice has a full compensation, which it never could have had in the punishment of the sinner himself. They who shall suffer for their sins, shall never have paid off the debt. What can be more honourable to the law of God, than that nothing less than the blood of his own Son could free from the wrath due to the breach of it? The infinitely worthy Sacrifice gave justice a full remuneration. Here is justice in perfection. What a solid ground of confidence does this

give to a Christian? He depends not more on mercy than on justice and truth. The Scriptures declare that God is *faithful* and *just* to forgive the sins of believers. The righteousness of a Christian is better than that of the highest angel in heaven. It is the righteousness of the Son of God. Clear views of the Divine character give a sinner the utmost confidence in the presence of God. Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God himself who clears them. Who is he that condemneth? Christ hath died. His blood takes away all the guilt of all who believe in him. The most hardened enemy of God and his people, will not be able to allege in the day of judgment, that in the salvation of sinners, God has remitted a tittle of his justice. There will not be found a spot on the whole ransomed of the Lord. So far from tarnishing justice, the plan of salvation through Jesus Christ, was necessary for the perfect manifestation of this attribute. In no other way could the infinitude of justice have been seen. It is the highest practical exhibition that infinite power could possibly give of infinite justice. Had sin never existed, Divine justice would have wanted its most perfect manifestation. In vain should we turn our eyes to the heavens and the earth for the discovery of this attribute. In vain should we search for it in the book of Providence, that records the acts of God's government of the world. Some twinklings of it may be seen, but they are scarcely visible from the glare of human crime. Even in hell itself, justice shines not with such lustre, as in the atonement of sin by the blood of a Divine personage.

Now, Sir, you say that the Scriptures are a forgery. Here is a Divine attribute which they display in perfection, which never was discovered by any of the human race. Here is a Divine attribute, which no other scheme of salvation but that taught in the Scrip-

tures, can represent in infinite perfection. Will you say, that a number of illiterate fishermen have discovered that, which from the foundation of the world has lain hid from the wisest of the children of men? Nay, to this hour, it lies hid from the wisest of men, who through the pride of their wisdom will not submit to the wisdom of God. This discovery is still unknown to multitudes who have in their hands the volumes that contain it. Not only infidels, but the great body of those who call themselves Christians, still restrict the Divine justice, and make the salvation of sinners the result of the victory of mercy. What then should bring to the minds of the apostles a view of justice so sublime, so perfect, so astonishing, so far from the common way of thinking? What should lead them, to discover what the wilful blindness of others will not suffer them to perceive even when discovered? If all men but the apostles, and those who receive their testimony, consider justice as standing in the way of the salvation of the guilty, and find it necessary to limit and mitigate this Divine attribute, before they can indulge hope before God, it is demonstrably certain that this view never was originally suggested by man. Even granting that this view of the Divine justice is false, and that the philosophical or common view of that attribute is just, I maintain, that this is a more sublime conception than the others, and if God's justice were such, he would be more perfect and glorious than he is without it. If the imperfectly just God be the true God, here is a theory of Divine justice that could render God infinitely more perfect than he is. Here is a plan that removes all the limitations of this attribute. But that cannot possibly be a true view of a Divine perfection, that represents it as capable of additional perfection. Shall it be possible to conceive a view of justice more excellent than that which belongs

to the true God? The God of the Scriptures is so just that no sin ever will be committed, without being visited with adequate punishment; that neither angel nor man shall ever dwell in his presence tarnished with the slightest impurity. If your God be the true God, he is much inferior to this, for if he suffers the world to escape punishment, he is obliged to lay aside justice, and become like the gods of Epicurus. The justice of the God of the Scriptures is vindicated by the blood of a Divine person: the justice of your God is affronted without receiving any compensation. Can there be a question which of these is the true God? Here is justice in perfection: here is justice utterly beyond human invention: here is justice essentially different from the natural views of that Divine attribute entertained by savage and sage: here is a just God, though a Saviour of men. Sir, it is not more clear to me that there is a God, than that this is the true God. It is as clear as the light of heaven, that this character of God has come from himself. It would be more reasonable to ascribe the Newtonian philosophy to an idiot, than the origin of this conception to the human mind.

MERCY.

Let us next attend to mercy. However fond men may be of giving this attribute a prominent place in the Divine character, yet no human scheme of salvation has ever admitted it in a perfect degree. Men in general have no more idea of infinite mercy in God, than they have of infinite justice. They consider the salvation of sinners as owing neither to justice nor mercy in perfection and in harmony, but to the claims of both as mitigated by opposition. A salvation wholly of justice they fear, a salvation wholly of mercy they disdain. But the salvation of the gospel is of infinite mercy as well as of infinite justice. The

mercy of God is unmixed mercy. The Scriptures declare salvation wholly of grace, without works of any kind or in any degree, as necessary for its reception. It is the gift of God through Jesus Christ. Since the foundation of the world, no man untaught by God ever looked for salvation in this way. Human wisdom in the learned and in the ignorant, in the civilized and in the barbarous, invariably expects that salvation will not be given without something on the part of the sinner himself to merit such a favour. The grace of God is not considered to consist in giving for nothing, but in giving at an undervalue. The great blessing of pardon is given for something done by the sinner, which in itself is not of adequate value. Men, according to their view of their own character, vary in the degree of mercy and of merit, thought requisite to their salvation. But without some degree of merit to recommend him, no man will venture his trust on mercy. The most abandoned profligate on the street, reeling and flaming out blasphemy, must be saved by some kind of goodness in himself, as well as mercy in God. On the very gallows he has some fancied merit to avert the Divine vengeance due to a life of rapine and murder. Unless he has believed God's testimony about his Son, he dare no more trust wholly to mercy, than to unmixed justice. Now, Sir, were the gospel a forgery, would not the mercy of God be represented in it agreeably to the common views of men of that attribute? I hold it to be a self-evident truth, that if the mercy of God in the Scriptures is of a peculiar kind, that never suggested itself to the mind of man in any age or country, it cannot be looked upon as an invention of man. But it is not only mercy of a peculiar kind, it is the only kind of mercy that is worthy of God. It is pure mercy. A Divine attribute must be without alloy. Here then, Sir, is

a thing the most wonderful. Have unlettered impostors brought to view a Divine attribute, of the true nature of which all men in all ages have been ignorant?—an attribute that all men speak of, and to discover the true nature of which is every man's greatest interest? For though this view of the Divine character was discovered by none of the human race, yet when perceived, it recommends itself as perfect wisdom. When the eye of reason perceives it, conviction is absolutely irresistible. It is impossible to perceive God without knowing that he is God. Men who have never seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, may be imposed on with false gods; but, after they have seen the true God, the infinite glory of his perfections intuitively convinces them of his existence. The King of heaven has only to show himself to men, to thwart the pretensions of all usurpers. Yes, if Mr Richard Carlile perceived the glory of the character which God has revealed of himself, he would admire and love the God that now he hates. He would confess that he never knew God before. He would count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. If he will not perceive this glory, it must be owing to the shutting of his eyes against the light. "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them who believe not: lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." If he does not discern Christ's doctrine, it is because he cannot bear to hear it with a proper mind.

The mercy of God in the Scriptures, is not only pure, it is also perfect. It extends to the chief of sinners. It receives at the last moment the most hateful of his enemies, through the belief of the truth. The thief on the cross found mercy on the very brink of eternity. Saul of Tarsus, the greatest enemy of Jesus,

was delivered by this mercy, at a time when, with a heart full of enmity, he was hasting to destroy the disciples. The hands of the three thousand converted on the day of Pentecost, were reeking with the blood through which they found mercy. These facts, while they call on the chief of sinners to believe in Jesus for salvation, serve to distinguish the Divine mercy from all the views of it ever suggested or entertained by the wisdom of man. Instead of owing its origin to the contrivance of man, human wisdom has ever been ashamed of this view of the Divine mercy. The illustrious facts above cited, are by many professed Christians kept in the back ground, or represented as a sort of anomaly in the Divine conduct. Men dread the scowl of philosophy, and are apprehensive lest such representations of mercy should give encouragement to sin. So opposed are we naturally to this view of the Divine character, that men use the utmost ingenuity to reconcile the Scriptures to human merit. They either give no encouragement to great sinners to turn to God through the belief of the truth, or they speak on this subject with a faltering voice. When a man is on the brink of eternity, they are indeed unwilling to give him up to despair; yet they are afraid to give him hope through mercy, if he has been a very great sinner, lest they should endanger the interests of morality, and encourage others to continue in sin. Now, if the wisdom of man universally puts limits to the Divine mercy, the view of God's character that represents this attribute as perfect, cannot be from man.

But Divine mercy is not only perfect, it is also sovereign. It not only extends to the chief of sinners, but, from among sinners, it takes one and leaves another, without any other reason than the will of God. Nay, it often selects the one that human mercy

would overlook, and overlooks the one that human mercy would select. It chose the persecuting Saul, and overlooked the rich young man who professed to come for instruction. It saved many of the publicans and sinners, while it overlooked many who boasted of their religious attainments. Now, this is mercy truly sovereign, and mercy which no man will ever cordially admit, whose high thoughts are not brought down by the word and Spirit of God. Nothing is more offensive to the world than this view of the Divine character. It is well known, that many who acknowledge this as a religious sentiment, are found to revolt at it in heart. Men will make God as accountable to them for the exercise of his mercy, as they are accountable to him in the exercise of his justice. They will not allow him to condemn or pardon the guilty as he pleases. He is not permitted to select a vile sinner, nor is he allowed to condemn those of a moderate character. Men therefore do not make God perfectly sovereign, therefore they do not make him truly God. If all men are guilty and worthy of punishment, which most who are called Christians admit, a sovereign God may punish all. If his mercy cannot save one, and pass by another, he is no sovereign. Here then is an attribute of God necessary to the Divine perfection, which human wisdom, so far from discovering, cannot admit. Shall we say that it was the invention of men?

But, granting that the apostles were capable of such a forgery, would impostors forge a character of their God, which they must know would be displeasing to the world? What object could impostors have but to advance their temporal interests by gaining disciples? How could they expect to do this by presenting to them a God whom they hate? Such is our natural opposition to this attribute of God, that many deny it as it respects men, who admit it as it respects angels. They admit that the fallen angels are left in misery

without mercy ; and that, without any superior claims to regard, God sent his Son to redeem men. They will not allow God to choose among sinners, though they grant that he chose men rather than angels.

Indeed, I am sensible, that, to many called Christians, this whole view of mercy will be as disagreeable as your infidelity, and that your God will be more popular than mine. Were my object to please men, I would represent God as extending mercy to all that deserve mercy, and would scarcely pronounce the damnation even of the infidel. Since, then, the sovereignty of God is displeasing to the world, I conclude, as from an axiom, that it is not an invention of impostors ; and, since it is necessary to the perfection of the Divine character, the book that discovers it must be a revelation from God.

I entreat you also, Sir, to consider the peculiar aspect of this sovereign mercy. There is a weak and wicked partiality which the gods of all nations are supposed to have for their favourite countries. This partiality the Jews supposed that the God of Israel had for them. In this confidence, they considered themselves safe in doing the sins for which they knew the other nations of the world would be punished. This sort of partiality many think that God will have towards the professors of Christianity, while he will more rigorously look to the conduct of infidels. While they drink, and swear, and lie, and cheat, without any dread of the Divine displeasure, they see the wrath of God coming on Mr Carlile. Indeed, there is a sectarian god, who winks at the sins of zealots of a favourite party ; but this is not the sovereignly merciful Lord God of the Scriptures : it is an idol of man's own creation, and the damnation of its deluded votaries is expressly declared by the true God. One of his ambassadors replies to them, at large, in the begin-

ning of the epistle to the Romans—"And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them that do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?" Rom. ii. 3. Though the God of the Scriptures selects one sinner as an object of mercy, and leaves another, not more criminal, to perish, he declares that there is no respect of persons with him. Rom. ii. 11. God's free mercy leads him to choose a sinner, without respect to his previous character; and his sovereign mercy to choose one rather than another: but neither the freedom nor sovereignty of mercy will cover any persisting in sin. All who receive this free sovereign mercy, are taught to "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity, and purify us unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Tit. ii. 12—15. All then who encourage themselves in sin, from a hope of the Divine partiality in their favour, prove themselves ignorant of the true nature of God's sovereign mercy, and discover themselves to be mere hypocrites. The same gospel that reveals mercy, free sovereign mercy, reveals the wrath of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

Now, Sir, if all men naturally view themselves as so entitled to the favour of their gods, that they may safely do what is condemnation to others, is it not self-evident, that, had the apostles been impostors, they would have given the same view of their God? While he would have frowned on the crimes of others, he would have looked with an indulgent eye on the vices of his friends. All people accommodate the character of their gods to their own wants. The character given of God in the Scriptures has been altered, to make it suitable to the professors of Christianity.

Does not this incontestibly prove, that the Scriptures were not made by man? Had they been an imposture of man, their God would have been like the gods of human creation.

WISDOM.

The wisdom of God is the next of his attributes, to which I take the liberty to call your attention. This appears in a blaze of light, in the harmonizing of attributes necessary to the Divine perfection, yet by all men, untaught by the Scriptures, thought irreconcilable. The plan of salvation by Jesus Christ, gives scope for the perfect operation of both justice and mercy, attributes which no other scheme of salvation can harmonize. Their claims are in themselves opposite, and, except on the gospel plan, really irreconcilable. If salvation is by perfect justice, how can it be in any measure by mercy? If it is altogether of mercy, how can it be in any measure by justice? Especially how can it be of infinite justice and of infinite mercy? If justice has all its own, how can mercy give all? If mercy gives all, how can justice receive its due? What mercy is there in cancelling debts that are fully paid? What justice can there be in free pardon? This is a question the solution of which is easy to the Christian, but by all others will remain unsolved for ever. The salvation of the believer is perfect justice, because his sin is fully punished in Christ, infinitely worthy as a Divine person: it is perfect mercy, because that punishment was suffered, not by the sinner himself, but by his Divine Substitute, sovereignly appointed. It is thus that the Scriptures speak of the believer as both justified and pardoned—words, in themselves, irreconcilable in any other way. To justify is to acquit, as being free from guilt: to pardon, is to freely forgive the person proved to be

guilty. Believers are in different respects both guilty and innocent, pardoned and cleared. They are cleared of all sin, because their Substitute hath taken it away; yet this is, in another light, pardon, because the Substitute was a Divine person, freely given for sinners. Here is wisdom truly Divine. It is not indeed the wisdom of this world; it is not like the speculations of philosophy: but to all whose eyes are not shut against it, through their enmity to God, there is an overwhelming glory in it that delights and amazes the soul. The more clearly it is understood, the more it astonishes. It commands the admiration of angels, though it is the scorn of the perverted intellect of rebellious men. Read all the treatises of all the wise men who have written on the being and attributes of God. Do you find any thing in their views of Divine wisdom like this? Which of them has a God perfectly just, and perfectly merciful? Could the intellect of an angel suggest any other way of harmonizing these attributes? You say the gospel is an imposture! What! Impostors forge such a God as this! Tell me that the heavens and the earth are not the work of God, but a forgery of some impostors. There is wisdom in the formation of the heavens and the earth, but in all the works of heaven and earth, there is not such wisdom as is displayed in that glorious plan of salvation that harmonizes infinite justice with infinite mercy.

Human wisdom has never even attempted to reconcile these attributes. Its only aim is to produce hope, and to promote virtue, by modifying and opposing them. Mercy obliges justice to work at the salvation of the imperfectly virtuous, and justice forbids mercy to stretch out her hand to the utterly vicious. Thus they continually oppose each other. Mercy, indeed, must have precedence, and the claims of justice on many urgent occasions are thwarted. The glory of

the Divine character, instead of being made to consist in the perfection and harmony of God's attributes, is made to consist in the victory of mercy in a struggle with justice. This is the god of the savage and of the sage, of the virtuous and of the vicious. This is the god of the wisdom of this world. But the Scriptures give us a God free of these imperfections. If there is a God, this is the true God.

The wisdom of God shines also in a wonderful manner in the mercy of the atonement. The exercise of mercy, as a human attribute, always, in some measure, gives encouragement to trespass. In proportion as there is a facility of obtaining mercy, will men be emboldened to violate law. Valuable as this prerogative is in our sovereign, it is necessarily accompanied with this disadvantage. Accordingly, the more effectually to prevent forgery, there has been no instance of the pardon of this crime. I believe the highest interest has failed in procuring it from a very merciful king. Men naturally entertain the same views of the Divine mercy, and, in proportion as they think God to be merciful, have they hopes of committing sin with impunity. The most wicked men accordingly shelter themselves under the Divine mercy, even while they continue in wickedness. *God is merciful*, is the refuge of the bulk of mankind, and their encouragement to disobey the God of mercy. That this is also the opinion of many of the advocates of Christianity, with regard to the tendency of Divine mercy, is clear, from their efforts to guard and limit it. They do not like to represent it with a very favourable aspect to the chief of sinners, nor are they fond of making it hang over the pillow of aged sinners. If the thief on the cross found mercy, the Saviour was then personally present, and the peculiar circumstances of that case can never again occur. They fear lest such views of

mercy should encourage others to sin, with a prospect of pardon in their last moments. And, with their views of mercy, they are right in their conclusions. If Divine mercy were like human mercy, all those dreaded consequences would flow from it. Their error lies in their views of the Divine mercy. Human mercy necessarily encourages to transgress; but the mercy revealed in the atonement is the strongest guard against sin. No man who really understands the mercy of God discovered in the salvation of Jesus Christ can live in sin. Though there is a free pardon to the sinner, this cost nothing less than the life of the Son of God. If sin is such a thing, that it could not be forgiven without the punishment of a Divine person, it is demonstrably evident that it is most hateful to God; and that any person who loves it, and continues in it, cannot escape the Divine wrath. If God spared not his own Son, when he stood in the room of sinners, shall any man expect to commit sin with impunity? Every man who believes that Jesus died by sin, considers himself as having died with him; and having this dreadful lesson before his eyes, he is effectually deterred from living in sin. In this view, sin appears no light matter. If any man, professing to be saved by the mercy of God through Jesus Christ, encourages himself to sin, with the hopes of impunity, he proves that he understands not this Divine attribute, and that he has no part in the salvation of the gospel. How can they who have died by sin, live any longer therein? Is it possible that any man should perceive the mercy of God in the gift of his Son, and his infinite hatred of sin, yet continue in that, on account of which the Father punished his Son without mercy? If Jesus drank the cup to the dregs, shall the hypocrite be suffered to escape? Men, therefore, who fear the consequences of exhibiting Divine mercy in all its freedom and fulness, err through not knowing

the Scriptures, and by confounding the mercy of man with the mercy of God. When the king pardons a guilty man, justice bleeds; but when God pardons a sinner, justice has all its own. The broken law is more honoured in the atonement made by the Divine Substitute, than in the punishment of the transgressor himself. No king could safely imitate the Divine mercy. Were he to save enormously guilty criminals, the common sense of mankind would revolt, the authority of law would be disrespected, and the total subversion of manners would follow. But God pardons the murderers of his own Son, without the slightest imputation on his justice, without injury to his law, without encouragement to transgression. Nay, God's hatred of the sin of the murderers of his Son, is more seen in the death of that Son for such sinners, than in the punishment of such of these murderers as are now in hell. Were a judge to free an insolvent debtor, his mercy would be unjust; but were he to free him by paying his debt, mercy and justice meet. If among a number of housebreakers there were one who, at the hazard of his life, had prevented his associates from murdering a family, and another who exerted every effort for their destruction, the common sense of mankind would be shocked, should a king pardon the latter, and suffer the former to perish for his crime. This would indeed be a monstrously bad action, and calculated, by its example, to endanger society. But God might save the guiltier of the two, and suffer the less guilty to die in his sins, without the slightest imputation on the tendency of his mercy. They are both guilty, therefore both may justly suffer, in proportion to their guilt. Should Divine mercy choose to snatch the guiltier from destruction, the blood of the Son of God has sufficiently avenged justice.

Now, Sir, as human mercy necessarily encourages

crime, as all men naturally entertain the same views of the Divine mercy, would not every religious system of human invention, give the same representation of this attribute, and guard accordingly against its supposed tendency? Has not this actually been done even by the advocates of Christianity? Were the gospel a device of man, its mercy would be the mercy of man? Is not this an axiom? But as the mercy revealed in the atonement, is not only of a peculiar kind, supposed by those who do not understand it, to give encouragement to sinners, but is in reality the strongest guard against it, shall we suppose that this is the invention of imposture? Here is amazing wisdom. Mercy to the chief of sinners, mercy at the last breath of life, yet mercy that effectually induces all who receive it to forsake sin! Shall this wisdom be ascribed to men totally unacquainted with philosophical speculation, when all the philosophers in all ages of the world have been unable to find it by their wisdom? when it lies hid from most of them, even when before their eyes, and while they profess faith in the books that make the revelation? Shall impostors be the authors of a view of Divine mercy that gives no shelter to sin?

The wisdom of God shines also illustriously in the gospel, by causing sin, which in itself is dishonourable to God, to redound to his glory. By tempting our first parents to sin, Satan meant to dishonour God, and mar his purpose. But God hath made the introduction of sin the means of the manifestation of his glory. The redemption by the Lord Jesus Christ was absolutely necessary for the full display of the Divine character. In no other way could his attributes have been practically exhibited. In this way God showed himself to the world. The person and work of Jesus Christ revealed God to mankind. God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness,

shined into the hearts of men, to give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The glory of God is seen in its highest exhibition, in the person and work of his Son. The heavens indeed declare his glory, but the gospel manifests a work more glorious than the creation. Can any thing be more wonderful than this? Sin, the most hateful and apparently injurious thing to God, has served to manifest his glory! Could such a thought ever have entered the mind of man? Even when revealed, it remains hid to many. The salvation of the gospel, is considered by many who profess it, as a kind of after-thought in God, the best possible reparation of an evil not capable of being entirely mended. Whence then could come the thought, that the entrance of sin was necessary to show God to be what he is?

The wisdom of God is also seen in the event of sin with respect to the redeemed. So far from ruining them according to its natural tendency, it has issued in their infinitely greater happiness and glory. They are not restored to a happy life in an earthly paradise, but by being united unto God through Jesus, they are raised above all worlds, and shall reign with him for ever. As Jesus has overcome, and is set down on his Father's throne, they also shall sit down with him on his throne. Here is wisdom. The efforts of Satan to plunge men into the misery of hell, have issued in the raising of millions of them to the throne of God. Did ever such a thought originate with man? Compared with this, the loftiest conceptions of Plato dwindle into utter insignificance.

This scheme of salvation manifests the Divine wisdom also, in as much as it harmonizes confidence and humility; the former necessary for the peace of the Christian, the latter essential to a just sense of his own

character. Yet these two things are in themselves inconsistent, and according to all other views of salvation, the one decreases by the increase of the other. If a man has a low opinion of his own merit, he can have little hope: if he has great confidence, he can possess little humility. "I do not see," said one, "why such a man as Dr Price, should not confide on the justice of the Deity as well as on his mercy." The high moral attainments of the sage come impudently to the bar of the Almighty, and demand a reward from justice. According to the view of the person who made use of this language, there was no scope for humility in this case. Now, the same is the tendency of the confidence of the devotee, and of confidence arising from every species of religious attainments. How very inconsistent this is with the real situation of man, is abundantly obvious, even independent of revelation. Had Dr Price been as pure as the throne of God, I defy reason to say, that God would have done him any injustice, had he annihilated him. A sinless being indeed justice cannot punish, but a sovereign God may take away that which he freely gave. His wisdom is a security against caprice, but let not angels dare to make God their debtor. The thought would hurl them into hell. But if there were any speck of sin in the philosopher (and every man not blinded by the influence of the god of this world, must know him to be a sinner), instead of confiding in justice, it is impossible in himself even to meet its claims. My reason tells me, that ten thousand years of uninterrupted virtue, cannot cover a single offence. On this point, view the glory of the gospel plan of salvation. It unites the utmost confidence with the greatest humility. Nay, humility is increased with the increase of confidence. A Christian is never so humble, as when he perceives most clearly the ground of confidence in the work of Christ. If the earth were

on fire under his feet, were the heavens melting over his head, were the red right hand of justice stretched out to take vengeance on iniquity, clearly perceiving this character of God, he would possess his soul in peace. He would triumph in the view of the bar of God, yet at the same moment would be clothed with humility in proportion to his confidence. He has no confidence in his own attainments: he sees himself utterly unworthy. He can indeed confide in justice as well as in mercy, but he has a Divine righteousness to meet Divine justice. The apostle Paul exclaims, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?" yet in the same letter he declares, "In me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." Here then is the harmony of contraries. Shall this wonderful depth of wisdom be ascribed to man, when all men but those taught by the apostles, consider these two things incompatible? Tell the world that you have great confidence of salvation, and every man will immediately reply, "Then you must have a very high opinion of yourself." If then the gospel reveals a plan which gives the utmost confidence, not only without encouraging self-conceit, but in necessary union with the deepest humility, I conclude as from an axiom, that the gospel is from God.

LOVE.

The love of God is an attribute which shines most illustriously in the atonement. To die for a friend, is the highest instance of love among mankind; an instance scarcely ever found. But God commended his love to men, in that, while they were yet sinners, Christ died for them. Among all the ransomed of the Lord, there is not one who is not naturally an enemy to him. There is not one of the human race who does not hate this God, till he perceives his love in the atonement.

You, Sir, can need no proof from me that you hate the God of the Scriptures. Even this God of love you hate to such a degree, that you are willing to make yourself a sacrifice to defame him. You no doubt love your own god, but he is an idol: he is the creation of your own fancy. You love your god even for his imperfections. The God of the Scriptures you hate even for the perfection of his character. How enormous must be the hatred of Mr Paine and you to this God, when you find debauchery in the holy records of the incarnation? To him that believes in a Being of Almighty power, is there any thing more incredible in the manner of the Saviour's conception, than in the ordinary production of man? Yet how does the malignity of your heart manifest itself with regard to this amazing instance of the infinite love and condescension of God! Now, had the Scriptures been the work of man, would they have represented, that the love of God was such that he gave his Son to suffer for such men as you? Would they ever speak of mercy to such enemies? Yet, thou blasphemer of the God of love, thou enemy of the incarnate Jehovah, to you does the gospel proclaim mercy. The blood that you have trampled on was shed for such enemies. Should God change your mind to the acknowledgment of the truth, after all your blasphemies, you should stand without spot before him in love, and reign with Jesus over all worlds. Here is love beyond any thing that could ever have entered into the mind of man. So far from being the authors of such a view of Divine love, men cannot credit it when revealed in the Scriptures. Multitudes even of those called Christians, would hesitate in making the Divine love extend to you. Some of them would grudge you such mercy. Surely then such a view of the love of God must have come from heaven. It has no feature of the offspring of man. Now, Sir, I entreat you to consider what is

your guilt, if this gospel is true. What must be your condemnation if you persist in opposing this God of love? If an infinitely just God will punish sin as it deserves, what must be the punishment of the man, who counteracts the purposes of infinite love, and labours with such zeal for the damnation of mankind!

Again, and again I entreat you, Sir, to contemplate the love of God in the gift of his Son. This is the greatest possible instance that infinite love could give of itself. The gift of ten thousand worlds would have been nothing to this. God, even the infinite Jehovah, had nothing greater to give. Could the thought of such amazing love have originated in the mind of man?

HOLINESS.

The atonement manifests also God's infinite holiness, and hatred of sin. How hateful must sin be to God, when he punished it even to its utmost desert in the person of his own Son? Can infidelity, can philosophy, produce any such proof of God's displeasure at sin? Did ever any philosopher conceive a God so holy, as to punish every sin to its utmost desert? No, the god of philosophy is very moderate in his hatred of sin, and makes many allowances for human infirmity. He must accommodate himself to the necessities of his worshippers, otherwise like Saturn he will be dethroned. As human nature is bankrupt, he must give an acquittance for a reasonable composition: as men have such passions, he must indulge them in some occasional deviations from duty. He is like a good natured old man, who himself has no relish for folly, but indulgently winks at the levities and indiscretions of youth. This, Sir, I suppose is your God, and it is not strange that you should love him. But the infinitely holy God of the Scriptures has revealed his wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of

men. Affliction and anguish are denounced as the portion of every one that doth evil. The smallest violation of the Divine law subjects to the curse. Every sin of men and angels will be visited with merited punishment. Divine holiness is unsullied in the pardon of the sin of believers, nay, it is rendered infinitely more illustrious in the death of Christ. Now, Sir, is an infinitely holy God, the God of impostors? No, Sir, he is the dread of the wise and the virtuous, and cannot therefore be the delight of men who could have no refuge from his vengeance. If the highest human virtue dare not meet such a God, how could deceivers escape his wrath? Here is an infinitely holy God, yet such a God is naturally the aversion of all men. It is then a self-evident truth that this character of God came from himself.

CONCLUSION.

Such, Sir, are some of the attributes of the God of the Scriptures. What is your god to this God? Here is a God who must be the true God, because he is perfect in every attribute. That cannot be the true God, a greater than whom it is possible to conceive. That cannot be God, whose attributes are capable of additional perfection. Now the god of the wisdom of this world is imperfect in many of his attributes, and I have here shown one infinitely perfect. Can it then be a question which of these is the true God? Shall imposture and ignorance invent an infinitely perfect God, while wisdom and virtue fail? Shall I give up my God, the harmony of whose attributes secures my salvation, for yours, who cannot look upon me with an eye of pity, without being at war with himself?

Then, Sir, I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. In it alone the character of the true God is manifested to the world. I cannot read a page of the Scriptures

without seeing proofs that they are not the work of man; but the character of God manifested in the atonement, independent of all other proofs, demonstrates the truth of the gospel. It is intrinsically light. It is utterly impossible to understand it, and not believe it. It is impossible to see God, and not believe him to be God. But here God is seen. He that hath seen Jesus hath seen the Father. The glory of God shines in his face. The view of this perfect character overwhelms the soul with evidence irresistible as the light of heaven. A man may as well look upon the sun, and yet be uncertain whether he sees that luminary, as discern the harmony and infinite perfection of this character, and doubt whether this is the true God. This is the reason why the gospel is called light in the Scriptures. This is the reason that the knowledge of God is represented as amounting to the same thing with the belief of it. It cannot be known without being credited. The plan of salvation here revealed, not only harmonizes the Divine attributes, but appears absolutely necessary, for the practical illustration of the Divine character. Had sin never entered, mercy could have had no scope, justice could have had neither operation nor adequate reparation. Love would have wanted an opportunity of manifesting its infinite perfection. Sovereignty would have been totally hid. Holiness could not have been seen in the same strong light. Without the atonement, God could not have been seen in all the glory of his perfect character. It is not an after thought to repair an evil that could not have been prevented. It is the only light in which the lustre of the Divine character could appear.

If, then, the knowledge of God is the noblest branch of philosophy, the gospel is the most noble science in the world. Here alone is to be found the knowledge of the true God. Philosophers, as well as infidels one

in the habit of looking on Christians with contempt. It is the contempt of the rustic for the Copernican system. The weakest and most illiterate Christian knows more of the most excellent of all sciences, than the greatest philosopher who is ignorant of the gospel. The Christian is the only man on earth who knows God. "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved, it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe."

CONFESSIONS OF INFIDELS

IN

FAVOUR OF CHRISTIANITY.

UNDERSTANDING that without any addition to the price of this publication, there is room for a few additional paragraphs, I know not how I can better occupy the space, and conclude this little work, in which I have felt much interest and pleasure, than by collecting and recording a few of the confessions of infidels to the truth and power of Christianity. I do not speak of men, who, having been born and educated in infidelity, from conviction become believers. There have been many such distinguished persons both in this country, and on the Continent of Europe, from the days of Lord Rochester downwards, the celebrated noblemen, who, laying his hand upon the Bible, emphatically said, "The only grand objection to this book is a bad life." I do not speak of such persons. It is to be expected they should lift up a strong testimony

in behalf of the truth, which after a long estrangement they have at length found. I allude to men who lived and died infidels; who would not have given the testimony which they rendered, if they had not been thrown off their guard by the power of conscience, and constrained to it; who probably afterwards, would have been glad to recall the *secret* which they had confessed, when aware how it might be turned to the disadvantage of their system. I allude to Bolingbroke, and Blount, and Paine, and Byron, and men of the same school. Of course the truth of revelation is not affected by their confessions, or by the want of them. The Bible would have been equally Divine—all the arguments employed in the preceding Tracts equally just and conclusive—though their reproach and obloquy of the Scriptures had been uniform and unbroken; but it is an additional testimony in behalf of Christianity, and a very strong because a reluctant and impartial one, when the very leaders of infidelity are constrained to speak favourably of its character; and yet strange to say, I believe there is scarcely an eminent adverse writer, who has not in the providence of God been led to admit enough, logically pursued, almost to close his mouth upon the subject of revelation altogether. So great is the power of conscience in the worst—so hopelessly inconsistent and absurd is infidelity, Hence also we see that Deists are inexcusable in their unbelief. They

show that they know enough of the truth to condemn them. Lord Bolingbroke, one of the most accomplished Deistical writers, says:—

“No religion ever appeared in the world, whose natural tendency was so much directed to promote the peace and happiness of mankind, as Christianity. No system can be more simple and plain than that of natural religion as it stands in the gospel. The system of religion which Christ published, and his Evangelists recorded, is a complete system to all the purposes of religion, natural and revealed. Christianity, as it stands in the gospel, contains not only a complete, but a very plain system of religion. The gospel is in all cases one continued lesson of the strictest morality, of justice, of benevolence, and of universal charity.”

After such confessions as these, one could scarcely see any very consistent ground upon which, as a good man, he could oppose so excellent a religion, especially as he could not pretend to substitute any thing better in its room. The same writer speaks with approbation of Christ blaming his disciples for wishing to call fire from heaven against the Samaritans, and declares “that the miracles wrought by him in the mild and beneficent spirit of Christianity, tended to the good of mankind.” Also, that the pernicious effects of persecution “have not been caused by the gospel, but by the system raised upon it; not by the revelations of God, but by the inventions of men.” Also, that the simplicity and plainness of the Christian system of faith and practice, “showed that it was de

signed to be the religion of mankind, and manifested likewise the Divinity of its original." And yet after all these things, he charges those with impiety, "who would impose upon us as the word of God, a book which scarce contains any thing that is not repugnant to the wisdom, power, and other attributes of a Supreme all-perfect Being."!!

I might refer to Blount, a well known infidel writer, who is constrained to confess that "undoubtedly in our travels to the other world, the common road is the safest; and though Deism is a good manuring of a man's conscience, yet certainly if joined with Christianity, it will produce the most plentiful crop." Is this not an acknowledgment that it is not safe to trust to Deism alone; that if we would be safe or prosperous, we must add revelation?

The CONFESSIONS of Rousseau, as to his own character, are well known. A more base and presumptuous profligate, on his own showing, perhaps never existed. The following is *a confession* of a very different nature. In it he not only draws out a strong argument in behalf of the Divine character and mission of Christ, but condemns and exposes his brother infidels by eulogizing those Sacred Writings on which they heap every term of contempt and reproach. He is at least as good a judge of writers and of writings as Paine. It may seem strange how one who could express himself in the following just and beautiful

words, should still have remained an infidel; until we remember that the true seat of infidelity is the *heart*, not the *head*; and that Rousseau felt the power of Rochester's strongest objection to the Bible, "a bad life."

"I will confess to you," says he, "that the majesty of the Scriptures strikes me with admiration, as the purity of the gospel hath its influence on my heart. Peruse the works of our philosophers, with all their pomp of diction: how mean, how contemptible are they, compared with the Scripture! Is it possible that a book, at once so simple and sublime, should be merely the work of man? Is it possible that the Sacred Personage, whose history it contains, should be himself a mere man? Do we find that he assumed the tone of an enthusiast or ambitious sectary? What sweetness, what purity in his manner! What an affecting gracefulness in his delivery! What sublimity in his maxims! What profound wisdom in his discourses! What presence of mind in his replies! How great the command over his passions! Where is the man, where the philosopher, who could so live and so die, without weakness, and without ostentation? When Plato described his imaginary good man, loaded with all the shame of guilt, yet meriting the highest rewards of virtue, he describes exactly the character of Jesus Christ: the resemblance was so striking, that all the Christian fathers perceived it.

"What prepossession, what blindness must it be, to compare Socrates, the son of Sophroniscus, to Jesus, the son of Mary? What an infinite disproportion there is between them? Socrates dying without pain or ignominy, easily supported his character to the last; and if his death, however easy, had not crowned his life, it might have been doubted whether Socrates

with all his wisdom, was anything more than a vain sophist. He invented, it is said, the theory of morals. Others, however, had before put them in practice : he had only to say therefore what they had done, and to reduce their example to precepts. Aristides had been just, before Socrates defined justice : Leonidas had given up his life for his country, before Socrates declared patriotism to be a duty : the Spartans were a sober people before Socrates recommended sobriety : before he had even defined virtue, Greece abounded in virtuous men. But where could Jesus learn, among his competitors, that pure and sublime morality, of which he only hath given us both precept and example. The greatest wisdom was made known among the most bigoted fanaticism, and the simplicity of the most heroic virtues did honour to the vilest people upon earth. The death of Socrates, peaceably philosophizing with his friends, appears the most agreeable that could be wished for ; that of Jesus, expiring in the midst of agonizing pains, abused, insulted, and accused by a whole nation, is the most horrible that could be feared. Socrates, in receiving the cup of poison, blessed indeed the weeping executioner who administered it, but Jesus, in the midst of excruciating tortures, prayed for his merciless tormentors. Yes, if the life and death of Socrates were those of a sage, the life and death of Jesus are those of a God. Shall we suppose the evangelic history a mere fiction ? Indeed, my friend, it bears not the marks of fiction ; on the contrary, the history of Socrates, which nobody presumes to doubt, is not so well attested as that of Jesus Christ. Such a supposition, in fact, only shifts the difficulty, without obviating it ; it is more inconceivable that a number of persons should agree to write such a history, than that only one should furnish the subject of it. The Jewish authors were incapable of the diction, and strangers to the morality contained

in the gospel, the marks of whose truth are so striking and inimitable, that the inventor would be a more astonishing character than the hero."—*Emilius*.

I may next appeal to Paine. On putting him into the witness-box he confesses, after all the scorn and obloquy to which he had given utterance against revelation, that "Jesus Christ was a virtuous and an amiable man; that the morality which he preached and practised was of the most benevolent kind; that though similar systems of morality had been preached by Confucius, and by some of the Greek philosophers many years before, and by many good men in all ages, it has not been exceeded by any."

If the morality of Christ be so good, so much better than any which this world has been able to find after the labour and ingenuity of six thousand years, why attempt to explode the gospel on which it rests, and without whose peculiar doctrines it is but a name? If "Jesus Christ was a virtuous and amiable man," would he assume what did not belong to him, and attempt to deceive mankind? Strange virtue and amiability this!

I conclude with unhappy Byron. In his own emphatic language, he says, "If a man was ever God, or God man, Jesus Christ was both." What praise short of actually receiving and honouring Christ as the Son of God, could be greater? On the blank leaf of his Bible, were found after his death, the following lines in his own hand-writing:—

“ Within this wondrous volume lies
 The mystery of mysteries :
 Thrice happy they, of human race,
 To whom our God has given the grace
 To read, to mark, to learn to pray,
 To lift the latch, and force the way !
 But better had they ne'er been born,
 Who read to doubt, and read to scorn.”

I believe these lines are not the writing of Lord Byron, but of another modern poet. But his adopting them, and transcribing them into the blank leaf of his Bible, is as strong if not a stronger proof that he felt and adopted the sentiment, than if he had actually been the author.

Nor is it Christianity alone to the excellence of which infidels have unwittingly confessed ; they have sometimes borne testimony to the wisdom of its means of propagation. Thus does Gibbon testify to the importance of *public worship*, one of the great Scripture appointments for the preservation and extension of true religion. “ The devotion of the poet or the philosopher may be secretly nourished by prayer, meditation, and study ; but the exercise of public worship appears to be the only solid foundation of the religious sentiments of the people, which derive their force from imitation and habit ; the interruption of that public exercise may consummate in the period of a few years, the important work of a *national revolution*. The memory of theological opinions cannot be long preserved without the artificial aids of priests and of books.”*

Nor does this testimony stand alone. Dr Adam

* Decline and Fall, Vol. iv. p. 83.

Smith, the celebrated author of the *Wealth of Nations*, who though he expressed some fine views in the first edition of his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, pointing by the light of nature to the Scripture doctrine of atonement, may yet unhappily be pronounced an infidel, in as much as he said of the great sceptic Hume, "that he came as near as human frailty admits, to the idea of a perfectly wise and good man;" even Smith, I say, testifies to the importance of Christianity and its means, when, in a letter to a friend, he says of Sabbath schools, though then but in their infancy, "No plan promises to effect a change of manners with equal ease and simplicity since the days of the apostles." What is the moral changing power in the Sabbath school? It is the gospel of Christ presented in an attractive form to children. And what are Christian churches but larger schools for a more advanced class, where substantially the same instructions and impressions are communicated? Is this not the testimony of infidelity, and philosophy, and political economy, to the value of the despised gospel of salvation?

I cannot better conclude than by quoting the testimony of the same writer on the doctrine of atonement, above referred to, one of the great doctrines on which the gospel of free salvation rests.

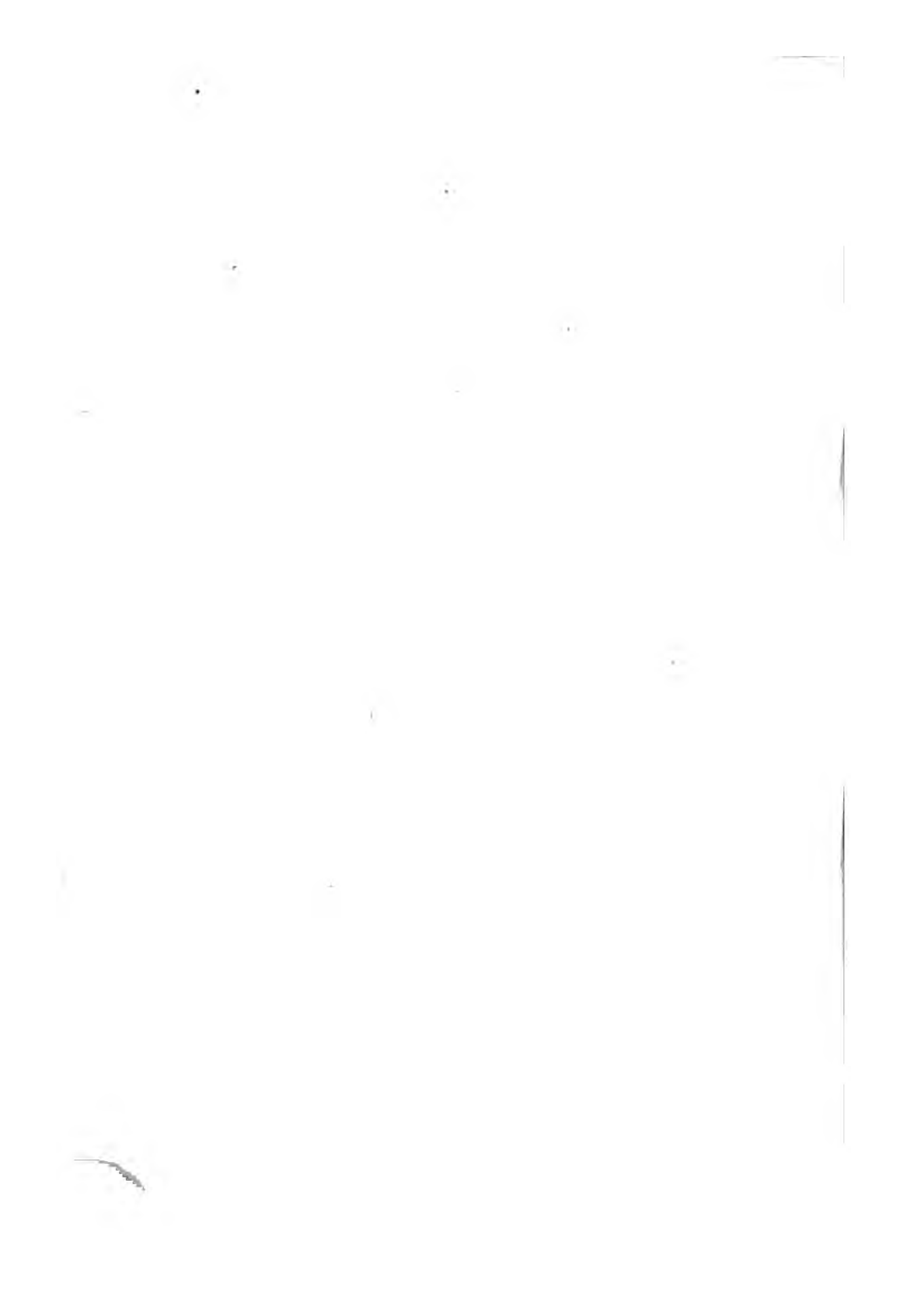
"If we consult our natural sentiments, we are apt to fear lest, before the holiness of God, vice should appear to be more worthy of punishment, than the weakness and imperfection of human virtue can ever seem to be of reward. Man, when about to appear before a Being of infinite perfection, can feel but little

confidence in his own merit, or in the imperfect propriety of his own conduct. In the presence of his fellow-creatures, he may often justly elevate himself, and may often have reason to think highly of his own character and conduct, compared to the still greater imperfection of theirs. But the case is quite different when he is about to appear before his infinite Creator. To such a Being, he can scarce imagine that his littleness and weakness should ever seem to be the proper object either of esteem or of reward. But he can easily conceive how the numberless violations of duty, of which he has been guilty, should render him the proper object of aversion and punishment; neither can he see any reason why the Divine indignation should not be let loose, without any restraint, upon so vile an insect, as he is sensible that he himself must appear to be. If he would still hope for happiness, he is conscious that he must entreat it from the mercy of God. Repentance, sorrow, humiliation, contrition at the thought of his past conduct, are, upon this account, the sentiments which become him, and seem to be the only means which he has left for appeasing that wrath, which he knows he has justly provoked. He even distrusts the efficacy of all these; and naturally fears lest the wisdom of God should not, like the weakness of man, be prevailed upon to spare the crime, by the most importunate lamentations of the criminal. Some other intercession, some other atonement, he imagines must be made for him, beyond what he himself is capable of making, before the purity of the Divine justice can be reconciled to his manifold offences. The doctrines of revelation coincide in every respect with those original anticipations of nature; and, as they teach us how little we can depend upon the imperfection of our own virtue, so they show us, at the same time, that the most powerful intercession has been made, and that the most dreadful atonement has been paid for our manifold transgressions and iniquities."

Who reading this, and not aware of the author, would not have imagined that he was perusing the page of some able analytic Christian divine? And yet, these are the words of one who pronounced David Hume to have come as perfectly near to the idea of a great and good man, as human frailty admits of! Christians may have their inconsistencies; but it would seem, the superior and boasted reason of Infidelity does not protect her from her full share of them, and that in the grossest form.

JOHN G. LORIMER.

THE END.



AN

APOLOGY FOR THE BIBLE

LETTER I.

SIR,—I have lately met with a book of yours entitled — *The Age of Reason*, part the second, being an investigation of true and of fabulous Theology; and I think it not inconsistent with my station, and the duty I owe to society, to trouble you and the world with some observations on so extraordinary a performance. Extraordinary I esteem it; not from any novelty in the objections which you have produced against revealed

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religion (for I find little or no novelty in them), but from the zeal with which you labour to disseminate your opinions, and from the confidence with which you esteem them true. You perceive, by this, that I give you credit for your sincerity, how much soever I may question your wisdom, in writing in such a manner on such a subject: and I have no reluctance in acknowledging that you possess a considerable share of energy of language, and acuteness of investigation; though I must be allowed to lament, that these talents have not been applied in a manner more useful to human kind, and more creditable to yourself.

I begin with your preface. You therein state, that you had long had an intention of publishing your thoughts upon religion, but that you had originally reserved it to a later period in life—I hope there is no want of charity in saying, that it would have been fortunate for the Christian world, had your life been terminated before you had fulfilled your intention. In accomplishing your purpose you will have unsettled the faith of thousands; rooted from the minds of the unhappy virtuous all their comfortable assurance of a future recompense; have annihilated in the minds of the flagitious all their fears of future punishment; you will have given the reins to the domination of every passion, and have thereby contributed to the introduction of the public insecurity, and of the private unhappiness, usually and almost necessarily accompanying a state of corrupted morals.

No one can think worse of confession to a priest and subsequent absolution, as practised in the Church of Rome, than I do; but I cannot, with you, attribute the guillotine massacres to that cause. Men's minds were not prepared, as you suppose, for the commission of all manner of crimes, by any doctrines of the Church of Rome, corrupted as I esteem it, but by their not

thoroughly believing even that religion. What may not society expect from those who shall imbibe the principles of your book?

A fever, which you and those about you expected would prove mortal, made you remember, with renewed satisfaction, that you had written the former part of your *Age of Reason*—and you know, therefore, you say, by experience, the conscientious trial of your own principles. I admit this declaration to be a proof of the sincerity of your persuasion, but I cannot admit it to be any proof of the truth of your principles. What is conscience? Is it, as has been thought, an internal monitor implanted in us by the Supreme Being, and dictating to us on all occasions, what is right or wrong? Or is it merely our own judgment of the moral rectitude, or turpitude of our own actions? I take the word (with Mr Locke) in the latter, as in the only intelligible sense. Now, who sees not that our judgments of virtue and vice, right and wrong, are not always formed from an enlightened and dispassionate use of our reason, in the investigation of truth? They are more generally formed from the nature of the religion we profess; from the quality of the civil government under which we live; from the general manners of the age, or the particular manners of the persons with whom we associate; from the education we have had in our youth; from the books we have read at a more advanced period; and from other accidental causes. Who sees not that, on this account, conscience may be conformable or repugnant to the law of nature?—may be certain or doubtful?—and that it can be no criterion of moral rectitude, even when it is certain, because the certainty of an opinion is no proof of its being a right opinion? A man may be certainly persuaded of an error in reasoning, or of an untruth in matters of fact. It is a maxim of every law, human

and Divine, that a man ought never to act in opposition to his conscience; but it will not from thence follow, that he will, in obeying the dictates of his conscience, on all occasions act right. An inquisitor who burns Jews and heretics: a Robespierre, who massacres innocent and harmless women; a robber, who thinks that all things ought to be in common, and that a state of property is an unjust infringement of natural liberty;—these and a thousand perpetrators of different crimes, may all follow the dictates of conscience; and may, at the real or supposed approach of death, remember “with renewed satisfaction” the worst of their transactions, and experience, without dismay, “a conscientious trial of their principles.” But this their conscientious composure can be no proof to others of the rectitude of their principles, and ought to be no pledge to themselves of their innocence, in adhering to them.

I have thought fit to make this remark, with a view of suggesting to you a consideration of great importance—whether you have examined calmly, and according to the best of your ability, the arguments by which the truth of revealed religion may, in the judgment of learned and impartial men, be established?—You will allow that thousands of learned and impartial men (I speak not of priests, who, however, are, I trust, as learned and impartial as yourself, but of laymen of the most splendid talents),—you will allow that thousands of these, in all ages, have embraced revealed religion as true. Whether these men have all been in an error, enveloped in the darkness of ignorance, shackled by the chains of superstition, whilst you and a few others have enjoyed light and liberty, is a question I submit to the decision of your readers.

If you have made the best examination you can, and yet reject revealed religion as an imposture, I pray that God may pardon what I esteem your error.

And whether you have made this examination or not, does not become me or any man to determine. That gospel, which you despise, has taught me this moderation; it has said to me—"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth."—I think that you are in an error; but whether that error be to you a vincible or invincible error, I presume not to determine. I know indeed where it is said—"that the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness—and that if the gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." The consequence of your unbelief must be left to the just and merciful judgment of Him, who alone knoweth the mechanism and the liberty of our understandings; the origin of our opinions; the strength of our prejudices; the excellencies and the defects of our reasoning faculties.

I shall, designedly, write this and the following letters in a popular manner; hoping that thereby they may stand a chance of being perused by that class of our readers, for whom your work seems to be particularly calculated, and who are the most likely to be injured by it. The really learned are in no danger of being infected by the poison of infidelity: they will excuse me, therefore, for having entered, as little as possible, into deep disquisitions concerning the authenticity of the Bible. The subject has been so learnedly, and so frequently handled by other writers, that it does not want (I had almost said, it does not admit) any further proof. And it is the more necessary to adopt this mode of answering your book, because you disclaim all learned appeals to other books, and undertake to prove, from the Bible itself, that it is unworthy of credit. I hope to show, from the Bible itself, the direct contrary. But in case any of your readers should think that you had not put forth all your strength, by not referring for proof of your opinion to ancient authors; lest they should suspect that all an-

cient authors are in your favour; I will venture to affirm, that had you made a learned appeal to all the ancient books in the world, sacred or profane, Christian, Jewish, or Pagan, instead of lessening, they would have established, the credit and authority of the Bible as the Word of God.

Quitting your preface, let us proceed to the work itself; in which there is much repetition, and a defect of proper arrangement. I will follow your track, however, as nearly as I can. The first question you propose for consideration is—"Whether there is sufficient authority for believing the Bible to be the Word of God, or whether there is not?—You determine this question in the negative, upon what you are pleased to call moral evidence. You hold it impossible that the Bible can be the word of God, because it is therein said, that the Israelites destroyed the Canaanites by the express command of God: and to believe the Bible to be true, we must, you affirm, unbelieve all our belief of the moral justice of God; for wherein, you ask, could crying or smiling infants offend?—I am astonished that so acute a reasoner should attempt to disparage the Bible, by bringing forward this exploded and frequently refuted objection of Morgan, Tindal, and Bolingbroke. You profess yourself to be a Deist, and to believe that there is a God, who created the universe, and established the laws of nature, by which it is sustained in existence. You profess that from the contemplation of the works of God, you derive a knowledge of his attributes; and you reject the Bible, because it ascribes to God things inconsistent (as you suppose) with the attributes which you have discovered to belong to him; in particular, you think it repugnant to his moral justice, that he should doom to destruction the crying or smiling infants of the Canaanites.—Why do you not maintain it to be repugnant

to his moral justice, that he should suffer crying or smiling infants to be swallowed up by an earthquake, drowned by an inundation, consumed by a fire, starved by a famine, or destroyed by a pestilence? The Word of God is in perfect harmony with his work; crying or smiling infants are subjected to death in both. We believe that the earth, at the express command of God, opened her mouth, and swallowed up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, with their wives, their sons, and their little ones. This you esteem so repugnant to God's moral justice, that you spurn, as spurious, the book in which the circumstance is related. When Catania, Lima, and Lisbon, were severally destroyed by earthquakes, men with their wives, their sons, and their little ones, were swallowed up alive—why do you not spurn, as spurious, the book of nature, in which this fact is certainly written, and from the perusal of which you infer the moral justice of God? You will, probably reply, that the evils which the Canaanites suffered from the express command of God, were different from those which are brought on mankind by the operation of the laws of nature.—Different! in what?—Not in the magnitude of the evil—not in the subjects of sufferance—not in the author of it—for my philosophy, at least, instructs me to believe, that God not only primarily formed, but that he hath, through all ages, executed the laws of nature; and that he will, through all eternity, administer them, for the general happiness of his creatures, whether we can, on every occasion, discern that end or not.

I am far from being guilty of the impiety of questioning the existence of the moral justice of God, as proved either by natural or revealed religion; what I contend for is shortly this—that you have no right, in fairness of reasoning, to urge any apparent deviation from moral justice as an argument against revealed religion, because you do not urge an equally apparent.

deviation from it, as an argument against natural religion: you reject the former, and admit the latter, without considering that, as to your objection, they must stand or fall together.

As to the Canaanites, it is needless to enter into any proof of the depraved state of their morals; they were a wicked people in the time of Abraham, and they, even then, were devoted to destruction by God; but their iniquity was not then full. In the time of Moses, they were idolaters, sacrificers of their own crying or smiling infants; devourers of human flesh; addicted to unnatural lusts; immersed in the filthiness of all manner of vice. Now, I think, it will be impossible to prove, that it was a proceeding contrary to God's moral justice to exterminate so wicked a people. He made the Israelites the executors of his vengeance; and in doing this, he gave such an evident and terrible proof of his abomination of vice, as could not fail to strike the surrounding nations with astonishment and terror, and to impress on the minds of the Israelites what they were to expect, if they followed the example of the nations whom he commanded them to cut off. "Ye shall not commit any of these abominations—that the land spew not you out also, as it spewed out the nations that were before you." How strong and descriptive this language! the vices of the inhabitants were so abominable, that the very land was sick of them, and forced to vomit them forth, as the stomach disgorges a deadly poison.

I have often wondered what could be the reason that men not destitute of talents, should be desirous of undermining the authority of revealed religion, and studious in exposing, with a malignant and illiberal exultation, every little difficulty attending the Scriptures, to popular animadversion and contempt. I am not willing to attribute this strange propensity to what

Plato attributed the atheism of his time—to profligacy of manners—to affectation of singularity—to gross ignorance, assuming the semblance of deep research and superior sagacity ;—I had rather refer it to an impropriety of judgment, respecting the manners, and mental acquirements, of human kind in the first ages of the world. Most unbelievers argue as if they thought that man, in remote and rude antiquity, in the very birth and infancy of our species, had the same distinct conceptions of one eternal, invisible, incorporeal, infinitely wise, powerful, and good God, which they themselves have now. This I look upon as a great mistake, and a pregnant source of infidelity. Human kind, by a long experience ; by the institutions of civil society ; by the cultivation of arts and sciences ; by, as I believe, Divine instruction actually given to some, and traditionally communicated to all : is in a far more distinguished situation, as to the powers of the mind, than it was in the childhood of the world. The history of man is the history of the Providence of God ; who willing the supreme felicity of all his creatures, has adapted his government to the capacity of those, who in different ages were the subjects of it. The history of any one nation throughout all ages, and that of all nations in the same age, are but separate parts of one great plan, which God is carrying on for the moral melioration of mankind. But who can comprehend the whole of this immense design ? The shortness of life, the weakness of our faculties, the inadequacy of our means of information, conspire to make it impossible for us, worms of the earth ! insects of an hour ! completely to understand any one of its parts. No man, who well weighs the subject, ought to be surprised, that in the histories of ancient times many things should occur foreign to our manners, the propriety and necessity of which we cannot clearly apprehend.

It appears incredible to many that God Almighty should have had colloquial intercourse with our first parents; that he should have contracted a kind of friendship for the patriarchs, and entered into covenants with them; that he should have suspended the laws of nature in Egypt; should have been so apparently partial as to become the God and Governor of one particular nation; and should have so far demeaned himself as to give to that people a burthensome ritual of worship, statutes and ordinances, many of which seem to be beneath the dignity of attention, unimportant and impolitic. I have conversed with many Deists, and have always found that the strangeness of these things was the only reason for their disbelief of them: nothing similar has happened in their time; they will not, therefore, admit that these events have really taken place at any time. As well might a child, when arrived at a state of manhood contend, that he had never either stood in need or experienced the fostering care of a mother's kindness, the wearisome attention of his nurse, or the instruction and discipline of his schoolmaster. The Supreme Being selected one family from an idolatrous world: nursed it up, by various acts of his Providence, into a great nation; communicated to that nation a knowledge of his holiness, justice, mercy, power, and wisdom; disseminated them at various times, through every part of the earth, that they might be a "leaven to leaven the whole lump," that they might assure other nations of the existence of one Supreme God, the Creator, and Preserver of the world, the only proper object of adoration. With what reason can we expect, that what was done to one nation, not out of any partiality to them, but for the general good, should be done to all? that the mode of instruction, which was suited to the infancy of the world, should be extended to the matu-

city of its manhood, or to the imbecility of its old age? I own to you, that when I consider, how nearly man, in a savage state, approaches to the brute creation, as to intellectual excellence; and when I contemplate his miserable attainments as to the knowledge of God, in a civilized state, when he has had no Divine instruction on the subject, or when that instruction has been forgotten (for all men have known something of God from tradition), I cannot but admire the wisdom and goodness of the Supreme Being, in having let himself down to our apprehensions; in having given to mankind, in the earliest ages, sensible and extraordinary proofs of his existence and attributes; in having made the Jewish and Christian dispensations mediums to convey to all men, through all ages, that knowledge concerning himself, which he had vouchsafed to give immediately to the first. I own it is strange, very strange, that he should have made an immediate manifestation of himself in the first ages of the world: but what is there that is not strange? It is strange that you and I are here—that there is water, and earth, and air, and fire—that there is a sun, and moon, and stars—that there is a generation, corruption, reproduction. I can account ultimately for none of these things, without recurring to him who made every thing. I also am his workmanship, and look up to him with hope of preservation through all eternity; I adore him for his word as well as for his work; his work I cannot comprehend, but his word hath assured me of all that I am concerned to know—that he hath prepared everlasting happiness for those who love and obey him. This you will call preachment: I will have done with it; but the subject is so vast, and the plan of Providence, in my opinion, so obviously wise and good, that I can never think of it without having my mind filled with piety, admiration, and gratitude.

In addition to the moral evidence (as you are pleased

to think it) against the Bible, you threaten in the progress of your work to produce such other evidence as even a priest cannot deny. A philosopher in search of truth forfeits with me all claim to candour and impartiality, when he introduces railing for reasoning, vulgar, and illiberal sarcasm in the room of argument. I will not imitate the example you set me; but examine what you shall produce, with as much coolness and respect, as if you had given the priests no provocation; as if you were a man of the most unblemished character, subject to no prejudices, actuated by no bad designs, not liable to have abuse retorted upon you with success.

LETTER II.

BEFORE you commence your grand attack upon the Bible, you wish to establish a difference between the evidence necessary to prove the authenticity of the Bible, and that of any other ancient book. I am not surprised at your anxiety on this head; for all writers on the subject have agreed in thinking that St Austin reasoned well, when, in vindicating the genuineness of the Bible, he asked—"What proofs have we that the works of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Varro, and other profane authors, were written by those whose names they bear; unless it be that this has been an opinion generally received at all times, and by all those who have lived since these authors?" This writer was convinced, that the evidence which established the genuineness of any profane book would establish that of a sacred book, and I profess myself to be of the same opinion, notwithstanding what you have advanced to the contrary.

In this part your ideas seem to me to be confused ; I do not say that you, designedly, jumble together mathematical science and historical evidence ; the knowledge acquired by demonstration, and the probability derived from testimony.—You know but of one ancient book, that authoritatively challenges universal consent and belief, and that is Euclid's Elements.—If I were disposed to make frivolous objections, I should say that even Euclid's Elements had not met with universal consent ; that there had been men, both in ancient and modern times, who had questioned the intuitive evidence of some of his axioms, and denied the justness of some of his demonstrations : but, admitting the truth, I do not see the pertinency of your observation. You are attempting to subvert the authenticity of the Bible, and you tell us that Euclid's Elements are certainly true.——What then ? Does it follow that the Bible is certainly false ? The most illiterate scribe in the kingdom does not want to be informed, that the examples in his Wingate's *Arithmetic*, are proved by a different kind of reasoning from that by which he persuades himself to believe, that there was such a person as Henry VIII., or that there is such a city as Paris.

It may be of use to remove this confusion in your argument to state, distinctly, the difference between the genuineness, and the authenticity of a book. A genuine book, is that which was written by the person whose name it bears as the author of it. An authentic book, is that which relates matters of fact, as they really happened. A book may be genuine without being authentic ; and a book may be authentic without being genuine. The books written by Richardson and Fielding are genuine books, though the histories of *Clarissa* and *Tom Jones* are fables. The *History of the Island of Formosa* is a genuine book ; it was written by Psalmanazzar : but it is not an authentic book

(though it was long esteemed as such and translated into different languages), for the author, in the latter part of his life, took shame to himself for having imposed on the world, and confessed that it was a mere romance. Anson's *Voyage* may be considered as an authentic book, it, probably, containing a true narration of the principal events recorded in it; but it is not a genuine book, having not been written by Walter, to whom it is ascribed, but by Robins.

This distinction between the genuineness and authenticity of a book, will assist us in detecting the fallacy of an argument, which you state with great confidence in the part of your work now under consideration, and which you frequently allude to, in other parts, as conclusive evidence against the truth of the Bible. Your argument stands thus—If it be found that books ascribed to Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, were not written by Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, every part of the authority and authenticity of these books is gone at once.—I presume to think otherwise. The genuineness of these books (in the judgment of those who say that they were written by these authors) will certainly be gone; but their authenticity may remain; they may still contain a true account of real transactions, though the names of the writers of them should be found to be different from what they are generally esteemed to be.

Had, indeed, Moses said that he wrote the first five books of the Bible; and had Joshua and Samuel said that they wrote the books which are respectively attributed to them; and had it been found that Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, did not write these books; then, I grant, the authority of the whole would have been gone at once; these men would have been found liars as to the genuineness of the books; and this proof of their want of veracity in one point, would have inva-

lidated their testimony in every other; these books would have been justly stigmatized, as neither genuine nor authentic.

An history may be true, though it should not only be ascribed to a wrong author, but though the author of it should not be known; anonymous testimony does not destroy the reality of facts, whether natural or miraculous. Had Lord Clarendon published his *History of the Rebellion*, without prefixing his name to it; or had the history of Titus Livius come down to us under the name of Valerius Flaccus, or Valerius Maximus; the facts mentioned in these histories would have been equally certain.

As to your assertion that the miracles recorded in Tacitus, and in other profane historians, are quite as well authenticated as those of the Bible—it being a mere assertion destitute of proof, may be properly answered by a contrary assertion. I take the liberty then to say, that the evidence for the miracles recorded in the Bible, is, both in kind and degree, so greatly superior to that for the prodigies mentioned by Livy, or the miracles related by Tacitus, as to justify us in giving credit to the one as the work of God, and in withholding it from the other as the effect of superstition and imposture. This method of derogating from the credibility of Christianity, by opposing to the miracles of our Saviour, the tricks of ancient imposters, seems to have originated with Hierocles in the fourth century; and it has been adopted by unbelievers from that time to this; with this difference indeed, that the heathens of the third and fourth century admitted that Jesus wrought miracles; but lest that admission should have compelled them to abandon their gods and become Christians, they said, that their Apollonius, their Apuleius, their Aristeas, did as great: whilst modern Deists deny the fact of Jesus having ever wrought a miracle. And they have some

reason for this proceeding ; they are sensible that the gospel miracles are so different in all their circumstances, from those related in pagan story, that if they admit them to have been performed, they must admit Christianity to be true ; hence they have fabricated a kind of deistical axiom—that no human testimony can establish the credibility of a miracle.—This, though it has been an hundred times refuted, is still insisted upon, as if its truth had never been questioned, and could not be disproved.

You “ proceed to examine the authenticity of the Bible ; and you begin,” you say, “ with what are called the five books of Moses, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.” Your intention, you profess, is to show that these books are spurious, and that Moses is not the author of them ; and still farther, that they were not written in the time of Moses, nor till several hundred years afterwards ; that they are no other than an attempted history of the life of Moses, and of the times in which he is said to have lived, and also of the times prior thereto, written by some very ignorant and stupid pretender to authorship, several hundred years after the death of Moses.”—In this passage the utmost force of your attack on the authority of the five books of Moses is clearly stated. You are not the first who has started this difficulty ; it is a difficulty, indeed, of modern date : having not been heard of either in the synagogue or out of it till the twelfth century. About that time, Eben Ezra, a Jew, of great erudition, noticed some passages (the same that you have brought forward) in the five first books of the Bible, which he thought had not been written by Moses, but inserted by some person after the death of Moses. But he was far from maintaining, as you do, that these books were written by some ignorant and stupid pretender to authorship, many

hundred years after the death of Moses. *Hobbes* contends that the books of Moses are so called, not from their having been written by Moses, but from their containing an account of Moses. *Spinoza* supported the same opinion; and *Le Clerc*, a very able theological critic of the last and present century, once entertained the same notion. You see that this fancy has had some patrons before you; the merit or the demerit, the sagacity or the temerity of having asserted, that Moses is not the author of the Pentateuch, is not exclusively yours. *Le Clerc*, indeed, you must not boast of. When his judgment was matured by age, he was ashamed of what he had written on the subject in his younger years; he made a public recantation of his error, by annexing to his commentary on Genesis, a Latin dissertation—concerning Moses the author of the Pentateuch, and his design in composing it. If in your future life you should chance to change your opinion on the subject, it will be an honour to your character to emulate the integrity, and to imitate the example, of *Le Clerc*. The Bible is not the only book which has undergone the fate of being reprobated as spurious, after it had been received as genuine and authentic for many ages. It has been maintained that the history of *Herodotus* was written in the time of *Constantine*; and that the classics are forgeries of the thirteenth or fourteenth century. These extravagant reveries amused the world at the time of their publication, and have long since sunk into oblivion. You esteem all prophets to be such lying rascals, that I dare not venture to predict the fate of your book.

Before you produce your main objection to the genuineness of the books of Moses, you assert “That there is no affirmative evidence that Moses is the author of them.”—What! no affirmative evidence? In the eleventh century, *Maimonides* drew up a confession of faith for the Jews, which all of them at this day ad-

mit; it consists of only thirteen articles; and two of them have respect to Moses; one affirming the authenticity, the other the genuineness of his books.—The doctrine and prophecy of Moses is true.—The law that we have was given by Moses.—This is the faith of the Jews at present, and has been their faith, ever since the destruction of their city and temple; it was their faith in the time when the authors of the New Testament wrote; it was their faith during their captivity in Babylon; in the time of their kings and judges; and no period can be shown, from the age of Moses to the present hour, in which it was not their faith.—Is this no affirmative evidence? I cannot desire a stronger. *Josephus*, in his book against *Apion*, writes thus—“ We have only two and twenty books which are to be believed as of Divine authority, and which comprehend the history of all ages; five belong to Moses, which contain the original of man, and the tradition of the succession of generations, down to his death, which takes in a compass of about three thousand years.” Do you consider this as no affirmative evidence? Why should I mention *Juvenal* speaking of the volume which Moses had written? Why enumerate a long list of profane authors, all bearing testimony to the fact of *Moses* being the leader and the lawgiver of the Jewish nation; and if a lawgiver, surely a writer of the laws. But what says the Bible? In *Exodus* it says—“ Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people.” In *Deuteronomy* it says—“ And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished (this surely imports the finishing a laborious work), that Moses commanded the Levites which bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, ‘ Take this book of the law, and put it in the

side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee.' ” This is said in Deuteronomy, which is a kind of repetition or abridgment of the four preceding books; and it is well known that the Jews gave the name of the Law to the first five books of the Old Testament. What possible doubt can there be that Moses wrote the books in question? I could accumulate many other passages from the Scriptures to this purpose; but if what I have advanced will not convince you that there is affirmative evidence, and of the strongest kind, for Moses being the author of these books, nothing that I can advance will convince you.

What if I should grant all you undertake to prove (the stupidity and ignorance of the writer excepted!). What if I should admit that *Samuel*, or *Ezra*, or some other learned Jew, composed these books, from public records, many years after the death of Moses? Will it follow, that there was no truth in them? According to my logic, it will only follow that they are not genuine books; every fact recorded in them may be true, whenever, or by whomsoever, they were written. It cannot be said that the Jews had no public records: the Bible furnishes abundance of proof to the contrary. I by no means admit, that these books, as to the main part of them, were not written by Moses: but I do contend, that a book may contain a true history, though we know not the author of it, or though we may be mistaken in ascribing it to a wrong author.

The first argument you produce against Moses being the author of these books is so old that I do not know its original author; and it is so miserable an one, that I wonder you should adopt it—“These books cannot be written by Moses, because they are written in the third person—it is always, The Lord said unto Moses, or Moses said unto the Lord. This, you say, is the style and manner that historians use in speaking of the

persons whose lives and actions they are writing. This observation is true, but it does not extend far enough; for this is the style and manner not only of historians writing of other persons, but of eminent men, such as *Xenophon* and *Josephus*, writing for themselves. If *General Washington* should write the history of the American war, and should, from his great modesty, speak of himself in the third person, you would think it reasonable that, two or three thousand years hence, any person should on that account, contend that the history was not true? *Cæsar* writes of himself in the third person—it is always *Cæsar* made a speech, or a speech was made to *Cæsar*; *Cæsar* crossed the Rhine; *Cæsar* invaded Britain; but every school-boy knows that this circumstance cannot be adduced as a serious argument against *Cæsar's* (being the author of his own) *Commentaries*.

But Moses, you urge, cannot be the author of the book of Numbers, because he says of himself—"that Moses was a very meek man, above all the men that were on the face of the earth." If he said this of himself, he was, you say, "a vain and arrogant coxcomb (such is your phrase!) and unworthy of credit; and if he did not say it, the *books* are without authority." This your dilemma is perfectly harmless; it has not an horn to hurt the weakest logician. If Moses did not write this little verse, it was inserted by Samuel, or any of his countrymen, who knew his character and revered his memory, will it follow that he did not write any other part of the book of Numbers? Or if he did not write any part of the book of Numbers, will it follow that he did not write any of the other books of which he is usually reputed the author? And if he did write this of himself, he was justified by the occasion which extorted from him this commendation. Had this expression been written in a modern style and manner, it would probably have given you

no offence. For who would be so fastidious as to find fault with an illustrious man, who, being calumniated by his nearest relations, as guilty of pride, and fond of power, should vindicate his character by saying, My temper was naturally as meek and unassuming as that of any man upon earth? There are occasions, in which a modest man, who speaks truly, may speak proudly of himself, without forfeiting his general character, and there is no occasion, which either more requires, or more excuses this conduct, than when he is repelling the foul and envious aspersions of those who both knew his character and had experienced his kindness; and in that predicament stood *Aaron* and *Miriam*, the accusers of *Moses*. You yourself have, probably, felt the stings of calumny, and have been anxious to remove the impression. I do not call you a vain and arrogant coxcomb for vindicating your character, when in the latter part of this very work you boast, and I hope truly, "that the man does not exist that can say, I have persecuted him, or any man, or any set of men, in the American revolution; or in the French revolution; or that I have in any case returned evil for evil." I know not what kings and priests may say to this; you may not have returned to them evil for evil, because they never, I believe, did you any harm; but you have done them all the harm you could, and that without provocation.

I think it needless to notice your observation upon what you call the dramatic style of *Deuteronomy*; it is an ill-founded hypothesis. You might as well ask where the author of *Cæsar's Commentaries* got the speeches of *Cæsar*, as where the author of *Deuteronomy*, got the speeches of *Moses*. But your argument, that *Moses* was not the author of *Deuteronomy*, because the reason given in that book for the observation of the Sabbath, is different from that given in *Exodus*, merits a reply.

You need not to be told, that the very name of this book imports, in Greek, a repetition of a law; and that the Hebrew doctors have called it by a word of the same meaning. In the fifth verse of the first chapter, it is said in our Bibles, "Moses began to declare this law;" but the Hebrew words, more properly translated, import, that Moses "began, or determined, to explain the law." This is no shift of mine to get over a difficulty; the words are so rendered in most of the ancient versions, and by *Flagius*, *Vetablus*, and *Le Clerc*, men eminently skilled in the Hebrew language. This repetition and explanation of the law, was a wise and benevolent proceeding in Moses; that those who were either not born, or were mere infants, when it was first (forty years before) delivered in Horeb, might have an opportunity of knowing it; especially as Moses, their leader, was soon to be taken from them and they were about to be settled in the midst of nations given to idolatry and sunk in vice. Now, where is the wonder, that some variations and some additions should be made to a law, when a legislator thinks fit to republish it many years after its first promulgation?

With respect to the Sabbath, the learned are divided in opinion concerning its origin; some contending that it was sanctified from the creation of the world; that it was observed by the patriarchs before the flood; that it was neglected by the Israelites during their bondage in Egypt, revived on the falling of manna in the wilderness, and enjoined, as a positive law, at Mount Sinai. Others esteem its institution to have been no older than the age of Moses; and argue, that what was said of the sanctification of the Sabbath in the book Genesis, is said by way of anticipation. There may be truth in both these accounts. To me it is probable, that the memory of the creation was handed down from Adam to all his posterity; and that the

seventh day was, for a long time, held sacred by all nations, in commemoration of that event; but that the peculiar rigidness of its observance was enjoined by Moses to the Israelites alone. As to there being two reasons given for its being kept holy,—one, that on that day, God rested from the work of creation—the other, that on that day God had given them rest from the servitude of Egypt,—I see no contradiction in the accounts. If a man, in writing the history of England, should inform his readers, that the parliament had ordered the fifth of November to be kept holy, because on that day God had delivered the nation from a bloody intended massacre by gunpowder; and if, in another part of his history, he should assign the deliverance of our church and nation from popery and arbitrary power, by the arrival of King William, as a reason for its being kept holy; would any one contend, that he was not justified in both these ways of expression, or that we ought from thence to conclude that he was not the author of them both?

You think “that law in Deuteronomy inhuman and brutal, which authorizes parents, the father and the mother, to bring their own children to have them stoned to death for what it is pleased to call stubbornness.” You are aware, I suppose, that paternal power, among the *Romans*, the *Gauls*, the *Persians*, and other nations, was of the most arbitrary kind; that it extended to the taking away the life of the child. I do not know whether the Israelites in the time of Moses exercised this paternal power; it was not a custom adopted by all nations, but it was by many; and in the infancy of society, before individual families had coalesced into communities, it was probably very general. Now, Moses, by this law, which you esteem brutal and inhuman, hindered such an extravagant power from being either introduced or exercised amongst the Israelites. This law is so far from countenancing

the arbitrary power of a father over the life of his child, that it takes from him the power of accusing the child before a magistrate: the father and the mother of the child must agree in bringing the child to judgment. And it is not by their united will that the child was to be condemned to death: the elders of the city were to judge whether the accusation was true; and the accusation was to be, not merely, as you insinuate, that the child was stubborn, but that he was "stubborn and rebellious, a glutton and a drunkard." Considered in this light, you must allow the law to have been an humane restriction of a power improper to be lodged with any parent.

That you may abuse the priests, you abandon your subject. "Priests," you say, "preach up Deuteronomy, for Deuteronomy preaches up tithes." I do not know that priests preach up Deuteronomy, more than they preach up other books of Scripture; but I do know that tithes are not preached up in Deuteronomy, more than in Leviticus, in Numbers, in Chronicles, in Malachi, in the law, the history, and the prophets of the Jewish nation. You go on: "It is from this book, chap. xxv. ver. 4, they have taken the phrase, and applied it to tithing, 'Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn;' and, that this might not escape observation, they have noted it in the table of contents at the head of the chapter, though it is only a single verse of less than two lines. O priests! priests! ye are willing to be compared to an ox, for the sake of tithes!" I cannot call this reasoning, and I will not pollute my pages by giving it a proper appellation. Had the table of contents, instead of simply saying, The ox is not to be muzzled, said, Tithes enjoined, or, Priests to be maintained, there would have been a little ground for your censure. Whoever noted this phrase at the head of the chapter, had better rea

son for doing it than you have attributed to them. They did it because St Paul had quoted it when he was proving to the Corinthians, that they who preached the gospel had a right to live by the gospel; it was Paul, and not the priests, who first applied this phrase to tithing. St Paul, indeed, did not avail himself of the right he contended for; he was not, therefore, interested in what he said. The reason on which he grounds the right, is not merely this quotation which you ridicule; nor the appointment of the law of Moses, which you think fabulous; nor the injunction of Jesus, which you despise; no, it is a reason founded on the nature of things, and which no philosopher, no unbeliever, no man of common sense can deny to be a solid reason;—it amounts to this, that “the labourer is worthy of his hire.” Nothing is so much a man’s own, as his labour and ingenuity; and it is entirely consonant to the law of nature, that by the innocent use of these he should provide for his subsistence. Husbandmen, artists, soldiers, physicians, lawyers, all let out their labour and talents for a stipulated reward: why may not a priest do the same? Some accounts of you have been published in England; but conceiving them to have proceeded from a design to injure your character, I never read them. I know nothing of your parentage, your education, or condition in life. You may have been elevated, by your birth, above the necessity of acquiring the means of sustaining life by the labour of either hand or head; if this be the case, you ought not to despise those who have come into the world in less favourable circumstances. If your origin has been less fortunate, you must have supported yourself, either by manual labour, or the exercise of your genius. Why should you think that conduct disreputable in priests, which you probably consider as laudable in yourself? I know not whether you have as great a dislike of *lings* as of priests; but that you may be induced to

think more favourably of men of my profession, I will just mention to you, that the payment of tithes is no new institution, but that they were paid in the most ancient times, not to priests only, but to kings. I could give you an hundred instances of this; two may be sufficient. *Abraham* paid tithes to the king of Salem, four hundred years before the law of Moses was given. The king of Salem was priest also of the most high God. Priests, you see, existed in the world, and were held in high estimation; for kings were priests, long before the impostures, as you esteem them, of the Jewish and Christian dispensations were heard of. But, as this instance is taken from a book which you call "a book of contradictions and lies"—the Bible,—I will give you another, from a book, to the authority of which, as it is written by a profane author, you probably will not object. *Diogenes Laertius*, in his life of *Solon*, cites a letter of *Pisistratus* to that lawgiver, in which he says: "I, *Pisistratus*, the tyrant, am contented with the stipends which were paid to those who reigned before me; the people of Athens set apart a *tenth* of the fruits of their land, not for my private use, but to be expended in the public sacrifices, and for the general good."

LETTER III.

HAVING done with what you call the grammatical evidence that Moses was not the author of the books attributed to him, you come to your historical and chronological evidence; and you begin with Genesis. Your first argument is taken from the single word—Dan—being found in Genesis, when it appears from the book of Judges, that the town of Laish was not

called Dan, till above three hundred and thirty years after the death of Moses : therefore the writer of Genesis, you conclude, must have lived after the town of Laish had the name of Dan given to it. Lest this objection should not be obvious enough to a common capacity, you illustrate it in the following manner: "Havre-de-Grace was called Havre-Marat in 1793; should then any dateless writing be found, in after times, with the name of Havre-Marat, it would be certain evidence that such a writing could not have been written till after the year 1793" This is a wrong conclusion. Suppose some hot republican should at this day publish a new edition of any old history of France, and instead of Havre-de-Grace, should write Havre-Marat; and that, two or three thousand years hence, a man, like yourself, should, on that account, reject the whole history as spurious, would he be justified in so doing? Would it not be reasonable to tell him—that the name Havre-Marat had been inserted, not by the original author of the history, but by a subsequent editor of it; and to refer him, for a proof of the genuineness of the book, to the testimony of the whole French nation? This supposition so obviously applies to your difficulty, that I cannot but recommend it to your impartial attention. But if this solution does not please you, I desire it may be proved, that the *Dan* mentioned in Genesis, was the same town as the *Dan* mentioned in Judges. I desire, further, to have it proved, that the *Dan* mentioned in Genesis, was the name of a town, and not of a river. It is merely said—Abraham pursued them (the enemies of Lot) to Dan. Now a river was full as likely as a town to stop a pursuit. *Lot*, we know, was settled in the plain of *Jordan*; and *Jordan*, we know, was composed of the united streams of two rivers, called *Jor* and *Dan*.

Your next difficulty respects its being said in Genesis—"These are the kings that reigned in *Edom*,

before there reigned any king over the children of Israel ;'—This passage could only have been written (you say, and I think you say rightly), after the first king began to reign over Israel ; so far from being written by Moses, it could not have been written till the time of Saul at the least." I admit this inference, but I deny its application. A small addition to a book does not destroy either the genuineness or the authenticity of the whole book. I am not ignorant of the manner in which commentators have answered this objection of Spinoza, without making the concession which I have made ; but I have no scruple in admitting that the passage in question, consisting of nine verses containing the genealogy of some kings of Edom, might have been inserted in the book of Genesis, after the book of Chronicles (which was called in Greek by a name importing that it contained things left out in other books) was written. The learned have shown that interpolations have happened to other books ; but these insertions by other hands have never been considered as invalidating the authority of these books.

“ Take away from Genesis,” you say, “ the belief that Moses was the author, on which only the strange belief that it is the word of God, has stood, and there remains nothing of Genesis but an anonymous book of stories, fables, traditionary or invented absurdities, or of downright lies.” What ! is it a story then that the world had a beginning, and that the author of it was God ? If you deem this a story, I am not disputing with a deistical philosopher, but with an atheistic madman. Is it a story that our first parents fell from a paradisaical state—that this earth was destroyed by a deluge—that Noah and his family were preserved in the ark—and that the world has been re-peopled by his descendants ? Look into a book so common that

almost every body has it, and so excellent that no person ought to be without it—Grotius *On the Truth of the Christian Religion*—and you will there meet with abundant testimony to the truth of all the principal facts recorded in Genesis. The testimony is not that of Jews, Christians, and priests, it is the testimony of the philosophers, historians, and poets of antiquity. The oldest book in the world, is Genesis; and it is remarkable that those books which come nearest to it in age, are those which make, either the most distinct mention of, or the most evident allusion to, the facts related in Genesis concerning the formation of the world from a chaotic mass; the primeval innocence and subsequent fall of man; the longevity of mankind in the first ages of the world; the depravity of the antediluvians, and the destruction of the world. Read the tenth chapter of Genesis. It may appear to you to contain nothing but an interesting narration of the descendants of *Shem, Ham, and Japheth*; a mere fable, an invented absurdity, a downright lie, No, sir; it is one of the most valuable, and the most venerable records of antiquity. It explains what all profane historians were ignorant of—the origin of nations. Had it told us, as other books do, that one nation had sprung out of the earth they inhabited; another from a cricket or a grasshopper; another from an oak; another from a mushroom; another from a dragon's tooth; then indeed would it have merited the appellation you, with so much temerity, bestow upon it. Instead of these absurdities, it gives such an account of the peopling the earth after the deluge, as no other book in the world ever did give; and the truth of which, all other books in the world, which contain any thing on the subject, confirm. The last verse of the chapter says—“These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations in their nations: and by these were the nations divided

in the earth after the flood." It would require great learning to trace out, precisely, either the actual situation of all the countries in which these founders or empires settled, or to ascertain the extent of their dominions. This, however, has been done by various authors, to the satisfaction of all competent judges; so much at least to my satisfaction, that had I no other proof of the authenticity of Genesis, I should consider this as sufficient. But, without the aid of learning, any man who can barely read his Bible, and has but heard of such people as the *Assyrians*, the *Elamites*, the *Lydians*, the *Medes*, the *Ionians*, the *Thracians*, will readily acknowledge that they had *Assur*, and *Elam*, and *Lud*, and *Madia*, and *Javan*, and *Tyros*, grandsons of *Noah*, for their respective founders; and knowing this he will not, I hope, part with his Bible, as a system of fables. I am no enemy to philosophy; but when philosophy would rob me of my Bible, I must say of it as Cicero said of the twelve tables—This little book alone exceeds the libraries of all the philosophers in the weight of its authority, and in the extent of its utility.

From the abuse of the Bible, you proceed to that of Moses, and again bring forward the subject of his wars in the land of Canaan. There are many men who look upon all war (would to God that all men saw it in the same light!) with extreme abhorrence, as afflicting mankind with calamities not necessary, shocking to humanity, and repugnant to reason. But is it repugnant to reason that God should, by an express act of his Providence, destroy a wicked nation? I am fond of considering the goodness of God as the leading principle of his conduct towards mankind, of considering his justice as subservient to his mercy. He punishes individuals and nations with the rod of his wrath; but I am persuaded that all his punishmen

originate in his abhorrence of sin, are calculated to lessen its influence, and are proofs of his goodness : inasmuch as it may not be possible for Omnipotence itself to communicate supreme happiness to the human race, whilst they continue servants of sin. The destruction of the Canaanites, exhibits to all nations, in all ages, a signal proof of God's displeasure against sin ; it has been to others, and is to ourselves, a benevolent warning. Moses would have been the wretch you represent him, had he acted by his own authority alone ; but you may as reasonably attribute cruelty and murder to the judge of the land in condemning criminals to death, as butchery and massacre to Moses, in executing the command of God.

The Midianites, through the counsel of Balaam, and by the vicious instrumentality of their women, had seduced a part of the Israelites to idolatry ; to the impure worship of their infamous god Baal-peor ;—for this offence, twenty-four thousand Israelites had perished in a plague from heaven, and Moses received a command from God “to smite the Midianites who had beguiled the people.” An army was equipped, and sent against Midian. When the army returned victorious, Moses and the princes of the congregation went to meet it : “and Moses was wroth with the officers.” He observed the women captives, and he asked with astonishment, “Have ye saved all the women alive? Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Baalam, to commit trespass against the Lord, in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation.” He then gave an order that the boys and the women should be put to death, but that the young maidens should be kept alive for themselves. I see nothing in this proceeding but good policy combined with mercy. The young men might have become dangerous avengers of, what they would esteem, their country's wrongs ; the mothers might

have again allured the Israelites to the love of licentious pleasures, and the practice of idolatry, and brought another plague upon the congregation; but the young maidens, not being polluted by the flagitious habits of their mothers, nor likely to create disturbance by rebellion, were kept alive. You give a different turn to the matter: you say—"that thirty-two thousand women-children were consigned to debauchery by the order of Moses." Prove this, and I will allow that Moses was the horrid monster you make him;—prove this, and I will allow that the Bible is what you call it—"a book of lies, wickedness, and blasphemy." Prove this, or excuse my wrath, if I say to you, as Paul said to Elymas the sorcerer, who sought to turn away Sergius Paulus from the faith, "O full of all subtlety, and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" I did not, when I began these Letters, think that I should have been moved to this severity of rebuke, by any thing you could have written; but when so gross a misrepresentation is made of God's proceedings, coolness would be a crime. The women-children were not reserved for the purposes of debauchery, but of slavery: a custom abhorrent from our manners, but every where practised in former times, and still practised in countries where the benignity of the Christian religion has not softened the ferocity of human nature. You here admit a part of the account given in the Bible respecting the expedition against Midian to be a true account; it is not unreasonable to desire that you will admit the whole, or show sufficient reason why you admit one part, and reject the other. I will mention the part to which you have paid no attention. The Israelitish army consisted but of twelve thousand men, a mere handful when opposed to the people of Midian;

yet, when the officers made a muster of their troops after their return from the war, they found that they had not lost a single man ! This circumstance struck them as so decisive an evidence of God's interposition, that out of the spoils they had taken, they offered "an oblation to the Lord, an atonement for their souls." Do but believe what the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds believed, at the time when these things happened, and we shall never more hear of your objection to the Bible, from its account of the wars of Moses.

You produce two or three other objections respecting the genuineness of the first five books of the Bible. I cannot stop to notice them ; every commentator answers them in a manner suited to the apprehension of even a mere English reader. You calculate, to the thousandth part of an inch, the length of the iron bed of *Og*, the king of Bashan : but you do not prove that the bed was too big for the body, or that a Patagonian would have been lost in it. You make no allowance for the size of a royal bed ; nor ever suspect that king *Og* might have been possessed with the same kind of vanity which occupied the mind of king Alexander, when he ordered his soldiers to enlarge the size of their beds, that they might give to the Indians, in succeeding ages, a great idea of the prodigious stature of a Macedonian. In many parts of your work you speak much in commendation of science. I join with you in every commendation you can give it ; but you speak of it in such a manner as gives room to believe that you are a great proficient in it ; if this be the case, I would recommend a problem to your attention, the solution of which you will readily allow to be far above the powers of a man conversant only, as you represent priests and bishops to be, in *hic, hæc, hoc*. The problem is this : To determine the height to which a human body, preserving its similarity of

figure, may be augmented, before it will perish by its own weight. When you have solved this problem, we shall know whether the bed of the king of Bashan was too big for any giant; whether the existence of a man twelve or fifteen feet high is in the nature of things impossible. My philosophy teaches me to doubt of many things; but it does not teach me to reject every testimony which is opposite to my experience; had I been born in Shetland, I could, on proper testimony, have believed in the existence of the Lincolnshire ox, or of the largest dray-horse in London; though the horses of Shetland had not been bigger than mastiffs.

LETTER IV.

HAVING finished your objections to the genuineness of the book of Moses, you proceed to your remarks on the book of Joshua; and from its internal evidence you endeavour to prove that this book was not written by Joshua. What then! what is your conclusion? "That it is anonymous, and without authority." Stop a little; your conclusion is not connected with your premises; your friend Euclid would have been ashamed of it. "Anonymous, and therefore without authority!" I have noticed this solecism before; but as you frequently bring it forward, and, indeed, your book stands much in need of it, I will submit to your consideration another observation upon the subject. The book called the *Fleta* is anonymous; but it is not on that account without authority, *Doomsday Book* is anonymous, and was written about seven hundred years ago; yet our courts of law do not hold it to be without authority, as to the matters of fact related in it. Yes, you

will say, but this book has been preserved with singular care amongst the records of the nation. And who told you that the Jews had no records, or that they did not preserve them with singular care? Josephus says the contrary; and, in the Bible itself, an appeal is made to many books which have perished; such as the book of Jasher, the book of Nathan, of Abijah, of Iddo, or Jehu, of the natural history of Solomon, of the acts of Manasseh, and others, which might be mentioned. If any one, having access to the journals of the lords and commons, to the books of the treasury, war-office, privy council, and other public documents, should at this day write an history of the reigns of George the First and Second, and should publish it without his name, would any man three or four hundreds or thousands of years hence, question the authority of that book, when he knew that the whole British nation had received it as an authentic book, from the time of its first publication to the age in which he lived? This supposition is in point. The books of the Old Testament were composed from the records of the Jewish nation, and they have been received as true by that nation, from the time in which they were written to the present day. Dodsley's *Annual Register* is an anonymous book, we only know the name of its editor; the *New Annual Register* is an anonymous book; the *Reviews* are anonymous books; but do we, or will our posterity, esteem these books as of no authority? On the contrary, they are admitted at present, and will be received in after ages, as authoritative records of the civil, military, and literary history of England and of Europe. So little foundation is there for our being startled by your assertion, "It is anonymous, and without authority."

If I am right in this reasoning (and I protest to you that I do not see any error in it), all the arguments you produce in proof that the book of Joshua was

not written by Joshua, nor that of Samuel by Samuel, are nothing to the purpose for which you have brought them forward : these books may be books of authority, though all you advance against the genuineness of them should be granted. No article of faith is injured by allowing that there is no such positive proof, when or by whom these, and some other books of Holy Scripture, were written, as to exclude all possibility of doubt and cavil. There is no necessity, indeed, to allow this. The chronological and historical difficulties which others before you have produced, have been answered ; and as to the greater part of them, so well answered, that I will not waste the reader's time by entering into a particular examination of them.

You make yourself merry with what you call the tale of the sun standing still upon Mount Gideon, and the moon in the Valley of Ajalon ; and you say that " the story detects itself, because there is not a nation in the world that knows any thing about it." How can you expect that there should, when there is not a nation in the world whose annals reach this era by many hundred years ? It happens, however, that you are probably mistaken as to the fact : a confused tradition concerning this miracle, and a similar one in the time of Ahaz, when the sun went back ten degrees, had been preserved among one of the most ancient nations, as we are informed by one of the most ancient historians. Herodotus, in his *Euterpe*, speaking of the Egyptian priests, says—" They told me that the sun four times deviated from his course, having twice risen where he uniformly goes down, and twice gone down where he uniformly rises. This, however, had produced no alteration in the climate of Egypt ; the fruits of the earth, and the phenomena of the Nile, had always been the same." (*Beloe's Transl.*) The last part of this observation confirms the conjecture, that

this account of the Egyptian priests had a reference to the two miracles respecting the sun mentioned in Scripture: for they were not of that kind which could introduce any change in climates or seasons. You would have been contented to admit the account of this miracle as a fine piece of poetical imagery;—you may have seen some Jewish doctors and some Christian commentators who considered it as such; but improperly, in my opinion. I think it idle, at least, if not impious, to undertake to explain how the miracle was performed; but one who is not able to explain the mode of doing a thing, argues ill if he thence infers that the thing was not done. We are perfectly ignorant how the sun was formed, how the planets were projected at the creation, how they are still retained in their orbits by the power of gravity; but we admit, notwithstanding, that the sun was formed, that the planets were then projected, and that they are still retained in their orbits. The machine of the universe is in the hand of God: he can stop the motion of any part, or the whole of it, with less trouble and less danger of injuring it, than you can stop your watch. In testimony of the reality of the miracle, the author of the book says—“Is this not written in the book of Jasher?” No author in his senses would have appealed in proof of his veracity to a book which did not exist, or in attestation of a fact, which, though it did exist, was not recorded in it; we may safely, therefore, conclude, that at the time the book of Joshua was written, there was such a book as the book of Jasher, and that the miracle of the sun’s standing still was recorded in that book. But this observation, you will say, does not prove the fact of the sun’s having stood still; I have not produced it as a proof of that fact; but it proves that the author of the book of Joshua believed the fact, and that the people of Israel admitted the authority of the book of

Jasher. An appeal to a fabulous book would have been as senseless an insult upon their understanding as it would have been upon ours, had Rapin appealed to the *Arabian Nights' Entertainment*, as a proof of the battle of Hastings.

I cannot attribute much weight to your argument against the genuineness of the book of Joshua, from its being said, that "Joshua burned Ai, and made it an heap for ever, even a desolation, unto *this day*." Joshua lived twenty-four years after the burning of Ai; and if he wrote his history in the latter part of his life, what absurdity is there in saying, Ai is still in ruins, or, Ai is in ruins to this very day. A young man, who had seen the heads of the rebels, in forty-five, when they were first stuck upon poles at Temple Bar, might, twenty years afterwards, in attestation of his veracity, in speaking of the fact, have justly said, and they are there to this very day. Whoever wrote the Gospel of St Matthew, it was written not many centuries, probably (I had almost said certainly) not a quarter of one century after the death of Jesus; yet the author, speaking of the Potter's field, which had been purchased by the chief priests with the money they had given Judas to betray his Master, says, that it was therefore called the field of blood *unto this day*; and in another place he says, that the story of the body of Jesus being stolen out of the sepulchre was commonly reported among the Jews *until this day*. Moses, in his old age, had made use of a similar expression, when he put the Israelites in mind of what the Lord had done to the Egyptians in the Red Sea: "The Lord hath destroyed them unto this day." (Deut. xi. 4.)

In the last chapter of the book of Joshua it is related that Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel to Sechem: and there, in the presence of the elders and principal men of Israel, he recapitulated in the short

speech, all that God had done for their nation, from the calling of Abraham, to that time, when they were settled in the land which God had promised to their forefathers. In finishing his speech, he said to them, "Choose you this day whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served, that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods." Joshua urged farther, that God would not suffer them to worship other gods in fellowship with him; they answered that "they would serve the Lord." Joshua then said to them, "Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the Lord to serve him." And they said, "We are witnesses." Here was a solemn covenant between Joshua, on the part of the Lord, and all the men of Israel, on their own part. The text then says: "So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Sechem; and Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God." Here is a proof of two things: first, that there was then, a few years after the death of Moses, existing a book called the *Book of the Law of God*; the same, without doubt, which Moses had written, and committed to the custody of the Levites, that it might be kept in the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that it might be a witness against them: secondly, that Joshua wrote a part, at least, of his own transactions in that very book, as an addition to it. It is not a proof that he wrote all his own transactions in any book; but I submit entirely to the judgment of every candid man, whether this proof of his having recorded a very material transaction, does not make it probable that he recorded other material transactions; that he wrote the chief part of the book of Joshua; and that

uch things as happened after his death, have been inserted in it by others, in order to render the history more complete.

The book of Joshua, chap. vi. ver. 26, is quoted in the first book of Kings, chap. xvi. ver. 44. "In his (Ahab's) days, did Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho: he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his first-born, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun." Here is a proof that the book of Joshua is older than the first book of Kings; but that is not all which may be reasonably inferred, I do not say proved, from this quotation. It may be inferred from the phrase, "according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun," that Joshua *wrote down* the word which the Lord had spoken. In Baruch, (which, though an apocryphal book, is authority for this purpose,) there is a similar phrase, "as thou spakest by thy servant Moses, in the day when thou didst command him *to write thy law*."

I think it unnecessary to make any observations on what you say relative to the book of Judges; but I cannot pass unnoticed your censure of the book of Ruth, which you call "an idle bungling story, foolishly told, nobody knows by whom, about a strolling country girl creeping slyly to bed to her cousin Boaz. Pretty stuff, indeed," you exclaim, "to be called the word of God!" It seems to me that you do not perfectly comprehend what is meant by the expression, The word of God, or, The Divine authority of the Scriptures. I will explain it to you, in the words of Dr Law, late Bishop of Carlisle, and in those of St Austin. My first quotation is from Bishop Law's *Theory of Religion*—a book not undeserving your notice. "The true sense, then, of the *Divine authority* of the books of the Old Testament, and which, per-

haps, is enough to denominate them in general *divinely inspired*, seems to be this,—that as in those times, God has all along, beside the inspection or superintendency of his general providence, interfered upon particular occasions, by giving express commissions to some persons (thence called *prophets*) to declare his will in various manners and degrees of evidence, as best suited the occasion, time, and nature of the subject; and in all other cases, left them wholly to themselves. In like manner, he has interposed his more immediate assistance (and notified it to them, as they did to the world), in the *recording* of these revelations, so far as that was necessary, amidst the common (but from hence termed *sacred*) history of those times; and mixed with various other occurrences, in which the historian's own natural qualifications were sufficient to enable him to relate things with all the accuracy they required."—The passage from St Austin is this: "I am of opinion, that those men, to whom the Holy Ghost revealed what ought to be received as authoritative in religion, might write some things as men with historical diligence, and other things as prophets by Divine inspiration; and that these things are so distinct, that the former may be attributed to themselves, as contributing to the increase of knowledge, and the latter to God, speaking by them things appertaining to the authority of religion." Whether this opinion be right or wrong, I do not here inquire. It is the opinion of many learned men and good Christians; and, if you will adopt it as your opinion, you will see cause, perhaps, to become a Christian yourself; you will see cause to consider chronological, geographical, or genealogical errors—apparent mistakes, or real contradictions as to historical facts—needless repetitions, and trifling interpolations—indeed, you will see cause to consider all the principal objections of your book to be absolutely without foundation. Receive but the Bible as composed

by upright and well-informed, though in some points, fallible men (for I exclude all fallibility, when they profess to deliver the word of God), and you must receive it as a book revealing to you, in many parts, the express will of God; and, in other parts, relating to you the ordinary history of the times. Give but the authors of the Bible that credit which you give to other historians; believe them to deliver the word of God, when they tell you that they do so; believe, when they relate other things as of themselves, and not of the Lord, that they wrote to the best of their knowledge and capacity, and you will be in your belief something very different from a Deist: you may not be allowed to aspire to the character of an orthodox believer, but you will not be an unbeliever in the Divine authority of the Bible, though you should admit human mistakes and human opinions to exist in some parts of it. This I take to be the first step towards the removal of the doubts of many sceptical men; and, when they are advanced thus far, the grace of God, assisting a teachable disposition and a pious intention, may carry them on to perfection.

As to Ruth, you do an injury to her character. She was not a strolling country girl. She had been married ten years; and, being left a widow, without children, she accompanied her mother-in-law, returning into her native country, out of which, with her husband and her two sons, she had been driven by a famine. The disturbances in France have driven many men, with their families, to America; if, ten years hence, a woman, having lost her husband and her children, should return to France with a daughter-in-law, would you be justified in calling the daughter-in-law a strolling country girl? But "she crept slyly to bed to her cousin Boaz." I do not find it so in the history. As a person imploring protection she laid herself down at

the foot of an aged kinsman's bed; and she rose up with as much innocence as she had laid herself down. She was afterwards married to Boaz, and reputed by all her neighbours a virtuous woman; and they were more likely to know her character than you are. Whoever reads the book of Ruth, bearing in mind the simplicity of ancient manners, will find it an interesting story of a poor young woman, following, in a strange land, the advice, and affectionately attaching herself to the fortunes, of the mother of her deceased husband.

The two books of Samuel come next under your review. You proceed to show that these books were not written by Samuel, that they are anonymous, and thence you conclude without authority. I need not here repeat what I have said upon the fallacy of your conclusion; and as to your proving that the books were not written by Samuel, you might have spared yourself some trouble, if you had recollected, that it is generally admitted, that Samuel did not write any part of the second book which bears his name, and only a part of the first. It would, indeed, have been an inquiry not undeserving your notice, in many parts of your work, to have examined what was the opinion of the learned men respecting the authors of the several books of the Bible; you would have found, that you were in many places fighting a phantom of your own raising, and proving what was generally admitted. Very little certainty, I think, can at this time be obtained on this subject; but that you may have some knowledge of what has been conjectured by men of judgment, I will quote to you a passage from Dr Hartley's *Observations on Mun.* The author himself does not vouch for the truth of his observation, for he begins it with a supposition.—“I suppose, then, that the Pentateuch consists of the writings of *Moses*, put together by *Samuel*, with a very few additions; that the books of Joshua and Judges were in like manner collected by

him ; and the book of Ruth, with the first part of the first book of Samuel, written by him : that the latter part of the first book of Samuel, and the second book, were written by the prophets who succeeded Samuel, suppose *Nathan* and *Gad* ; that the book of Kings and Chronicles are extracts from the records of the succeeding prophets, concerning their own times, and from the public genealogical tables, made by *Ezra* ; that the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are collections of like records, some written by *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*, and some by their predecessors ; that the book of Esther was written by some eminent Jew, in or near the times of the transactions there recorded, perhaps *Mordecai* ; the book of Job by a Jew, of an uncertain time ; the Psalms by *David*, and other pious persons ; the books of Proverbs and Canticles by *Solomon* ; the book of Ecclesiastes by *Solomon*, or perhaps by a Jew of later times, speaking in his person, but not with an intention to make him pass for the author ; the prophecies by the prophets whose names they bear, and the books of the New Testament by the persons to whom they are usually ascribed."——I have produced this passage to you, not merely to show you, that, in a great part of your work, you are attacking what no person is interested in defending ; but to convince you that a wise and good man, and a firm believer in revealed religion, for such was Dr Hartley, and no priest, did not reject the anonymous books of the Old Testament as books without authority. I shall not trouble either you or myself, with any more observations on that head ; you may ascribe the two books of Kings, and the two books of Chronicles, to what authors you please ; I am satisfied with knowing that the annals of the Jewish nation were written in the time of Samuel, and, probably, in all succeeding times, by men of ability, who lived in or near the times

in which they write. Of the truth of this observation we have abundant proof, not only from the testimony of Josephus, and of the writers of the Talmuds, but from the Old Testament itself. I will content myself with citing a few places:—"Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer." 1 Chron. xxix. 29.—"Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, first and last, are they not written in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer?" 2 Chron. ix. 29.—"Now the acts of Rehoboam, first and last, are they not written in the book of Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the seer, concerning genealogies?" 2 Chron. xii. 15.—"Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, first and last, behold they are written in the book of Jehu the son of Hanani." 2 Chron. xx. 34. Is it possible for writers to give a stronger evidence of their veracity than by referring their readers to the books from which they had extracted the materials of their history?

"The two books of Kings," you say, "are little more than an history of assassinations, treachery, and war." That the kings of Israel and Judah, were many of them very wicked persons, is evident from the history which is given of them in the Bible: but it ought to be remembered that their wickedness is not to be attributed to their religion; nor were the people of Israel chosen to be the people of God on account of their wickedness; nor was their being chosen a cause of it. One may wonder, indeed, that, having experienced so many singular marks of God's goodness towards their nation, they did not at once become, and continue to be (what however, they have long been), strenuous advocates for the worship of one only God, the Maker of heaven and earth. This was the

purpose for which they were chosen, and this purpose has been accomplished. For above three-and-twenty hundred years, the Jews have uniformly witnessed to all the nations of the earth, the unity of God, and his abomination of idolatry. But as you look upon the "appellation of the Jews being God's *chosen* people as a *lie*, which the priests and leaders of the Jews had invented to cover the baseness of their own characters, and which Christian priests, sometimes as corrupt, and often as cruel, have professed to believe," I will plainly state to you the reasons which induce me to believe that it is no *lie*, and I hope they will be such reasons as you will not attribute either to cruelty or corruption.

To any one contemplating the universality of things, and the fabric of nature, this globe of earth, with the men dwelling on its surface, will not appear (exclusive of the divinity of their souls) of more importance than an hillock of ants : all of which, some with corn, some with eggs, some without any thing, run hither and thither, bustling about a little heap of dust. This is a thought of the immortal Bacon ; and it is admirably fitted to humble the pride of philosophy, attempting to prescribe forms to the proceedings, and bounds to the attributes, of God. We may as easily circumscribe infinity, as penetrate the secret purposes of the Almighty. There are but two ways by which I can acquire any knowledge of the nature of the Supreme Being—by reason, and by revelation ; to you, who reject revelation, there is but one. Now, my reason informs me, that God has made a great difference between the kinds of animals, with respect to their capacity of enjoying happiness. Every kind is perfect in its order ; but if we compare different kinds together, one will appear to be greatly superior to another. An animal which has but one sense, has but one source of happi

ness ; but if it be supplied with what is suited to that sense, it enjoys all the happiness of which it is capable, and is in its nature perfect. Other sorts of animals, which have two or three senses, and which have also abundant means of gratifying them, enjoy twice or thrice as much happiness as those do which have but one. In the same sort of animals, there is a great difference amongst individuals, one having the senses more perfect, and the body less subject to disease than another. Hence, if I were to form a judgment of the Divine goodness by this use of my reason, I could not but say that it was partial and unequal. “What shall we say then? Is God unjust? God forbid!” His goodness may be unequal, without being imperfect; it must be estimated from the whole, and not from a part. Every order of beings is so sufficient for its own happiness, and so conducive at the same time to the happiness of every other, that in one view it seems to be made for itself alone, and in another not for itself but for every other. Could we comprehend the whole of the immense fabric which God hath formed, I am persuaded, that we should see nothing but perfection, harmony, and beauty, in every part of it; but whilst we dispute about parts, we neglect the whole, and discern nothing but supposed anomalies and defects. The maker of a watch, or the builder of a ship, is not to be blamed because a spectator cannot discover either the beauty or the use of disjointed parts. And shall we dare to accuse God of injustice, for not having distributed the gifts of nature in the same degree to all kinds of animals, when it is probable that this very inequality of distribution may be the means of producing the greatest sum total of happiness to the whole system? In exactly the same manner may we reason concerning the acts of God’s especial Providence. If we consider any one act, such as that of appointing the Jews to be his peculiar people, as

unconnected with every other, it may appear to be a partial display of his goodness; it may excite doubts concerning the wisdom or the benignity of his Divine nature. But if we connect the history of the Jews with that of other nations, from the most remote antiquity to the present time, we shall discover that they were not chosen so much for their own benefit, or on account of their own merit, as for the general benefit of mankind. To the Egyptians, Chaldeans, Grecians, Romans, to all the people of the earth, they were formerly, and they are still to all civilized nations, a beacon set upon a hill, to warn them from idolatry, to light them to the sanctuary of a God, holy, just, and good. Why should we suspect such a dispensation of being a *lie*? when even from the little which we can understand of it, we see that it is founded in wisdom, carried on for the general good, and analogous to all that reason teaches us concerning the nature of God.

Several things, you observe, are mentioned in the book of the Kings, such as the drying up of Jeroboam's hand, the ascent of Elijah into heaven, the destruction of the children who mocked Elisha, and the resurrection of a dead man; these circumstances being mentioned in the book of Kings, and not mentioned in that of Chronicles, is a proof to you that they are lies. I esteem it a very erroneous mode of reasoning, which, from the silence of one author concerning a particular circumstance, infers the want of veracity in another who mentions it. And this observation is still more cogent, when applied to a book which is only a supplement to, or an abridgment of, other books: and under this description the book of Chronicles has been considered by all writers. But though you will not believe the miracle of the drying up of Jeroboam's hand, what can you say to the prophecy which was then delivered concerning the future

destruction of the idolatrous altar of Jeroboam? The prophecy is thus written : 1 Kings xiii. 2. "Behold a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name, and upon thee (the altar) shall he offer the priests of the high places." Here is a clear prophecy ; the name, family, and office of a particular person are described in the year 975 (according to the Bible chronology) before Christ. Above 350 years after the delivery of the prophecy, you will find, by consulting the second book of Kings (chap. xxiii. 15, 16), this prophecy fulfilled in all its parts.

You make a calculation that Genesis was not written till 800 years after Moses, and that it is of the same age, and you may probably think of the same authority, as *Æsop's Fables*. You give, what you call, the evidence of this, the air of a demonstration. "It has but two stages : first, the account of the kings of Edom, mentioned in Genesis, is taken from Chronicles, and therefore the book of Genesis was written after the book of Chronicles ; secondly, the book of Chronicles was not begun to be written till after Zedekiah, in whose time Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem, 588 years before Christ, and more than 860 years after Moses." Having answered this objection before, I might be excused taking any more notice of it : but as you build much, in this place, upon the strength of your argument, I will show you its weakness when it is properly stated. *A few verses* in the book of Genesis could not be written by Moses ; *therefore no part* of Genesis could be written by Moses : a child would deny your *therefore*. Again, a few verses in the book of Genesis could not be written by *Moses*, because they speak of kings of Israel, there having been no kings of Israel in the time of Moses ; and *therefore* they could not be written by *Samuel*, or by *Solomon*, or by any other person who lived after they were kings in Israel, except by the author of the book

of **Chronicles**; this is also an illegitimate inference from your position. Again, a few verses in the book of Genesis are word for word the same as a few verses in the book of **Chronicles**; *therefore* the author of the book of Genesis must have taken them from **Chronicles**;—another lame conclusion! Why might not the author of the book of **Chronicles** have taken them from Genesis, as he has taken many other genealogies, supposing them to have been inserted in Genesis by Samuel? But where, you may ask, could Samuel, or any other person, have found the account of the kings of Edom? Probably, in the public records of the nation, which were certainly as open for inspection to Samuel, and the other prophets, as they were to the author of **Chronicles**. I hold it needless to employ more time on the subject.

LETTER V.

At length you come to two books, **Ezra** and **Nehemiah**, which you allow to be genuine books, giving an account of the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity, about 536 years before Christ; but then, you say, “Those accounts are nothing to us, nor to any other persons, unless it be to the Jews, as a part of the history of their nation; and there is just as much of the Word of God in those books as there is in any of the histories of France, or in Rapin’s *History of England*.” Here let us stop a moment, and try if, from your own concessions, it be not possible to confute your argument. **Ezra** and **Nehemiah**, you grant, are genuine books, “but they are nothing to us!” The very first verse of **Ezra** says—the prophecy of **Jeremiah** was fulfilled: is it nothing to us to know

What Jeremiah was a true prophet? Do but grant that the Supreme Being communicated to any of the sons of men a knowledge of future events, so that their predictions were plainly verified, and you will find little difficulty in admitting the truth of revealed religion. Is it nothing to us to know, that five hundred and thirty-six years before Christ, the books of Chronicles, Kings, Judges, Joshua, Deuteronomy, Numbers, Leviticus, Exodus, Genesis, every book the authority of which you have attacked, are all referred to by Ezra and Nehemiah, as authentic books, containing the history of the Israelitish nation, from Abraham to that very time? Is it nothing to us to know, that the history of the Jews is true? It is every thing to us; for if that history be not true, Christianity must be false. The Jews are the root, we are branches "grafted in among them;" to them pertain "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen."

The history of the Old Testament has, without doubt, some difficulties in it; but a minute philosopher, who busies himself in searching them out, whilst he neglects to contemplate the harmony of all its parts, the wisdom and goodness of God displayed throughout the whole, appears to me to be like a purblind man, who, in surveying a picture, objects to the simplicity of the design, and the beauty of the execution, from the asperities he has discovered in the canvass and the colouring. The history of the Old Testament, notwithstanding the real difficulties which occur in it; notwithstanding the scoffs and cavils of unbelievers, appears to me to have such internal evidences of its truth, to be so corroborated by the most ancient profane histories, so confirmed by the present circumstances

of the world, that if I were not a Christian, I would become a Jew. You think this history to be a collection of lies, contradictions, blasphemies: I look upon it to be the oldest, the truest, the most comprehensive, and the most important history in the world. I consider it as giving more satisfactory proofs of the being and attributes of God, of the origin and end of human kind, than ever were attained by the deepest researches of the most enlightened philosophers. The exercise of our reason in the investigation of truths respecting the nature of God, and the future expectations of human kind, is highly useful: but I hope I shall be pardoned by the metaphysicians in saying, that the chief utility of such disquisitions consists in this—that they bring us acquainted with the weakness of our intellectual faculties. I do not presume to measure other men by my standard; you may have clearer notions than I am able to form of the infinity of space; of the eternity of duration; of necessary existence; of the connexion between necessary existence and intelligence, between intelligence and benevolence: you may see nothing in the universe but organized matter, or, rejecting a material, you may see nothing but an ideal world. With a mind weary with conjecture, fatigued by doubt, sick of disputation, eager for knowledge, anxious for certainty, and unable to attain it by the best use of my reason in matters of the utmost importance, I have long ago turned my thoughts to an impartial examination of the proofs on which revealed religion is grounded, and I am convinced of its truth. This examination is a subject within the reach of human capacity; you have come to one conclusion respecting it, I have come to another; both of us cannot be right; may God forgive him that is in an error!

You ridicule, in a note, the story of an angel ap-

pearing to Joshua. Your mirth you will perceive to be misplaced, when you consider the design of this appearance; it was to assure Joshua, that the same God who had appeared to Moses, ordering him to pull off his shoes, because he stood on holy ground, had now appeared to himself. Was this no encouragement to a man who was about to engage in war with many nations? Had it no tendency to confirm his faith? Was it no lesson for him to obey, in all things, the commands of God, and to give the glory of his conquests to the Author of them, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? As to your wit about pulling off the shoe, it originates, I think, in your ignorance; you ought to have known that this rite was an indication of reverence for the Divine presence; and that the custom of entering bare-foot into their temple, subsists in some countries to this day.

You allow the book of Ezra to be a genuine book; but that the author of it may not escape without a blow, you say that in matters of record it is not to be depended on; and as a proof of your assertion, you tell us that the total amount of the numbers who returned from Babylon does not correspond with the particulars; and that every child may have an argument for its infidelity, you display the particulars, and show your own skill in arithmetic, by summing them up. And can you suppose that Ezra, a man of great learning, knew so little of science, so little of the lowest branch of science, that he could not give his readers the sum total of sixty particular sums? You know, undoubtedly, that the Hebrew letters denoted also numbers; and that there was such a great similarity between some of these letters, that it was extremely easy for a transcriber of a manuscript to mistake a כ for a כ (or 2 for 20), a ג for a ג (or 3 for 50), a ד for ד (or 4 for 400). Now, what have we to do with numerical contradictions in the Bible, but to attribute

them, wherever they occur, to this obvious source of error—the inattention of the transcriber in writing one letter for another that was like it ?

I should extend these letters to a length troublesome to the reader, to you, and to myself, if I answered minutely every objection you have made, and rectified every error into which you have fallen; it may be sufficient briefly to notice some of the chief. The character represented in Job, under the name of Satan, is, you say, “the first and the only time this name is mentioned in the Bible.” Now, I find this name, as denoting an enemy, frequently occurring in the Old Testament; thus, 2 Sam. xix. 22, “What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruah, that you should this day be adversaries unto me?” In the original it is, “satans unto me.” Again, 1 Kings v. 4, “The Lord my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent,”—in the original, “neither satan nor evil.” I need not mention other places. These are sufficient to show, that the word “satan,” denoting an adversary, does occur in various places of the Old Testament; and it is extremely probable to me, that the root “satan” was introduced into the Hebrew and other Eastern languages, to denote an adversary, from its having been the proper name of the great enemy of mankind. I know it is an opinion of Voltaire, that the word “satan” is not older than the Babylonian captivity. This is a mistake; for it is met with in Psalm cix., which all allow to have been written by David, long before the captivity. Now we are upon this subject, permit me to commend to your consideration, the universality of the doctrine concerning an evil being, who, in the beginning of time, had opposed himself, who still continues to oppose himself, to the Supreme Source of all good. **Amongst all nations, in all ages,**

this opinion prevailed, that human affairs were subject to the will of the gods, and regulated by their interposition. Hence has been derived whatever we have read of the wandering stars of the Chaldeans—two of them beneficent, and two malignant; hence the Egyptian *Typho* and *Osiris*; the Persian *Arimanius* and *Oromasdes*; the Grecian *celestial* and *infernal Jove*; the *Brama* and the *Zupay* of the Indians, Peruvians, Mexicans; the good and evil principle, by whatever names they may be called, of all other barbarous nations; and hence the structure of the whole book of Job, in whatever light of history or drama it be considered. Now, does it not appear reasonable to suppose, that an opinion so ancient and so universal, has arisen from tradition concerning the fall of our first parents; disfigured, indeed, and obscured, as all traditions must be, by many fabulous additions?

“The Jews,” you tell us, “never prayed but when they were in trouble.” I do not believe this of the Jews; but that they prayed more fervently when they were in trouble than at other times, may be true of the Jews, and, I apprehend, is true of all nations and all individuals. But “the Jews never prayed for any thing but victory, vengeance, and riches.” Read Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple, and blush for your assertion—illiberal and uncharitable in the extreme!

“It appears,” you observe, “to have been the custom of the heathens, to personify both virtue and vice by statues and images, as is done now-a-days both by statuary and by paintings; but it does not follow from this that they worshipped them any more than we do.” Not worshipped them! What think you of the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar set up? Was it not worshipped by the princes, the rulers, the judges, the people, the nations, and the languages of the Babylonian empire?—Not worshipped them! What think

you of the decree of the Roman senate, for fetching the statue of the mother of the gods from Pessinem? Was it only that they might admire it as a piece of workmanship?—Not worshipped them! “What man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians was a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?”—Not worshipped them! The worship was universal. “Every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places, which the Samaritans had made; the men of Babylon made Succoth-bonoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashmia, and the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burned their children in the fire to Adrammelech, and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim.” (2 Kings, chap. xvii.) The heathens are much indebted to you for this your curious apology for their idolatry; for a mode of worship the most cruel, senseless, impure, abominable, that can possibly disgrace the faculties of the human mind. Had this your conceit occurred in ancient times, it might have saved *Micah's teraphims*, the *golden calves of Jeroboam*, and of *Aaron*, and quite superseded the necessity of the second commandment!!! Heathen morality has had its advocates before you. The facetious gentleman, who pulled off his hat to the statue of Jupiter, that he might have a friend when heathen idolatry should again be in repute, seems to have had some foundation for his improper humour, some knowledge that certain men, esteeming themselves great philosophers, had entered into a conspiracy to abolish Christianity, some foresight of the consequences which will certainly attend their success.

It is an error, you say, to call the Psalms, the Psalms of David. This error was observed by St Jerome, many hundred years before you were born; his words

are, "We know that they are in an error who attribute all the Psalms to David." You, I suppose, will not deny, that David wrote some of them. Songs are of various sorts; we have hunting songs, drinking songs, fighting songs, love songs, foolish, wanton, wicked songs; if you will have the "Psalms of David to be nothing but a collection from different song-writers," you must allow that the writers of them were inspired by no ordinary spirit; that this is a collection incapable of being degraded by the name you give it; that it greatly excels every other collection in matter and in manner. Compare the Book of Psalms with the odes of Horace or Anacreon, with the hymns of Callimachus, the golden verses of Pythagoras, the choruses of the Greek tragedians (no contemptible compositions any of these), and you will quickly see how greatly it surpasses them all in piety of sentiment, in sublimity of expression, in purity of morality, and in rational theology.

As you esteem the Psalms of David a song-book, it is consistent enough in you to esteem the Proverbs of Solomon a jest-book: "there have not come down to us above eight hundred of his jests; if we had the whole three thousand which he wrote, our mirth would be extreme." Let us open the book, and see what kind of jests it contains. Take the very first as a specimen: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and instruction." Do you perceive any jest in this? The fear of the Lord! what Lord does Solomon mean? He means that Lord who took the posterity of Abraham to be his peculiar people; who redeemed that people from Egyptian bondage, by a miraculous interposition of his power; who gave the law to Moses; who commanded the Israelites to exterminate the nations of Canaan. Now this Lord you will not fear; the jest says, you despise wisdom and instruction. Let us try again: "My son,

hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother." If your heart has been ever touched by parental feelings, you will see no jest in this. Once more: "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." These are the three first proverbs in Solomon's "Jest-book;" if you read it through, it may not make you merry; I hope it will make you wise; that it will teach you, at least, the beginning of wisdom—the fear of that Lord whom Solomon feared. Solomon, you tell us, was witty; jesters are sometimes witty; but though all the world, from the time of the queen of Sheba, has heard of the wisdom of Solomon, his wit was never heard of before. There is a great difference, Mr Locke teaches us, between wit and judgment, and there is a greater between wit and wisdom. Solomon "was wiser than Ethan the Ezahite, and Heman, and Shalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol." These men you may think were jesters, and so you may call the seven wise men of Greece; but you will never convince the world that Solomon, who was wiser than them all, was nothing but a witty jester. As to the sins and debaucheries of Solomon, we have nothing to do with them but to avoid them; and to give full credit to his experience, when he preaches to us his admirable sermon on the vanity of every thing but piety and virtue.

Isaiah has a greater share of your abuse than any other writer in the Old Testament, and the reason of it is obvious—the prophecies of Isaiah have received such a full and circumstantial completion, that, unless you can persuade yourself to consider the whole book (a few historical sketches excepted), "as one continued bombastical rant, full of extravagant metaphor, without application, and destitute of meaning," you must of necessity allow its Divine authority. You compare the burden of Babylon, the burden of Moab,

the burden of Damascus, and the other denunciations of the prophet against cities and kingdoms, to the "story of the *Knight of the Burning Mountain*, the story of *Cinderella*," &c. I may have read these stories, but I remember nothing of the subjects of them; I have read also Isaiah's burden of Babylon, and I have compared it with the past and present state of Babylon, and the comparison has made such an impression on my mind, that it will never be effaced from my memory. I shall never cease to believe, that the Eternal alone, by whom things future are more distinctly known than past or present things are by man, that the eternal God alone could have dictated to the prophet Isaiah the subject of the burden of Babylon.

The latter part of the forty-fourth, and the beginning of the forty-fifth chapter of Isaiah, are, in your opinion, so far from being written by Isaiah, that they could only have been written by some person who lived at least an hundred and fifty years after Isaiah was dead: These chapters you go on, "are a compliment to Cyrus, who permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity, above one hundred and fifty years after the death of Isaiah." And is it for this, sir, that you accuse the church of audacity, and the priests of ignorance, in imposing, as you call it, this book upon the world as the writing of Isaiah? What shall be said of you, who, either designedly or ignorantly, represent one of the most clear and important prophecies in the Bible, as an historical compliment, written above an hundred and fifty years after the death of the prophet! We contend sir, that this is a prophecy, and not a history; that God called Cyrus by his name; declared that he should conquer Babylon; and described the means by which he should do it, above one hundred years before Cyrus was born, and when there was no probability of such an event. *Porphry* could not resist the evidence of

Daniel's prophecies, but by saying, that they were forged after the events predicted had taken place; *Voltaire* could not resist the evidence of the prediction of *Jesus*, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, but by saying that the account was written after Jerusalem had been destroyed: and you at length (though for aught I know, you may have had predecessors in this presumption), unable to resist the evidence of *Isaiah's* prophecies, contend that they are bombastical rant, without application, though the application is circumstantial; and destitute of meaning, though the meaning is so obvious that it cannot be mistaken; and that one of them is not a prophecy, but an historical compliment written after the event. We will not, sir, give up Daniel and St Matthew, to the impudent assertions of Porphyry and Voltaire, nor will we give up Isaiah to your assertion. Proof, proof is what we require, and not assertion: we will not relinquish our religion, in obedience to your abusive assertion respecting the prophets of God. That the wonderful absurdity of this hypothesis may be more obvious to you, I beg you to consider that Cyrus was a Persian, had been brought up in the religion of his country, and was probably addicted to the Magian superstition of two independent beings, equal in power, but different in principle, one the author of light, and of all good, the other, the author of darkness, and all evil. Now, is it probable that a captive Jew, meaning to compliment the greatest prince in the world, should be so stupid as to tell the prince that his religion was a lie? "I am the Lord, and there is none else; I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create evil, I the Lord do all these things."

But if you will persevere in believing that the prophecy concerning Cyrus was written after the event, peruse the burden of Babylon: was that also written

after the event? Were the Medes then stirred up against Babylon? Was Babylon, the glory of the kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans, *then* overthrown, and become as Sodom and Gomorrah? Was it *then* uninhabited? Was it *then* neither fit for the Arabian's tent nor the shepherd's fold? Did the wild beasts of the desert *then* lie there? Did the wild beasts of the islands *then* cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces? Were Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, the son and the grandson, *then* cut off? Was Babylon *then* become a possession of the bittern, and pools of water? Was it *then* swept with the besom of destruction, so swept that the world knows not now where to find it?

I am unwilling to attribute bad designs, deliberate wickedness, to you or to any man; I cannot avoid believing, that you think you have truth on your side, and that you are doing service to mankind in endeavouring to root out what you esteem superstition. What I blame you for is this—that you have attempted to lessen the authority of the Bible by ridicule, more than by reason; that you have brought forward every petty objection which your ingenuity could discover, or your industry pick up from the writings of others; and without taking any notice of the answers which have been repeatedly given to these objections, you urge and enforce them as if they were new. There is certainly some novelty, at least in your manner, for you go beyond all others in boldness of assertion, and in profaneness of argumentation; Bolingbroke and Voltaire must yield the palm of scurrility to Thomas Paine.

Permit me to state to you, what would, in my opinion, have been a better mode of proceeding; better suited to the character of an honest man, sincere in his endeavours to search out truth. Such a man, in reading the Bible, would in the first place, examine

whether the Bible attributed to the Supreme Being any attributes repugnant to holiness, truth, justice, goodness; whether it represented him as subject to human infirmities; whether it excluded him from the government of the world, or assigned the origin of it to chance, and an eternal conflict of atoms. Finding nothing of this kind in the Bible (for the destruction of the Canaanites by his express command, I have shown not to be repugnant to his moral justice), he would, in the second place, consider that the Bible being, as to many of its parts, a very old book, and written by various authors, and at different and distant periods, there might, probably, occur some difficulties and apparent contradictions in the historical part of it; he would endeavour to remove these difficulties, to reconcile these apparent contradictions, by the rules of such sound criticism as he would use in examining the contents of any other book; and if he found that most of them were of a trifling nature, arising from short additions inserted into the text as explanatory and supplemental, or from mistakes and omissions of transcribers, he would infer that all the rest were capable of being accounted for, though he was not able to do it; and he would be the more willing to make this concession from observing, that their ran through the whole book an harmony and connexion utterly inconsistent with every idea of forgery and deceit. He would then, in the third place, observe, that the miraculous and historical parts of this book were so intermixed, that they could not be separated; that they must either both be true, or both false; and from finding that the historical part was as well or better authenticated, than that of any other history, he would admit the miraculous part; and to confirm himself in this belief, he would advert to the prophecies; well knowing that the prediction of things to come,

was as certain a proof of the Divine interposition, as the performance of a miracle could be. If he should find, as he certainly would, that many ancient prophecies had been fulfilled in all their circumstances, and that some were fulfilling at this very day, he would not suffer a few seeming or real difficulties to overbalance the weight of this accumulated evidence for the truth of the Bible. Such, I presume to think, would be a proper conduct in all those who are desirous of forming a rational and impartial judgment on the subject of revealed religion. To return.

As to your observation, that the book of Isaiah is (at least in translation) that kind of composition and false taste which is properly called prose run mad—I have only to remark, that your taste for Hebrew poetry, even judging of it from translation, would be more correct, if you would suffer yourself to be informed on the subject by Bishop Lowth, who tells you in his *Prelections*, “that a poem translated literally from the Hebrew into any other language, whilst the same forms of the sentences remain, will still retain, even as far as relates to versification, much of its native dignity, and a faint appearance of versification.” (*Gregory’s Transl.*) If this is what you mean by prose run mad, your observation may be admitted.

You explain at some length your notion of the misapplication made by St Matthew of the prophecy in Isaiah, “Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son.” That passage has been handled largely and minutely by almost every commentator, and it is too important to be handled superficially by any one; I am not on the present occasion concerned to explain it. It is quoted by you to prove, and it is the only instance you produce, that Isaiah was a lying prophet and an impostor.” Now I maintain, that this very instance proves, that he was a true prophet and no impostor. The history of the prophecy, as delivered in the seventh

chapter is this:—Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, made war upon Ahaz, king of Judah; not merely, or perhaps, not at all, for the sake of plunder or the conquest of territory, but with a declared purpose of making an entire revolution in the government of Judah, of destroying the royal house of David, and of placing another family on the throne. Their purpose is thus expressed, “Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal.” Now, what did the Lord commission Isaiah to say to Ahaz? Did he commission him to say, The kings shall not vex thee? No.—The kings shall not conquer thee? No.—The kings shall not succeed against thee? No. He commissioned him to say, “It (the purpose of the two kings) shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass.” I demand, did it stand, did it come to pass? Was any revolution effected? Was the royal house of David dethroned and destroyed? Was Tabeal ever made king of Judah? No. The prophecy was perfectly accomplished. You say, “Instead of these two kings failing in their attempt against Ahaz, they succeeded; Ahaz was defeated and destroyed.” I deny the fact; Ahaz was defeated, but not destroyed: “and even the two hundred thousand women, and sons, and daughters” whom you represent as carried into captivity, were not carried into captivity: they were made captives, but they were not carried into captivity; for the chief men of Samaria, being admonished by a prophet, would not suffer Pekah to bring the captives into the land. “They rose up and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses (some humanity, you see, amongst those Israel-

ites, whom you every where represent as barbarous brutes), and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm-trees, to their brethren," 2 Chron. xxviii. 15. The kings did fail in their attempt; their attempt was to destroy the house of David, and to make a revolution; but they made no revolution, they did not destroy the house of David, for Ahaz slept with his fathers; and Hezekiah, his son, of the house of David, reigned in his stead.

LETTER VI.

AFTER what I conceive to be a great misrepresentation of the character and conduct of Jeremiah, you bring forward an objection, which Spinoza and others before you, have much insisted upon, though it is an objection which neither affects the genuineness nor the authenticity of the book of Jeremiah, any more than the blunder of a bookbinder, in misplacing the sheets of your performance, would lessen its authority. The objection is, that the book of Jeremiah has been put together in a disordered state. It is acknowledged, that the order of time is not every where observed; but the cause of the confusion is not known. Some attribute it to *Baruch* collecting into one volume all the several prophecies which Jeremiah had written, and neglecting to put them in their proper places; others think that the several parts of the work were at first properly arranged, but that through accident, or the carelessness of transcribers, they were deranged; others contend that there is no confusion; that prophecy differs from history, in not being subject to an accurate observance of time and order. But leaving this matter to be settled by critical discussion, let us come to a matter of greater importance—to your

charge against Jeremiah for his duplicity, and for his false prediction. First, as to his duplicity :—

Jeremiah, on account of his having boldly predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, had been thrust into a miry dungeon by the princes of Judah, who sought his life; there he would have perished, had not one of the eunuchs taken compassion on him, and petitioned king Zedekiah in his favour, saying, "These men (the princes) have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah, the prophet (no small testimony this, of the probity of the prophet's character), whom they have cast into the dungeon, and he is like to die for hunger." On this representation, Jeremiah was taken out of the dungeon by an order from the king, who soon afterwards sent privately for him and desired him to conceal nothing from him, binding himself, by an oath, that, whatever might be the nature of his prophecy, he would not put him to death or deliver him into the hands of the princes who sought his life. Jeremiah delivered to him the purpose of God respecting the fate of Jerusalem. The conference being ended, the king, anxious to perform his oath, to preserve the life of the prophet, dismissed him, saying, "Let no man know of these words, and thou shalt not die. But if the princes hear that I have talked with thee, and they come unto thee, and say unto thee, Declare unto us now what thou hast said unto the king, hide it not from us, and we will not put thee to death; also what the king said unto thee: then thou shalt say unto them, I presented my supplication before the king, that he would not cause me to return to Jonathan's house to die there. Then came all the princes unto Jeremiah, and asked him, and he told them according to all these words that the king had commanded." Thus, you remark, "this man of God, as he is called, could tell a lie, or very strongly prevaricate; for certainly he

did not go to Zedekiah to make his supplication, neither did he make it." It is not said that he told the princes he *went* to make his supplication, but that he *presented* it: now it is said in the preceding chapter, that he did make the supplication, and it is probable that in this conference he renewed it; but be that as it may, I contend that Jeremiah was not guilty of duplicity, or in more intelligible terms, that he did not violate any law of nature, or of civil society, in what he did on this occasion. He told the truth, in part, to save his life; and he was under no obligation to tell the whole to men who were certainly his enemies, and no good subjects to his king. "In a matter (says Puffendorf) "which I am not obliged to declare to another, if I cannot with safety conceal the whole, I may fairly discover no more than a part." Was Jeremiah under any obligation to declare to the princes what had passed in his conference with the king? You may as well say that the House of Lords has a right to compel privy counsellors to reveal the king's secrets. The king cannot justly require a privy counsellor to tell a lie for him; but he may require him not to divulge his *counsels* to those who have no right to know them. Now for the false prediction—I will give the description of it in your own words.

"In the 34th chapter is a prophecy of Jeremiah to Zedekiah, in these words, verse 2:—'Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and will burn it with fire; and thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but thou shalt surely be taken, and be delivered into his hand; and thine eyes shalt behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth, and thou shalt go to Babylon. *Yet hear the word of the Lord, O Zedekiah, King of Judah; thus saith the Lord, thou shalt not die by the sword, but thou shalt die in peace; and with the burnings of thy fathers, the former*

kings that were before thee, so shall they burn odours for thee, and will lament thee, saying, Ah, Lord! for I have pronounced the word, saith the Lord.'

“Now, instead of Zedekiah beholding the eyes of the king of Babylon, and speaking with him mouth to mouth, and dying in peace, and with the burnings of odours, as at the funeral of his fathers (as Jeremiah had declared the Lord himself had pronounced), the reverse, according to the 52d chapter, was the case; it is there stated, verse 10, ‘That the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes; that he put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death.’ What can we say of these prophets, but that they are impostors and liars?” I can say this—that the prophecy you have produced, was fulfilled in all its parts; and what then shall be said of those who call Jeremiah a liar and an impostor? Here then we are fairly at issue—you affirm that the prophecy was not fulfilled, and I affirm that it was fulfilled in all its parts. “I will give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire:” so says the prophet; what says the history? “They (the forces of the king of Babylon) burnt the house of God, and brake down the walls of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire.” (2 Chron. xxxvi. 19.) “Thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but shalt surely be *taken* and *delivered* into his hand:” so says the prophet; what says the history? “The men of war fled by night, and the king went the way towards the plain, and the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho; and all his army were scattered from him; so they *took* the king, and *brought him up to the king of Babylon, to Riblah.*” (2 Kings xxv. 5.) The prophet goes on, “Thine eyes shall

behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth." No pleasant circumstance this to Zedekiah, who had provoked the king of Babylon by revolting from him! The history says, "The king of Babylon gave judgment upon Zedekiah," or as it is more literally rendered from the Hebrew, "*spake judgments with him at Riblah.*" The prophet concludes this part with "And thou shalt go to Babylon:" the history says, "the king of Babylon bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death." (Jer. lii. 11.)—"Thou shalt not die by the sword." He did not die by the sword, he did not fall in battle.—"But thou shalt die in peace." He did die in peace, he neither expired on the rack, nor on the scaffold; was neither strangled nor poisoned; no unusual fate of captive kings! he died peaceably in his bed, though that bed was in a prison. "And with the burnings of thy fathers shall they burn odours for thee." I cannot prove from the history that this part of the prophecy was accomplished, nor can you prove that it was not. The probability is, that it was accomplished; and I have two reasons on which I ground this probability. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego, to say nothing of other Jews, were men of great authority in the court of the king of Babylon, before and after the commencement of the imprisonment of Zedekiah; and Daniel continued in power till the subversion of the kingdom of Babylon by Cyrus. Now it seems to me to be very probable, that Daniel, and the other great men of the Jews, would both have inclination to request, and influence enough with the king of Babylon to obtain permission to bury their deceased prince Zedekiah, after the manner of his fathers. But if there had been no Jews at Babylon of consequence enough to make such a request, still it is probable that the king of Babylon would have ordered the Jews to bury

and lament their departed prince, after the manner of their country. Monarchs, like other men, are conscious of the instability of human condition; and when the pomp of war has ceased, when the insolence of conquest is abated, and the fury of resentment subsided, they seldom fail to revere royalty even in its ruins, and grant without reluctance proper obsequies to the remains of captive kings.

You profess to have been particular in treating of the books ascribed to Isaiah and Jeremiah. Particular! in what? You have particularized two or three passages, which you have endeavoured to represent as objectionable, and which I hope have been shown, to the reader's satisfaction, to be not justly liable to your censure; and you have passed over all the other parts of these books without notice. Had you been particular in your examination, you would have found cause to admire the probity and the intrepidity of the characters of the authors of them; you would have met with many instances of sublime composition, and what is of more consequence, with many instances of prophetic veracity; particularities of these kinds you have wholly overlooked. I cannot account for this; I have no right, no inclination, to call you a dishonest man; am I justified in considering you as a man not altogether destitute of ingenuity, but so entirely under the dominion of prejudice in every thing respecting the Bible, that, like a corrupted judge previously determined to give sentence on one side, you are negligent in the examination of truth?

You proceed to the rest of the prophets, and you take them collectively, carefully however, selecting for your observations such particularities as are best calculated to render, if possible, the prophets odious or ridiculous in the eyes of your readers. You confound prophets with poets and musicians: I would

distinguish them thus : many prophets were poets and musicians, but all poets and musicians were not prophets. Prophecies were often delivered in poetic language and measure ; but flights and metaphors of the Jewish poets, have not, as you affirm, been foolishly erected into what are now called prophecies—they are now called, and have always been called, prophecies—because they were real predictions, some of which have received, some are now receiving, and all will receive, their full accomplishment.

That there were false prophets, witches, necromancers, conjurors, fortune-tellers among the Jews, no person will attempt to deny ; no nation, barbarous or civilized, has been without them ; but when you would degrade the prophets of the Old Testament to a level with these conjuring, dreaming, strolling, gentry—when you would represent them as spending their lives in fortune-telling, casting nativities, predicting riches, fortunate or unfortunate marriages, conjuring for lost goods, &c., I must be allowed to say, that you wholly mistake their office, and misrepresent their character ; their office was to convey to the children of Israel, the commands, the promises, the threatenings of Almighty God : and their character was that of men sustaining, with fortitude, persecution in the discharge of their duty. There were false prophets in abundance amongst the Jews ; and if you oppose these to the true prophets, and call them both party prophets, you have the liberty of doing so, but you will not thereby confound the distinction between truth and falsehood. False prophets are spoken of with detestation in many parts of Scripture ; particularly by Jeremiah, who accuses them of prophesying lies in the name of the Lord, saying, “ I have dreamed, I have dreamed :—Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues, and say, He saith ; that prophesy false dreams, and cause my people to err by their lies,

and by their lightness." Jeremiah cautions his countrymen against giving credit to their prophets, to their diviners, to their dreamers, to their enchanters, to their sorcerers, "which speak unto you saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon." You cannot think more contemptibly of these gentry, than they were thought of by the true prophets at the time they lived; but, as Jeremiah says on this subject, "what is the chaff to the wheat?" what are the false prophets to the true ones? Every thing good is liable to abuse; but who argues against the use of a thing from the abuse of it?—against physicians, because there are pretenders to physic? Was Isaiah a fortune-teller, predicting riches, when he said to king Hezekiah, "Behold the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." Fortune-tellers generally predict good luck to their simple customers, that they may make something by their trade; but Isaiah predicts to a monarch, desolation of his country, and the ruin of his family. This prophecy was spoken in the year (before Christ) 713; and, above an hundred years afterwards, it was accomplished; when Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem, and carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house (2 Kings xxiv. 13), and when he commanded the master of his eunuchs (Dan. i. 3), that he should take certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes, and educate them for three years, till they were able to stand before the king.

Jehoram, king of Israel, Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and the king of Edom, going with their armies to

ake war on the king of Moab, came into a place where there was no water either for their men or cattle. In this distress they waited upon Elisha (an high honour for one of your conjurors), by the advice of Jehoshaphat, who knew that the word of the Lord was with him. The prophet, on seeing Jehoram, an idolatrous prince, who had revolted from the worship of the true God, come to consult him, said to him, "Get thee to the prophets of thy father and the prophets of thy mother." This, you think, shows Elisha to have been a party prophet, full of venom and vulgarity. It shows him to have been a man of great courage, who respected the dignity of his own character, the sacredness of his office as a prophet of God, whose duty it was to reprove the wickedness of kings, as of other men. He ordered them to make the valley where they were full of ditches:——this, you say, "every countryman could have told, that the way to get water was to dig for it:" but this is not a true representation of the case; the ditches were not dug that water might be gotten by digging for it, but that they might hold the water when it should miraculously come, "without wind or rain," from another country; and it did come "from the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water." As to Elisha's cursing the little children who had mocked him, and their destruction in consequence of his imprecation, the whole story must be taken together. The provocation he received, is by some, considered as an insult offered to him, not as a man, but as a prophet; and that the persons who offered it were not what we understand by little children, but grown up youths; the term child being applied in the Hebrew language, to grown up persons. Be this as it may, the cursing was the act of the prophet; had it been a sin, it would not have been followed by a miraculous destruction of the offenders; for this was the act of God, who best

knows who deserves punishment. What effect such a signal judgment had on the idolatrous inhabitants of the land, is no where said; but it is probable it was not without a good effect.

Ezekiel and Daniel lived during the Babylonian captivity; you allow their writings to be genuine. In this you differ from some of the greatest adversaries of Christianity; and in my opinion cut up, by this concession, the very root of your whole performance. It is next to an impossibility for any man, who admits the book of Daniel to be a genuine book, and who examines that book with intelligence and impartiality, to refuse his assent to the truth of Christianity. As to your saying, that the interpretations which commentators and priests have made of these books only show the fraud, or the extreme folly, to which credulity and priestcraft can go: I consider it as nothing but a proof of the extreme folly or fraud to which prejudice and infidelity can carry a minute philosopher. You profess a fondness for science; I will refer you to a scientific man, who was neither a commentator nor a priest—to Ferguson: In a tract entitled—*The Year of our Saviour's Crucifixion ascertained; and the Darkness at the Time of His Crucifixion, proved to be Supernatural*—this real philosopher interprets the remarkable prophecy in the 9th chapter of Daniel, and concludes his dissertation in the following words:—“ Thus we have an astronomical demonstration of the truth of this ancient prophecy, seeing that the prophetic year of the Messiah's being cut off was the very same with the astronomical.” I have somewhere read an account of a solemn disputation which was held at Venice, in the last century, between a Jew and a Christian; the Christian strongly argued from Daniel's prophecy of the seventy weeks, that Jesus was the Messiah whom the Jews had long expected from the predictions of their

prophets; the learned rabbi who presided at this disputation, was so forcibly struck by the argument, that he put an end to the business, by saying, "Let us shut up our Bibles; for if we proceed in the examination of this prophecy, it will make us all become Christians." Was it a similar apprehension which deterred you from so much as opening the book of Daniel? You have not produced from it one exceptionable passage. I hope you will read that book with attention, with intelligence, and with an unbiassed mind follow the advice of our Saviour when he quoted this very prophecy—"Let him that readeth understand," and I shall not despair of your conversion from Deism to Christianity.

In order to discredit the authority of the books which you allow to be genuine, you form a strange and prodigious hypothesis concerning Ezekiel and Daniel, for which there is no manner of foundation, either in history or probability. You suppose these two men to have had no dreams, no visions, no revelations from God Almighty; but to have pretended to these things; and under that disguise, to have carried on an enigmatical correspondence relative to the recovery of their country from the Babylonian yoke. That any man in his senses should frame or adopt such an hypothesis, should have so little regard to his own reputation as an impartial inquirer after truth, so little respect for the understanding of his readers, as to obtrude it on the world, would have appeared an incredible circumstance, had not you made it a fact.

You quote a passage from Ezekiel: in the 29th chapter, verse 11, speaking of Egypt, it is said, "No foot of man shall pass through it, nor foot of beast shall pass through it; neither shall it be inhabited forty years:" this, you say, "never came to pass, and consequently it is false, as all the books I have already reviewed are." Now, that this did come to pass, we

nave, as Bishop Newton observes, "the testimonies of Megasthenes and Berosus, two heathen historians, who lived about 300 years before Christ; one of whom affirms, expressly, that Nebuchadnezzar conquered the greater part of Africa; and the other affirms it, in effect, in saying, that when Nebuchadnezzar heard of the death of his father, having settled his affairs in Egypt, and committed the captives whom he took in Egypt, to the care of some of his friends, to bring them after him, he hasted directly to Babylon." And if we had been possessed of no testimony in support of the prophecy, it would have been an hasty conclusion, that the prophecy never came to pass. The history of Egypt, at so remote a period, being no where accurately and circumstantially related, I admit that no period can be pointed out, from the age of Ezekiel to the present, in which there was no foot of man or beast to be seen for forty years in all Egypt; but some think that only a part of Egypt is here spoken of; and surely you do not expect a literal accomplishment of an hyperbolical expression, denoting great desolation; importing that the trade of Egypt, which was carried on then, as at present, by caravans, by the foot of man and beast, should be annihilated. Had you taken the trouble to have looked a little farther into the book from which you have made your quotations, you would have there seen a prophecy delivered above two thousand years ago, and which has been fulfilling from that time to this—"Egypt shall be the basest of the kingdoms, neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations; there shall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt!" This you may call a dream, a vision, a lie; I esteem it a wonderful prophecy; for as is the prophecy, so has been the event. Egypt was conquered by the Babylonians; and after the Babylonians by the Persians; and after the Persians it became subject to

the Macedonians; and after the Macedonians to the Romans; and after the Romans to the Saracens; and then to the Mamelukes; and is now a province of the Turkish empire.

Suffer me to produce to you from this author not an enigmatical letter to Daniel respecting the recovery of Jerusalem from the hands of the kings of Babylon, but an enigmatical prophecy concerning Zedekiah the king of Jerusalem, before it was taken by the Chaldeans. "I will bring him (Zedekiah) to Babylon, to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there." How! not see Babylon when he shall die there!" How, moreover, is this consistent, you may ask, with what Jeremiah had foretold—that Zedekiah should see the eyes of the king of Babylon! This darkness of expression and apparent contradiction between the two prophets, induced Zedekiah (as Josephus informs us) to give no credit to either of them; yet he unhappily experienced—and the fact is worthy your observation—the truth of them both. He saw the eyes of the king of Babylon, not at Babylon, but at Riblah; his eyes were there put out; and he was carried to Babylon, yet he saw it not; and thus were the predictions of both the prophets verified, and the enigma of Ezekiel explained.

As to your wonderful discovery that the prophecy of Jonah is a book of some Gentile, "and that it has been written as a fable, to expose the nonsense, and to satirize the vicious and malignant character of a Bible prophet, or a predicting priest," I shall put it, covered with *hellebore*, for the service of its author, on the same shelf with your hypothesis concerning the conspiracy of Daniel and Ezekiel, and shall not say another word about it.

You conclude your objections to the Old Testament in a triumphant style; an angry opponent would say, in a style of extreme arrogance, and sottish self-suffi-

ciency. "I have gone," you say, "through the Bible (mistaking here, as in other places, the Old Testament for the Bible) as a man would go through a wood with an axe on his shoulder, and fell trees; here they lie; and the priests, if they can, may replant them. They may, perhaps, stick them in the ground, but they will never grow." And is it possible that you should think so highly of your performance, as to believe, that you have thereby demolished the authority of a book which Newton himself esteemed the most authentic of all histories; which, by its celestial light, illumines the darkest ages of antiquity: which is the touchstone whereby we are enabled to distinguish between true and fabulous theology, between the God of Israel, holy, just, and good, and the impure rabble of heathen Balaam; which has been thought, by competent judges, to have afforded matter for the laws of Solon, and a foundation for the philosophy of Plato; which has been illustrated by the labour of learning, in all ages and countries; and been admired and venerated for its piety, its sublimity, its veracity, by all who were able to read and understand it? No, sir; you have gone indeed through the wood, with the best intention in the world to cut it down; but you have merely busied yourself in exposing to vulgar contempt a few unsightly shrubs, which good men had wisely concealed from public view; you have entangled yourself in thickets of thorns and briars; you have lost your way on the mountains of Lebanon: the goodly cedar-trees whereof, lamenting the madness, and pitying the blindness of your rage against them, have scorned the blunt edge and the base temper of your axe, and laughed unhurt at the feebleness of your stroke.

In plain language, you have gone through the Old Testament, hunting after difficulties, and you have

found some real ones; these you have endeavoured to magnify into insurmountable objections to the authority of the whole book. When it is considered that the Old Testament is composed of several books written by different authors, and at different periods, from Moses to Malachi, comprising an abstracted history of particular nation for above a thousand years, I think the real difficulties which occur in it are much fewer, and of much less importance, than could reasonably have been expected. Apparent difficulties you have represented as real ones, without hinting at the manner in which they have been explained. You have ridiculed things held most sacred, and calumniated characters esteemed most venerable; you have excited the scoffs of the profane, increased the scepticism of the doubtful, shaken the faith of the unlearned, suggested cavils to the "disputers of this world," and perplexed the minds of honest men, who wish to worship the God of their fathers in sincerity and truth. This, and more, you have done, in going through the Old Testament; but you have not as much as glanced at the great design of the whole, at the harmony and mutual dependence of the several parts. You have said nothing of the wisdom of God in selecting a particular people from the rest of mankind, not for their own sakes, but that they might witness to the whole world, in successive ages, his existence and attributes; and that they might be an instrument of subverting idolatry, of declaring the name of the God of Israel throughout the whole earth. It was through this nation that the Egyptians saw the wonders of God; that the Canaanites (whom wickedness had made a reproach to human nature) felt his judgments; that the Babylonians issued their decrees, "That none should dare to speak amiss of the God of Israel; that all should fear and tremble before him;" and it is through them that you and I, and all the world, are not at this day worshippers of

idols. You have said nothing of the goodness of God in promising, that through the seed of Abraham, all the nations of the earth were to be blessed; that the desire of all nations, the blessing of Abraham to the Gentiles should come. You have passed by all the prophecies respecting the coming of the Messiah; though they absolutely fixed the time of his coming, and of his being cut off; described his office, character, condition, sufferings, and death, in so circumstantial a manner, that we cannot but be astonished at the accuracy of their completion in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. You have neglected noticing the testimony of the whole Jewish nation, to the truth both of the natural and miraculous facts recorded in the Old Testament. That we may better judge of the weight of this testimony, let us suppose that God should now manifest himself to us, as we contend he did to the Israelites in Egypt, in the desert, and in the land of Canaan; and that he should continue these manifestations of himself to our posterity for a thousand years or more, punishing or rewarding them according as they disobeyed or obeyed his commands; what would you expect should be the issue? You would expect that our posterity would, in the remotest period of time, adhere to their God, and maintain, against all opponents, the truth of the books in which the dispensations of God, to us and to our successors, had been recorded. They would not yield to the objections of men, who, not having experienced the same Divine government, should, for want of such experience, refuse assent to their testimony. No; they would be to the then surrounding nations, what the Jews are to us, witnesses of the existence and of the moral government of God.

LETTER VII.

“THE New Testament, they tell us, is founded upon the prophecies of the Old; if so, it must follow the fate of its foundation.” Thus you open your attack upon the New Testament; and I agree with you, that the New Testament must follow the fate of the Old—and that fate is, to remain unimpaired by such efforts as you have made against it. The New Testament, however, is not founded solely on the prophecies of the Old. If an heathen from *Athens* or *Rome*, who had never heard of the prophecies of the Old Testament, had been an eye-witness of the miracles of Jesus, he would have made the same conclusion that the Jew, Nicodemus, did: “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.” Our Saviour tells the Jews, “Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me;” and he bids them search the Scriptures, for they testified of him; but, notwithstanding this appeal to the prophecies of the Old Testament, Jesus said to the Jews, “Though you believe not me, believe the works,”—“believe me for the very works’ sake;” “if I had not done among them the works which none other men did, they had not had sin.” These are sufficient proofs that the truth of Christ’s mission was not even to the Jews, much less to the Gentiles, founded solely on the truth of the prophecies of the Old Testament. So that if you could prove some of these prophecies to have been misapplied, and not completed in the person of Jesus, the truth of the Christian religion would not thereby be overturned. That Jesus of Nazareth was the person, in whom all the prophecies, direct and typical, in the Old Testament respecting the Messiah, were fulfilled, is a proposition founded on those prophecies, and to be proved by comparing them with the history of

his life. That Jesus was *a* prophet sent from God, is one proposition ; that Jesus was *the* prophet, the Messiah, is another : and though he certainly was both *a* prophet and *the* prophet, yet the foundations of the proof of these propositions are separate and distinct.

“ The mere existence of such a woman as Mary and of such a man as Joseph, and Jesus, is,” you say, “ a matter of indifference, about which there is no ground either to believe or to disbelieve.” Belief is different from knowledge, with which you here seem to confound it. We know that the whole is greater than its part ; and we know, that all the angles in the same segment of a circle are equal to each other. We have intuition and demonstration as grounds of this knowledge ; but is there no ground for belief of past or future existence ? Is there no ground for believing that the sun will exist to-morrow, and that your father existed before you ? You condescend, however, to think it probable, that there were such persons as Mary, Joseph, and Jesus ; and, without troubling yourself about their existence or non-existence, assuming, as it were, for the sake of argument, but without positively granting their existence, you proceed to inform us, “ that it is the fable of Jesus Christ, as told in the New Testament, and the wild and visionary doctrine raised thereon,” against which you contend. You will not repute it a fable, that there was such a man as Jesus Christ ; that he lived in Judea near eighteen hundred years ago ; that he went about doing good, and preaching, not only in the villages of Galilee, but in the city of Jerusalem ; that he had several followers who constantly attended him ; that he was put to death by Pontius Pilate ; that his disciples were numerous a few years after his death, not only in Judea, but in Rome, the capital of the world, and in every province of the Roman empire ; that a particular day has been

observed in a religious manner by all his followers, in commemoration of a real or supposed resurrection; and that the constant celebration of baptism, and of the Lord's Supper, may be traced back from the present time to him, as the author of those institutions. These things constitute, I suppose, no part of your fable; and if these things be facts, they will, when maturely considered, draw after them so many other things related in the New Testament concerning Jesus, that there will be left for your fable but very scanty materials, which will require great fertility of invention before you will dress them up into any form which will not disgust even a superficial observer.

The miraculous conception you esteem a fable, and in your mind it is an obscene fable. Impure, indeed, must that man's imagination be, who can discover any obscenity in the angel's declaration to Mary, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore, that holy thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God." I wonder you do not find obscenity in Genesis, where it is said, "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters," and brought order out of confusion, a world out of a chaos, by his fostering influence. As to the Christian faith being built upon the heathen mythology, there is no ground whatever for the assertion; there would have been some for saying, that much of the heathen mythology was built upon the events recorded in the Old Testament.

You come now to a demonstration, or, which amounts to the same thing, to a proposition which cannot, you say, be controverted:—first, that the *agreement* of all the parts of a story does not prove that story to be true—because the parts may agree, and the whole may be false; secondly, That the *disagreement* of the parts of a story proves that the *whole cannot be true*. The agreement does not prove truth, but the

disagreement proves falsehood positively." Great use, I perceive, is to be made of this proposition. You will pardon my unskilfulness in dialectics, if I presume to controvert the truth of this abstract proposition, as applied to any purpose in life. The agreement of the parts of a story implies that the story has been told, by at least two persons, (the life of Dr Johnson, for instance, by Sir John Hawkins, and Mr Boswell.) Now I think it scarcely possible for even two persons, and the difficulty is increased if there are more than two, to write the history of the life of any one of their acquaintance, without there being a considerable difference between them, with respect to the number and order of the incidents of his life. Some things will be omitted by one, and mentioned by the other; some things will be briefly touched by one, and the same things will be circumstantially detailed by the other; the same things which are mentioned in the same way by them both, may not be mentioned as having happened exactly at the same point of time; with other possible and probable differences. But these real or apparent difficulties, in minute circumstances, will not invalidate their testimony as to the material transactions of his life, much less will they render the whole of it a fable. If several independent witnesses, of fair character, should agree in all the parts of a story, (in testifying, for instance, that a murder or a robbery was committed at a particular time, in a particular place, and by a certain individual,) every court of justice in the world would admit the fact, notwithstanding the abstract possibility of the whole being false: again, if several honest men should agree in saying, that they saw the king of France beheaded, though they should disagree as to the figure of the guillotine, or the size of his executioner, as to the king's hands being bound or loose, as to his being composed or

agitated, in ascending the scaffold, yet every court of justice in the world would think, that such difference, respecting the circumstances of the fact, did not invalidate the evidence respecting the fact itself. When you speak of the whole of a story, you cannot mean every particular circumstance connected with the story, but not essential to it; you must mean the pith and marrow of the story; for it would be impossible to establish the truth of any fact (of Admirals Byng or Keppel, for example, having neglected or not neglected their duty), if a disagreement in the evidence of witnesses, in minute points, should be considered as annihilating the weight of their evidence in point of importance. In a word, the relation of a fact differs essentially from the demonstration of a theorem. If one step is left out, one link in the chain of ideas constituting a demonstration, is omitted, the conclusion will be destroyed; but a fact may be established, notwithstanding a disagreement of the witnesses in certain trifling particulars of their evidence respecting it.

You apply your incontrovertible proposition to the genealogies of Christ given by Matthew and Luke—there is a disagreement between them; therefore, you say, “If Matthew speak truth, Luke speaks falsehood; and if Luke speak truth, Matthew speaks falsehood; and thence there is no authority for believing either; and, if they cannot be believed even in the very first thing, they say and set out to prove, they are not entitled to be believed in any thing they say afterwards.” I cannot admit either your premises or your conclusion; not your conclusion, because two authors who differ in tracing back the pedigree of an individual for above a thousand years, cannot, on that account, be esteemed incompetent to bear testimony to the transactions of his life, unless an intention to falsify could be proved against them. If two Welch historians should at this time, write the life of any remarkable man in their

country, who had been dead twenty or thirty years, and should through different branches of their genealogical tree, carry up their pedigree to *Cadwalloen*, would they, on account of that difference be discredited in every thing they said? Might it not be believed that they gave the pedigree as they had found it recorded in different instruments, but without the least intention to write a falsehood? I cannot admit your premises; because Matthew speaks truth, and Luke speaks truth, though they do not speak the same truth; Matthew giving the genealogy of Joseph, the reputed father of Jesus, and Luke giving the genealogy of Mary, the real mother of Jesus. If you will not admit this, other explanations of the difficulty might be given; but I hold it sufficient to say, that the authors had no design to deceive the reader, that they took their accounts from the public registers, which were carefully kept, and that had they been fabricators of these genealogies, they would have been exposed at the time to instant detection; and the certainty of that detection would have prevented them from making the attempt to impose a false genealogy on the Jewish nation.

But that you may effectually overthrow the credit of these genealogies, you make the following calculation: "From the birth of David to the birth of Christ, is upwards of 1080 years; and as there were but 27 full generations, to find the average age of each person mentioned in St Matthew's list at the time his first son was born, it is only necessary to divide 1080 by 27, which gives 40 years for each person. As the life-time of men was then but of the same extent it is now, it is an absurdity to suppose that 27 generations would all be old bachelors, before they were married. So far from this genealogy being a solemn truth, it is not even a reasonable lie." This argument assumes the appearance of arithmetical accuracy, and the con-

clusion is in a style, which even its truth would not excuse: yet the argument is good for nothing, and the conclusion is not true. You have read the Bible with some attention; and you are extremely liberal in imputing to it lies and absurdities; read it over again, especially the books of the Chronicles, and you will there find, that, in the genealogical list of St Matthew, three generations are omitted between Joram and Ozias; Joram was the father of Azariah, Azariah of Joash, Joash of Amaziah, and Amaziah of Oziah. I inquire not, in this place, whence this omission proceeded; whether it is to be attributed to an error in the genealogical table from whence Matthew took his account, or to a corruption of the text of the evangelist; still it is an omission. Now if you will add these three generations to the 27 you mention, and divide 1080 by 30, you will find the average age when these Jews had each of them their first son born was thirty-six. They married sooner than they ought to have done, according to Aristotle, who fixes thirty-seven as the most proper age when a man should marry. Nor was it necessary that they should have been old bachelors, though each of them had not a son to succeed him till he was thirty-six; they might have been married at twenty, without having a son till they were forty. You assume in your argument that the first born son succeeded the father in the list; this is not true. Solomon succeeded David; yet David had at least six sons, who were grown to manhood before Solomon was born; and Rehoboam had at least three sons before he had Abia (Abijah), who succeeded him. It is needless to cite more instances to this purpose; but from these, and other circumstances which might be insisted upon, I can see no ground for believing, that the genealogy of Jesus Christ, mentioned by St Matthew is not a solemn truth.

You insist much upon some things being mentioned

by one evangelist, which are not mentioned by all, or any of the others: and you take this to be a reason why we should consider the gospels, not as the works of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, but as the productions of some *unconnected* individuals, each of whom made his own legend. I do not admit the truth of this supposition; but I may be allowed to use it as an argument against yourself: it removes every possible suspicion of fraud and imposture, and confirms the gospel history in the strongest manner. Four *unconnected* individuals have each written memoirs of the life of Jesus: from whatever source they derived their materials, it is evident they agree in a great many particulars of the last importance: such as the purity of his manners; the sanctity of his doctrines; the multitude and publicity of his miracles; the persecuting spirit of his enemies; the manner of his death; and the certainty of his resurrection: and whilst they agree in these great points, their disagreement in points of little consequence is rather a confirmation of the truth, than an indication of the falsehood, of their several accounts. Had they agreed in nothing, their testimony ought to have been rejected as a legendary tale; had they agreed in every thing, it might have been suspected, that, instead of *unconnected* individuals, they were a set of impostors. The manner in which the evangelists have recorded the particulars of the life of Jesus is wholly conformable to what we experience in other biographers, and claims our highest assent to its truth: notwithstanding the force of your incontrovertible proposition.

As an instance of contradiction between the evangelists, you tell us that Matthew says, the angel, announcing the immaculate conception, appeared unto Joseph; but Luke says, he appeared unto Mary. The angel, sir, appeared unto them both; to Mary, when

he informed her that she should, by the power of God, conceive a son; to Joseph, some months afterwards, when Mary's pregnancy was visible; in the interim she had paid a visit of three months to her cousin Elizabeth. It might have been expected, that, from the accuracy with which you have read your Bible, you could not have confounded these obviously distinct appearances; but men, even of candour, are liable to mistakes. Who, you ask, would now believe a girl, who would say she was gotten with child by a ghost? Who, but yourself, would ever have asked a question so abominably indecent and profane? I cannot argue with you on this subject. You will never persuade the world, that the Holy Spirit of God has any resemblance to the stage-ghosts in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, from which you seem to have derived your idea of it.

The story of the massacre of the young children by the order of Herod, is mentioned only by Matthew; and therefore you think it is a lie. We must give up all history if we refuse to admit facts recorded by only one historian. Matthew addressed his gospel to the Jews, and put them in mind of a circumstance of which they must have had a melancholy remembrance; but Gentile converts were less interested in the event. The evangelists were not writing the life of Herod, but of Jesus: it is no wonder that they omitted, above half a century after the death of Herod, an instance of his cruelty, which was not essentially connected with their subject. The massacre, however, was probably known even at Rome; and it was certainly correspondent to the character of Herod. John, you say, at the time of the massacre, "was under two years of age, and yet he escaped; so that the story circumstantially belies itself." John was six months older than Jesus: and you cannot prove that he was not beyond the age to which the order of Herod extended: it probably reached no farther than to those who had completed

their first year, without including those who had entered upon their second; but without insisting upon this, still I contend that you cannot prove John to have been under two years of age at the time of the massacre; and I could give many probable reasons to the contrary. Nor is it certain that John was, at that time, in that part of the country to which the edict of Herod extended. But there would be no end of answering, at length, all your little objections.

No two of the evangelists, you observe, agree in reciting, *exactly in the same words*, the written inscription which was put over Christ, when he was crucified. I admit that there is an unessential verbal difference; and are you certain that there was not a verbal difference in the inscriptions themselves? One was written in Hebrew, another in Greek, another in Latin; and though they had all the same meaning, yet it is probable, that if two men had translated the Hebrew and the Latin into Greek, there would have been a verbal difference between their translations. You have rendered yourself famous by writing a book, called, *The Rights of Man*; had you been guillotined by Robespierre, with this title, written in French, English, and German, and affixed to the guillotine—Thomas Paine, of America, author of the *Rights of Man*; and had four persons, some of whom had seen the execution, and the rest had heard of it from eye-witnesses, written short accounts of your life twenty years or more after your death, and one had said the inscription was, This is Thomas Paine, the author of the *Rights of Man*; another, The author of the *Rights of Man*; a third, This is the author of the *Rights of Man*; and a fourth, Thomas Paine, of America, the author of the *Rights of Man*; would any man of common sense have doubted, on account of this disagreement, the veracity of the authors in writing your life? “The only one,” you

tell us, "of the men called apostles, who appears to have been near the spot where Jesus was crucified, was Peter." This your assertion is not true; we do not know that Peter was present at the crucifixion; but we do know that John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was present; for Jesus spoke to him from the cross. You go on, "But why should we believe Peter, convicted by their own account of perjury, in swearing that he knew not Jesus?" I will tell you why; because Peter sincerely repented of the wickedness into which he had been betrayed through fear for his life, and suffered martyrdom in attestation of the truth of the Christian religion.

But the evangelists disagree, you say, not only as to the superscription on the cross, but as to the time of the crucifixion, "Mark saying it was at the third hour (nine in the morning), and John at the sixth hour (twelve, as you suppose, at noon)." Various solutions have been given of this difficulty, none of which satisfied Dr Middleton, much less can it be expected that any of them should satisfy you. But there is a solution not noticed by him, in which many judicious men have acquiesced; that John, writing his gospel in Asia, used the Roman method of computing time, which was the same as our own; so that by the sixth hour, when Jesus was *condemned*, we are to understand six o'clock in the morning! the intermediate time from six to nine, when he was crucified, being employed in preparing for the crucifixion. But if this difficulty should be still esteemed insuperable, it does not follow that it will always remain so; and if it should, the main point, the crucifixion of Jesus, will not be affected thereby.

I cannot, in this place, omit remarking some circumstances attending the crucifixion, which are so natural, that we might have wondered if they had not occurred. Of all the disciples of Jesus, John was beloved by him

with a peculiar degree of affection ; and as kindness produces kindness, there can be little doubt that the regard was reciprocal. Now whom should we expect to be the attendants of Jesus in his last suffering ? Whom but John, the friend of his heart ? Whom but his mother, whose soul was now pierced through by the sword of sorrow, which *Simeon* had foretold ? Whom but those who had been attached to him through life ; who, having been healed by him of their infirmities, were impelled by gratitude to minister to him of their substance, to be attentive to all his wants ? These were the persons whom we should have expected to have attended his execution ; and these were there. To whom would an expiring son, of the best affections, recommend a poor, and probably a widowed mother, but to his warmest friend ? And this did Jesus. Unmindful of the extremity of his own torture, and anxious to alleviate the burden of her sorrows, and to protect her old age from future want and misery, he said to his beloved disciple, " Behold thy mother ! and from that hour the disciple took her to his own home." I own to you, that such instances as these, of the conformity of events to our probable expectation, are to me genuine marks of the simplicity and truth of the gospels ; and far outweigh a thousand little objections, arising from our ignorance of manners, times, and circumstances, or from our incapacity to comprehend the means used by the Supreme Being in the moral government of his creation.

St Matthew mentions several miracles which attended our Saviour's crucifixion : the darkness which overspread the land, the rending of the veil of the temple, an earthquake which rent the rocks, and the resurrection of many saints, and their going into the holy city. " Such," you say, " is the account which this dashing writer of the book of Matthew gives, but

in which he is not supported by the writers of the other books." This is not accurately expressed. Matthew is supported by Mark and Luke, with respect to two of the miracles—the darkness, and the rending of the veil; and their omission of the others does not prove that they were either ignorant of them, or disbelieved them. I think it idle to pretend to say positively what influenced them to mention only two miracles; they probably thought them sufficient to convince any person, as they convinced the centurion, that Jesus "was a righteous man," "the Son of God." And these two miracles were better calculated to produce general conviction, amongst the persons for whose benefit Mark and Luke wrote their gospels, than either the earthquake or the resurrection of the saints. The earthquake was probably confined to a particular spot, and might, by an objector, have been called a natural phenomenon; and those to whom the saints appeared might, at the time of writing the gospels of Mark and Luke have been dead: but the darkness must have been generally known and remembered; and the veil of the temple might still be preserved at the time these authors wrote. As to John not mentioning any of these miracles, it is well known that his gospel was written as a kind of supplement to the other gospels; he has therefore omitted many things which the other three evangelists had related, and he has added several things which they had not mentioned. In particular, he has added a circumstance of great importance. He tells us, that he saw one of the soldiers pierce the side of Jesus with a spear, and that blood and water flowed through the wound; and, lest any one should doubt of the fact, from its not being mentioned by the other evangelists, he asserts it with peculiar earnestness—"And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." John saw blood and water flowing

from the wound. The blood is easily accounted for ; but whence came the water ? The anatomists tell us, that it came from the *pericardium* : so consistent is evangelical testimony with the most curious researches into natural science ! You amuse yourself with the account of what the Scripture calls *many* saints, and you call an *army* of saints, and are angry with Matthew for not having told you a great many things about them. It is very possible that Matthew might have known the fact of their resurrection, without knowing every thing about them ; but if he had gratified your curiosity in every particular, I am of opinion that you would not have believed a word of what he had told you. I have no curiosity on the subject : it is enough for me to know, that “ Christ was the first-fruits of them that slept,” and “ that all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth,” as those holy men did, who heard the voice of the Son of God at his resurrection, and passed from death to life. If I durst indulge myself in being wise above what is written, I might be able to answer many of your inquiries relative to these saints ; but I dare not touch the ark of the Lord, I dare not support the authority of Scripture by the boldness of conjecture. Whatever difficulty there may be in accounting for the silence of the other evangelists, and of St Paul also, on this subject, yet there is a greater difficulty in supposing that Matthew did not give a true narration of what had happened at the crucifixion. If there had been no supernatural darkness, no earthquake, no rending of the veil of the temple, no graves opened, no resurrection of holy men, no appearance of them unto many ; if none of these things had been true, or rather if any one of them had been false, what motive could Matthew, writing to the Jews, have had for trumping up such wonderful stories ? He wrote, as

every man does, with an intention to be believed; and yet every Jew he met would have stared him in the face, and told him that he was a liar and an impostor. What author, who, twenty years hence, should address to the French nation an history of Louis XVI., would venture to affirm, that when he was beheaded there was darkness for three hours over all France? that there was an earthquake? that rocks were split? graves opened? and dead men brought to life, who appeared to many persons in Paris? It is quite impossible to suppose, that any one would dare to publish such obvious lies; and I think it equally impossible to suppose, that Matthew would have dared to publish his account of what had happened at the death of Jesus, had not that account been generally known to be true.

LETTER VIII.

THE "tale of the resurrection," you say, "follows that of the crucifixion." You have accustomed me so much to this kind of language, that when I find you speaking of a tale, I have no doubt of meeting with a truth. From the apparent disagreement in the accounts, which the evangelists have given of some circumstances respecting the resurrection, you remark, "If the writers of these books had gone into any court of justice to prove an *alibi* (for it is of the nature of an *alibi* that is here attempted to be proved, namely, the absence of a dead body by supernatural means), and had given their evidence in the same contradictory manner as it is here given, they would have been in danger of having their ears cropt for perjury, and would have justly deserved it,"—hard words or hanging, it seems, if you had been their judge. Now, I

maintain, that it is the brevity with which the account of the resurrection is given by all the evangelists, which has occasioned the seeming confusion; and that this confusion would have been cleared up at once, if the witnesses of the resurrection had been examined before any judicature. As we cannot have this *vivâ voce* examination of all the witnesses, let us call up and question the evangelists as witnesses to a supernatural *alibi*. Did you find the sepulchre of Jesus empty? One of us actually saw it empty, and the rest heard, from eye-witnesses, that it was empty.—Did you, or any of the followers of Jesus, take away the dead body from the sepulchre? All answer, No.—Did the soldiers or the Jews take away the body? No.—How are you certain of that? Because we saw the body when it was dead, and we saw it afterwards when it was alive.—How do you know that what you saw was the body of Jesus? We had been long and intimately acquainted with Jesus, and knew his person perfectly.—Were you not affrighted, and mistook a spirit for a body? No. The body had flesh and bones: we are sure that it was the very body which hung upon the cross, or we saw the wound in the side, and the print of the nails in the hands and feet.—And all this you are ready to swear? We are; and we are ready to die also, sooner than we will deny any part of. This is the testimony which all the evangelists would give, in whatever court of justice they were examined; and this, I apprehend, would sufficiently establish the *alibi* of the dead body from the sepulchre by supernatural means.

But as the resurrection of Jesus is a point which you attack with all your force, I will examine minutely the principal of your objections; I do not think them deserving of this notice; but they shall have it. The book of Matthew, you say, “states, that when Christ

was put in the sepulchre, the Jews applied to Pilate for a watch or a guard to be placed over the sepulchre, to prevent the body being stolen by the disciples." I admit this account, but it is not the whole of the account; you have omitted the reason for the request which the chief priests made to Pilate—"Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again." It is material to remark this; for at the very time that Jesus predicted his resurrection, he predicted also his crucifixion, and all that he should suffer from the malice of those very men who now applied to Pilate for a guard. "He showed to his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." (Matt. xvi. 21.) These men knew full well that the first part of this prediction had been accurately fulfilled through their malignity; and instead of repenting of what they had done, they were so infatuated as to suppose, that by a guard of soldiers they could prevent the completion of the second. The other books, you observe, "say nothing about this application, nor about the sealing of the stone, nor the guard, nor the watch, and according to these accounts there were none." This, sir, I deny. The other books do not say that there were none of these things; how often must I repeat, that omissions are not contradictions, nor silence concerning a fact a denial of it?

You go on: "The book of Matthew continues its account, that at the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn, towards the first day of the week, came *Mary Magdalene* and the other *Mary* to see the sepulchre. Mark says it was sun-rising, and John says it was dark. Luke says it was *Mary Magdalene*, and *Joanna*, and *Mary the mother of James*, and *other women*, that came to the sepulchre; and John says that *Mary Mag-*

dalene came alone. So well do they agree about their first evidence! They all appear, however, to have known most about Mary Magdalene; she was a woman of a large acquaintance, and it was not an ill conjecture that she might be upon the stroll." This is a long paragraph; I will answer it distinctly: first, there is no disagreement of evidence with respect to the time when the women went to the sepulchre; all the evangelists agree as to the day on which they went; and, as to the time of the day, it was early in the morning; what court of justice in the world would set aside this evidence as insufficient to substantiate the fact of the women's having gone to the sepulchre, because the witnesses differed as to the degree of twilight which lighted them on their way? Secondly, there is no disagreement of evidence with respect to the persons who went to the sepulchre. John states that Mary Magdalene went to the sepulchre; but he does not state, *as you make him state*, that Mary Magdalene went alone: she might, for any thing you have proved, or can prove, to the contrary, have been accompanied by all the women mentioned by Luke: is it an unusual thing to distinguish by name a principal person going on a visit, or an embassy, without mentioning his subordinate attendants? Thirdly, in opposition to your insinuation that Mary Magdalene was a common woman, I wish it to be considered, whether there is any Scriptural authority for that imputation; and whether there be or not, I must contend, that a repentant and reformed woman ought not to be esteemed an improper witness of a fact. The conjecture which you adopt concerning her, is nothing less than an illiberal, indecent, unfounded calumny, not excusable in the mouth of a libertine, and intolerable in yours.

The book of Matthew, you observe, goes on to say—
"And behold there was an earthquake, for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and

rolled back the stone from the door, and *sat upon it*; but the other books say nothing about any earthquake:” what then? does their silence prove that there was none? “nor about the angel rolling back the stone and sitting upon it;” what then? does their silence prove that the stone was not rolled back by an angel, and that he did not sit upon it? “and according to their accounts, there was no angel sitting there.” This conclusion I must deny; their accounts do not say there was no angel sitting there, at the time that Matthew says he sat upon the stone. They do not deny the fact, they simply omit the mention of it; and they all take notice that the women, when they arrived at the sepulchre, found the stone rolled away; hence it is evident that the stone was rolled away *before* the women arrived at the sepulchre; and the other evangelists, giving an account of what happened to the women when they reached the sepulchre, have merely omitted giving an account of a transaction previous to their arrival. Where is the contradiction? What space of time intervened between the rolling away the stone, and the arrival of the women at the sepulchre is no where mentioned; but it certainly was long enough for the angel to have changed his position; from sitting on the outside he might have entered into the sepulchre; and another angel might have made his appearance; or, from the first, there might have been two, one on the outside rolling away the stone, and the other within. Luke, you tell us, “says there were two, and they were both standing; and John says there were two, and both sitting.” It is impossible, I grant, even for an angel, to be sitting and standing at the same instant of time; but Luke and John do not speak of the same instant, nor of the same appearance; Luke speaks of the appearance to all the women; and John of the appearance to Mary Magda-

lene alone, who tarried weeping at the sepulchre after Peter and John had left it. But I forbear making any more minute remarks, on still minuter objections, all of which are grounded on this mistake—that the angels were seen at one particular time, in one particular place, and by the same individuals.

As to your inference, from Matthew's using the expression *unto this day*, "that the book must have been manufactured after a lapse of some generations at least," it cannot be admitted against the positive testimony of all antiquity. That the story about stealing away the body was a bungling story, I readily admit; but the chief priests are answerable for it; it is not worthy either your notice or mine, except as it is a strong instance to you, to me, and to every body, how far prejudice may mislead the understanding.

You come to that part of the evidence in those books that respects, you say, "the pretended appearances of Christ after his pretended resurrection; the writer of the book of Matthew relates, that the angel that was sitting on the stone at the mouth of the sepulchre said to the two Marys (chap. xxviii. 7) "Behold, Christ is gone before you into Galilee, there shall you see him." The gospel, sir, was preached to poor and illiterate men: and it is the duty of priests to preach it to them in all its purity, to guard them against the errors of mistaken, or the designs of wicked men. You, then, who can read your Bible, turn to this passage, and you will find that the angel did not say, "Behold Christ *is gone* before you into Galilee,"—but, "Behold, *he goeth* before you into Galilee." I know not what Bible you made use of in this quotation, none that I have seen render the original word by—he is gone: it might be properly rendered, he will go, and it is, literally rendered, he is going. This phrase does not imply any immediate setting out for Galilee: when a man has fixed upon a long jour-

ney to London or Bath, it is common enough to say, he is going to London or Bath, though the time of his going may be at some distance. Even your dashing Matthew could not be guilty of such a blunder as to make the angel say, *he is gone*; for he tells us, immediately afterwards, that as the women were departing from the sepulchre, to tell his disciples what the angels had said to them, Jesus himself met them. Now, how Jesus could be gone into Galilee, and yet meet the women at Jerusalem, I leave you to explain, for the blunder is not chargeable upon Matthew. I excuse your introducing the expression—"then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee," for the quotation is rightly made; but had you turned to the Greek Testament, you would not have found in this place any word answering to *then*; the passage is better translated—and the eleven. Christ had said to his disciples (Matt. xxvi. 32), "After I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee:" and the angel put the women in mind of the very expression and prediction—"He is risen, as he said; and behold, he goeth before you into Galilee." Matthew, intent upon the appearance in Galilee, of which there were, probably, at the time he wrote, many living witnesses in Judea, omits the mention of many appearances taken notice of by John, and by this omission, seems to connect the day of the resurrection of Jesus with that of the departure of the disciples for Galilee. You seem to think this a great difficulty, and incapable of solution; for, you say, "It is not possible, unless we admit these disciples the right of wilful lying, that the writers of these books could be any of the eleven persons called disciples; for if, according to Matthew, the eleven went into Galilee to meet Jesus in a mountain, by his own appointment, on the same day that he is said to have risen, Luke and John must have been two of that eleven; yet the writer of Luke says expressly, and

John implies as much, that the meeting was that same day in a house at Jerusalem; and on the other hand, if, according to Luke and John, the eleven were assembled in a house at Jerusalem, Matthew must have been one of that eleven; yet Matthew says the meeting was in a mountain in Galilee; and consequently the evidence given in those books destroys each other." When I was a young man in the university, I was pretty much accustomed to drawing of consequences; but my *Alma Mater* did not suffer me to draw consequences after your manner; she taught me that a false position must end in an absurd conclusion. I have shown your position, that the eleven went into Galilee on the day of the resurrection, to be false; and hence your consequence, that the evidence given in those two books destroys each other, is not to be admitted. You ought, moreover, to have considered, that the feast of unleavened bread, which immediately followed the day on which the passover was eaten, lasted seven days; and that strict observers of the law did not think themselves at liberty to leave Jerusalem till that feast was ended; and this is a collateral proof that the disciples did not go to Galilee on the day of the resurrection.

You certainly have read the New Testament, but not, I think, with great attention, or you would have known who the apostles were. In this place you reckon Luke as one of the eleven, and in other places you speak of him as an eye-witness of the things he relates: you ought to have known that Luke was no apostle, and he tells you himself, in the preface to his gospel, that he wrote from the testimony of others. If this mistake proceeds from your ignorance, you are not a fit person to write comments on the Bible; if from design (which I am unwilling to suspect), you are still less fit: in either case, it may suggest to your readers the propriety of suspecting the truth and accu-

racy of your assertions, however daring and intemperate. "Of the numerous priests or parsons of the present day, bishops and all, the sum total of whose learning," according to you, "is *a, b, ab*, and *hic, hæc, hoc*, there is not one amongst them," you say, "who can write poetry like Homer, or science like Euclid." If I should admit this (though there are many of them, I doubt not, who understand these authors better than you do), yet I cannot admit that there is one among them, bishops and all, so ignorant as to rank Luke the evangelist among the apostles of Christ. I will not press this point: any man may fall into a mistake; and the consciousness of this fallibility should create in all men a little modesty, a little diffidence, a little caution, before they presume to call the most illustrious characters of antiquity liars, fools, and knaves.

You want to know why Jesus did not show himself to all the people after his resurrection. This is one of Spinoza's objections; and it may sound well enough in the mouth of a Jew, wishing to excuse the infidelity of his countrymen; but it is not judiciously adopted by Deists of other nations. God gives us the means of health, but he does not force us to the use of them; he gives us the powers of the mind, but he does not compel us to the cultivation of them; he gave the Jews opportunities of seeing the miracles of Jesus, but he did not oblige them to believe them. They who persevered in their incredulity after the resurrection of Lazarus, would have persevered also after the resurrection of Jesus. Lazarus had been buried four days, Jesus but three; the body of Lazarus had begun to undergo corruption, the body of Jesus saw no corruption; why should you expect that they would have believed in Jesus on his own resurrection, when they had not believed in him on the resurrection of Lazarus? When the Pharisees were told of the resurrection of

Lazarus, they, together with the chief priests, gathered a council, and said—"What do we? for this man doth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him; then from that day forth they took counsel together to put him to death." The great men at Jerusalem, you see, admitted that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead; yet the belief of that miracle did not generate conviction that Jesus was the Christ; it only exasperated their malice, and accelerated their purpose of destroying him. Had Jesus shown himself after his resurrection, the chief priests would probably have gathered another council, have opened it with, What do we? and ended it with a determination to put him to death. As to us, the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, which we have in the New Testament, is far more convincing than if it had been related that he showed himself to every man in Jerusalem; for then we should have had a suspicion that the whole story had been fabricated by the Jews.

You think Paul an improper witness of the resurrection; I think him one of the fittest that could have been chosen; and for this reason, his testimony is the testimony of a former enemy. He had, in his own miraculous conversion, sufficient ground for changing his opinion as to a matter of fact; for believing that to have been a fact, which he had formerly, through extreme prejudice, considered as a fable. For the truth of the resurrection of Jesus, he appeals to above two hundred and fifty living witnesses; and before whom does he make this appeal? Before his enemies, who were able and willing to blast his character, if he had advanced an untruth. You know, undoubtedly, that Paul had resided at Corinth nearly two years; that during a part of that time, he had testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ; that, finding the bulk

of that nation obstinate in their unbelief, he had turned to the Gentiles, and had converted many to the faith in Christ; that he left Corinth, and went to preach the gospel in other parts; that, about three years after he had quitted Corinth, he wrote a letter to the converts which he had made in that place, and who, after his departure, had been split into different factions, and had adopted different teachers in opposition to Paul. From this account we may be certain, that Paul's letter, and every circumstance in it, would be minutely examined. The city of Corinth was full of Jews; these men were, in general, Paul's bitter enemies; yet, in the face of them all, he asserts, "that Jesus Christ was buried; that he rose again the third day; that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve; that he was afterwards seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part were then alive." An appeal to above two hundred and fifty living witnesses, is a pretty strong proof of a fact; but it becomes irresistible, when that appeal is submitted to the judgment of enemies. St Paul, you must allow, was a man of ability; but he would have been an idiot, had he put it in the power of his enemies to prove, from his own letter, that he was a lying rascal. They neither proved, nor attempted to prove, any such thing, and therefore we may safely conclude, that this testimony of Paul to the resurrection of Jesus was true; and it is a testimony, in my opinion, of the greatest weight.

You come, you say, to the last scene, the ascension; upon which, in your opinion, "the reality of the future mission of the disciples was to rest for proof." I do not agree with you in this. The reality of the future mission of the apostles might have been proved though Jesus Christ had not visibly ascended into heaven. Miracles are the proper proofs of a Divine mission; and when Jesus gave the apostles a commission

to preach the gospel, he commanded them to stay at Jerusalem, till they "were endued with power from on high." Matthew has omitted the mention of the ascension; and John, you say, has not said a syllable about it. I think otherwise. John has not given an express account of the ascension, but has certainly said something about it; for he informs us, that Jesus said to Mary, "Touch me not, for I am not yet *ascended* to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I *ascend* unto my Father, and your Father, and to my God and your God." This is surely saying something about the ascension: and if the fact of the ascension be not related by John or Matthew, it may reasonably be supposed, that the omission was made on account of the notoriety of the fact. That the fact was generally known, may be justly collected from the reference which Peter makes to it, in the hearing of all the Jews, a very few days after it had happened—"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore, being *by the right hand of God exalted.*" Paul bears testimony also to the ascension, when he says that Jesus was *received up into glory.* As to the difference you contend for between the account of the ascension, as given by Mark and Luke, it does not exist except in this, that Mark omits the particulars of Jesus going with his apostles to Bethany, and blessing them there, which are mentioned by Luke. But omissions, I must often put you in mind, are not contradictions.

You have now, you say, "gone through the examination of the four books ascribed to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; and when it is considered that the whole space of time, from the crucifixion to what is called the ascension, is but a few days, apparently not more than three or four, and that all the circumstances are reported to have happened near the same spot,

APOLOGY FOR THE BIBLE.

Jerusalem, it is, I believe, impossible to find in any story upon record, so many and such glaring absurdities, contradictions, and falsehoods, as are in those books." What am I to say to this? Am I to say, that in writing this paragraph you have forfeited your character as an honest man? Or, admitting your honesty, am I to say that you are grossly ignorant of the subject? Let the reader judge. John says that Jesus appeared to his disciples at Jerusalem on the day of his resurrection, and that Thomas was not then with them. The same John says, that *after eight days* he appeared to them again, when Thomas was with them. Now, sir, how *apparently three or four days* can be consistent with *really eight days*, I leave you to make out. But this is not the whole of John's testimony, either with respect to *place* or *time*; for he says—after these things (after the two appearances to the disciples at Jerusalem, on the first and on the eighth day after the resurrection) Jesus showed himself again to his disciples at the sea of *Tiberias*. The sea of *Tiberias*, I presume you know, was in Galilee; and Galilee, you may know, was sixty or seventy miles from Jerusalem; it must have taken the disciples some time, after the eighth day, to travel from Jerusalem into Galilee. What, in your own insulting language to the priests, what have you to answer, as to the *same spot Jerusalem*, as to your *apparently three or four days*? But this is not all. Luke, in the beginning of the Acts, refers to his gospel, and says—"Christ showed himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs, being seen of the apostles forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:" instead of *four*, you perceive there were *forty* days between the crucifixion and the ascension. I need not, I trust, after this, trouble myself about the falsehoods and contradictions which you impute to the evangelists: your readers cannot but be upon their guard, as to the

credit due to your assertions, however bold and improper. You will suffer me to remark, that the evangelists were plain men; who, convinced of the truth of their narration, and conscious of their own integrity, have related what they know, with admirable simplicity. They seem to have said to the Jews of their time, and to say to the Jews and unbelievers of all times—We have told you the truth; and if you will not believe us, we have nothing more to say. Had they been impostors, they would have written with more caution and art, have obviated every cavil, and avoided every appearance of contradiction. This they have not done; and this I consider as a proof of their honesty and veracity.

John the baptist had given his testimony to the truth of our Saviour's mission in the most unequivocal terms; he afterwards sent two of his disciples to Jesus, to ask him whether he was really the expected Messiah or not. Matthew relates both these circumstances: had the writer of the book of Matthew been an impostor, would he have invalidated John's testimony by bringing forward his real or apparent doubt? Impossible! Matthew, having proved the resurrection of Jesus, tells us, that the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them, and "when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted." Would an impostor, in the very last place where he mentions the resurrection, and in the conclusion of his book, have suggested such a cavil to unbelievers, as to say—some doubted? Impossible! The evangelist has left us to collect the reason why some doubted:—The disciples saw Jesus at a distance, on the mountain; and some of them fell down and worshipped him; whilst others doubted whether the person they saw was really Jesus; their doubt, however, could not have lasted long,

for in the very next verse we are told, that Jesus came and spake unto them.

Great and laudable pains have been taken by many learned men, to harmonize the several accounts given us by the evangelists of the resurrection. It does not seem to me to be a matter of any great consequence to Christianity, whether the accounts can, in every minute particular, be harmonized or not; since there is no such discordance in them, as to render the fact of the resurrection doubtful to any impartial mind. If any man in a court of justice should give possible evidence of a fact; and three others should afterwards be examined, and all of them should confirm the evidence of the first as to the fact, but should apparently differ from him and from each other, by being more or less particular in their accounts of the circumstances attending the fact; ought we to doubt of the fact, because we could not harmonize the evidence respecting the circumstances relating to it? The omission of any one circumstance (such as that of Mary Magdalene having gone twice to the sepulchre; or that of the angel having, after he had rolled away the stone from the sepulchre, entered into the sepulchre) may render an harmony impossible, without having recourse to supposition to supply the defect. You Deists laugh at all such attempts, and call them priestcraft. I think it better then, in arguing with you, to admit that there may be (not granting, however, that there is) an irreconcilable difference between the evangelists in some of their accounts respecting the life of Jesus, or his resurrection. Be it so; what then? Does this difference, admitting it to be real, destroy the credibility of the gospel history in any of its essential points? Certainly, in my opinion, not. As I look upon this to be a general answer to most of your deistical objections, I profess my sincerity in saying, that I consider it as a true and sufficient answer: and I leave it to your con-

sideration. I have, purposely, in the whole of this discussion, been silent as to the inspiration of the evangelists; well knowing that you would have rejected with scorn any thing I could have said on that point; but in disputing with a Deist, I do most solemnly contend, that the Christian religion is true, and worthy of all acceptation, whether the evangelists were inspired or not.

Unbelievers, in general, wish to conceal their sentiments: they have a decent respect for public opinion; are cautious of affronting the religion of their country; fearful of undermining the foundations of civil society. Some few have been more daring, but less judicious; and have, without disguise, professed their unbelief. But you are the first who ever swore that he was an infidel, concluding your deistical creed with—So help me God! I pray that God may help you: that he may, through the influence of his Holy Spirit, bring you to a right mind; convert you to the religion of his Son, whom, out of his abundant love to mankind, he sent into the world, that all who believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

You swear, that you think the Christian religion is not true. I give full credit to your oath; it is an oath in confirmation—of what?—of an opinion. It proves the sincerity of your declaration of your opinion; but the opinion, notwithstanding the oath, may be either true or false. Permit me to produce to you an oath not confirming an opinion, but a fact; it is the oath of St Paul, when he swears to the Galatians, that, in what he told them of his miraculous conversion, he did not tell a lie: “Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not.” Do but give that credit to Paul, which I give to you, do but consider the difference between an opinion and a fact, and I shall not despair of our becoming a Christian.

Deism, you say, consists in a belief of one God, and an imitation of his moral character, or the practice of what is called virtue : and in this (as far as religion is concerned) you rest all your hopes. There is nothing in Deism but what is in Christianity, but there is much in Christianity which is not in Deism. The Christian has no doubt concerning a future state ; every Deist, from Plato to Thomas Paine, is on this subject overwhelmed with doubts insuperable by human reason. The Christian has no misgivings as to the pardon of penitent sinners, through the intercession of a mediator ; the Deist is harassed with apprehension lest the moral justice of God should demand with inexorable rigour, punishment for transgression. The Christian has no doubt concerning the lawfulness and the efficacy of prayer ; the Deist is disturbed on this point by abstract considerations concerning the goodness of God, which wants not to be intreated ; concerning his foresight, which has no need of our information ; concerning his immutability, which cannot be changed through our supplication. The Christian admits the Providence of God, and the liberty of human actions ; the Deist is involved in great difficulties, when he undertakes the proof of either. The Christian has assurance that the Spirit of God will help his infirmities ; the Deist does not deny the possibility that God may have access to the human mind, but he has no ground to believe the fact of his either enlightening the understanding, influencing the will, or purifying the heart.

LETTER IX.

“THOSE,” you say, “who are not much acquainted with ecclesiastical history, may suppose that the book called the New Testament, has existed ever since the

time of Jesus Christ; but the fact is historically otherwise: there was no such book as the New Testament till more than three hundred years after the time that Christ is said to have lived." This paragraph is calculated to mislead common readers: it is necessary to unfold its meaning. The book, called the New Testament, consists of twenty-seven different parts; concerning seven of these, viz.—the Epistles to the Hebrews, that of James, the second of Peter, the second of John, the third of John, that of Jude, and the Revelation—there were at first some doubts; and the question, whether they should be received into the canon, might be decided, as all questions concerning opinions must be, by vote. With respect to the other twenty parts, those who are most acquainted with ecclesiastical history will tell you, as Du Pin does after Eusebius, that they were owned as canonical, at all times, and by all Christians. Whether the Council of Laodicea, was held before or after that of Nice, is not a settled point; all the books of the New Testament, except the Revelations, is enumerated as canonical in the Constitutions of that Council; but it is a great mistake to suppose, that the greatest part of the books of the New Testament were not in *general use* amongst Christians, long before the Council of Laodicea was held. This is not merely my opinion on the subject; it is the opinion of one much better acquainted with ecclesiastical history than I am, and probably than you are—*Mosheim*. "The opinions," says this author, "or rather the conjectures, of the learned concerning the time when the books of the New Testament were collected into one volume, as also about the authors of that collection, are extremely different. This important question is attended with great and almost insuperable difficulties to us in these latter times. It is, however, sufficient for us to know, that, before the

middle of the second century, the greatest part of the books of the New Testament, were read in every Christian society throughout the world, and received as a Divine rule of faith and manners. Hence it appears that these sacred writings were carefully separated from several human compositions upon the same subject, either by some of the apostles themselves, who lived so long, or by their disciples and successors, who were spread abroad through all nations. We are well assured that the four gospels were collected during the life of St John, and that the three first received the approbation of this divine apostle. And why may we not suppose that the other books of the New Testament were gathered together at the same time? What renders this highly probable is, that the most urgent necessity required its being done. For, not long after Christ's ascension into heaven, several histories of his life and doctrines, full of pious frauds and fabulous wonders, were composed by persons, whose intentions, perhaps, were not bad, but whose writings discovered the greatest superstition and ignorance. Nor was this all: productions appeared, which were imposed on the world by fraudulent men as the writings of the holy apostles. These apocryphal and spurious writings must have produced a sad confusion, and rendered both the history and the doctrine of Christ uncertain, had not the rulers of the church used all possible care and diligence in separating the books that were truly apostolical and divine, from all that spurious trash, and conveying them down to posterity in one volume."

Did you ever read the apology for the Christians, which Justin Martyr presented to the emperor Antoninus Pius, to the senate and people of Rome? I should sooner expect a falsity in a petition, which any body of persecuted men, imploring justice, should present to the King and Parliament of Great Britain, than

in this *Apology*. Yet in this *Apology*, which was presented not fifty years after the death of St John, not only parts of all the four gospels are quoted, but it is expressly said, that on the day called Sunday, a portion of them was read in the public assemblies of the Christians. I forbear pursuing this matter farther; else it might easily be shown, that probably the gospels, and certainly some of St Paul's epistles, were known to Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp, contemporaries with the apostles. These men could not quote or refer to books which did not exist: and, therefore, though you could make it out that the book called the New Testament did not formally exist under that title, till three hundred and fifty years after Christ; yet I hold it to be a certain fact, that all the books, of which it is composed, were written, and most of them received by all Christians, within a few years after his death.

You raise a difficulty relative to the time which intervened between the death and resurrection of Jesus, who had said, that the Son of Man shall be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Are you ignorant then that the Jews used the phrase "three days and three nights," to denote what we understand by three days? It is said in Genesis, chap. vii. 12, "The rain was upon the earth, forty days and forty nights;" and this is equivalent to the expression (verse 17), "And the flood was forty days upon the earth." Instead then of saying three days and three nights, let us simply say—three days, and you will not object to Christ's being three days—Friday, Saturday, and Sunday—in the heart of the earth. I do not say that he was in the grave the whole of either Friday or Sunday; but an hundred instances might be produced, from writers of all nations, in which a part of a day is spoken of as the whole. Thus much for the defence of the historical part of the New Testament.

You have introduced an account of Faustus, as denying the genuineness of the books of the New Testament. Will you permit that great scholar in sacred literature, Michaelis, to tell you something about this Faustus? "He was ignorant, as were most of the African writers, of the Greek language, and acquainted with the New Testament merely through the channel of the Latin translation: he was not only devoid of a sufficient fund of learning, but illiterate in the highest degree. An argument which he brings against the genuineness of the gospel affords sufficient ground for this assertion; for he contends that the gospel of St. Matthew could not have been written by St. Matthew himself, because he is always mentioned in the third person." You know who has argued like Faustus, but I did not think myself authorized on that account, to call you illiterate in the highest degree; but Michaelis makes a still more severe conclusion concerning Faustus; and he extends his observation to every man who argued like him.—"A man capable of such an argument, must have been ignorant not only of the Greek writers, the knowledge of which could not have been expected from Faustus, but even of the *Commentaries* of Cæsar. And were it thought improbable that so heavy a charge could be laid with justice on the side of his knowledge, it would fall with double weight on the side of his honesty, and induce us to suppose, that, preferring the arts of sophistry, to the plainness of truth, he maintained opinions which he believed to be false." (*Marsh's Transl.*) Never more, I think, shall we hear of Moses not being the author of the Pentateuch, on account of its being written in the third person.

Not being able to produce any argument to render questionable either the genuineness or the authenticity of St. Paul's epistles, you tell us, that "it is a matter of no great importance by whom they were

written, since the writer, whoever he was, attempts to prove his doctrine by argument; he does not pretend to have been witness to any of the scenes told of the resurrection and ascension; and he declares that he had not believed them." That Paul had so far resisted the evidence which the apostles had given of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, as to be a persecutor of the disciples of Christ, is certain; but I do not remember the place where he declares that he had not believed them. The high priest and the senate of the children of Israel, did not deny the reality of the miracles, which had been wrought by Peter and the apostles; they did not contradict their testimony concerning the resurrection and the ascension: but whether they believed it or not, they were fired with indignation, and took counsel to put the apostles to death: and this was also the temper of Paul; whether he believed or did not believe the story of the resurrection, he was exceedingly mad against the saints. The writer of Paul's epistles does not attempt to prove his doctrine by argument: he in many places tells us that his doctrine was not taught him by man, or any invention of his own, which required the ingenuity of argument to prove it: "I certify you, brethren, that the gospel, which was preached of me, is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Paul does not pretend to have been a witness of the story of the resurrection, but he does much more; he asserts that he was himself a witness of the resurrection. After enumerating many appearances of Jesus to his disciples, Paul says of himself, "Last of all, he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." Whether you will admit Paul to have been a *true* witness or not, you cannot deny that he pretends to have been a witness of the resurrection.

The story of his being struck to the ground, as he was journeying to Damascus, has nothing in it, you say, miraculous or extraordinary: you represent him as struck by lightning. It is somewhat extraordinary for a man who is struck by lightning, to have, at the very time, full possession of his understanding; to hear a voice issuing from the lightning, speaking to him in the Hebrew tongue, calling him by his name, and entering into conversation with him. His companions, you say, appear not to have suffered in the same manner: the greater the wonder. If it was a common storm of thunder and lightning which struck Paul and all his companions to the ground, it is somewhat extraordinary that he alone should be hurt; and that, notwithstanding his being struck blind by lightning, he should in other respects be so little hurt, as to be immediately able to walk into the city of Damascus. So difficult is it to oppose truth by an hypothesis! In the character of Paul, you discover a great deal of violence and fanaticism; and such men you observe, are never good moral evidences of any doctrine they preach. Read, sir, Lord Lyttleton's *Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St Paul*, and I think you will be convinced of the contrary. That elegant writer thus expresses his opinion on this subject—“Besides all the proofs of the Christian religion, which may be drawn from the prophecies of the Old Testament, from the necessary connexion it has with the whole system of the Jewish religion, from the miracles of Christ, and from the evidence given of his resurrection by all the other apostles, I think the conversion and apostleship of St Paul alone, duly considered, is of itself, a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a Divine revelation.” I hope this opinion will have some weight with you; it is not the opinion of a lying Bible-prophet, of a stupid evangelist,

or of an *a, b, ab* priest, but of a learned layman, whose illustrious rank received splendour from his talents.

You are displeased with St Paul, for “setting out to prove the resurrection of the *same* body.” You know, I presume, that the resurrection of the same body is not, by all, admitted to be a scriptural doctrine. “In the New Testament (wherein, I think, are contained all the articles of the Christian faith), I find our Saviour and the apostles, to preach the *resurrection of the dead*, and the *resurrection from the dead*, in many places; but I do not remember any place where the resurrection of the same body is so much as mentioned.” This observation of Mr Locke I so far adopt, as to deny that you can produce any place in the writings of St Paul, wherein he sets out to prove the resurrection of the same body. I do not question the possibility of the resurrection of the same body, and I am not ignorant of the manner in which some learned men have explained it (somewhat after the way of your vegetative speck in the kernel of a peach); but as you are discrediting St Paul’s doctrine, you ought to show that what you attempt to discredit is the doctrine of the apostle. As a matter of choice, you had rather have a better body—you will have a better body, “your natural body will be raised a spiritual body, your corruptible will put on incorruption.” You are so much out of humour with your present body, that you inform us, every animal in the creation excels us in something. Now I had always thought, that the single circumstance of our having hands, and their having none, gave us an infinite superiority not only over insects, fishes, snails, and spiders (which you represent as excelling us in locomotive powers), but over all the animals of the creation; and enable us, in the language of Cicero, describing the manifold utility of our hands, to make as it were a new nature of things. As to what you say about the consciousness of exis-

tence being the only conceivable idea of a future life—it proves nothing, either for or against the resurrection of a body, or of the same body: it does not inform us, whether to any or to what substance, material or immaterial, this consciousness is annexed. I leave it, however, to others, who do not admit personal identity to consist in consciousness, to dispute with you on this point, and willingly subscribe to the opinion of Mr Locke, “that nothing but consciousness can unite remote existences into the same person.”

From a caterpillar's passing into a torpid state resembling death, and afterwards appearing a splendid butterfly, and from the (supposed) consciousness of existence which the animal had in these different states, you ask, “Why must I believe, that the resurrection of the same body is necessary to continue in me the consciousness of existence hereafter?” I do not dislike analogical reasoning, when applied to proper objects, and kept within due bounds; but where is it said in Scripture, that the resurrection of the same body is necessary to continue in you the consciousness of existence? Those who admit a conscious state of the soul between death and the resurrection, will contend that the soul is the substance in which consciousness is continued without interruption:—those who deny the intermediate state of the soul as a state of consciousness, will contend that consciousness is not destroyed by death, but suspended by it, as it is suspended during a sound sleep; and that it may as easily be restored after death, as after sleep, during which the faculties of the soul are not extinct, but dormant. Those who think that the soul is nothing distinct from the compages of the body, not a substance but a mere quality, will maintain, that the consciousness appertaining to every individual person is not lost when the body is destroyed; that it is known

to God ; and may, at the general resurrection, be annexed to any system of matter he may think fit, or to that particular compages to which it belonged in this life.

In reading your book, I have been frequently shocked at the virulence of your zeal, at the indecorum of your abuse in applying vulgar and offensive epithets, to men who have been held, and who will long, I trust, continue to be holden, in high estimation. I know that the scar of calumny is seldom wholly effaced ; it remains long after the wound is healed ; and your abuse of holy men and holy things will be remembered when your arguments against them are refuted and forgotten. Moses you term an arrogant coxcomb, a chief assassin ; Aaron, Joshua, Samuel, David, monsters and impostors ; the Jewish kings a parcel of rascals ; Jeremiah and the rest of the prophets, liars ; and Paul a fool, for having written one of the sublimest compositions, and on the most important subject that ever occupied the mind of man—the lesson in our burial service ; this lesson you call a doubtful jargon, as destitute of meaning as the tolling of the bell at the funeral. Men of low condition ! pressed down as you often are, by calamities generally incident to human nature, and groaning under burdens of misery peculiar to your condition, what thought you when you heard this lesson read at the funeral of your child, your parent, or your friend ? Was it mere jargon to you, as destitute of meaning as the tolling of a bell ? No. You understand from it, that you would not all sleep, but that you would all be changed in a moment at the last trump ; you understood from it, that this corruptible must put on incorruption, that this mortal must put on immortality, and that death would be swallowed up in victory ; you understood from it, that if (notwithstanding profane attempts to subvert your faith) ye continue steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, your labour will not be in vain.

YOU seem fond of displaying your skill in science and philosophy; you speak more than once of Euclid; and in censuring St Paul, you intimate to us, that when the apostle says, "one star differeth from another star in glory," he ought to have said, in distance. All men *see* that one star differeth from another star in glory or brightness; but few men *know* that their difference in brightness arises from their difference in distance; and I beg leave to say, that even you, philosopher as you are, do not *know* it. You make an assumption which you cannot prove—that the stars are equal in magnitude, and placed at *different* distances from the earth; but you cannot prove that they are not *different* in magnitude, and placed at *equal* distances, though none of them may be so near to the earth, as to have any sensible annual *parallax*. I beg pardon of my readers for touching upon this subject; but it really moves one's indignation, to see a smattering in philosophy urged as an argument against the veracity of an apostle. "Little learning is a dangerous thing."

"Paul," you say, "affects to be a naturalist; and to prove (you might more properly have said illustrate) his system of resurrection from the principles of vegetation—'Thou fool,' says he, 'that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die;' to which one might reply, in his own language, and say, 'Thou fool, Paul, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die *not*.'" It may be seen, I think, from this passage, who affects to be a naturalist, to be acquainted with the microscopical discoveries of modern times; which were probably neither known to Paul, nor to the Corinthians; and which, had they been known to them both, would have been of little use in the illustration of the subject of the resurrection. Paul said, "that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die:" every husbandman in Corinth, though unable perhaps to

define the term death, would understand the apostle's phrase in a popular sense, and agree with him that a grain of wheat must become *rotten* in the ground before it could sprout: and that, as God raised from a rotten grain of wheat, the roots, the stem, the leaves, the ear of a new plant, he might also cause a new body to spring up from the rotten carcass in the grave. *Dr Clarke* observes, "In like manner as in every grain of corn there is contained a minute insensible seminal principle, which is itself the entire future blade and ear, and in due season, when all the rest of the grain is corrupted, evolves and unfolds itself visibly to the eye; so our present mortal and corruptible body may be but the *exuviae*, as it were, of some hidden and at present insensible principle (possibly the present seat of the soul), which at the resurrection shall discover itself in its proper form." I do not agree with this great man (for such I esteem him) in this philosophical conjecture; but the quotation may serve to show you, that the germ does not evolve and unfold itself visibly to the eye till all the rest of the grain is *corrupted*; that is, in the language and meaning of St Paul, till it *dies*. Though the authority of Jesus may have as little weight with you as that of Paul, yet it may not be improper to quote our Saviour's expression, when he foretells the numerous disciples which his death would produce. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and *die*, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." You perceive from this, that the Jews thought the death of the grain was necessary to its reproduction; hence every one may see what little reason you had to object to the apostle's popular illustration of the possibility of a resurrection. Had he known as much as any naturalist in Europe does, of the progress of an animal from one state to another, as from a worm to a butterfly

(which you think applies to the case), I am of opinion he would not have used that illustration in preference to what he has used, which is obvious and satisfactory.

Whether the fourteen epistles ascribed to Paul, were written by him or not, is, in your judgment, a matter of indifference. So far from being a matter of indifference, I consider the genuineness of St Paul's epistles to be a matter of the greatest importance: for if the epistles, ascribed to Paul, were written by him (and there is unquestionable proof that they were), it will be difficult for you, or for any man upon fair principles of sound reasoning, to deny that the Christian religion is true. The argument is a short one, and obvious to every capacity. It stands thus: St Paul wrote several letters to those whom, in different countries, he had converted to the Christian faith; in these letters he affirms two things; first, that he had wrought miracles in their presence; secondly, that many of themselves had received the gift of tongues, and other miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost. The persons to whom these letters were addressed, must, on reading them, have certainly known, whether Paul affirmed what was true, or told a plain lie; they must have known, whether they had seen him work miracles; they must have been conscious, whether they themselves did or did not possess any miraculous gifts. Now, can you, or can any man, believe, for a moment, that Paul (a man certainly of great abilities) would have written public letters full of lies, and which could not fail of being discovered to be lies, as soon as his letters were read? Paul could not be guilty of falsehood in these two points, or in either of them; and if either of them be true, the Christian religion is true. References to these two points are frequent in St Paul's epistles: I will mention only a few. In his epistle to the Galatians, he says (chap. iii. 2, 5), "This only would I learn of you, received ye the Spirit (gifts of

the Spirit), by the works of the law? He ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you." To the Thessalonians he says (1 Thess. i. 5), "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost." To the Corinthians he thus expresses himself (1 Cor. ii. 4): "My preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit, and of power;" and he adds the reason for his working miracles—"That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." With what alacrity would the faction at Corinth, which opposed the apostle, have laid hold of this, and many similar declarations in the letter, had they been able to have detected any falsehood in them! There is no need to multiply words on so clear a point. The genuineness of Paul's epistles proves their authenticity, independently of every other proof: for it is absurd in the extreme, to suppose him, under circumstances of obvious detection, capable of advancing what was not true: and if Paul's epistles be both genuine and authentic, the Christian religion is true. Think of this argument.

You close your observations in the following manner: "Should the Bible (meaning, as I have before remarked, the Old Testament) and Testament hereafter fall, it is not I that have been the occasion." You look, I think, upon your production with a parent's partial eye, when you speak of it in such a style of self-complacency. The Bible, sir, has withstood the learning of Porphyry and the power of Julian, to say nothing of the Manichean Faustus. It has resisted the genius of Bolingbroke, and the wit of Voltaire, to say nothing of a numerous herd of inferior assailants—and it will not fall by your force. You have barbed anew the blunted arrows of former adversaries; you have feathered them with blasphemy and ridicule;

dipped them in your deadliest poison; aimed them with your utmost skill; shot them against the shield of faith with your utmost vigour; but, like the feeble javelin of aged *Priam*, they will scarcely reach the mark—will fall to the ground without a stroke.

LETTER X.

THE remaining part of your work can hardly be made the subject of animadversion. It principally consists of unsupported assertions, abusive appellations, illiberal sarcasms, strifes of words, profane babblings, and oppositions of science, falsely so called. I am hurt at being, in mere justice to the subject, under the necessity of using such harsh language; and am sincerely sorry that, from what cause I know not, your mind has received a wrong bias in every point respecting revealed religion. You are capable of better things; for there is a philosophical sublimity in some of your ideas, when you speak of the Supreme Being as the Creator of the universe. That you may not accuse me of disrespect, in passing over any of your work without bestowing proper attention upon it, I will wait upon you through what you call your Conclusion.

You refer your reader to the former part of the *Age of Reason*; in which you have spoken of what you esteem three frauds—mystery, miracle, and prophecy. I have not at hand the book to which you refer, and know not what you have said on these subjects. They are subjects of great importance, and we probably should differ essentially in our opinion concerning them: but I confess I am not sorry to be excused from examining what you have said on these points. The specimen of your reasoning, which is now before me, has taken from me every inclination to trouble

either my reader or myself, with any observations on your former book.

You admit the possibility of God's revealing his will to man: yet "the thing so revealed," you say, "is revelation to the person only to whom it is made; his account of it to another is not revelation." This is true; his account is simple testimony. You add, "there is no possible criterion to judge of the truth of what he says." This I positively deny; and contend that a real miracle, performed in attestation of a revealed truth, is a certain criterion by which we may judge of the truth of that attestation. I am perfectly aware of the objections which may be made to this position. I have examined them with care. I acknowledge them to be of weight; but I do not speak unadvisedly, or as wishing to dictate to other men, when I say, that I am persuaded the position is true. So thought Moses, when, in the matter of Korah, he said to the Israelites, "If these men die the common death of all men, then the Lord hath not sent me." So thought Elijah, when he said, "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day, that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant." And the people, before whom he spake, were of the same opinion; for, when the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt-sacrifice, they said, "The Lord he is the God." So thought our Saviour, when he said, the "works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me;" and "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not." What reason have we to believe Jesus speaking in the Gospel, and to disbelieve the Mahomet speaking in the Koran? Both of them lay claim to a Divine commission; and yet we receive the words of the one as a revelation from God, and we reject the words of the other as an imposture of man. The reason is evident. Jesus established his

pretensions not by alleging any secret communication with the Deity, but by working numerous and indubitable miracles in the presence of thousands, and which the most bitter and watchful of his enemies could not disallow; but Mahomet wrought no miracles at all. Nor is a miracle the only criterion by which we may judge of the truth of a revelation. If a series of prophets should, through a course of many centuries, predict the appearance of a certain person, whom God would, at a particular time, send into the world for a particular end; and at length such a person should appear, in whom all the predictions were minutely accomplished; such a completion of prophecy would be a criterion of the truth of that revelation, which that person should deliver to mankind. Or if a person should now say (as many false prophets have said, and are daily saying), that he had a commission to declare the will of God; and, as a proof of his veracity, should predict that, after his death, he would rise from the dead on the third day; the completion of such a prophecy would I presume, be a sufficient criterion of the truth of what this man might have said, concerning the will of God. "Now I tell you," says Jesus to his disciples, concerning Judas, who was to betray him, "before it come, that when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he. In various parts of the gospels, our Saviour, with the utmost propriety, claims to be received as the messenger of God, not only from the miracles which he wrought, but from the prophecies which were fulfilled in his person, and from the predictions which he himself delivered. Hence, instead of there being no criterion by which he may judge of the truth of the Christian revelation, there are clearly three. It is an easy matter to use an indecorous flippancy of language in speaking of the Christian religion, and, with a supercilious negligence, to class Christ and his apostles amongst the impostors who have figured

in the world; but it is not I think, an easy matter for any man of good sense and sound erudition, to make an impartial examination into any one of the three grounds of Christianity, which I have here mentioned, and to reject it.

What is it, you ask, the Bible teaches? The prophet Micah shall answer you: It teacheth us, "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God;" justice, mercy, and piety, instead of what you contend for—rapine, cruelty, and murder. What is it, you demand, the Testament teaches us? You answer your question, To believe that the Almighty committed debauchery with a woman. Absurd and impious assertion! No, sir, no; this profane doctrine, this miserable stuff, this blasphemous perversion of Scripture, is your doctrine, not that of the New Testament. I will tell you the lesson which it teaches to infidels as well as to believers; it is a lesson which philosophy never taught, which wit cannot ridicule, nor sophistry disprove. The lesson is this: "The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live: all that are in their graves shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

The moral precepts of the gospel are so well fitted to promote the happiness of mankind in this world, and to prepare human nature for the future enjoyment of that blessedness, of which, in our present state, we can form no conception, that I had no expectation they would have met with your disapprobation. You say, however, "As to the scraps of morality, that are irregularly and thinly scattered in those books, they make no part of the pretended thing, revealed religion." "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Is this a scrap of morality?

Is it not rather the concentrated essence of all ethics, the vigorous root from which every branch of moral duty towards each other may be derived? Duties, you know, are distinguished by moralists [into duties of perfect and imperfect obligation; does the Bible teach you nothing, when it instructs you, that this distinction is done away? when it bids you "put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any." These and precepts such as these, you will in vain look for in the codes of *Frederic* or *Justinian*; you cannot find them in our statute books; they were not taught, nor are they taught in the schools of heathen philosophy; or, if some one or two of them should chance to be glanced at by a Plato, a Seneca, or a Cicero, they are not bound upon the consciences of mankind by any sanction. It is in the gospel, and in the gospel alone, that we learn their importance; acts of benevolence and brotherly love may be, to an unbeliever, voluntary acts, to a Christian they are indispensable duties. Is a new commandment no part of revealed religion? "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another." The law of Christian benevolence is enjoined us by Christ himself in the most solemn manner, as the distinguishing badge of our being his disciples.

Two precepts you particularize as inconsistent with the dignity and the nature of man—that of not resenting injuries, and that of loving enemies. Who but yourself ever interpreted literally the proverbial phrase, "If a man smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also!" Did Jesus himself turn the other cheek when the officer of the high priest smote him? It is evident, that a patient acquiescence under slight personal injuries is here enjoined; and that a prone-

ness to revenge, which instigates men to savage acts of brutality for every trifling offence is forbidden. As to loving enemies, it is explained, in another place, to mean, 'the doing them all the good in our power; "if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink." And what, think you, is more likely to preserve peace, and promote kind affections amongst men, than the returning good for evil? Christianity does not order us to love in proportion to the injury: "it does not offer a premium for a crime;" it orders us to let our benevolence extend alike to all, that we may emulate the benignity of God himself, who maketh "his sun to rise on the evil and on the good."

In the law of Moses, retaliation for deliberate injuries had been ordained, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Aristotle, in his treatise of morals, says, that some thought retaliation of personal wrongs an equitable proceeding. *Rhadamanthus* is said to have given it his sanction. The decemviral laws allowed it; the common law of England did not forbid it; and it is said to be still the law of some countries, even in Christendom. But the mild spirit of Christianity absolutely prohibits, not only the retaliation of injuries, but the indulgence of every resentful propensity.

"It has been," you affirm, "the scheme of the Christian church to hold man in ignorance of the Creator, as it is of government to hold him in ignorance of his rights." I appeal to the plain sense of any honest man, to judge whether this representation be true in either particular. When he attends the service of the church, does he discover any design in the minister to keep him in ignorance of his Creator? Are not the public prayers in which he joins, the lessons which are read to him, the sermons which are preached to him, all calculated to impress upon his mind a strong conviction of the mercy, justice, holiness, power, and wisdom, of the one adorable God,

lessed for ever. By these means, which the Christian church hath provided for our instruction, I will venture to say, that the most unlearned congregation of Christians in Great Britain have more just and sublime conceptions of the Creator, a more perfect knowledge of their duty towards him, and a stronger inducement to the practice of virtue, holiness, and temperance, than all the philosophers of all the heathen countries in the world ever had, or now have. If, indeed, your scheme should take place, and men should no longer believe their Bible, then would they soon become as ignorant of the Creator, as all the world was when God called Abraham from his kindred; and as all the world, which has had no communication with either Jews or Christians, now is. Then would they soon bow down to stocks and stones, kiss their hand (as they did in the time of Job, and as the poor African does now) to *the moon walking in brightness, and deny the God that is above*; then would they worship Jupiter, Bacchus, and Venus, and emulate, in the transcendent flagitiousness of their lives, the impure morals of their gods.

What design has government to keep men in ignorance of their rights? None whatever. All wise statesmen are persuaded, that the more men know of their rights, the better subjects they will become. Subjects, not from necessity, but choice, are the firmest friends of every government. The people of Great Britain are well acquainted with their natural and social rights; they understand them better than the people of any other country do; they know that they have a right to be free, not only from the capricious tyranny of any one man's will, but from the more afflicting despotism of republican factions; and it is this very knowledge which attaches them to the constitution of their country. I have no fear that the

people should know too much of their rights; my fear is that they should not know them in all their relations and to their full extent. The government does not desire that men should remain in ignorance of their rights; but it both desires and requires, that they should not disturb the public peace under vain pretences; that they should make themselves acquainted, not merely with the rights, but with the duties also of men in civil society. I am far from ridiculing (as some have done) the rights of man. I have long ago understood, that the poor as well as the rich, and that the rich as well as the poor, have by nature some rights which no human government can justly take from them without their tacit or express consent; and some also, which they themselves have no power to surrender to any government. One of the principal rights of man, in a state either of nature or of society, is a right of property in the fruits of his industry, ingenuity, or good fortune. Does government hold any man in ignorance of this right? So much the contrary, that the chief care of government is to declare, ascertain, modify, and defend this right. Nay, it gives right where nature gives none; it protects the goods of an intestate; and it allows a man, at his death, to dispose of that property, which the law of nature would cause to revert into the common stock. Sincerely as I am attached to the liberties of mankind, I cannot but profess myself an utter enemy to that spurious philosophy, that democratic insanity, which would equalize all property, and level all distinctions in civil society. Personal distinctions, arising from superior probity, learning, eloquence, skill, courage and from every other excellency of talents, are the very blood and nerves of the body politic; they animate the whole, and invigorate every part; without them its bones would become reeds, and its marrow water; it would presently sink into a fetid, senseless

mass of corruption. Power may be used for private ends, and in opposition to the public good; rank may be improperly conferred, and insolently sustained; riches may be wickedly acquired, and viciously applied; but as this is neither necessarily nor generally the case, I cannot agree with those who, in asserting the natural equality of men, spurn the instituted distinctions attending power, rank, and riches. But I mean not to enter into any discussion on this subject, farther than to say, that your crimination of government appears to me to be wholly unfounded; and to express my hope, that no one individual will be so far misled by disquisitions on the rights of man, as to think, that he has any right to do wrong, as to forget that other men have rights as well as he.

You are animated with proper sentiments of piety when you speak of the structure of the universe. No one, indeed, who considers it with attention, can fail of having his mind filled with the supremest veneration for its Author. Who can contemplate, without astonishment, the motion of a comet, running far beyond the orb of Saturn, endeavouring to escape into the pathless regions of unbounded space, yet feeling, at its utmost distance, the attractive influence of the sun, hearing, as it were, the voice of God arresting its progress, and compelling it, after a lapse of ages, to reiterate its ancient course? Who can comprehend the distance of the stars from the earth, and from each other? It is so great that it mocks our conception; our very imagination is terrified, confounded, and lost, when we are told, that a ray of light, which moves at the rate of about ten millions of miles in a minute, will not, though emitted at this instant from the brightest star, reach the earth in less than six years. We think this earth a great globe; and we see the sad wickedness which individuals are often guilty of, in scraping together a little of its dirt: we view, with

still greater astonishment and horror, the mighty ruin which has, in all ages, been brought upon human kind by the low ambition of contending powers, to acquire a temporary possession of a little portion of its surface. But how does the whole of this globe sink, as it were, to nothing, when we consider that a million of earths will scarcely equal the bulk of the sun; that all the stars are suns; and that millions of suns constitute, probably, but a minute portion of that material world, which God hath distributed through the immensity of space. Systems, however, of insensible matter, though arranged in exquisite order, prove only the wisdom and the power of the great Architect of nature. As percipient beings, we look for something more—for his goodness—and we cannot open our eyes without seeing it.

Every portion of the earth, sea, and air, is full of sensitive beings, capable, in their respective orders, of enjoying the good things which God has prepared for their comfort. All the orders of beings are enabled to propagate their kind; and thus provision is made for a successive continuation of happiness. Individuals yield to the law of dissolution, inseparable from the material structure of their bodies; but no gap is thereby left in existence, their place is occupied by other individuals, capable of participating in the goodness of the Almighty. Contemplations such as these fill the mind with humility, benevolence, and piety. But why should we stop here? why not contemplate the goodness of God in the redemption, as well as in the creation of the world? By the death of his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, hath he redeemed the whole human race from the eternal death, which the transgression of Adam had entailed on all his posterity. You believe nothing about the transgression of Adam. The history of Eve and the serpent excites your con-

tempt : you will not admit that it is either a real history, or an allegorical representation of death entering into the world through sin, through disobedience to the command of God. Be it so. You find, however, that death doth reign over all mankind, by whatever means it was introduced : this is not a matter of belief, but of lamentable knowledge. The New Testament tells us, that through the merciful dispensation of God, Christ hath overcome death, and restored man to that immortality which Adam had lost : this also you refuse to believe. Why ? Because you cannot account for the propriety of this redemption. Miserable reason ! stupid objection ! What is there that you can account for ? Not for the germination of a blade of grass, not for the fall of a leaf of the forest—and will you refuse to eat of the fruits of the earth because God has not given you wisdom equal to his own ? Will you refuse to lay hold on immortality, because he has not given you, because he, probably, could not give to such a being as man, a full manifestation of the end for which he designs him, nor of the means requisite for the attainment of that end ? What father of a family can make level to the apprehension of his infant children all the views of happiness which his paternal goodness is preparing for them ? How can he explain to them the utility of reproof, correction, instruction, example ; of all the various means by which he forms their minds to piety, temperance, and probity ? We are children in the hand of God ; we are in the very infancy of our existence ; just separated from the womb of eternal duration ; it may not be possible for the Father of the universe to explain to us (infants in apprehension !) the goodness and the wisdom of his dealings with the sons of men. What qualities of mind will be necessary for our well-doing through all eternity, we know not ; what discipline in this infancy of existence may be necessary for generating these quali-

ties, we know not: whether God could, or could not consistently with the general good, have forgiven the transgression of Adam, without any atonement, we know not: whether the malignity of sin be not so great, so opposite to the general good, that it cannot be forgiven whilst it exists, that is, whilst the mind retains a propensity to it, we know not: so that, if there should be much greater difficulty in comprehending the mode of God's moral government of mankind than there really is, there would be no reason for doubting of its rectitude. If the whole human race be considered as but one small member of a large community of free and intelligent beings of different orders, and if this whole community be subject to discipline, and laws productive of the greatest possible good to the whole system, then may we still more reasonably suspect our capacity to comprehend the wisdom and goodness of all God's proceedings in the moral government of the universe.

You are lavish in your praise of Deism: it is so much better than Atheism, that I mean not to say any thing to its discredit; it is not, however, without its difficulties. What think you of an uncaused cause of every thing? and a Being who has no relation to time, not being older to-day than he was yesterday, nor younger to-day than he will be to-morrow? who has no relation to space, not being a part here and a part there, or a whole any where? What think you of an Omniscient Being, who cannot know the future actions of a man? Or, if his omniscience enables him to know them, what think you of the contingency of human actions. And if human actions are not contingent, what think you of the morality of actions, of the distinction between vice and virtue, crime and innocence, sin and duty? What think you of the infinite goodness of a Being who existed through eternity,

without any emanation of his goodness manifested in the creation of sensitive beings? Or, if you contend that there has been an eternal creation, what think you of an effect coeval with its cause, of matter not posterior to its Maker? What think you of the existence of evil, moral and natural, in the work of an infinite Being, powerful, wise, and good? What think you of the gift of freedom of will, when the abuse of freedom becomes the cause of general misery? I could propose to your consideration a great many other questions of a similar tendency, the contemplation of which has driven not a few from Deism and Atheism, just as the difficulties in revealed religion have driven yourself, and some others, from Christianity to Deism.

For my own part, I can see no reason why either revealed or natural religion should be abandoned, on account of the difficulties which attend either of them. I look up to the incomprehensible Maker of heaven and earth, with unspeakable admiration and self-annihilation, and am a Deist. I contemplate with the utmost gratitude and humility of mind, his unsearchable wisdom and goodness in the redemption of the world from eternal death, through the intervention of his Son, Jesus Christ, and am a Christian. As a Deist, I have little expectation; as a Christian, I have no doubt of a future state. I speak for myself, and may be in an error, as to the ground of the first part of this opinion. You and other men may conclude differently. From the inert nature of matter—from the faculties of the human mind—from the apparent imperfection of God's moral government of the world—from many modes of analogical reasoning, and from other sources, some of the philosophers of antiquity did collect, and modern philosophers may, perhaps, collect a strong probability of a future existence; and not only of a future existence, but (which is quite a distinct question) of a future state of retribution, proportioned to

our mortal conduct in this world. Far be it from to loosen any of the obligations to virtue; but I must confess that I cannot, from the same sources of argumentation, derive any positive assurance on the subject. Think, then, with what thankfulness of heart I receive the word of God, which tells me, that though "in Adam (by the condition of our nature) all die," yet, "in Christ (by the covenant of grace) shall all be made alive." I laid hold on "eternal life as the gift of God through Jesus Christ." I consider it not as any appendage to the nature I derive from Adam, but as the free gift of the Almighty, through his Son, whom he has constituted Lord of all, the Saviour, the Advocate, and the Judge of human kind.

"Deism," you affirm, "teaches us, without the possibility of being mistaken, all that is necessary or proper to be known." There are three things, which all reasonable men admit are necessary and proper to be known—the being of God—the providence of God—a future state of retribution. Whether these three truths are so taught us by Deism, that there is no possibility of being mistaken concerning any of them, let the history of philosophy, and of idolatry, and superstition, in all ages and countries, determine. A volume might be filled with an account of the mistakes into which the greatest reasoners have fallen, and of the uncertainty in which they lived, with respect to every one of these points. I will advert, briefly, only to the last of them. Notwithstanding the illustrious labours of Gassendi, Cudworth, Clarke, Baxter, and of above two hundred other modern writers on the subject, the *natural* mortality or immortality of the human soul is as little understood by us, as it was by the philosophers of Greece or Rome. The opposite opinion of Plato and of Epicurus, on this subject, have their several supporters amongst the learned of the present

age. in Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy, 'in every enlightened part of the world: and they who have been most seriously occupied in the study of the question concerning a future state, as deducible from the nature of the human soul, are least disposed to give, from reason, a positive decision of it either way. The importance of revelation is by nothing rendered more apparent than by the discordant sentiments of learned and good men (for I speak not of the ignorant and immoral) on this point. They show the insufficiency of human reason, in a course of above two thousand years, to unfold the mysteries of human nature, and to furnish, from the contemplation of it, any assurance from the quality of our future condition. If you should ever become persuaded of this insufficiency (and you can scarce fail of becoming so, if you examine the matter deeply), you will, if you act rationally, be disposed to investigate, with seriousness and impartiality, the truth of Christianity. You will say of the gospel, as the Northumbrian heathens said of Paulinus, by whom they were converted to the Christian religion, "the more we reflect on the nature of our soul, the less we know of it. Whilst it animates our body, we may know some of its properties; but when once separated, we know not whither it goes, or from whence it came. Since then the *gospel* pretends to give us clearer notions of these matters, we ought to hear it; and laying aside all passion and prejudice, follow that which shall appear most conformable to right reason."

What a blessing is it to beings, with such limited capacities as ours confessedly are, to have God himself for our instructor in every thing which it much concerns us to know! We are principally concerned in knowing—not the origin of arts, or the recondite depths of science—not the histories of mighty empires desolating the globe by their contentions—not the

subtleties of logic, the mysteries of metaphysics, the sublimities of poetry, or the niceties of criticism. These, and subjects such as these, properly occupy the learned leisure of a few; but the bulk of human kind have ever been, and must ever remain, ignorant of them all; they must, of necessity, remain in the same state with that which a German emperor voluntarily put himself into, when he made a resolution bordering on barbarism, that he would never read a printed book. We are all, of every rank and condition, equally concerned in knowing what will become of us after death; and if we are to live again, we are interested in knowing, whether it be possible for us to do any thing whilst we live here, which may render that future life an happy one. Now, "that thing called Christianity," as you scoffingly speak, that last, best gift of Almighty God, as I esteem it, the gospel of Jesus Christ, has given us the most clear and satisfactory information on both these points. It tells us, what Deism never could have told us, that we shall certainly be raised from the dead; that, whatever be the nature of the soul, we shall certainly live for ever; and that, whilst we live here, it is possible for us to do much towards the rendering that everlasting life an happy one. These are tremendous truths to bad men; they cannot be received and reflected on with indifference by the best; and they suggest to all such a cogent motive to virtuous action, as Deism could not furnish even to *Brutus* himself.

Some men have been warped to infidelity by viciousness of life; and some may have hypocritically professed Christianity from prospects of temporal advantage; but, being a stranger to your character, I neither impute the former to you, nor can admit the latter as operating on myself. The generality of unbelievers are such, from want of information on the subject of

religion; having been engaged from their youth in struggling for worldly distinction, or perplexed with the incessant intricacies of business, or bewildered in the pursuits of pleasure, they have neither ability, inclination, nor leisure, to enter into critical disquisitions concerning the truth of Christianity. Men of this description are soon startled by objections which they are not competent to answer: and the loose morality of the age (so opposite to Christian perfection!) co-operating with their want of scriptural knowledge, they presently get rid of their nursery faith, and are seldom sedulous in the acquisition of another, founded, not on authority, but sober investigation. Presuming, however, that many Deists are as sincere in their belief as I am in mine, and knowing that some are more able, and all as much interested as myself, to make a rational inquiry into the truth of revealed religion, I feel no propensity to judge uncharitably of any of them. They do not think as I do, on a subject surpassing all others in importance; but they are not, on that account, to be spoken of by me with asperity of language, to be thought of by me as persons alienated from the mercies of God. The gospel has been offered to their acceptance; and from whatever cause they reject it, I cannot but esteem their situation to be dangerous. Under the influence of that persuasion I have been induced to write this book. I do not expect to derive from it either fame or profit; these are not improper incentives to honourable activity; but there is a time of life when they cease to direct the judgment of thinking men. What I have written, will not, I fear, make any impression on you; but I indulge a hope, that it may not be without its effect on some of your readers. Infidelity is a rank weed, it threatens to overspread the land; its root is principally fixed amongst the great and opulent; but you are endeavouring to extend the malignity of its poison

through all the classes of the community. There is a class of men for whom I have the greatest respect, and whom I am anxious to preserve from the contamination of your religion—the merchants, manufacturers, and tradesmen of the kingdom. I consider the influence of the example of this class as essential to the welfare of the community. I know that they are in general given to reading, and desirous of information on all subjects.

If this little book should chance to fall into their hands, after they have read yours, and they should think that any of your objections to the authority of the Bible have not been fully answered, I entreat them to attribute the omission to the brevity which I have studied; to my desire of avoiding learned disquisitions; to my inadvertency; to my inability; to any thing, rather than to an impossibility of completely obviating every difficulty you have brought forward. I address the same request to such of the youth of both sexes, as may unhappily have imbibed, from your writings, the poison of infidelity; beseeching them to believe, that all their religious doubts may be removed, though it may not have been in my power to answer, to their satisfaction, all your objections. I pray God that the rising generation of this land may be preserved from that “evil heart of unbelief,” which has brought ruin on a neighbouring nation; that neither a neglected education, nor domestic irreligion, nor evil communication, nor the fashion of a licentious world may ever induce them to forget that religion alone ought to be their rule of life.

In the conclusion of my *Apology for Christianity*, I informed Mr Gibbon of my extreme aversion to public controversy. I am now twenty years older than I was then, and I perceive that this my aversion has increased with my age. I have, through life, aban-

doned my little literary productions to their fate ; such of them as have been attacked, have never received any defence from me ; nor will this receive any, if it should meet with your public notice, or with that of any other man.

Sincerely wishing that you may become a partaker of that faith in revealed religion, which is the foundation of my happiness in this world, and of all my hopes in another, I bid you farewell.

R. LANDAFF.

CALGARTH PARK,
Jan. 20th, 1796.

THE END.

