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R E P R E S E N T A T I O N  
O F T H E  
C O N D U C T A N D O P I N I O N S  
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P R I M I T I V E C H R I S T I A N S,  
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M R . G I B B O N A N D D R . P R I E S T L E Y .



# S E R M O N S

PREACHED BEFORE THE

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

A T S T. M A R Y ' S

IN THE YEAR MDCCXC.

A T T H E

L E C T U R E

FOUNDED BY THE LATE

REV. JOHN BAMPTON, M. A.

CANON OF SALISBURY.

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BY HENRY KETT, M. A.

FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE.

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O X F O R D,

SOLD BY J. FLETCHER; D. PRINCE AND J. COOKE'S  
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Vice-Can. Oxon. . . .

C. C. C.  
May 16. 1791.

TO THE

RIGHT REVEREND

LEWIS BAGOT, LL.D.

LORD BISHOP OF ST. ASAPH.

MY LORD,

THE satisfaction, which I feel on being permitted to dedicate the following work to your Lordship, is greatly diminished when I reflect upon its deficiency in every point, which to persons of your refined judgment must appear essential to correct and elegant composition. My sermons, therefore, can have no stronger claim to your patronage, than that, which arises from their connexion with those sacred studies, which amid the most important scenes of active life, you have  
ever

## D E D I C A T I O N.

ever found leisure to cultivate. When you formerly presided over that eminent Society, which owes so large a share of its present reputation and splendour to your salutary institutions, your discourses from the pulpit were admirably calculated, by the energetick seriousness of your delivery, and the judicious selection of your topicks, to confirm the Students of Oxford in the genuine principles of Christianity. Your writings have no less contributed to the same useful and honourable end; since the Trustees of Warburton, as well as the Society for the propagation of the Gospel have happily afforded you an opportunity of giving similar proofs of your pious labours.

If my Lord other reasons were wanting, to induce me to make this publick address, I should notwithstanding think myself justified in sheltering these earliest fruits of my ecclesiastical studies under your protection. I contemplate in your Lordship's character a striking resemblance, both with respect to  
firmness



# D E D I C A T I O N,

firmness of principles, and zeal for the honour of religion, to those primitive Christians, whose conduct I have endeavoured to delineate, and whose virtues furnished the brightest model for the imitation of succeeding ages.

I have the honour to be,

MY LORD,

Your most obedient,

And humble Servant,

H E N R Y K E T T,

*Extract from the last Will and Testament of  
the late Reverend JOHN BAMPTON,  
Canon of SALISBURY.*

“ I direct and appoint, that the eight  
“ Divinity Lecture Sermons shall be preach-  
“ ed upon either of the following subjects —  
“ to confirm and establish the Christian Faith,  
“ and to confute all heretics and schismatics —  
“ upon the divine authority of the Holy Scrip-  
“ tures, &c.”

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# C O N T E N T S.

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## S E R M O N I.

JEREMIAH VI. 16.

*Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths ; where is the good way ? and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.*

A Vindication of the writings of the fathers of the church in general, and a Recommendation of the works of the earliest fathers in particular. Plan of the ensuing sermons proposed. The object of them to rectify the misrepresentations of Mr. Gibbon and Dr. Priestley with respect to the history of the primitive church.

S E R M O N.

# C O N T E N T S.

## S E R M O N II.

M A R K XVI. 20.

*And they went forth and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word, with signs following.*

The conduct of the primitive Christians considered with reference to the six real causes of the first general establishment of Christianity. I. The miraculous powers exercised by the Disciples and Successors of the apostles. II. The Apologies of the first Christians. III. The zeal of the first Missionaries.

## S E R M O N III.

J E R E M I A H I. 19.

*They shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee.*

IV. The Fortitude of the early Martyrs. The different causes to which that fortitude may be attributed, and its immediate influence on the Pagan world.

S E R M O N

C O N T E N T S.

S E R M O N IV.

EPHESIANS V. 27.

*A glorious Church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish.*

V. The Discipline of the primitive church, with respect to its internal regulations, and its opposition to heresy. VI. The Virtues of the first Christians. The combined Effects of the foregoing causes upon private manners and publick institutions among the nations converted to the faith.

S E R M O N V.

ISAIAH XLIII. 9.

*Who among the people can declare this, and shew us former things? Let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified: or let them hear and say, It is truth.*

Observations on the character of an Historian in general, applied to the Author of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. Particular review of some striking misrepresentations contained in his fifteenth and sixteenth chapters.

S E R M O N

C O N T E N T S.

S E R M O N VI.

J U D E V. 3.

*Earnestly contend for the Faith which was once delivered unto the Saints.*

Remarks on the History of the Early Opinions concerning Christ, and an essay towards a refutation of its leading principles.

S E R M O N VII.

2 T I M O T H Y III. 15.

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.*

Evidences given by the earliest fathers of the church to the books of the New Testament.

S E R M O N VIII.

H E B R E W S XII. 1.

*Wherefore seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of Witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the Sin which doth so easily beset us; and let us run with patience the Race that is set before us; looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our Faith.*

Recapitulation. Analogy between the primitive church and the church of England. Practical inferences.

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# S E R M O N I.

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JEREMIAH VI. 16.

*Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths; where is the good way? and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.*

**T**HE Prophet, in the verses preceding the text, represents in a strain of animated and striking description the supine indifference of the Jews, not only to the divine commandments, but to the temporal judgments which had been the immediate consequences of their impiety. Although they had been favoured by the peculiar protection of the Almighty, and convinced of his power and goodness by his frequent interference to shield them from impending danger, and to scatter around them the blessings of prosperity, their disobedience was unchecked by his awful remonstrances, and their stubbornness was ob-

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durate and incorrigible. Deluded by error, and enslaved by sin, they were alike forgetful of the pure precepts of the law, and of the great examples of piety and obedience, which the records of Israel held out to their observation.

The advice of the Prophet was not less adapted to the spiritual wants of the Jews, than calculated to display an intimate acquaintance with the infirmities of human nature. Man is ever averse to that retrospection which carries with it a sense of his own misconduct; and in his eagerness to grasp the pleasures of the present moment, he listens not to the admonitions of past experience. Scorning the salutary ties of prescription, he mistakes novelty for excellence; and reflects not that in proportion as he differs from the wise and the exemplary who have gone before him, he may become profligate in sentiment and degenerate in practice. The pride of opinion weakens his reverence for departed virtue, and abates his curiosity *to ask for the old paths*, which his Predecessors trod, even when the pursuit of their steps would free him from the tyranny of disordered passions and confirm the principles of his wavering mind.



At a period, distinguished as the present is; by an eager spirit of investigation, it cannot be thought improper, in humble conformity with the advice contained in the text, to leave the beaten fields of literary research, and to explore those paths of Ecclesiastical Learning, which are too undeservedly neglected. While the greatest diligence is applied to every subject which is honoured with the name of antiquity; he cannot fairly be exposed to censure who recommends to general notice those objects of speculation, which combine an inquiry into remote times with the survey of characters so renowned for piety and virtue, as the Fathers of the Church. If his pursuit can in any degree counteract the violence of licentious opinions, and check the progress of Infidelity, it cannot be derided for being frivolous, or condemned for being unprofitable. But if it should prove an object of higher consequence, by fixing the attention more steadily upon the great standard of moral and religious duty, which is set up in the Gospel of Christ; it may fairly be esteemed the faithful guide to useful knowledge, and the powerful auxiliary to true religion.

Whatever relates to those, who have participated with us the common privileges of Christianity, and made the best use of its ad-

vantages, for the enrichment of their understanding, as well as the direction of their conduct; is a subject of curious and profitable inquiry. Their characters and actions command our reverence, and their sentiments fail not to excite our curiosity. We naturally desire to know what sense they annexed to the scriptures; what was their conviction of the divine origin of Christianity; and upon what grounds they embraced the faith themselves, and recommended it to others.

Objections rise in various forms to stop the progress of these researches. As much diligence has been employed in multiplying their number, and augmenting their force: the same diligence may not be wholly unsuccessful in reducing them to their natural size, and in shewing that they are very far from being insurmountable.

The Fathers of the Church then, have been represented as unfavourable to the cultivation of rational and manly piety; because we are told, that in their writings occur the reveries of fanaticism, and the conjectures of visionary refinement.

Now, as the use which ought to be made of their works consists in adhering to whatever  
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is excellent, and disregarding whatever is frivolous; no danger can be incurred by the judicious student, if he should meet with some scattered instances of weak argument and unrestrained imagination. Since there is the widest difference between a blind and implicit reverence for every work which is sanctioned by the name of antiquity, and a selection of those parts of its genuine productions which may be made conducive to solid improvement and moral benefit. Such a line of discrimination is universally marked out in all departments of literature and science to make them produce the desired ends. To reject the expositions of the fathers, when they reject the obvious and rational interpretation of scripture, is a valuable and unerring rule, and an effectual security against being misled. The failings of a few, in a few instances, ought not to involve the works of all in indiscriminate and uncandid condemnation. To abandon them because some proofs of visionary refinement are to be found, is equally unreasonable and unjust, as to censure the study of the Hebrew language, on account of the forced constructions of Hutchinſon; or to relinquish the researches of natural philosophy, on perusing the fanciful theories of Cartesius,

Moralists observe that due remarks on the pernicious tendency of vicious indulgence may contribute materially to the regulation of the manners. Pursuing a similar train of reasoning we maintain that no small degree of intellectual improvement may be derived from contemplating the progress of error. For if we discover the occasions on which great and enlightened minds have deviated from the paths of right reason into the mazes of falsehood, our understandings will be gradually weaned from that implicit homage which we too fondly pay to a favourite name, and we shall become more scrupulous and circumspect in the admission of opinions which are not founded on the basis of truth. The survey of such deviations will extinguish, likewise, the petulance of dogmatism, and the pride of conceit. He who observes, that writers conspicuous for vivacity of fancy, extent of learning, and acuteness of penetration have some times been hurried into weak conclusions, or misled by trifling speculations; will advance with more deliberate and cautious steps in the progress of his inquiries; he will be more candid in his observations, and more inclined to compassionate than to censure the infirmity of the human intellect. When in the course of his studies he remarks that a great mind has in any instance deserted the

dictates

dictates of sober reason for the phantoms of paradox, he will feel a sensation of regret similar to that which is excited on seeing the virtuous fall a sacrifice to the allurements of casual temptation. Comprehensive knowledge and splendid talents afford no constant security against the delusions of fancy, and the wiles of imposture, Origen gave way to the most chimerical expositions of scripture, and Tertullian embraced the preposterous reveries of Montanus. Thus as the great art of life consists in extracting good out of evil; so even from the imperfections of these writers may be drawn those considerations which encourage Humility of mind, and are favourable to genuine Liberality of sentiment,

Considerable learning united with much critical skill has been employed, in endeavouring to expose the Credulity of the fathers. It has been urged that they have admitted many Facts and Opinions to a place in their writings, which were adopted upon insufficient grounds.

Upon an impartial examination of the passages, upon which this charge principally depends for support, it will appear, that many of the supposed errors arise from misrepresentation; that many relate to trifling circum-

stances, many are dispersed among the sentiments of individuals, and not among the tenets of the church; and have no relation whatever, to publick principles of belief, or publick terms of communion. How therefore these peculiarities conspire to make them generally unserviceable in the cause of religion, it is difficult to comprehend. If any attempts to elevate the fathers to the high rank of the apostles, were made by their advocates; if they were affirmed to have been assisted by inspiration; or to have been endowed, above the common lot of mankind, with infallibility; the objection would, doubtless, carry great force against such ambitious pretensions. But we contend only that they deserve our regard as witnesses of the opinions of their respective ages; as historians of the facts which were accessible to their inquiries; and as teachers whose piety and learning eminently distinguished them from all their contemporaries. Sharing the imperfections of other writers, they fairly claim the same indulgence. The faults imputed to them, ought frequently to be imputed to the times in which they lived; when accuracy of research was often precluded by numerous obstacles, and when ardent zeal induced them to press every circumstance into their service, which carried with it even the appearance

appearance of truth. If the plea of credulity deserves to be admitted as a ground of rejection, with equal or perhaps superiour force does it operate against some of the most celebrated authors of Greece and Rome. But while judgment can discern the probability of facts; while it can appretiate the credit of witnesses, and discriminate the gradations of evidence; the faults of historians will be weighed against their excellences, and such of them will unquestionably be entitled to high esteem whose veracity preponderates in the balance,

This charge, therefore, cannot in any degree induce us to conclude, that because they admitted some disputable facts with too much precipitation, they therefore embraced Christianity itself upon insufficient grounds.

For supposing their credulity to have been as excessive as some writers are willing to represent, whence arises the probability that it was the basis of their conversion? Had Christianity been a *cunningly devised fable*, calculated to delude the imagination, and laying no restraints on the conduct, there would be some colour for the charge; but faith in a crucified Redeemer was not a merely speculative point,

point, which required no more than the passive assent of the understanding. It by no means resembled an adherence to the Pagan mythology, which charmed the fancy by the beauty of its objects, and even authorized the most depraved corruptions of the heart. The Christian convert was obliged to turn aside from the prospect of worldly interest, to oppose the tide of ridicule and persecution, and to recommend himself to the church by a series of exertions the most opposite to his former pursuits, and the most painful to human nature. His sincerity was called to the severest trial by the austerities of mortification, and by the voluntary rejection of sensual pleasure. It was his daily endeavour to correct all his irregular desires, and it was his steadfast resolve to forfeit even life itself, rather than recant the vows of baptism, and bow before the altar of idolatry. His faith therefore must necessarily have been the result of sober and serious conviction, not of blind and headstrong credulity. In the exercise of his belief he discovered an enlightened understanding, which yielded a ready assent to the evidences of revelation, and followed the dictates of divine truth with alacrity and gladness.

The deficiency of the Fathers with respect to topicks of morality has likewise been much  
misre-



misrepresented. They have been charged with deviating from the standard of scripture, and with encouraging the subtleties and evasions of disingenuous casuistry. The accusation, however, carries not with it even the slightest plausibility, except when brought against one Father in particular, whose general sentiments are far from justifying so vague a charge. While their accusers censure the rules of conduct marked out by some of the fathers, they make the candid concession, that their characters and actions were eminent for piety and virtue. This tribute of just applause furnishes us with a strong presumption in favour of the soundness of their instructions; since it is highly improbable, that theory should degenerate into corruption, where practise is consistent with the rules of morality and religion. As a decisive argument in vindication of their ethicks, it ought particularly to be observed, that the most judicious modern writers upon the subject of Jurisprudence have derived information from them, and have gratefully acknowledged the favour. The general principles and particular sentiments of Chrysofom and of Basil have given solidity of argument and copiousness of illustration to the celebrated treatises of Grotius and of Pufendorf.

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Even the Author whose acute criticisms, and original remarks have given the greatest force to his censures, has candidly acknowledged that peculiar merit which constitutes the strongest recommendation of the ecclesiastical writers. “ They abound in strong and  
 “ solid proofs of the fundamental principles of  
 “ Christianity, and they teach many excellent  
 “ things which contribute to the clear understanding of the scriptures, in which these  
 “ mysteries are contained. In this respect,  
 “ their authority is of great use, and may  
 “ serve as a probable argument of the truth.”

A declaration such as this, is of no small importance ; since it manifestly points out the great advantage of their testimony, by deducing the fundamental principles of the faith through their works. Thus they become eminently useful by furnishing a new and curious illustration of the scriptures, and by supplying a safe repository for the doctrines of the gospel.

From the concessions, therefore, of censurers themselves, may be drawn no small degree of encouragement to prosecute ecclesiastical studies, and to investigate the labours of the wise and good, who zealously espousing  
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the cause of Christianity have written in its vindication, and sacrificed every worldly object to its glory. In their works may be found specimens of elegant Composition to gratify the taste; interesting Facts to enlarge the circle of knowledge; and Examples of piety to amend the heart.

The reader of the fathers is convinced that although the prize of literature is borne away by the classical authors of Greece and Rome; yet similar beauties distinguish the compositions which are the objects of his pursuit. Neither the graces of simplicity, nor the splendour of ornament were confined to Xenophon and Plato, nor to Livy and Cicero; for every impartial critick will commend the pure stile of Lactantius; the rich imagery, and apposite illustrations of Theodoret; the classical fluency of Minucius Felix; the uniform perspicuity of Basil; the glowing effusions of Gregory of Nazianzum; and the exuberant and attracting eloquence of Chrysostom, and Cyprian.

To connect the different provinces of literature by new associations, is a pleasing and a profitable task. If science has acted as the useful ally to theology, the learning of Greece and

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and Rome has the best pretensions to claim the same honourable employment in the service of sacred history. The works of Polybius, Livy and Diodorus Siculus throw a strong light upon the prophecies of Isaiah and Daniel. The relations of Suetonius, Tacitus, and Pliny corroborate the evidence of the gospels, and illustrate the early events of the church. The sentiments of Plato are no less useful in developing the principles of the ancient heresies; and even from the sarcastick fallies of Lucian, and the illiberal representations of Julian, may be derived considerable information respecting the conduct of their christian contemporaries.

From the fathers we may learn with what unremitting care the Holy Scriptures were preserved during successive ages. The quotations which abound in their works furnish strong and convincing proofs of the authenticity of the present copies. By them we are informed that these scriptures were zealously appealed to and consulted by writers who were unanimous upon no other subject. Their authenticity was held to be indisputable. They were repeatedly made the arbiters of controversy, and the guides of faith and practice. Hence also we estimate the veneration in which they were

were held, and the vigilance with which they were guarded. Hence we derive the most perfect assurance and strongest evidence that they have escaped un mutilated, and uncorrupted from the tumult of Controversy, the artifice of Fraud, the hostility of Paganism, and the ravages of Time.

We may not only trace the progress of the scriptures until the ancient manuscripts which now exist, give the strongest assurance that no subsequent corruption took place ; but we may remark likewise the various Revolutions of the church. The prospect of primitive christianity, in all its various states of depression and of triumph, is open to our view. We behold it rising from the shade of obscurity, opposed in its advances to general observation by formidable obstacles, and at length establishing an extensive and supreme dominion.

The celebrated work of Eusebius stands first as a regular history, in the order both of time and of excellence, to throw light upon this interesting subject. The variety and originality of its contents ; as well as the diligence and judgment of the writer, supersede in a great degree, the necessity of recurring to other sources for early intelligence ; and supply no small consolation for the loss of many monuments

monuments of christian antiquity which have long since perished.

In a survey so comprehensive, examples may be found of the purest and most exalted virtue. Here we may contemplate the strictest integrity of conduct, and the most unremitting attention to duty; zeal tempered by moderation in opposing the encroachments of heresy, and courage free from rashness in defying the malice of power. To the volumes of classical history we are directed by the wisdom of our early teachers, for incentives to the practise of whatever is fair and good. We admire the tranquil dignity of Socrates, the noble moderation of Cincinnatus, and the unconquerable spirit of Hannibal. But is not example more powerfully recommended, and ought it not to have greater efficacy when superiour virtues spring from superiour principles, and are productive of more valuable effects? When obedience to the Supreme Being is the leading inducement to action, and the attainment of everlasting happiness is its transcendant and invaluable end? For this reason, the commendation bestowed upon the illustrious characters of prophane history is languid and transitory, when compared with the sentiments with which we are inspired, on contemplating

templating the conduct of those who have gone before us in the faith. The ingenuous mind is struck with the perfection of christian principles and with the most chearful obedience to the dictates of the gospel, when it remarks the frugality of the venerable Basil, who although he was the opulent Metropolitan of Cæsarea, bestowed all his revenues upon the poor; the noble moderation of Gregory of Nazianzum, who voluntarily resigned his bishoprick to preserve the harmony of the church; the benevolent condescension of the Empress Pulcheria, who frequently retired from the splendour of a court, to visit the abodes of indigence and sickness; and the mildness of the amiable and learned Pamphilus when placidly resigning himself to the flaming pile.

Examples such as these, while they rouse the mind of a Christian to sacred emulation, have likewise an immediate tendency to confirm his Faith. The early Converts had the best opportunity to examine the grounds of their religion; since they lived so near to the period when its divine Author appeared upon earth. As they were prompted to act with such unshaken constancy, upon the most trying occasions of life, they must have had full

assurance and perfect satisfaction for the truth and the importance of all they believed. Their conduct therefore naturally impresses upon our minds a stronger persuasion of the truth of their principles, than the most ingenious and acute reasonings of modern Theologians. The arguments in favour of a divine revelation may be opposed by the arguments for Deism, but the evidence of Facts can never be disproved. It is level to the capacities of all Mankind, and produces the speediest, the clearest and the most durable conviction.

Such is the nature of these studies, such is the information which they hold out to the inquisitive, and such are the advantages which they confer on the impartial.

Far be it however from our design, to paint them in colours that are too splendid, or to bestow on them the commendation of equal and indiscriminate excellence. To render the study of the Fathers truly useful, a distinction must not only be made between the several works of one Author, but between the works of different Authors of different ages. Without subscribing to the censures which are frequently thrown upon the later Fathers of the Church, it may properly be remarked, that  
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the manners and customs, the institutions, and the literature of the two centuries which immediately succeeded the Incarnation of our Lord form objects of infinitely great importance in the opinion of an ecclesiastical Student than any thing which relates to the following times. The seeds of christian degeneracy began to be sown in the fourth century. At that period, and perhaps not before, there are visible traces of those rites and establishments which encumbered Christianity with burthenfome appendages and afterwards brought down upon the Church of Rome the just and weighty charge of corruption. Many Writers have been led into uncandid and confused misrepresentation by losing sight of this important distinction, and by throwing the same censure upon all the Fathers have held out fallacious lights to mislead their unsuspecting Readers. The failings of a few have been unjustly attributed to all; the sentiments of individuals have been represented as the language of communities; and the motives, which actuated degenerate ages, have been imputed to the purest times. In vain therefore we may sometimes look for that accurate delineation of History which carefully assigns to each period of time its appropriate defects and virtues, and which never blends the discordant cha-

racteristicks of various ages in one confused mass of unqualified generalization.

The utility of the writings of the Fathers is in many respects disputable, if placed in competition with more modern Theologians who have brought more extensive learning and more sound philosophy to the elucidation of scripture, and have combated the attacks of Infidels with more profound and more subtle arguments. The study of the Oriental languages, in particular, which among the Antients was almost intirely confined to Origen and Jerom, and the improvement of the general art of Criticism have given a manifest superiority to the Moderns. If however the palm of victory be adjudged to them on account of more extensive attainments, there is one advantage on the side of the earlier Fathers which cannot be counterbalanced. Their antiquity places them in an exalted situation, from which they address us in a tone of such solemnity as excites our earnest attention. In the foremost rank of Christians stand the Apostles, to whom we pay that reverential deference which is due to the inspired Ambassadors of Heaven. The next in order are those, who enjoyed the unspeakable satisfaction and peculiar privilege of conversing familiarly

familiarly with them, and hearing from their sacred lips the *words of eternal life*. Their evidence in the cause of our religion is truly important and valuable, if we consider the high improbability of their deviation in any fundamental point from the principles of doctrine and practice laid down by their great Masters. They will recommend themselves more strongly to our notice, if we recollect any instances in which the government of the primitive Churches was committed to their care. From the qualifications enumerated by St. Paul as requisite for a charge so weighty, we may conclude that the Apostles were particularly careful in confining the superintendance of the christian communities to those, who were not only eminent for moral graces, but for rectitude of sentiment in all the articles of the faith, as well as for peculiar abilities to communicate instruction to their flocks. The immediate successors of these apostolical Fathers claim likewise great regard, if we consider their conformity in essential points with the precepts of the Gospel, and the sentiments of their Predecessors. Thus the connections with the Disciples of our Lord, although they are in some degree remote, establish the respectability, and confirm the credit of the

writers of the first and second century ; and thus the Apostles become not only conspicuous from their own lustre, but impart splendour to all around them.

Hence from the great store of literature which the Church has accumulated from age to age, there are certain productions which deserve to be selected with peculiar care. The works of those, whose names have been recited, are valuable for elegance of Stile, faithfulness of Narrative, fervour of Piety, or copiousness of Examples. But allowing the strength of these recommendations, we hesitate not to conclude that the first attention of an ecclesiastical student is most properly directed to Clemens Romanus, Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Irenæus, and Athenagoras.

If it be considered that their writings immediately succeeded the publication of the New Testament ; that they are the repositories of sacred History which in the order of time claim the nearest place to the Gospel ; that they are the monuments of the sincerity of the early Converts, and the evidences of the authenticity of the New Testament, they become very interesting subjects of speculation,

tion. We shall raise these works to a much greater height of esteem if we consider the situations and the attainments of their respective Authors. The ages in which they flourished were singularly propitious to the acquirement of evangelical knowledge, as they drew christianity from its source. Some of them were exalted to the highest rank in the Church, and others were distinguished by comprehensive learning. Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp and Irenæus were Bishops of the most populous and celebrated cities of the Roman empire, and Justin and Athenagoras were instructed in the wisdom of the antient Philosophers. The lives of all were consecrated to the faith; and such was their unconquerable adherence to the christian cause, that Ignatius, Polycarp and Justin sealed its truth with their blood.

The field of information which their works open to our view is wide and interesting. Here are to be found the prevailing sentiments of the first Christians, the testimony borne to the inspired volume, and the interpretation first made of its contents. Here are described the first heresies; and what measures were adopted to confute them; the discipline esta-

blished in the infant Church, the form of its government, and the various and cruel machinations of its enemies. Moreover, in them may be seen the earnestness of the primitive Believers for the glory of God, and their solicitude for the salvation of Man; what was their support during the vicissitudes of life; and what the ground of their hopes, amid the sufferings of martyrdom.

Such topicks are at all times curious and edifying. In the present day an accurate inquiry into them is more particularly seasonable, when the actions and opinions of the first Christians have been placed in the most unfavourable light, and painted in the darkest colours. When one writer prompted by blind partiality to their implacable enemies, has stripped them of their most distinguished virtues, and defrauded them of their just praise: and when another has elevated the earliest Hereticks to the rank of Orthodox Believers, and drawn arguments from the supposed tenets of the primitive ages, in order to deprive Christianity of its essential doctrine, by reducing the Eternal Son of God to the common level of human nature,

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Such manifest prejudice, and such perversion of history need not disturb the tranquillity of the timid, nor unsettle the principles of the pious ; unless truth will relinquish her antient conquests, and leave her cause to be tried at the tribunal of the most unjust misrepresentation.

For the *elegant Historian of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire* is too precipitate in his decisions, if he thinks that the Religion which has overcome the assaults of violence, and repelled the arguments of scepticism ; which has triumphed over every obstacle that has impeded its progress for the long period of seventeen centuries is at length to be shaken by the cavils of sarcasm, and subverted by the artifices of sophistry.

Before an implicit regard be paid to the indefatigable Author of *the Early Opinions concerning Christ*, justice and impartiality seem to require, that the decisions of the ecclesiastical Writers should be fully and accurately exhibited ; and that their evidence should not be tortured by prejudice to speak the language of his favourite hypothesis.

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The air of novelty which is diffused over the productions of these Writers may operate as an attraction upon the inconsiderate and the unwary. But where novelty is sometimes supposed to exist, on a closer examination, it is not to be found. The dress may strike by its singularity, but on a more accurate inspection, the features of ancient error will be recognized and detected. Many of their sentiments are the same or nearly the same to those which formerly prevailed. Like a subterraneous river they are concealed for a time, and again come forth to view. The fundamental error of the Unitarians is a modification of the opinion of Socinus, which was derived from the Hereticks of the early ages. Their interpretations of scripture and their sophistical arguments are either drawn from the works of Zuicker and of Episcopius, or from the ample compilations of the Brethren of Poland. The degrading description which the *Historian of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire* has given of the Jewish nation may be traced through the popular narratives of Voltaire, and the obsolete works of Collins and Tindal.

To trace the progress of these sentiments and characters, and to ascertain their original  
Authors,



Authors, is a pleasing pursuit to the ecclesiastical Student. His desire to make an accurate estimate of the conduct and sentiments of the primitive Christians gives additional vigour to his researches into the pious monuments of antiquity. He compares the antient portrait with the copies of modern artists, and carefully examines how far they have preserved a resemblance of those original features which he has been ever accustomed to contemplate with veneration and delight. In order to take as comprehensive a survey of the subject, as seems fully necessary for the occasion; he considers the CONDUCT of the Christians of the first and second century, by examining the six immediate causes which cooperated in the propagation of the Gospel; viz.

1. The MIRACLES wrought in the primitive Church.

2. The APOLOGIES addressed to Emperors in vindication of the Christian cause.

3. The Zeal of the FIRST PREACHERS in disseminating the Knowledge of Christianity.

4. The Fortitude of the early MARTYRS.

5. The

5. The DISCIPLINE of the primitive Church.

6. The Conformity of the MANNERS of the first Christians with the precepts of the Gospel.

He moreover considers their SENTIMENTS with respect to the evidence given to the New Testament; he examines certain Assertions made by the Writers before mentioned, and closes his Disquisition with practical inferences.

Such will be the subjects of the following Lectures. The advantages which the serious lover of Truth, and the sincere follower of Christ may derive from the investigation, are manifold and important. Justice will be rendered to injured merit and to aspersed innocence; the superintendance of the Almighty in the diffusion of the Gospel will be fairly stated; the estimation, in which the sacred volume was at first held, will be manifested; and the faith, which was once delivered to the Saints, will be vindicated and confirmed.

Moreover,

Moreover, this inquiry will enable us to ascertain the high respect which the most authentick and most antient remains of christian antiquity merit ; it will illustrate the external evidences of Christianity, demonstrate that the doctrine of the primitive ages is the doctrine of the Church of England ; and thus ultimately confirm the steadiness of our faith, and invigorate the motives of our obedience.



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# S E R M O N    I I.

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M A R K    X V I.    20.

*And they went forth and preached every where,  
the Lord working with them, and confirming  
the Word, with signs following.*

**O**F all the Revolutions which have taken place upon the great theatre of the world, there is no one so calculated to attract the attention of the learned, to rouse the curiosity of the inquisitive, or to excite the gratitude of the pious, as that which has been effected by the Establishment of Christianity. The page of History displays to us various instances, in which conquered nations have been compelled to acknowledge the authority of one mighty Sovereign, and to yield a reluctant and temporary submission to the terror of his arms. It also presents us with examples of Philosophers who have disseminated

nated discoveries of science, and taught systems of ethicks within the narrow circle of their disciples. But to simplify the leading principles of social and religious obligation, to harmonize them in one comprehensive plan, to accommodate them to the capacity of every individual, and to propagate them by the gentle arts of persuasion, has never been the project of any Legislator, or of any Philosopher. Such a design was as far above human ingenuity to contrive, as surpassing human power to execute. The Plan, and the Execution were reserved for the Prince of Peace; and the final cause for which he condescended to be so employed, and for which such essential changes have been made in the sentiments of the most enlightened part of the globe, equally includes the Glory of God, and the temporal and eternal Welfare of Mankind.

The obstacles however which opposed the first reception of Christianity were so numerous and formidable; and the human instruments employed for its diffusion so apparently weak and insufficient, that a comparison between them will not only shew that the passions and opposition of man far from impeding the divine designs, may ultimately become the means of their perfect accomplishment; but will

will fully demonstrate the divine origin of Christianity by displaying the powerful assistance which the Almighty supplied for its establishment.

The simple and illiterate Fishermen of Galilee and their Disciples in converting a corrupted, were obliged also to propitiate an hostile world. They dispelled the bigotry of the Jew, and confuted the cavils of the Philosopher. Though aspersed by the slander of the malicious, and exposed to the sword of the powerful, in a short period of time they induced multitudes of various Nations who were equally distinguished by the peculiarity of their manners, and the diversity of their language, to forsake the religion of their ancestors. The converts whom they made deserted ceremonies and institutions which were defended by vigorous authority, sanctified by remote age, and associated with the most alluring gratification of the Passions. Their minds were purified as well as enlightened by the new Faith which they had embraced, and the incomparable excellency of its precepts was visible in the rapid growth of private virtues, and the gradual reformation of publick enormities.

The Six grand Causes by which this Revolution was produced, were as extraordinary  
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in their nature, as salutary in their effects. On some occasions, the divine assistance was vouchsafed to the first christians, and they were endued with the power of working Miracles. The exertions of the Apologists were called forth to vindicate the Professors of the faith from slander, and to explain the nature and design of their Religion. Inspired by the most ardent zeal, the first Missionaries travelled into various countries to sow the seeds of the gospel. The fortitude of the most eminent Martyrs was brought to the severest trial by torture and by death. A peculiar form of Government was established in the infant church, and its institutions were accompanied by that regularity of Manners, which as it was uniformly consistent with the evangelical precepts, gave to those precepts a powerful recommendation among the Gentiles, and left a bright example for the imitation of succeeding ages.

Of all these various causes combining to produce one great effect, we shall first consider the Miraculous powers.

That miraculous Powers were exercised after the death of the Apostles, upon certain occasions, is a truth supported by the unanimous



mous and successive testimony of the Fathers down to the Reign of the Emperour Julian. The particular species of miracle which the fathers describe as having been most frequently wrought, was the expulsion of Evil Spirits from the bodies of Men. If however it should only be supposed that by demoniacal possessions are represented those diseases which from their violent symptoms resemble the influence of evil spirits; such a supposition can make no difference with respect to the supernatural operation.

For as no ordinary means of relief were employed, the instantaneous Recovery of the persons afflicted, was altogether miraculous. These wonderful interpositions of Providence are recorded too, not as traditionary tales or vague reports, but as events publicly known, and credibly attested. The fathers hold them forth as conspicuous marks of the Truth of christianity, and are so far from confining their narrations to the christian communities who might possibly be suspected of too great a degree of credulity, that they confidently publish them to the Pagans. In their addresses to Magistrates and to Emperours, they state them as incontrovertible facts, when the detection of falshood and the discovery of imposture,

posture, would not only have sunk the cause which they wished to promote in irretrievable discredit; but have exposed them to the indignation and vengeance of insulted authority.

Modern writers have indulged so sceptical a disposition, as to question the probability of these miracles, or rather to deny that they ever were wrought. *The ingenious Author of the Life of Cicero* has employed the classical purity of his stile, and the comprehensive reach of his understanding, in the discussion of this subject. We pay with cheerfulness the tribute of praise to his learning and abilities, but at the same time regret their misapplication and abuse. While endeavouring to demolish the outworks of the Church, he obliquely glanced at the fortress itself, and while he laboured to invalidate the credit of the fathers, seemed careless of the effect which his arguments might ultimately produce upon the general evidences of revelation. His observations, if admitted in their obvious sense, will lead to consequences the most alarming to Christianity; for they tend to invalidate the certainty of all such effects as exceed the common operations of nature, and differ from all such facts as are the daily objects of the senses. Although he admits with the greatest plausibility of

of concession, the truth of the Miracles of Christ and his Apostles, yet his arguments indirectly weaken their credit. He represents as a full and complete view of the possible variety which may exist in the works of God, only those objects which our feeble intellect can comprehend, and our limited observation can supply. But by consenting to such a restriction as this we are led to adopt a principle as the result of daily experience, which even daily experience itself, as it opens a more extensive prospect of the phenomena of Nature, and elucidates the hidden properties of Matter, will rectify and in some cases even visibly contradict. Such reasoning would, moreover, confine the agency of the Deity within the narrow bounds of human prescription, and would even arrest the power of his arm when extended to display itself in signs and wonders and mighty deeds,

Having thus in a sophistical manner assailed the credibility of the Facts, the author above mentioned next proceeds to attack the competency of the Witnesses. Dissatisfied with the testimony of the honest, the sincere, and the pious, he erects a fantastick standard of judgment, and seems to lay it down as an indisputable position, that the acuteness of a

critick and the deliberation of a philosopher are necessary to distinguish truth from falsehood, and that a witness who sometimes betrays the marks of credulity, is always weak and generally deceitful. But if such principles be implicitly and indiscriminately adopted, we shall contradict our own mode of conduct in common life, in the course of which we expect not the greatest possible degrees of certainty, but determine and act upon high probability. We shall inevitably be seduced into the most complete scepticism, and shall find ourselves at a loss for the proper authentication of any facts. The existence of Julius Cæsar, and the event of the battle of Actium will be involved in equal doubt, and exposed to equal objections with the miracles of Christ, and the propagation of christianity.

It is moreover objected that the apostolical fathers are silent relative to the continuance of miraculous powers, and thence it is inferred that no such powers were possessed by their contemporaries.

But upon a careful examination we shall probably find that although this subject forms no direct and material part of their disquisitions, yet some slight traces and occasional intimations

timations may be discovered sufficient to abate the confidence of the objector, and make it more probable that miraculous powers were possessed at that time, than that they had actually ceased in the church. Clement Bishop of Rome addressed his epistle to the church of Corinth, and describing the prosperous and godly state of the converts before an alarming diffension had arisen among them, expressly says “that they were all endued with a plentiful effusion of the Holy Spirit.” In what that plentiful effusion consisted, may be best understood from the particular description which St. Paul had not long before given of the various gifts of the Holy Ghost, that were imparted to the Corinthian converts. They were endued with the supernatural power of speaking various languages, of prophecying distant events, and healing diseases.

Ignatius in his Epistle to the Philadelphians mentions a particular Revelation which had been made to himself; and in the superscription of his Epistle to the Smyrnæans, alludes to the spiritual gifts which they possessed. Polycarp the venerable Bishop of Smyrna congratulates the Church of the Philippians by declaring that “God had blessed them with every good gift, that they had been filled  
C 4 “with

“with hope and charity, and were destitute  
“of no spiritual grace.”

If these expressions should seem to afford little assistance to disprove the assertion, we wish not to overrate their force, or draw from them unwarrantable conclusions. Rather than attempt to torture them into a sense which may be thought harsh and overstrained, we will admit the fact to be as it is stated; and consider what advantage the opponent can derive from a concession apparently so important.

Many Epistles may be found in the New Testament itself, in which miracles are not mentioned, even at the precise period when they are known to have been actually performed. The 2d Epistle to the Thessalonians, the Epistles to the Philippians, Colossians, to Titus, to Philemon, and the Hebrews are universally silent upon the subject, during the time that St. Paul and the other Apostles are acknowledged to have exercised, and communicated those powers. The inference therefore which is drawn from this negative argument is inconsequential, and cannot be allowed to have any force whatever. It proves only that where the immediate view of the writer was to

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to inculcate some didactic or to defend some speculative proposition, he either saw no necessity, or felt no desire to mingle a narrative of fact with the interpretation of doctrine.

In order to shake the credit of the fathers of the second century they are accused of maintaining vague and absurd traditions. Justin Martyr, Irenæus and Athenagoras are affirmed to have been unanimous in embracing such frivolous doctrines as the approach of the Millenium; the Translation of Enoch into the Paradise of Adam; the Production of Demons from Angels and Women; and the Old Age of Christ; and hence we are told it follows that they are not to be credited when they assert the continuance of the miraculous Powers,

In the first place, we may venture without incurring the censure of precipitate petulance to doubt the truth of the assertion. By what proof is the unanimity of these fathers upon the points in question established? The greatest diligence, in the perusal of their works will probably be ineffectual to make the discovery.

Athenagoras in his Embassy for the christians and in his Treatise on the Resurrection,  
is

is silent upon the subject of the Millenium. Justin Martyr in his exhortation to the Greeks, in his Apologies, and in his Dialogues, as well as Athenagoras, neither mentions the Old Age of Christ, nor the Translation of Enoch : nor does Irenæus in any passage of his confutation of Heresies, expressly assert that Demons were the offspring of Angels and Women.

How far it is fair to reason from matters of opinion to matters of fact is a subject not sufficiently considered by the objector. An inconclusive reasoner, may still be a competent witness. Now even if we suppose the judgment of these fathers to have been ever so unequal to the determination of abstruse points, to the interpretation of the difficulties of scripture, or to the development of its mysteries, how can such a defect be an impeachment of their Veracity? They may, notwithstanding, be credible relaters of those things which either immediately occurred to their own observation, or were conveyed to them by the workers of the miracles in question, by the spectators, or by the persons for whose benefit they were performed. The Apostles themselves were sometimes remarkable for misapprehension of the discourses of our Lord. They required the most obvious parables to be explained to them, and they  
mistook



mistook the allusion of their Master to the leaven of the Pharisees for an allusion to the means of ordinary subsistence. Yet such instances diminish not our veneration for them as the Historians of the Son of God. Nor by parity of reasoning, ought such instances to lessen the credit of the fathers who immediately succeeded them. The sentiments, therefore, which we may entertain respecting their opinions, and their evidence, ought to be kept distinct; by which means a decision will be made, more just to them, and more consistent with candour and impartiality. To exclude their evidence to miracles because they erred in the interpretation of dubious texts, is nearly as unwarrantable, as to declare a witness disqualified to appear in a judicial proceeding, because he does not satisfactorily explain the meaning of an intricate law of his country.

Hence it seems to follow as a necessary Corollary, that as these fathers are competent witnesses, their attestations either must be opposed by contradictory evidence, or ought to be admitted as decisive.

From the misrepresentations of the ingenious Middleton, whose cavils we have endeavoured to expose, the *Historian of the decline*

*cline and fall of the Roman Empire* derived his objections against the miraculous powers subsequent to the time of the Apostles. He has, it must be confessed, given some embellishment, but has added little weight to the arguments of his great Master. He asks what period of time is fixed for the cessation of miracles, and how are we to account for the insensibility of the christians who then lived, to so remarkable a circumstance?

The miracles may fairly be said to cease, with respect to our belief, when we can no longer obtain satisfactory evidence of their continuation. The close of the reign of the Emperour Julian is the period at which that evidence begins to fail. Since about that time we discover, or imagine we discover causes for suspicion, we may be allowed to suspend our belief, and to make our deductions from the imperfect evidence which succeeds. For this state of mind the learned Origen prepares us, by remarking that in the Apostolical age miracles were frequent; that in the succeeding century their number considerably decreased; and that in the third century only a few traces remained of such supernatural interposition.

Similar

Similar to the remarks of Origen are the observations of Eusebius at a later period. The sentiments of Jerom and Chrysofom although not perfectly consistent with themselves will enable us to come to a determination. Sometimes they explicitly assert that the extraordinary gifts of the spirit were imparted in the early ages, and were gradually withdrawn as christianity was more extensively propagated and the flourishing state of the church less and less required such support. Sometimes they give particular relations of miracles performed, even in their own days; they confess however that the genuineness of them was doubted, the fame of them was not so extensively spread abroad, and they were not recommended with such authority as to be received without hesitation even by believers themselves. As no such doubts are expressed relative to those of the earlier ages, a clear distinction is marked out which amounts to an indirect acknowledgement of preceding miracles, or at least a strong presumption in favour of their existence. The christians had for some time been attentive to the gradual change which was taking place in the interpositions of Providence; and so far were they from being insensible or careless, that they remark the decrease and the  
cessation,

cessation, with sufficient accuracy to satisfy a reasonable and unprejudiced mind.

An Event happened in the middle of the fourth Century, which may perhaps not improperly be thought to have closed the scene of these extraordinary interpositions. The conduct which produced it was marked by singularity of enterprize, and confidence of success; and its consequences were in the greatest degree wonderful and tremendous, they displayed a signal proof of the temerity of Man, and of the manifest and irresistible power of God.

Meditating the infliction of a fatal wound on christianity, the Emperour Julian determined to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem, and to restore the ancient rites of Judaical Worship. His heart was elated with the vain imagination of frustrating the Predictions of Christ. But the Almighty who gave the Law in Thunder from Mount Sinai, and dispersed the rebellious Israelites in conformity with the prophecies of his Son, fully manifested his power to demonstrate the truth of revelation. A sudden Earthquake swallowed up the foundations of the new Edifice, and flames ascended in vast columns to the blazing firmament

ment of Heaven. The most fierce and unconquerable of the elements was made the instrument of divine indignation. All the materials for the building were destroyed, and many of the workmen were deprived of life. Those who escaped, bore on their bodies the deep marks of the scorching fire; and the ground on which the temple stood, for many years retained the dismal vestiges of ruin and conflagration.

If evidence for the truth of this awful interposition be required, our appeal may be made to the universal voice of the ecclesiastical writers. Some of them lived near the spot, others derived their information from those who had visited it. The testimony of the adversaries to christianity is equally strong. Ammianus Marcellinus the friend and companion of Julian, a writer equally remarkable for his learning, candour and impartiality, gives a circumstantial detail of the event. In dark and ambiguous terms, the Emperour himself alludes to it. A learned Rabbi of the fifteenth century, who appears to have collected his materials from Jewish traditions, records it; and even the *Historian of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire*, although he attempts with stubborn scepticism to invalidate

validate some of its proofs, and insinuates a want of impartial authorities, is compelled not only to acknowledge the general fact, but many of the particular circumstances by which it was accompanied and distinguished.

It may be objected that this is a Miracle of a peculiar kind, as it was the immediate operation of the Supreme Being, without the intervention of human means; and consequently that it differs materially from other miracles, whether of the disputed or acknowledged class.

To this objection we are prepared to answer, that although it may differ in the means of its operation, yet it harmonizes with them in respect to its design, which was the Establishment of the christian Religion.

This was a publick demonstration of the veracity of the divine prediction. “Jerusalem shall be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” The decree went forth, and the powers of Heaven and Earth were combined to establish it.—Whilst the *Heathen furiously raged and the People imagined a vain thing*. The period of desolation ordained by the Almighty was  
not

not yet arrived, and therefore vain was the attempt of man to hasten its approach. Upon the same immoveable basis was built that remarkable promise which our Lord made to his disciples, before his ascension to heaven : — *these signs shall follow them who believe ; in my name they shall cast out devils ; they shall speak with new tongues ; they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them ; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.*

That such powers were not intended to be imparted to the apostles only, is evident from the context ; as the promise refers to those who should believe in consequence of their preaching, without any precise limitation as to time, or exception as to persons. This assistance was first given to the Corinthian Church to which St. Paul sent directions for the proper regulation of miraculous endowments. St. James likewise in his catholick epistle, recommends the prayers of the Elders of the church, and the performance of a ceremonial rite as certain means to produce the recovery of the sick. Such examples by furnishing a probable argument for the communication of miraculous powers to different so-

cieties of christians, confirm the veracity of the fathers.

From considering the nature of miracles as being not a contradiction of the great laws of nature, but only a deviation from the ordinary course of Providence for some salutary end, and from observing that the Deity can extend his power not merely to the performance of them himself, but to the performance of them likewise by the agency of mankind; there arises no absurdity from the supposition, that some of the primitive christians were employed for that purpose. In the earliest ages, when the church was in a low and persecuted state, when its adherents had no wordly comfort to support their drooping spirits, and animate their faith; there seems to have been a necessity sufficient to call for this divine assistance. So that although we are willing to concur with the adversaries of the fathers, in censuring their vague representations of events which ought to have been related in circumstantial details; yet we are justified in asserting, in direct opposition to their cavils, that the objections, brought from the silence of the apostolical writers, are inconclusive; and that the unanimous testimony of the second  
and



and third century deserves to be received without hesitation, unless we violate the first principles of historical credit. We admit, moreover, that the interposition of heaven to prevent Julian from rebuilding the Temple at Jerusalem was the close of miraculous operations for the establishment of christianity; and that the promises of Christ himself, the example of the church of Corinth, and the directions of St. Paul and of St. James, confirm and illustrate the general argument.

The justness and the propriety of these conclusions may be inferred, in some degree, from the concessions of those who appear most unfavourable to the subject. For *the Author of the Inquiry into the miraculous powers*, at the conclusion of his controversy, found himself so closely pressed by the arguments of his learned and able opponents, that he changed the ground of contest. Instead of persisting in the unqualified denial of an occasional display of supernatural gifts by any of the earliest christians, which was the leading principle of his first work, he maintained and only maintained in his last dissertation, that there was no standing power in the church which enabled her members to perform miracles on whatever occasions they pleased. This ma-

nifest equivocation was an indirect acknowledgement of a defeat, and was a signal proof that if such only was the object of his diligent investigations, his learning and his talents had been unprofitably exhausted in combating a position, which even the most bigotted friend to christian antiquity had never stood forth to defend.

The Utility of miracles in the propagation of the gospel, seems to be so obvious, that it requires not to be enlarged upon. We might at first conclude that they were calculated to succeed where every argument failed. For if the precepts of the gospel were too pure to engage the minds of the ignorant, and the uncultivated; if its rewards were too refined and sublime to warm their affections; a miracle was a proof of a divine revelation which was at once calculated to vanquish prejudice, and to flash conviction in the eyes of the spectator. If the dead man was raised, or the sick were instantaneously healed, Bigotry we should suppose must therefore have deserted her idols to embrace the cross of Christ, and Persecution dropping her sword, must have fallen prostrate to adore that Being who imparted such gifts to men.

But

But proper reflections on the disposition of mankind, and the testimony of evangelical and ecclesiastical history, will rectify this amusing theory. The effects of miracles might be transient, and as it sometimes happens with respect to the more rare phenomena of nature might leave no lasting impression on the mind. Our Saviour too often experienced in the Jews a stubbornness of prejudice, which reluctantly gave way to the force of his mighty works. His disciples were obliged to contend with equal difficulties among the inhabitants of other nations. The Pagans attributed miracles to the operation of magick, and refused their assent to them, when urged as an evidence of a divine revelation. As the idolatrous priests pretended that supernatural effects were produced by the interposition of their Gods, so the distinction between true and false miracles was liable to be confounded; and the enquirer after truth from a latent suspicion of fraud even in the most specious, might have recourse to some other proof to fix his choice of a religious persuasion. Among the authentick instances of divine interposition, several were of a private nature, and were more immediately designed for the consolation of individuals, or the support of particular congregations. These and similar causes conspired

we may suppose, to prevent that wonderful and lasting effect of miracles which a display of them, more frequent and more conspicuous than that which is recorded by the fathers of the church, must necessarily have produced.

Let us now pass on to consider the method that was adopted, and the arguments that were adduced by the earliest vindicators of christianity, to make the true nature of their profession known to their enemies.

The Apologies of the primitive christians were no less calculated to prove the zeal and sincerity of their respective authors, than to vindicate the honour of their religion. Christianity for a long period of time after its first appearance in the world, was aspersed by the virulence of defamation, and oppressed by the insolence of power. The edicts of emperours gave a sanction to the most unjustifiable proceedings against its followers, and incited the bigotted multitude to kindle the flames of persecution. These eventful scenes were equally calculated to try the patience of the humble and uncomplaining, and to rouse the courage, and call forth the abilities of the intrepid and the learned. In the first rank of the champions of the faith we see St. Peter coming

coming forth to rectify the misconceptions of the Jews, and to declare the nature of the new dispensation. We likewise behold St. Paul inspired with more than mortal boldness, whilst he unfolded the awful scene of a future judgment to the trembling Felix. Upon occasions almost equally perilous, Justin Martyr and Athenagoras, two of the most eminent converts from the schools of the philosophers in the second century, followed these illustrious examples. From their apologies we find that they combated slander with the weapons of truth, that they exhibited the rules of their conduct as they are recorded in the gospel, and described with the warmth of charity, and the consciousness of rectitude the virtues of their christian contemporaries. With the earnestness of men who were sinking under the weight of persecution they solicit the indulgence of that religious toleration which was freely allowed by the Roman Emperours to all the rest of their subjects.

The works of many eminent men who distinguished themselves in the same manner, are unhappily lost. There is one consolation, however, which may in some degree compensate for the misfortune, since the diligence of Eusebius has rescued their names and some

fragments of their works from oblivion. Quadratus Bishop of Athens, Aristides the Philosopher, Melito Bishop of Sardis, Apollinaris Bishop of Hierapolis, and Miltiades presented their vindications of christianity respectively to Adrian, Aurelian, and Commodus. The frequency of such applications in successive reigns, is both a proof of the depressed and injured state of christianity, and of the opinion prevalent in the different periods of time when these writers pleaded its cause, that their labours would produce a proper effect by dispelling the prejudices of its enemies, and that the Emperours were not implacable, or deaf to the voice of truth.

These earliest advocates of christianity have not escaped the severe animadversions of the Historian of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. He laments with pretended concern the scantiness of their talents, and complains of the misapplication of their arguments to improper subjects. "He asserts that they expose with superfluous wit and eloquence the extravagance of Polytheism."

Now, the whole system of Polytheism was the offspring of fiction, and derived its support from superstition and fraud. No obstacles  
could

could more powerfully retard the progress of truth. The lustre of evangelical light and the corruption of idolatrous darkness could not maintain a divided empire over the minds of men. The altar of Jupiter and the standard of the Cross could not be erected on the same place. *For what concord hath Christ with Belial? And what agreement hath the temple of God with Idols?* The prejudices of education, the general habits of life, and the fervour of the passions all united to plead in favour of rites and ceremonies which were closely connected with the pursuit of the grossest sensuality. In what more important or more necessary service, therefore, could the advocates for christianity be employed, than in demolishing the fabrick of Paganism, in order that christianity might be erected upon its ruins?

Whatever might be the incredulity which the more enlightened Gentiles secretly entertained, their external respect for their religion was a formidable impediment to the progress of the faith; as it rivetted more closely the chains of vulgar superstition. The magistrates, however deep their dissimulation might be, preserved at least the appearance of devotion from motives of policy; and the philosophers

phers too prudent to make an ostentatious display of their sceptical tenets, professed the same specious veneration for the Gods of their country. The keenness of wit was therefore by the christian most judiciously directed against the motley mass of Polytheism which was so artfully countenanced by the united examples of the wise and the powerful. The force of eloquence was as properly employed in exposing the plausible tales of a popular mythology, and in recommending the doctrines and the precepts of a pure and spiritual religion.

The Historian next proceeds to censure the apologists because “ they insist much more strongly on the predictions which announced, than on the miracles which accompanied the appearance of the Messiah.”

It is somewhat doubtful how far the fact is correctly stated, and if it be correctly stated, how far the practise itself is unjustifiable. Justin Martyr, fully sensible of the powerful effect which the representation of miracles was calculated to produce, appealed to the Roman registers which contained a full account of the most remarkable transactions of our Lord. An additional proof that the miracles of Christ were well known arises from considering the labours of the preceding advocates for christianity



tianity. A short time before Justin addressed his apology to Antoninus Pius; Quadratus, the learned Bishop of Athens, delivered an elegant oration to Adrian; in which he particularly insisted upon the miracles performed by our Lord. He represented that they were not of short duration, like the impostures which charm the eye of credulity with a momentary delusion, and produce no permanent effects. Their duration was not merely limited to the period of our Lord's continuance on earth, but lasted for a sufficient time to give the fullest proof of their reality and efficaciousness. He confirms the truth of his assertions by appealing to a fact which was open to common enquiry. He assures the Emperour that some persons who had experienced the miraculous influence of the power of Christ in healing the sick and raising the dead, had even survived until that age.

Since the evidence of miracles had been displayed on a recent occasion, it would have been superfluous for Justin Martyr to have rested the proofs of christianity upon that ground alone, when they might be strongly established upon another. The evidence of prophecy is so clear and conclusive, that it may reasonably be questioned how far the  
proofs

proofs drawn from miracles, ought to supersede it. The Old Testament contains a long series of predictions which are gradually enlarged with more particular circumstances, and pointed with more striking and appropriate reference to a most extraordinary event recorded in the gospels. Like rays of light proceeding from different points they all converge in the same focus. The history of Christ related by the evangelists is an exact copy of the prophecies, in which not only the proportion and the outlines are uniformly preserved, but the striking resemblance of every feature, and the peculiar effect of every expression are faithfully delineated. A prophecy is indeed a more refined and philosophical proof, because it appeals to the judgment which delights in the comparison of general descriptions and particular circumstances with the event which they anticipate. A miracle is more liable to the cavils of doubt; because the possibility of its existence may be disputed, it may be attributed to the artifice of fraud, or the agency of demons. A miracle rests for its confirmation upon the evidence of men, but a prophecy when fulfilled, may be said to be the immediate evidence of God himself. The Ethiopian Eunuch struck with the pathetic predictions of Isaiah expressed an eager  
curiosity

curiosity to know to what person they properly referred. Great was his astonishment, and instantaneous his conversion when Philip held up to him the picture of the Redeemer, as their compleat and illustrious counterpart. Our Saviour himself appeals not less frequently to the prophets, for an attestation of his divine mission, than to his miracles; and seems to intimate that an inattention to the former, immediately led to the rejection of the latter; — *for if they believe not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.*

Exclusive of the propriety of having recourse to prophetic evidence considered in itself; there are other reasons which justify the introduction of such proof arising from the genius and disposition of the Romans. Their eagerness to explore the events of futurity may be collected from the invectives of their satyrists, the censures of their philosophers, and the narratives of their historians. They practised the arts of divination with ardour, and applied themselves with blind credulity to the occult studies of magick and astrology. The mysterious volume of the Sibyl, supposed to contain the destined revolutions of the empire, was preserved with the greatest  
reverence

reverence in the capitol, and consulted in all emergencies of the state. This attachment to the predictions which it contained was improved to great advantage by the most celebrated of their poets in a beautiful anticipation of the happiness ordained to succeed the approaching birth of the Son of Jupiter. If the imagination of the Romans was delighted with the felicity which should succeed the restoration of the golden age, and with the return of Astræa to the earth; with what astonishment might their minds be impressed when they were guided to those ancient writers who foretold the tranquil state of the world at the advent of the Messiah, the establishment of his spiritual and eternal kingdom, and the wide extent of his dominion. Even their own experience could convince them in some degree with what exactness these splendid descriptions had corresponded with the event. The advance of christianity from an obscure city of Syria to the metropolis of the empire, and its rapid diffusion through the provinces, formed an object too singular and too conspicuous to escape the publick notice. A persuasion which was prevalent at that time contributed likewise to justify the conduct of the apologists and to awaken an attention to the works of the prophets. For it was generally believed

“ that

“ that the antient facerdotal volumes had fore-  
“ told that the East should have the preemi-  
“ nence, and that those who came from Ju-  
“ dæa should obtain the sovereignty of the  
“ world.”

It appears therefore upon the whole, that the subjects of these Apologies are unreasonably censured, since they were well calculated to silence the clamour and abate the rage of the Pagans. They moreover excited curiosity to inquire into the nature of a religion whose professors had been so injuriously treated, and thus greatly contributed to the conversion of the enlightened and candid part of mankind.

Whilst the Apologists were exerting their talents to confute calumny and prevent persecution, the christian Missionaries were more actively engaged in publishing the new revelation to the world.

Of the fidelity with which the Apostles executed the final injunction of their divine Master to proclaim to every land the glad tidings of the gospel, we may form the best judgment from the inspired records. Neither dangers, nor hardships deterred them from any exertion which contributed to the glory of God by the  
diffusion

diffusion of the gospel of his Son. The steadiness of their conduct, and the ardour of their zeal are best seen in the effects of that conduct and of that zeal on the various countries to which they travelled, and the multitudes of different nations whom they converted. The first advances towards extending the knowledge of the new dispensation beyond Judæa, were made by Philip the Deacon, who met with the greatest encouragement to prosecute his labours in the conversion of the Samaritans; and the inhabitants of the shores of Cæsarea. The disciples who were driven from Jerusalem when the persecution raged after the martyrdom of St. Stephen, converted their flight into an occasion of triumph, by planting the gospel in the opulent coasts of Phœnicia, and in the fertile island of Paphos; and in laying the foundation of the antient and renowned church of Antioch. The labours of St. Paul and of St. Barnabas are recorded with sufficient particularity to display the unabating vigour of their perseverance, and the wide extent of their travels. The progress of the great apostle of the Gentiles may indeed be traced from the banks of the Euphrates, to the metropolis of the Roman world. The celebrated cities of Damascus, Ephesus, Corinth, and Athens by the number, and the respectability

bility of their converts, bore testimony to his labours.

We are informed by the most authentick evidence of ecclesiastical history, that after St. Peter had with the assistance of St. Paul established a church at Rome; he directed his attention to those Jews who were dispersed throughout various provinces of Asia. St. Mark planted christianity in Ægypt, and the coasts of the Ægean sea were distinguished by the preaching of St. John who fixed his residence at Ephesus, where he composed his gospel. At this period, the most effectual means were taken to disengage habit and prejudice from the popular superstitions of Paganism, to correct their impurities, and to give them a more becoming and more honourable employment in the service of christianity. St. John founded the catechetical school of Ephesus, St. Mark that of Alexandria, and Polycarp that of Smyrna. Here the seeds of the gospel were first sown in the young and ductile mind, before the propensities of more mature age had obstructed their growth. The difficulties which might have accompanied instruction merely private were lessened both to the teachers and their disciples; and the experience of succeeding ages has only served

to confirm the consummate wisdom and utility of these apostolical establishments, by displaying more fully the advantages of early piety and religious education.

From these general accounts it is highly probable that even within half a century from the death of our Lord, his religion was disseminated over all the Eastern part of the Roman Empire. The period of the conversion of the Western provinces is enveloped, in great obscurity, as well as the particular history of those missionaries, who piously undertook and accomplished it. By the dim light however which is thrown upon this subject by the Ecclesiastical Writers we distinguish the names of Pothinus and Irenæus, who travelled from Asia into Gaul, and there established the churches of Vienne and Lyons which were in the reign of Adrian most eminently distinguished by the faith and fortitude of their martyrs. In the reign of the Emperor Adrian many other successors of the apostles visited remote countries, where they either confirmed the churches already converted, or made new profelytes to the faith. From the high antiquity of some versions, particularly the Italic, the Syriac and the Æthiopic we may reasonably conclude that they

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left copies of the scriptures with their converts, and thus furnished the means not only of diffusing the knowledge of christianity, but of delivering it down in its original purity to succeeding ages.

In the primitive Missionary we may contemplate the greatest resolution productive of the most assiduous and painful exertions. Impressed by the deepest sense of duty, and eager to diffuse that divine light of revelation which burned with undiminished heat in his own breast, he disengaged himself from the strong attachments to his native country, and went forth to convert an idolatrous world. As his life was devoted to the interests of his religion, all the causes by which its pains were aggravated, or its continuance shortened, were stript their terrour. His imagination presented to him the scourge, the rack, and the cross, yet was his resolution unshaken by the apprehensions of persecution and death. At the loud and solemn calls of duty he was loosened even from the ties of consanguinity; and with a spirit not less dignified than that of the Roman Heroe, he suffered principle to predominate over affection, turned aside from the tears of friendship, and was even deaf to the tender supplications of love. The bright object of

his ambition was not the barren praise of inflexible constancy, but the crown of immortal happiness. The dangers of travel, the precariousness of subsistence, the perfidy of pretended friends, and the violence of open enemies were in his estimation no more than light afflictions which endure for a moment. Lost in the solitude of the wilderness, exposed to the tempests of the ocean, or assailed by the outrage of the multitude, he was not destitute and forsaken, for the Almighty was his guide, and his comforter. With patience he saw the frowns of the great, and heard the scoffs of the vulgar. He proclaimed with the unshaken confidence of truth, the wondrous tidings of the new dispensation, and exhorted a guilty race to repentance and amendment. Elate with the accomplishment of his pious task, in bringing many sheep to the fold of Christ, he gloried amid the flames of martyrdom, and breathed out his soul with joy.

The Gospel pursued its steady course through those regions, in which the Roman conquests had prepared the way. Yet the victorious progress which was made by the arms of the most warlike people in the universe, in the course of a thousand years, was equalled, or perhaps exceeded, by the christian religion in

two centuries. From Judea it conveyed the blessings of life and immortality to the most remote countries, and resembled the Nile, which rising from a distant and obscure source, gradually overflows vast provinces, and fertilizes every soil which is watered by its stream.

There is no subject which seems to have inspired the early fathers with such exultation, or which they describe with more lively colours of eloquence, than the general diffusion of the gospel. It was highly gratifying to their devout minds to observe, that the spiritual comfort which they enjoyed, was communicated to others; and that the extent of the faith was correspondent with the declarations of prophecy. From the glowing representations of Tertullian we collect that not more than a century and a half had elapsed from the ascension of Christ, when the followers of his religion might be found among all ranks of society; in all cities and villages; in the senate, in the camp, and the palace; in the vast regions of Asia, on the coasts of Africa, in the provinces of Gaul, Germany and Spain; in the parts of Britain inaccessible to hostile arms; and in countries much more remote from the metropolis of the Roman world.

The Historian of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire seems to labour with much solicitude to confine primitive christianity within the narrowest limits. Whilst he makes a partial allowance for the exaggeration of Pliny, relative to the number of christians in Bithynia; he condemns a similar exaggeration of Justin Martyr as too precipitate and partial. It is the part of candour to allow the same indulgence to both, and to recollect that the passions of both might be so highly inflamed by the different motives of prejudice and fear, as to produce a description not strictly consistent with truth. When the fathers expatiate upon the wide extent of christianity, they assume a licentiousness of description, which is not uncommon among the antient writers, of confounding the Roman Empire with the whole habitable earth. It is however somewhat remarkable, that even from those records which the Historian esteems the most indisputable and authentick, we may find expressions to countenance, if not to justify the representations of the fathers. The warm declamation of Justin Martyr and of Tertullian, the energetick narrative of Eusebius, and the exact parallel drawn by Chrysostom between the Pagans and the Christians, derive very considerable support from the express declarations

tions of Suetonius, Tacitus, Pliny, Lucian, and Porphyry.

In thus tracing the progress of the gospel and estimating the zeal of its first preachers, a melancholy reflection naturally arises in the mind. The countries in which the faith was first promulgated, retain at present very imperfect marks of its antient diffusion. The rich provinces of Asia Minor and Syria, which have been long exposed to the despotism of the Ottoman Princes, exhibit only in venerable ruins the antient edifices of magnificence and devotion. Most of the seven cities immortalized by the writer of the Apocalypse, discover no remaining vestiges to gratify the eye of the pious traveller. In Damascus, renowned in sacred history for the conversion of the great Apostle of the Gentiles, a Turkish Mosque is erected amid the ruins of a Christian Church. Jerusalem itself, the theatre of the stupendous and mighty works of the Son of God, exists only as a monument of the rapacity and extortion of its infidel tyrants. Even in that holy place where rending rocks and opening graves attested the dignity of an expiring Redeemer, The proud crescent of Mahomet is displayed over the prostrate banner of the Cross.

Of this triumphant ascendancy the history of the middle ages can sufficiently explain to us the causes. The degenerate christians corrupted that faith which they were bound to have kept unfullied ; they introduced those superstitious rites which they ought to have despised, and indulged in all those vices, which it was their duty to avoid. Hence the sceptre departed from them, and hence the wolves were permitted to ravage the fold of Christ.

But if christianity has been involved in the great revolutions of empire, the seat of her dominion is not destroyed, but removed. Her found has gone forth into lands which were unknown to the primitive preachers. The vast regions of the north of Europe have been long added to the kingdoms of the Messiah. In a world unknown to the antients, the wide extended shores of America have received the religion, as well as the civilization, of the European colonists. The commerce of the East has afforded an opportunity, which the patrons of a most pious institution have embraced, and the coasts of Malabar can attest the successful labours of their Missionaries,

Thus the acquisitions which christianity has made in some places, are abundantly more than

than a counterbalance for her depressed state in others ; and thus the evidence of its divine origin is established, by the confirmation of the prophecies which declare that no power should be able to effect its subversion. Obscure to man are the events of futurity, and veiled in awful mystery are the councils of the Most High ; yet from the goodness of the Almighty, and the wisdom of his dispensations, we may venture to conclude, that the gospel will in some future age, be preached in all the world.

To that blissful period the benevolent and pious mind wishes to extend its eager view, and feels the most sublime gratification by anticipating the immense addition which will be made to human happiness, both temporal and eternal, when the follower of Mahomet, the disciple of Brama, and the votary of Confucius, with every worshipper of every Idol, shall bow with equal veneration at the name of Jesus ; and when the Christian Religion, like the bright luminary of day, shall diffuse its auspicious influence over the whole race of Mankind.





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# S E R M O N    I I I .

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J E R E M I A H    I .    19 .

*They shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee ; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee.*

**I**N the perusal of ecclesiastical history we are often surprized by observing, that men have existed so ignorant of the human mind, as to imagine that its operations can be controuled by violence. The scourge of oppression and the sword of tyranny may indeed have very powerful effects over the outward actions, and may awe the wretch who is exposed to them, into sullen acquiescence, or reluctant silence. But the free born soul is subject to no such restraints ; for amidst the severest oppression, it exerts the boldest energies of thought, and triumphs even in the agonies of torture.

Compulsion

Compulsion eventually defeats its own purpose, and either forces the object of its resentment to wear the temporary mask of hypocrisy, or excites that restless and determined resistance of the will which no force can subdue. To soothe the mind into compliance by the gentle arts of persuasion, and to allure it by the flattering prospect of advantage, is easy and practicable; but to restrain its inclinations by violence, or to implant opinions repugnant to its judgment is not less impossible, than to arrest the flight of the winged lightning; or to imprint a durable mark upon the surface of the ocean.

Such are the reflections which naturally arise in our minds, on considering the folly of Persecution. That the meek professors of a pure and peaceful religion should have ever been exposed to its fury, may, abstractedly considered, be a just subject of wonder. The inoffensiveness of its institutions and the benevolence of its principles, gave it the fairest title to security and protection. Yet the reception it first met with, was far different; for as a proof how much the best gift of heaven to mankind was undervalued, the christians of the three first centuries were engaged in almost a continual struggle, against oppression and cruelty.

That

That we may be enabled to form the more compleat idea of this interesting subject, it will be proper to survey, the causes of the persecutions, the conduct of the martyrs, and the effects of their fortitude.

Whilst the christian religion was effectually making its progress through various parts of the world, it became an object of sufficient magnitude and importance, to attract the attention of the Roman government. When first superficially noticed in the metropolis of the empire, it was confounded with Judaism, and excited only the derision of the vulgar, and the contempt of the learned, and the powerful. As soon however as the zeal of the christians in making converts, and the simple ceremonies of their worship had distinguished them from the adherents to the Mosaical law, they were exposed to the most cruel and most unmerited punishments. On considering the character of Nero, it can excite no surprize to observe that the first persecution raged in his sanguinary reign. Christianity recorded the event as an honour to her cause, that the first Emperour who destroyed her votaries, was the incessant foe of exalted merit. For the imputed conflagration of Rome, of which he was himself the insidious and unfeeling author,  
they

they were condemned to the most horrid tortures, that ingenious malice could contrive. Their dreadful execution began that long and melancholy catalogue of martyrs which like the myftick fcroll of the prophet was infcribed, within and without, with lamentation, and mourning, and woe.

The boasted harmony of the antient world refpecting religious worship, muft be understood to have exifted only under certain reftrictions. The inhabitants of different nations enjoyed the liberty of ferving their refpective deities without moleftation, or reftraint. Hence the chriftians, in their apologies, complain of the injuftice of their enemies, in not allowing them the common liberty of toleration, which was granted to all the reft of the world. But when once this privilege paffed its prefcribed limits, and thofe who held fuch tenets as differed from the received opinions of the public, began to propagate them; they became the objects of public animofity and fevere punifhment. Many philofophers, whofe free opinions tended to undermine the common veneration for the gods of their country were doomed either to exile or to death. This was the caufe of the profcRIPTION of Diagoras, and the chief pretext of the guilt of Socrates.

The

The Romans adopting an antient law of Athens guarded against the introduction of foreign rites with scrupulous precaution, and in various periods of their history, roused the vigilance of the magistrate to prevent their diffusion. Tiberius prohibited the exercise of the religious ceremonies of other countries, particularly those of Ægypt and Judæa. We must therefore have recourse to the general manners of antiquity to account for their prejudices against christianity, and must impute the leading cause of persecution to the zeal of the christians in making converts from Paganism.

Urged by the purest motives of conscience the christians expressed the greatest abhorrence of idolatry. They not only abstained with unremitting care from the participation of its rites, but embraced every occasion to expose the prophaneness of them, and to gain proselytes to the truth. Their zealous conduct appeared highly criminal in the eyes of the bigotted magistrates, who saw the new religion increase with alarming rapidity, and were apprehensive that the number of the converts would endanger the publick peace. Moreover the religious establishment of the state was supposed to be too intimately connected with  
its

its political constitution not to receive a violent convulsion, if this bold innovation was suffered to proceed with impunity.

The alarms of the Roman government were equally groundless, but more plausible, when excited either by the frequency of the christian assemblies, or the secret manner in which they were held. The Emperours surveyed the associations of their subjects with so much jealousy and suspicion, that they were strictly prohibited, even when holden for purposes the most inoffensive and salutary. As the meetings of the christians were confounded with factious and disorderly societies, they were exposed to rigorous and unjust penalties.

To avoid interruption they met together during the silence of the night, or at the dawn of the day. Their choice of such unseasonable hours for their devotions gave great alarm to the Romans, since the laws from the foundation of the republick, had strictly forbidden nocturnal meetings. In the celebration of the Bacchanalian rites, with which the christian assemblies on account of their external appearance might possibly be confounded, the Senate was alarmed with apprehensions of danger, on being informed that a multitude  
was

was often convened in the season of darkness and repose. The baptismal vow likewise, gave no small cause for suspicion, as it was liable to be interpreted into an oath of criminal secrecy, and a ratification of treasonable designs.

That the meek and benevolent followers of Jesus should be mistaken for the abettors of sedition, is an evident proof with what a superficial glance the jealous Roman surveyed their assemblies. His fears of their designs were vain, and his ignorance of their conduct was inexcusable. Had he carefully examined their simple rites, and harmless transactions, he would doubtless have passed a more equitable judgment, and rather have imputed their conduct to the delusions of pitiable fanaticism, than to the machinations of a malignant and destructive superstition.—*He knew not what spirit they were of.* They met not to drain the bowl of intemperance, or to indulge the excesses of licentiousness; but to break the sacred bread of the Eucharist, and renew their resolutions of purity and holiness. They were convened not to fan the flames of insurrection or meditate dark and subtle stratagems against the State; but to invoke the Most High for the prosperity of the Emperour, and pay the

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tribute of adoration and prayer to the Prince of Peace.

Whilst they were thus irreproachable in their conduct and steady in their loyalty, their enemies meditated a decisive blow against their reputation, by devoting their moral character to the most heinous infamy. The calumnies which were industriously reported, probably took their rise from the superficial remarks and observations of those, who had been present at the celebration of the sacraments. The ceremony employed in the immersion of the infant, and the distribution of the consecrated elements were aggravated by the inventive genius of scandal into the licentious indulgences of the orgies of Bacchus, and the horrid and inhuman banquet of Atreus. The diligence of the earliest apologists was therefore roused to confute, and in some degree to retort this infamous and glaring imputation; and the developement of its falshood failed not to acquire new honour to the church, by introducing and warranting the delineation of her virtues.

To the elegant Correspondent of Trajan we are indebted for an invaluable testimony relative to the primitive church. By the converts;  
of



of Bithynia, he was made acquainted with the principles of their faith, and the ceremonies of their worship. Although convinced by the clearest evidence, that the aspersions which had been thrown upon them were wholly groundless, he scrupled not to assert in his celebrated Epistle to the Emperour that whatever was the nature of their confession, yet their inflexible obstinacy and stubbornness deserved to be punished. Dissatisfied with the asseverations of numbers who declared the inoffensive purposes for which their assemblies were convened, he hesitated not to put two Deaconesses to the torture in order to draw forth a confession of some imagined guilt.

From a magistrate so enlightened by learning, so conversant with mankind, and so compliant upon all other occasions with the dictates of philanthropy, we naturally expect more candid decisions, and more mild behaviour. This inconsistency with his general conduct and sentiments is yet more peculiarly striking, if it be considered, that the same virtues which were exercised in the adherence of the pious to their principles, were the subjects of admiration and applause, when exemplified in the illustrious characters of antient heroes and patriots. The partial and inconsi-

derate Pliny denied to the followers of Christ, that praise, and that estimation, which, as a Roman, he must necessarily feel for the exulting patience of Mutius, the inflexible resolution of Regulus, and the unconquerable spirit of Cato.

Our candour wishes to throw a veil over the failings of an illustrious character. We look however in vain for even a partial justification of Pliny, unless we impute his conduct to the inveterate prejudices of the times in which he lived, or to the apprehensions of a conscientious magistrate, who by excessive solicitude to discharge his duty, is sometimes hurried into acts of flagrant injustice.

An additional reason for the persecution of the christians resulted from their conduct upon some occasions being interpreted into personal disrespect to the Emperour. To his name in all seasons of publick festivity, libations were made, and in his praise, congratulatory songs were composed. These honours were accompanied by rites, similar to those which were performed to the Deities themselves. Hence as the christians refused to join in this prophane flattery, the invocation of the Imperial name was adopted, as a snare for their loyalty, and

and a test of their abjuration. A refusal to comply was interpreted into an avowal of complicated guilt, and furnished a plausible pretext for punishing them not only as subvertors of the national religion, but as enemies of the supreme and established authority.

The severity of the Edicts enacted against them varied according to the temper and passions of the different Emperours. Under the cruel Nero and the pusillanimous Domitian, they were rigorous and sanguinary. The partial clemency of Trajan checked indeed the fury of persecution ; but left the christians exposed to the malice of informers. Marcus Antoninus the philosopher listened with credulity to the calumnies thrown upon the christians by their enemies, and the effects of his severity were felt from the more southern provinces of France to the most distant cities of Asia Minor. Although the laws were often silent, yet they were not always repealed. Hence the interval of persecution far from becoming a state of tranquillity, was a season of awful expectation and anxious fear. A temporary calm was no security against the return of more violent storms. The church was kept in a continual state of alarm, and enjoyed no permanent repose until the reign of Com-

modus, when the flames of popular fury were at least mitigated, if not extinguished, and when peace reigned for some time, in all the churches of the world.

The consequences of the Imperial edicts were calamitous and deplorable. As often as they were enacted, the rage of persecution was let loose, and her way was marked with blood. The furious multitude were instigated by the superstitious priests, and the selfish artists, to whom the worship of Idols was a source of subsistence and wealth. Often when assembled to view the publick games, they demanded, with loud and tumultuous acclamations, a sacrifice to their insulted Gods; and crowded the spacious amphitheatre, to see the innocent Martyrs exposed to the edge of the sword, the jaws of the hungry lion, or the more excruciating tortures of the flaming pile. “ In the  
“ fight of the unwise they seemed to die, and  
“ their departure was taken for misery. For  
“ though they were punished in the fight of  
“ men, yet was their hope full of immorta-  
“ lity. As they have been chastised they shall  
“ be greatly rewarded, for God proved them  
“ and found them worthy for himself. As  
“ gold in the furnace hath he tried them, and  
“ received them as a burnt offering.”

Thus

Thus are we led on to consider in the second place the behaviour of the primitive martyrs in the last trying scenes of their sufferings.

Whilst the most eminent and respectable adherents to the faith, were devoted to publick executions, the obscure condition of common converts was generally the cause of their safety. The Romans adopted the policy of Tarquin, and concluded that by dooming the leaders of the rising sect to death, the energy and spirit of its institutions might effectually be broken. No plan it must be confessed could promise with greater hopes of success its complete ruin and extinction. The persecutors seemed to think that by depriving piety of her brightest ornaments, and most firm supports, they should strike terror into the whole body of christians; and either drive them to instant despair or disgraceful apostacy.

Such were the vain and sanguine hopes which were formed from the condemnation of Ignatius Bishop of Antioch, Polycarp Bishop of Smyrna, and Justin, who, with an emphatical allusion to his unmerited fate, was denominated the Martyr.

A minute account of their pious lives and exemplary deaths has been ably and repeatedly given by various writers. To transcribe the particulars of their narrations, is altogether unnecessary, as they form the most striking and most obvious parts of the antient martyrologies. It may be more proper on the present occasion to exhibit the leading principles of their conduct, and to place their behaviour in that point of view, which is most consistent with the impartiality of truth, and most productive of religious edification.

They were unanimously actuated by the same motives of duty, and expired in the confession of the same faith. A firm conviction that the bold avowal of christianity was absolutely necessary to display their sincerity, and secure their eternal happiness, made them rise superior to every wordly consideration. Their behaviour was equally remote from the enthusiasm of bigotted zeal, and the rashness of obstinate folly. They disdained to sacrifice the ardent love of their divine Master to the allurements of the world. No offers of impunity, no threats of malice, no prospect of temporal advantage diverted them from the straight though thorny path of duty. To temporize by servile concession, or timid retraction was  
equally

equally repugnant to their integrity, inconsistent with their resolutions, and injurious to the honour of their cause. Supported by the animating succour of the divine grace, they rose superiour to the fears and the tortures of untimely and agonizing dissolution. They considered their light afflictions as dust in the balance ; and with pious confidence, and ardent desire looked up to the author and finisher of their faith, for the unfading crown of immortality.

On reviewing the conduct of Polycarp and of Justin Martyr we commiserate their sufferings, and admire their firmness. The language of their professions was temperate and chastised, and their conduct in the last trying scenes of life was in every respect dispassionate and heroick. In the epistles of Ignatius are found more ardent effusions of zeal : he expresses his eagerness to suffer death, and requests the Roman converts not to desire his deliverance, nor to intercede with the magistrates for his discharge.

To the Historian of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire such fervour for martyrdom appears unnatural and censurable. But let the zealous spirit of the Apostolical times be

be considered, as well as the suffering state of christianity, and the ardent temper of Ignatius. The desire of immortality was the ruling passion of his mind, and hurried him into expressions of rapture and impatience. His enthusiastic ardour so far from resulting from a censurable motive arose from an excess of virtue. He was steadfastly and unalterably determined to persevere unto the end, and to crown a long life of unshaken fidelity with a magnanimous death. He sought not officiously the occasion of suffering; but when the accomplishment of his sentence approached, he even disconcerted the malice of his enemies, and increased the confidence of his friends by converting that event into a subject of pious exultation. He panted for that close of his life from which Socrates in circumstances not dissimilar, disdained to shrink.

The Emperour Trajan intended to inflict the deepest wound on christianity, by devoting to publick execution one of its most eminent Pastors. It may be concluded therefore, that the intercession of the Roman converts for the deliverance of Ignatius would have been vain and fruitless. Had their application been successful, the favour obtained by it would have been totally repugnant to his principles as  
well



well as his wishes ; since he looked forward to his approaching sufferings as the necessary trial of his constancy, and the true and unequivocal test of his faith. The prospect of heavenly bliss, which was the end and the reward of his perseverance, made the means appear not only tolerable, but attracting ; not only to be endured with patience, but to be anticipated with rapture. St. Peter, by whom Ignatius was initiated into the service of the church, had not long before sealed the truth of the gospel with his blood. St. Paul had made Rome, and probably the same amphitheatre in which Ignatius was to be exposed to lions, the scene of his last sufferings. The Apostle of the Gentiles on a similar occasion, calmed the grief of his friends, and silenced their pathetic remonstrances, when they foreboded the fatal consequences of his journey to Jerusalem. Animated rather than depressed by the impending trial of his fortitude and sincerity, he zealously expressed his readiness not only to submit to the rigours of imprisonment, but to endure the pains of death in order to promote the cause of christianity. Moreover, the disciples of our Lord after their dismissal from the Jewish assembly had converted their ignominious treatment into a subject of joy and congratulation. These examples therefore

were

were too recent, and too applicable to his own situation not to make the deepest impression on the mind of Ignatius. Hence he was inspired with sacred emulation, and was encouraged to extend his eager views to that martyrdom which he wished to participate with his great and holy predecessors, in full assurance of participating with them also, its transcendent and immortal rewards.

However the sentiments expressed by Ignatius may seem to exceed the bounds of calm and quiet resignation, they are by no means singular. Amidst the multitude of similar instances with which later monuments of ecclesiastical antiquity abound, our attention is first directed to the conduct of Cyprian and Basil. Their expressions, on approaching the spot which was destined for their execution, were the dictates of joy, rather than of grief. Their death, like that of Ignatius, far from being attended with indications of tame dejection, or sullen acquiescence, wore the dignified air of a triumph.

The elegant Author of the inquiry into the miraculous powers of the church has represented that the Martyrs were encouraged by peculiar incentives to bear their harsh sentences

tences with patience and even with joy ; because they were animated by the expectation that earthly glory would crown their afflictions ; that their memory would be celebrated by panegyric orations, and annual festivals ; that the greatest veneration would be paid to their reliques ; and that the merit of their sufferings would be a sufficient expiation of sin. Now as no traces are to be found of such expectations in the works of the earliest fathers, which our plan has led us to consult ; it seems more just and more necessary to develop those principles of action which we may conclude with greater certainty to have influenced their conduct.

He whose mind is deeply impressed with the description of the sufferings of the early Martyrs, aggravated as those sufferings were, in many instances, by all the tortures of ingenious cruelty ; and endured at the same time with the most unruffled composure ; will easily admit, that their extraordinary fortitude arose from the immediate support of the divine grace. He may be led to express his opinion in the following train of representation.

There exists in man an inherent love of life, which is so deeply engraven by the hand  
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of nature, that it seems to form an essential part of the soul. Self preservation is the fundamental law of our being ; it is the passion which precedes every other in the order of utility, and is implanted by the Creator, as the root, from which every social and religious obligation necessarily springs.

However strong this principle may be, and however uniformly it might be supposed to operate in every state of society, the page of history and the authentic relation of credible witnesses exhibit to us various instances in which it is sometimes counteracted and overcome. The antient inhabitants of northern Europe sought death with ardent eagerness in the field of battle, or welcomed its approach in the decline of age with expressions of savage joy. The follower of Brama to shun the wearisome decay of lingering sickness anticipates the hour of death, and devotes himself to the flames. The Indian remains unmoved amid the dreadful preparations for his lingering execution, and defies in the agonies of torture the ingenious cruelty of his foes. The Gentoo with steady pace and unaltered look ascends the funeral pile and becomes a willing sacrifice to her departed husband.

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In these cases we behold the effect of national custom and inveterate habit. Such self-devoted victims were trained up from their birth to the contemplation of spectacles of torture and of death; and their perpetual occurrence operating upon a general obduracy of manners and temper prepared the way for the unfeeling sacrifice of life.

On contemplating the situation and circumstances, of the early Martyr, his case will appear to be widely different: he was generally taken from the eminent ranks of christians; he was born in an enlightened country; his disposition and education inclined him more necessarily to the allurements of ease and peace; unlike the savage he was a stranger to scenes of turbulence and blood, and unaccustomed to situations that called for vigorous exertion, or unremitting and hardy activity; his mind was actuated by keen sensibility, which is a quality that never exists in a barbarous state of society; he was alive to all the exquisite endearments of social life, and attached to the world by all those tender ties of friendship and of affection which hold the heart in the most permanent captivity. Hence arose a contest between the love of God and love of Life; between the suggestions of conscience,

science, and the calls of affection; between the claims of rigid duty, and the expostulations of violated nature. Nothing less therefore than a divine interference seems capable of terminating the dubious contest, and of making religion triumphant over the reluctance of humanity, and the powerful attractions of the world.

Moreover, the tenderness of youth, and the delicacy of the female sex were frequently exposed to the same punishments. They turned from the fascinating pleasures of the world, and met their fate with the same unruffled composure, which distinguished the victims of more mature experience. The conduct of Blandina among the Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne, was as conspicuous and exemplary as that of the venerable Pothinus. As the same temper of mind actuated all the sufferers, without distinction of sex or age; it becomes more necessary to advert to a principle, which from the energy of its effect, and the extent, and the uniformity of its operation, will obviously account for such heroick behaviour.

The powerful succour which gave ardour and confidence to the first christians was by no means confined to them. It was graciously  
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displayed whenever the consolations and assistance vouchsafed to the faithful, were equally instrumental to the glory of the christian cause. The mercy of the Almighty was equally propitious to those whose conduct was uniformly distinguished by rational piety, and whose unremitting zeal prompted them to contend earnestly for the faith. For evident instances of similar assistance the pious reader of the martyrologies will proceed to appeal to the history of our own country. He will still continue to maintain that when the Demon of Papistical bigotry raged, and the fires of superstition blazed in every part of Britain, the assertors of the protestant faith received powerful support from on high. To this auspicious source his gratitude will attribute the inflexible constancy of Hooper, the unruffled serenity of Rogers, and the reanimated zeal of Cranmer. Nor when he looks back to the transactions of bigotry which occur in the annals of Oxford, will he think that any other adequate cause can be assigned for the dignified resignation of Ridley, and Latimer.

In this divine interference there appears most assuredly to be nothing repugnant to the declarations of scripture; nothing that offers an affront to the powers of reason: so far

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from it, the supposition is strictly consistent with the predictions and promises of our Lord, who graciously displayed the glory of his divine person, to animate St. Stephen when sinking under the violence of his murderers. The particular attention of Providence, to virtue in distress, was a tenet which reflected honour on the principles of antient philosophy. Without distrusting the firmness of the ground on which the general hypothesis rests, the caviller may be challenged to prove that such an interposition is in any degree derogatory from the honour of the Supreme Being. For he cannot have the hardiness to assert that it is at all inconsistent with the goodness and mercy of God, to succour his faithful servants in the most momentous and trying conflicts of life; more especially, at a time when those momentous and trying conflicts were undergone in attestation to that truth, which even his beloved Son died to establish.

But however eager the reader of the martyrologies may be, to establish his sentiments in the minds of others; he must not precipitately urge his favourite hypothesis, as an indisputable truth. Considered as a conjecture, it derives some probability from the extraordinary nature of the christian dispensation itself,



as well as from the extraordinary difficulties, which its advocates were forced to encounter. But the evidence for it, is less complete and less striking than might have been expected. The deficiency in this respect may lead many into a different train of thinking, and a different mode of accounting for the courage of the martyrs.

Such may impute it to the full conviction with which the martyrs were impressed of the goodness of their cause ; to their certain hope of immediate happiness ; to their reluctance to retract from the profession they had solemnly made ; to the approbation of their own conscience, and to their desire of following the example of their predecessors, and of leaving an equal example to posterity.

The suppositions which we have attempted to state, have a certain degree of evidence and probability to support them. The adoption of either must ultimately depend upon particular modes of education, and particular trains of thinking. He who views the providence of the Almighty presiding over every part of the world, and sometimes more immediately interposing his arm to support his distressed servants, will eagerly embrace the former. He

who is an advocate for the dignity of unassisted reason, and asserts the unconquerable strength of human resolution, will not fail to espouse the latter.

These arguments naturally lead us, in the third place, to consider the Effects produced by the fortitude of the martyrs.

Their conduct was eminently conducive to the diffusion of christianity. The people, after viewing repeated executions of the faithful, far from adopting the sentiments of informers and persecutors, were impressed with just indignation and excessive horror at their unrelenting malice. The tender emotions of pity to the sufferers were excited in their breasts, and a strong inclination was awakened to ask what principles had inspired them with such undaunted heroism. The compassion of the multitude rendered them curious, and their curiosity became the happy cause of their conversion. Thus was the consummate wisdom of the divine decrees exemplified in the wayward and precipitate folly of man. The sanguinary measures adopted to extirpate the new religion, operated as the means of its more rapid diffusion; and the church, far from sinking under her repeated losses, rapidly augmented the number  
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of her profelytes. She resembled the fruitful vine, which from the defalcation of some branches, produces more rich and more abundant fruit.

Nor did the number of her sons only encrease, but their respectability also. From the patience of the suffering christians the more contemplative and rational Pagans inferred the innocence of their lives, and the purity of their characters. To them it seemed impossible that men who undauntedly encountered the pains of premature dissolution, could be addicted to voluptuousness or stained with guilt. For they wisely concluded that the indulgence of vicious gratifications inevitably tends to enervate the mind and to render it incapable of such great and strenuous exertions. These arguments made a deep impression on the minds of many who had been educated in the schools of philosophy; and their conversion failed not to reflect additional lustre on the christian name.

From the particulars of the preceding disquisition it appears, that christianity was long exposed to dangers which were constantly threatening its compleat and irreparable subversion. During its infant state, it was as-

faulted by the relentless rage of the most cruel tyrants, whose crimes contaminate the annals of history. The poison of slander, the shaft of ridicule, the scoff of contempt, and the sword of persecution were the active but ineffectual instruments that were constantly employed against it. But its great Author permitted not his religion to be extirpated by the malevolence and the infatuation of man; since he was graciously pleased not only to invigorate the minds of his suffering servants by his all-sufficient aid; but converted the machinations of their merciless foes into the most effectual and abundant sources of the diffusion of the faith.

If the perseverance of the early martyrs was thus eminently conducive to the rapid progress of the gospel, it is not difficult to ascertain, or at least to conjecture, what would have been the consequences of their recantation and apostasy. The Pagans would have boasted, that christianity itself wanted a sufficient energy of principle, to arm its followers with intrepidity; and consequently, that it sunk much below many institutions confessedly of human origin; and was weaker in its attractions than many attachments which have influenced the courageous of all ages, to disregard the approach

proach of danger, and contemn the frowns of death. This would have been their presumptive argument against its pretensions to a divine revelation; and if it was a system founded on the ingenuity of man, by the violence of man also, it could have been subverted. Satisfied with such sophistry, and elated with the success of their first attempts, the enemies of the gospel would obviously have proceeded to try the same methods, upon the more ignoble adherents to the faith, which had successfully been pursued against its leaders. Their repeated success would have given a severe check to the progress of christianity. For it must have been driven for refuge to the recesses of remote provinces; and its benefits would have been lost to multitudes for many generations.

But the perseverance of the martyrs proves the vigour, as well as the perfection of the christian principles. They rightly understood that its great Author never intended to confine its operations within the narrow and degrading limits of worldly prudence and temporizing caution. Their behaviour was sufficient to convince all succeeding ages, that whilst it can inculcate the love of whatever is laudable, and the desire of whatever is good; it can

likewise excite the endurance of all that is terrible, and produce the performance of all that is magnanimous,

From the blind partiality which the frequent contemplation of suffering virtue is too apt to diffuse over the credulous mind, and from too close and vehement a pursuit of those reflections which prove how greatly the progress of christianity was accelerated by the fortitude of the first profelytes; the christians of the middle ages were led to attribute a peculiar efficacy to their relicks. They advanced martyrs to the same honours which the gratitude of primeval ages had conferred on the founders of states and the inventors of useful arts. When however the christian of more enlightened times censures the misguided conduct of such weak and superstitious zealots, let him be careful not to imbibe the opposite sentiments of those, who contemptuously overlook or studiously depreciate such eminent instances of merit. Weighed in the balance of fair and dispassionate judgment, the conduct of the early martyrs appears to have shed distinguished lustre on their profession. When a desertion of the banners of christianity would have been detrimental to her best interest, they were the first who met the encounter of  
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the enemy. By the ardour of their zeal, and by the firmness of their resolution, they disconcerted his continued assaults; and though they fell victims to their determined steadiness became more than conquerors by securing the ultimate triumph of their cause. For all who were thus exposed to danger and to death in the gloomy season of persecution, we cannot fail to cherish a high degree of respect and honour. They reached the true elevation of the christian character, and adorned the noble institutes of their religion with immoveable attachment, and unshaken courage. They gave the most convincing and most valuable proof of their sincerity, by sealing the truth with their blood. In every instance of their pious resignation; through a long succession of illustrious examples, they present us with that noble and awful spectacle, which is the favourite theme of philosophical eulogy, and is the most interesting and most edifying object which can possibly be exhibited to the contemplation of the world:—a virtuous man suffering unmerited misfortunes with patience.—*They have fought a good fight, they have finished their course, they have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for them a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give them at that day; and not to them only, but to all that love his appearing.*





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# S E R M O N    I V .

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EPHESIANS V. 27.

*A glorious Church not having spot or wrinkle  
or any such thing, but holy and without  
blemish.*

**T**HE establishment of discipline is necessary not only to the existence of every community, but also to its continuance; as it connects the members by one common bond of association, and checks internal disorders by salutary and efficacious restraints. This principle extends to religious as well as to civil constitutions, for though the origin of religion be divine, yet the preservation of it is committed to human means; and therefore like every other trust in the moral dispensations of providence, it requires some directions for the understanding, and some restraints upon the passions. The christian church seems to have  
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been formed upon the model of the Judaical synagoge, since they agree in many circumstances of their government. The principles of its polity were immediately founded upon the express declarations of scripture, and the constant practise of the apostles. As from no less an authority than that of our Lord himself, was derived the privilege of initiating converts by the water of baptism, and of confirming their faith by eating the bread of the eucharist; so from the conduct of Christ's immediate successors originated the power of pronouncing the sentence of excommunication.

This discipline, by the unabating vigour with which it was enforced in the infancy of the church, constituted a sure and infallible criterion of the sincerity of the profelytes. A conformity of manners with the institutes of the gospel was expected to be the immediate consequence of conversion. Hypocrisy could not for any long period of time elude the vigilance of strict observation, nor could any flagrant infringement of baptismal vows remain unmarked and unpunished. As the reputation of the church intirely depended on the irreproachable conduct of her members, she wisely preserved the greatest distinction  
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between the exemplary and the profligate. The result was highly favourable to her best interests; for whilst her unfullied purity of morals supplied her friends with the most animating subject of panegyrick; it gave the most unequivocal confutation to the malicious calumny of her enemies.

To ministers selected from the body of the converts, the discharge of the sacred functions, was entrusted. As the church was frequently groaning under the severity of persecution, or filled with the apprehensions of its approach; and as the most eminent christians were the certain victims of popular rage, the ambition of raising themselves to ecclesiastical honours must have been in a great measure repressed. Spiritual preeminence was accompanied neither with the comfort of security, nor the gratification of emolument. So that a purer and more exalted principle necessarily predominated in these early ages, when a situation of more immediate danger made the most conspicuous distinction between the pastor and his flock. Hence a long life of vigilance and piety was often closed by a sudden and cruel death.

If many passages of scripture seem not clearly to ascertain the difference between the orders

orders of bishops and of presbyters; that difference may be best illustrated and defined, by the early establishments. In the beginning of the apocalypse, the bishops are peculiarly distinguished from all other members of the christian communities; and by a figurative allusion derived from the synagogue, are denominated the angels of the seven churches. The letters addressed by Ignatius, the venerable prelate of Antioch, to various congregations of Asia, plainly show that their order was generally established, and that they were invested with peculiar powers of superintendance soon after the decease of St. John.

The clear distinction which Ignatius marks out between the bishops, and the presbyters, is supported by the antient acts of the same martyr, and of Polycarp. It is confirmed in the succeeding part of the century by the epistle of the Emperor Hadrian to Servianus; by the testimony of Dionysius of Corinth, the epistle of the churches of Lyons and Vienne; and by the fragments of Hegesippus, Polycrates, and Serapion.

Implicit obedience to these governours of the church was represented as a proper principle of action, and an indispensable branch of duty.

duty. A high degree of deference and even veneration was recommended, as peculiarly due to their character and rank. And without doubt the most compleat subordination will appear to have been highly necessary, on considering the perilous state of the early christians. Recently formed into communities, they were at once assailed by open violence, and agitated by internal discord. No expedient seemed better calculated to invigorate their common efforts, and infuse a spirit of unanimity, than a chearful obedience to their ecclesiastical guides. The rising church resembled a small army stationed on hostile ground, whose only security against the perfidy of insidious allies, and the assault of open enemies, consisted in receiving the orders of their leader without murmurs, and following him without complaint.

Among the arduous employments which called forth the activity of the primitive bishops, no one required more unremitting attention than to confute the errours of heresy. The alarming diffusion of false doctrines had required the repeated exertions of the apostles; and their successors found by painful experience, that a great part of their employment must necessarily consist in eradicating the

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the noxious tares which the enemies of the true faith still laboured to disseminate.

To accommodate the sacred volume to their own preconceived ideas, and not to sacrifice their preconceived ideas to the sacred volume; seems to have been the fundamental error of the early hereticks. The causes of their desertion of the true faith, must therefore be traced from their original manners of life, from the bias of corrupt inclinations, from the stubborn influence of early habits, and their warm attachment to a spurious philosophy. In some, may be discerned the fallies of a licentious imagination which delights to decorate truth, with the most incongruous appendages of fantastick mythology; in others, is equally evident a palpable perversion of scripture, interpreted upon the contracted principles of bigotted Judaism. They resembled the philosophers of Greece, who attributed such characters to their deities as were most conformable to the relaxed, or rigid maxims of their favourite schools. Thus the Gnostick represented the person of the Messiah airy and volatile as his general system of theology; whilst the Ebionite, whose mind could not soar above ritual and carnal ordinances, sunk him to a level with his own nature.

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Although the Gnosticks, and the Ebionites were remarkable for an early desertion of the true faith, they were not contemporaries. So that ineffectual is the attempt which has been made by the Author of the early opinions concerning Christ to heighten their antiquity by referring them to the time of the apostles. As a proof how detrimental to the interest of christianity their errors were thought, and how serious an alarm was given to the orthodox by their diffusion, the detail and the confutation of their opinions forms a considerable part of the more antient literature of the church.

The Oriental and Platonic philosophy, some fictitious writings of Zoroaster and Abraham, together with the pretended traditions of Christ and his apostles combined to form the visionary system of the Gnosticks. Their particular tenets are too extravagant, and too numerous, to admit of repetition after the minute and curious catalogue which has been given of them, by the ecclesiastical writers. The Historian of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire has distinguished them by a circumstantial account of their opinions, and a favourable representation of their conduct. He has however made an omission which the

rigid impartiality of truth can by no means justify, by passing over in silence those sects of the Gnosticks, who were censurable for the licentiousness of their morals. If even great allowance be made for the unfavourable relations of Irenæus, and the more dark and disgusting descriptions of Epiphanius ; it cannot be imagined, that they were totally destitute of a foundation. For the latter of these fathers had every opportunity of ascertaining the facts which he records, and describes circumstances which were publickly known. We must conclude, therefore, that the sensuality of their conduct bore some analogy to the extravagance of their opinions. The censures, incurred by their profligacy of manners, may be applied with too much justice to the followers of Marcion, Saturninus, Basilides, Marcus, and Carpocrates.

As the disciples of Cerinthus, of Menander, and of Valentinus, held the passions to be the most dangerous enemies of the soul, they mortified them with the most rigid austerity ; whilst those Gnostics, who were more relaxed in their principles, indulged them with criminal licentiousness. Such conduct however opposite, may be reconciled to their grand and fundamental tenet ; as they held the body to be



be the source of evil and corruption, and totally distinct and disunited from the soul when purified by religion. They maintained therefore, that the impulses of the passions however irregular, might be obeyed or disregarded, without spiritual danger, or spiritual advantage.

They denied the humanity of Christ, from a supposition that it was highly unworthy of a divine being to be united to impure and gross matter. They affirmed that what appeared to be his body was a mere phantom, and that his crucifixion was illusive and visionary.

To confute these paradoxical and erroneous opinions, both Ignatius Bishop of Antioch, and Polycarp Bishop of Smyrna impressed upon the minds of the christian converts the grand and awful facts of the incarnation, and of the crucifixion. They declare in express terms, and repeat the same sentiments in various passages of their epistles that “whosoever  
“does not confess, that our Lord suffered upon  
“the cross, is from Satan. Jesus Christ was  
“truly born, and did eat and drink, was truly  
“persecuted under Pontius Pilate; was truly  
“crucified and died, and was truly raised up by  
“the Father.”

The derivation of the name of the Ebionites is involved in some obscurity. It has been supposed to allude to their indigent condition, or to the degrading opinion which they formed of the Son of God. But probability seems upon the whole to incline to the conjecture that it was the appellation of the author of the sect. They sprang originally from the Nazarenes, who composed a more antient society of Judaizing christians. These two sects have been very improperly confounded with each other, by the Author of the early opinions concerning Christ; although the distinctions which subsisted between them is carefully marked out by the antient writers. As a characteristick distinction, they not only held different opinions of the fundamental articles of faith but received different gospels. In the gospel of the Nazarenes the two first chapters of St. Matthew were admitted, which the gospel of the Ebionites wanted. The Nazarenes not only maintained the miraculous conception of Christ, but also that he partook in some limited degree of the divine nature. The Ebionites held St. Paul in great contempt as a deserter of the law of his ancestors; the Nazarenes on the contrary, placed him among the most eminent teachers of divine truth. The Ebionites maintained that the laws

laws of Moses ought to be observed by all profelytes to christianity; the Nazarenes, that such an observance should be extended only to the descendants of Abraham. As a decisive argument that the Nazarenes held opinions more sound and more approaching to the true faith than their successors the Ebionites, they are not included in the heretical catalogue by the early writers, whereas the Ebionites are distinguished by a conspicuous place.

They drew their opinions from a spurious history of Christ, to which reference is probably made in St. Paul's epistle to the Galatians. It was their grand object to make an accommodation between the law, and the gospel, by raising the former, and depressing the latter, and to combine them in one system of belief and practise in order to render them equally obligatory. A part of this sect maintained that the conception of Christ was miraculous; whilst others more presumptuously asserted, that he was a mere man, the Son of Joseph and Mary; and that he was not distinguished from mortals by any miraculous circumstances of birth. Some at least of this latter description are known to have held, that at the time of his baptism, the Christ, who had been invested by the Supreme Being

with the sovereignty of the world, descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove, and continued the director of his actions to the time of his crucifixion; when he reascended to heaven, and left Jesus exposed to the pains of unassisted humanity.

As the Ebionites began to rise into notice at the commencement of the second century, Ignatius and Polycarp assiduously laboured to extirpate their opinions. That the division of Jesus Christ into two distinct persons was at once unscriptural and irrational, sufficiently appears from the expressions employed by these fathers to confute the Gnosticks. There are however many other passages in their epistles, more particularly directed against the Ebionites, the substance of which is conveyed in the following declarations:—“ That Jesus  
 “ Christ our inseparable life, is sent by the will  
 “ of the Father. That our God Jesus Christ  
 “ was according to the divine dispensation con-  
 “ ceived of the Virgin, of the family of David,  
 “ by the Holy Ghost. Again; Be not deceived  
 “ by heterodox doctrines, nor with antient fa-  
 “ bles, which are unedifying; for if ye continue  
 “ to live according to the Jewish law, ye con-  
 “ fess yourselves not to have received grace; ye  
 “ ought no longer to observe sabbaths, but  
 “ keep the Lord’s day.”

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These words in their general import seem equally to affect all the heresies of that early age, and to be levelled against those who denied the miraculous conception, as well as the divinity of Christ. The latter part of the quotation, however, is more strictly appropriate. The converts are exhorted to quit their attachment to the law of Moses because totally inconsistent with the principles of the true faith; and the prejudices attributed to them, are not so strictly applicable to any description of Christians, as to the Ebionites.

On a full consideration of the expressions of Ignatius, it may not be improper to apply to them the pertinent remark which Tertullian makes on the first epistle of St. John. “The Evangelist particularly stigmatizes those Infidels by the name of Antichrists, who deny that Christ is come in the flesh, and who do not maintain that Jesus is the Son of God. The former was the error of Marcion, the latter of Ebion.”

The censures of Justin Martyr are directed against the same hereticks, in his curious dialogue with Trypho the Jew. He describes particularly the errors of the sect, and his omission of their name is similar to his prac-

tise with respect to the evangelists, of whom he speaks only in general terms. He marks out the wide distinction between the Ebionites and the orthodox believers; adverts to their desertion of the doctrines of scripture for the vain traditions of men. To him their opinions appeared so derogatory from the divinity of the Son of God, that he expressed his deliberate disapprobation of their opinions, and seems rather inclined to rank them among the believing Jews, than to include them in the number of genuine christians.

Irenæus in his elaborate work, in which he confutes the various sectaries of the second century, maintains that the Ebionites by their perverse and degrading opinions had wantonly deprived themselves of the benefits of the incarnation; and were deserving of the same severe and full reprehension which was due to all other deserters of the truth. He includes them in the general catalogue of those hereticks  
“ who are so unlearned and ignorant of the  
“ dispensations of God, particularly of his  
“ gracious design respecting the redemption  
“ of man, that they are blind to the truth,  
“ and contradict their own salvation.”

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From this unanimous opposition of the ancient fathers of the church it appears how much the sentiments of the Ebionites were reprobated. To the different pleas which they confidently set up, the most cogent and unanswerable arguments were opposed. They boasted of various advantages which they enjoyed in common with the church, and their claims were disputed with that firmness, and vanquished with that irresistible power of confutation, which will ever be the recompense of presumption and error. Like the church they had traditions : but of what did they consist ? Not of the pure and uncorrupted injunctions of the apostles ; but of the empty and obsolete ceremonies of the Levitical law. Like the church they had prophecies ; but how did they interpret them ? Not in the spirit of the inspired writers ; not by an enlarged and complete view of the predictions that display the exalted nature of the Messiah, as well as of those which describe his humiliation ; but by a servile adherence to the false glosses of the later and more contracted Rabbins, who maintained him to be a mere man. Like the church they had scriptures ; but were their scriptures the complete and indisputable productions of truth ? So far was this from being the case that they contained

tained not the testimony of the beloved disciple, nor the epistles of the great apostle of the Gentiles, because they rejected such parts of the canonical code with disdain. On the contrary, they received a mutilated gospel of St. Matthew, and perused with eager credulity the romantick legends of false teachers.

Thus they were slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had spoken, and all that the apostles had testified. Whilst the true christian enlarged his mind with a full conception of his religion, the Ebionite with inflexible obstinacy submitted to bear the unnecessary burthens of the law, and with blind perverseness cut off the essential principle of the gospel.

Between the Ebionite and the Mahometan there is a close and striking resemblance. According to the creed of both, Jesus Christ is a mere man. They practice with scrupulous attention the rites of circumcision and of purification. They both appeal to the authority of spurious books; and as the Ebionites value the fabulous travels of Clement, so the Mahometans consult the false gospel of Barnabas. They have a high regard for particular places: The Mahometan indulges the most profound veneration for the holy city which contains the



the tomb of his prophet : the Ebionite glows with equal enthusiasm on contemplating the prospect of Jerusalem,

The pride of Mahomet would have suffered the keenest mortification, if when he adopted some ceremonial parts of the Mosaical law, and degraded the sublime character of the christian legislator, he had reflected, that he servilely pursued the steps of an obscure heresiarch ; and that the boldness of his enterprizes, and not the fertility of his invention, gave him the best title to the admiration of his followers.

Such was the origin of the antient communities of christians. In conformity with the apostolical appointment, the spiritual governors undertook their superintendance. To their more especial custody, the sacred volume was committed, and by them the most authentick copies of it were preserved. They performed the sacred offices of religion, opposed the incroachments of hereticks, confirmed the converts in their fidelity, and invited the Pagans to embrace the same auspicious hopes, which they cherished in their own breasts.

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The regulations of these establishments and the salutary influence of their rules were open to general inspection. The heathens saw effects produced in the church which were more beneficial to society, than the theory of the sublimest philosopher had promised; or the performance of renowned legislators had produced. Here was the republick of Plato, without its licentiousness; and the asylum of Romulus without its reception of the outcasts of society. The grand object of the institutions of Lycurgus was the acquirement of barren conquest. The consequence of the sanguinary decrees of Draco was the depopulation of his country. But the church whilst she executed judgment, remembered mercy, and the final cause of her severity was the extinction of sin, not the destruction of the sinner. Even in her discipline, there was nothing to repel the advances of the timid, nor to confirm the aversion of the prejudiced. The sentence of excommunication was awful in its circumstances, and certain in its infliction; but it was not irreversible. During the solemn season of penance, indeed, the countenance and the dress of the spiritual exile discovered the strongest marks of dejection and sorrow. But after giving the most unequivocal proofs of his sincere contrition, he was again admitted into  
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the church, and his return was welcomed by the most ardent congratulations of the pious.

The prudent administration and strict regularity of ecclesiastical discipline made the most favourable impression on the the mind of the Pagans, more particularly, when they observed the close conformity of the conduct of the primitive christians with the precepts of the gospel.

Now, the christian precepts appear to greatest advantage when contrasted with the laws of the Jews, and the maxims of the Philosophers.

The moral laws of the Mosaical code breathe much of that spirit of philanthropy which constitutes the glory of the evangelical scheme. Yet the last injunction of the Decalogue was liable to be fettered by a partial interpretation, and made subservient to the contracted views of local prejudice. *Thou shalt not covet the possessions of thy neighbour*, might literally be understood as a prohibition of such desires only, as were fixed upon the property of persons in the same vicinity. That the Jews were disposed to consider this duty as confined to so narrow a circle, seems probable, not only from the general aversion which

which they discovered against all other nations ; but likewise from the question proposed by the inquisitive scribe. Our Lord with his accustomed readiness to instruct, and his peculiar felicity to illustrate, represented the sensibility and the benevolence of the good Samaritan. This interesting picture was admirably adapted to awaken the torpid feelings of a bigotted Jew, and to display to him that sublime scheme of universal affection, in which he was to extend his views of charity beyond his native country, and to consider himself as the general friend of mankind.

The superiority of the gospel over the Mosaic law, appears more fully by considering that the commandments of the latter, are, for the most part, negative ; containing rather prohibitions of sin, than incitements to goodness. Whilst the disciple of Moses, adhering to his own principles, advances only the first step in the path of morality ; the disciple of Christ leaves him far behind, adds to his innocence much positive excellence, and adorns his character with every virtue. So far from merely not invading the possessions of another man, he reaches out his liberal hand to minister to his necessities : so far from merely not retaliating injuries received, he stands  
ready

ready to embrace his enemy in the arms of affection, and breathes a fervent supplication to heaven, for his temporal and eternal happiness.

The philosophers of Greece and Rome present us with the most convincing proof, how far unenlightened reason carried her investigations towards the perfection of ethicks. The powers of intellect which they displayed, and the obstacles which they surmounted, before they discovered many valuable truths, are not fairly estimated, when viewed through the medium of the christian revelation. Their attainments ought to be compared with the ignorance of the multitudes that surrounded, and that preceded them. Then will they appear most wonderful efforts of the human mind. Then will they become the bright dawn of the intellectual morning which shone more and more unto the perfect day.

If moral wisdom descended from heaven to dwell with the most enlightened Sage of Athens, she quickly caught the contagion of earthly depravity, and forgot her dignity so far as to bend at the shrine of superstition. Her dictates were not built upon any certain foundation, or digested in a consistent plan. They

They were disgraced with false notions, intermixed with frivolous refinements, and scattered among discordant sects. The indissoluble union of consistency, the powerful attraction of example, and the strong and awakening voice of authority were wanted to give to precept the energy of law. But the most material obstacle to a ready compliance with their instructions was the want of such sanctions as hold the mind in the most permanent subjection, by immediately addressing its hopes and fears.

These defects were distinctly visible to the ancients themselves. Aristodorus declared to Socrates that he would willingly worship the Gods, whenever their embassadours descended to inform him what to perform and what to avoid. The enlightened philosopher himself observed, on contemplating the insufficiency of natural reason to reform the world, that the labours of moralists must be vain and ineffectual, unless the Supreme Being would commission some teacher to instruct mankind. The great Roman orator also, expressed an ardent wish for the discovery of a new demonstration to prove that virtue alone was sufficient for happiness. This general dissatisfaction clearly evinces the  
necessity

necessity of a divine revelation, and may be considered as the voice of philosophy complaining of her own defects, and imploring the Supreme Being to point out the path of duty to her impatient and bewildered followers.

By the gospel, therefore, were supplied the deficiencies of all preceding institutions and systems. The Mosaical code was as far excelled by the religion of Christ, as the tabernacle of the wilderness was surpassed by the magnificence of the temple of Solomon.

The maxims of antient wisdom were not only refined and enlarged, but established upon a true principle, and made conducive to an exalted end. The scattered and feeble stars of philosophy which were visible during the night of ignorance, were obscured by the diffusive effulgence of the evangelical sun.

To complete the benevolent plan of revelation, the same volume which was filled with the most pure lessons of wisdom, contained likewise the most perfect exemplification of them. The adorable Son of God condescended to recommend his own instruction by his own practice, and to exhibit that lively image of

moral perfection which had, indeed, sublimed the imagination of Plato and of Cicero ; but which, antient experience in the widest circle of observation, had sought for in vain. The divine teacher not only spake, as man never spoke, but at once to combine the efficacy of example with the perfection of precept, became the unerring guide to all that was pious, all that was amiable, and all that was great.

- If the Pagans were dazzled with the lustre of his conduct, and saw him soar to an elevation which mere humanity cannot reach ; they were convinced that it was practicable in some degree to follow his steps when they directed their attention to the early converts, who were no less zealous in their professions of fidelity to his commands, than instrumental to his glory by their actions.

The basis of the primitive virtues was a steadfast and lively Faith, which consisted in a perfect conviction of the truth of christianity, preceded by a careful examination of its evidences, and accompanied with a full assurance of its rewards. This principle purified their taste, and exalted their desires above the gross pleasures of sense, and made all sublunary enjoyments seem as dust in the balance when  
weighed



weighed against the happiness of eternal life. It dispelled the mists which obstructed their prospect of heaven; for during the vexations of adversity, the distress of persecution, and the agony of martyrdom they behaved with the same invincible persuasion of the truth of the divine promises, as if they had beheld their Lord and Master coming in the clouds with power and majesty, and holding out the crowns of everlasting life to his persevering followers.

From this faith arose that ardent and rational zeal which is shown in a chearful and prompt execution of the commands of God, whatever he enjoined, and an unremitting pursuit of duty wherever it pointed the way. Their conduct was equally remote from the languor of indifference, and the extravagance of fanaticism.

In the first rank of primitive virtues stood Humility, which was the chief characteristick of our Lord himself, and is the peculiar ornament of his religion. How far the cultivation of it was carried by his early followers, appears from the literary remains of the first and second centuries. The writers of that period were not influenced by dogmatical arrogance,

or dictatorial presumption ; but uniformly discovered an amiable and unassuming diffidence. Clement Bishop of Rome although honourably mentioned by St. Paul, as his coadjutor in the faith, aspires to no authority over the Corinthian church, when writing to compose its dissensions ; and Ignatius, the venerable Bishop of Antioch, celebrated for his piety and constancy, scarcely presumes to take the name of a disciple of Christ.

The character of many congregations was marked by the same virtue which distinguished their teachers. Gentleness of manners and obedience to authority were the fruits of their instructions. No sufferings in the service of their divine Master induced them to arrogate the smallest degree of merit to themselves, or to think that their conduct entitled them to any distinction, until they had advanced to final perseverance and finished their course with joy. Armed by humility they were invulnerable against the derision and contumely of their enemies. As they cherished not the conceit of excellence, the pride of rank, nor the insolence of power ; vain were the attempts of malevolence and slander, to ruffle their tranquillity, and provoke their resentment.

In the diffusion of this virtue we behold the wonderful triumph of christianity over national character, and deeply rooted prejudice. The Romans were elated with the prospect of their ample dominions, which exceeded the extent of all former conquests. Descended from ancestors whose achievements, and whose virtues swelled their breasts with conscious dignity, and rich with the spoils of the vanquished provinces; they wanted nothing to increase their sense of personal dignity. The Greeks, equally illustrious for the noble exploits of their predecessors, and distinguished by the cultivation of the most elegant arts, beheld with disdain the barbarous nations that surrounded them. The philosophers although divided into various sects, yet were all elevated by the same spirit of superciliousness, and as they soared above the multitude in the rejection of vulgar prejudices, and the cultivation of the intellectual powers, they esteemed themselves the wisest of mortals. These respective propensities, so dear to the human mind because so founded on self love, were softened and controuled by the precepts of christianity. The humility of the gospel checked the presumption of the proud; and that haughtiness of spirit which had never

before submitted to controul was transformed into complacence and condescension.

The primitive christians were equally remarkable for the exercise of Charity in its most enlarged and proper sense. One considerable branch of this duty was their genuine liberality of sentiment. This was as observable in their general conduct to the Pagans, as in their publick and private supplications to the throne of mercy. In the midst of the most fierce persecutions they fervently prayed for the preservation of the Emperour, and the prosperity of the state. When defamed by the insinuations of the Jews, and mindful of their rebellion against their crucified Messiah; when exposed to contempt and calumny on account of the scandalous licentiousness of hereticks, they generously confess, that far from viewing them as objects of hatred and abomination, they entreat the compassionate Parent of the world for their amendment and happiness.

The fairest and most conspicuous fruit of this comprehensive virtue was Beneficence. Its effects were not confined to individuals, or to a particular congregation, but extended to the church at large. The accumulation of  
property

property for the relief of the poor in the infancy of the church, as well as the liberal contributions promoted by the apostle of the Gentiles, attest its early prevalence. Nor did the converts of succeeding times degenerate from their predecessors. The commendation which was bestowed on the munificence of the Corinthians by Clement Bishop of Rome, was with equal justice and ardour returned by Dionysius the Great. He describes the attention of the Romans to the generous custom which commenced at the first diffusion of the gospel of alleviating the necessities of distant brethren. Nor did their liberality stop here, but was reached out to those pious captives who torn from their social connections, were condemned for their adherence to the faith to labour in the imprisonment of the mines. This principle was in some instances elevated to the height of ardent affection, and led to that disinterested sacrifice of personal considerations which realizes the attachments of romantic friendship. Many rescued their fellow christians from captivity by voluntarily occupying their places, and others sold themselves into bondage, that by the price obtained by the forfeiture of freedom, they might supply the necessitous with food and raiment. To the Pagans such conduct was at first a subject of

surprize, and afterwards excited the greatest admiration, when the humanity of the more opulent christians was not confined to the circle of their own community, but extended to the multitude at large. Acts of similar munificence were in some degree familiarized to the minds of the Romans, by the expences lavished by the opulent and the noble on the splendid exhibition of publick games, and the ostentatious prodigality of entertainments; but the christian liberality was directed to far more beneficial and disinterested ends. It was not dissipated among those who returned the obligation by sacrificing their civil rights to the lust of power or of ambition, but it was conveyed to distant lands and foreign cities, to the naked and the hungry who saw not the hand that reached out the kind supply, and could make no acknowledgment to their unknown benefactors, but the ardent benediction of gratitude, and the pious sacrifice of prayer,

The sarcastick Satyrists of the philosophers in a strain of lively but malevolent irony, endeavours to fix the imputation of weakness and imprudence on the christians for their generous conduct. The Emperour Julian remarking its attractive influence on the minds of the people determined to reform the religion  
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of polytheism, by ingrafting upon its observances the pure precepts of the christian law. He confessed that nothing had contributed more to the progress of christianity, than the kindness of the christians to strangers, the decent solemnity of their funeral rites, and the sanctity of their general conduct. It was then to virtues not pretended but real that the church was indebted for her enlargement; to virtues, which the most acrimonious enemies of the faith combined unintentionally to commend, and by that means supply an illustrious confirmation of the veracity of those ecclesiastical writers who record and extol them.

Whilst these were more particularly conspicuous, the christians recommended themselves by their general conduct. Their firm attachment to the established government, their sacred adherence to truth and honour, their strict integrity, love of peace and inoffensiveness gradually dispelled the mists of prejudice and calumny which first obscured the prospect of christianity, and brought them forward to the general observation of the world,

It was evident then that the christians rose to that elevation of character which is the most

most difficult to attain, and at the same time the most valuable to possess. An elevation, not supported by the flattery of self-love, but the firmness of consistency. Their practise reflected lustre on their principles, and gave them the most persuasive recommendation. It was a severe and just reproach to the Pharisees that "they said, but did not." They sat in the seat of Moses, and expounded the moral law; but they wore the mask of hypocrisy, and listened not to the cry of the supplicating widow. The philosophers adorned the dictates of wisdom with the graces of eloquence; but they too often sullied the purity of their schools with the stains of immorality. The Philosopher and the Pharisee might confess with a blush, that they were far surpassed, and if ever a sense of real merit touched their breasts, they bowed with unfeigned deference to the unassuming followers of Christ.

In the christian character, the opposite extremes of torpid apathy and boundless gratification were avoided. So that the Stoic might learn to relax his principles with decorum, and the Epicurean to find pleasure in the pursuit of virtue. They saw that the christian directed the natural propensities of the mind,  
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the love of pleasure, and the love of action to their noblest ends; for he was temperate, just, benevolent and pious. These are the qualities which shed the most soft and pleasing lustre over the scenes of domestick as well as publick life, which refine the feelings of nature, and advance the happiness of society, which adorn the father in the circle of his family, and dignify the statesman in the consultations of the senate. So that such is the wonderful and intimate connection between the true interests of this world and the next, that the same virtues which render man useful and agreeable among his fellow creatures, are the best preparatives and most unerring guides to the society of angels.

This imperfect display of the conduct of the first christians is not drawn from the solitary examples of individuals, or the vague assertions of rhetorical declaimers, but from circumstantial and authentick records, from the apologies of the converts when on the assertion of truth depended all their earthly welfare, from the concurrent attestation of the ecclesiastical writers, and from the partial relations of their avowed enemies. A display of facts derived from such various sources, may therefore properly be regarded as the general voice  
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of antiquity proclaiming the virtues of true believers to the world, and calling upon posterity for wonder, applause and imitation.

Yet these virtues great and illustrious as they are, *the Historian of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire* has confined to a bigotted zeal and a timid repentance. Such animating subjects would do honour to the talents and the exertions of any writer, because they display the best feelings and most exalted sentiments of human nature. Upon this occasion the pencil of fiction is not necessary to give shade and colouring to the outlines of fact, to soften the frowns of tyranny, and beautify the features of licentiousness. The virtues of the primitive christians require not those flowers of fancy, nor that splendour of eloquence which are vainly lavished on the superstitious folly of Julian, and the consummate hypocrisy of Mahomet. They modestly ask to be enrolled in the records of impartial truth, *that men may see their good works and glorify their Father which is in heaven,*

To the contemplative statesman the revolutions of government become subjects of curious speculation. He considers them in their immediate and remote effects upon laws and customs,

customs, and how far they contribute to the aggrandisement of the sovereign, or the extension of the privileges of the people. To the moralist, the revolutions of manners appear far more interesting, as the consideration of them leads to an intimate acquaintance with the mind; and shows to what a degree the fervour of its passions may be abated, and the stubbornness of its prejudices may be bent, by new and salutary principles of action. It points out likewise how those principles may become productive of the greatest comfort to individuals, and the greatest happiness to society.

The triumph of christianity was completed during three centuries after the ascension of its divine Founder partly by the subversion of the most antient and most popular superstitions which had been ever known to the world, and partly by the gradual revolutions which it produced in publick customs and private manners. Its salutary influence was not only felt by the refined and luxurious citizens of the Roman Empire, but by the savage and warlike people of Europe and Asia, who successively came forth in mighty armies to subvert the vast fabrick of Imperial greatness.

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As it was the first glory of the gospel to call forth into action the most benevolent feelings of the mind, the treasures of its more opulent converts were not lavished on votive offerings, and bloody sacrifices; but were appropriated to the relief of the ship-wrecked mariner, the distant exile, and the fettered captive. The songs of gratitude and the supplications of distress were no longer wasted on sculptured images, but were addressed to the high and lofty one who inhabiteth eternity, and who heareth when the righteous call. The dark and fraudulent oracles of the priests were deserted for the predictions of inspired prophets, and for the lessons of the book of life. The parents who formerly exposed their infant offspring to untimely death, or reared them to maturity, that they might barter their innocence for the wages of prostitution, awoke to the exquisite feelings of nature, and led them to the path of holiness and virtue. The slave no longer dreaded the stripes of his despotick master, for as soon as he was purified by the water of baptism he arose to a spiritual equality with him and was entitled to all the benefits of a free born citizen. The bloody combats of gladiators, which had long been the favourite spectacles of the polite as well as of the vulgar, gave way to amusements  
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more refined, and more consistent with humanity. The licentious festival of the Saturnalia was superseded by the commemoration of the birth of Christ; and the feasts of Flora were abolished for the observance of his meritorious passion. The prophane mysteries of Ceres, and of Bacchus, and the horrid barbarity of human sacrifices were succeeded by the pure and simple celebration of baptism, and of the eucharist. The cross of Calvary which had been the contemptible instrument of the execution of slaves, adorned the summit of the churches, and was depicted on the standard of the legions. As soon as divine honours were paid to Christ, the heathen acknowledged the weakness of his gods. He listened no longer with eager credulity to the ambiguous predictions of the Delphick priestess, or to the oracular streams of Daphne. Whilst broken arches and prostrate columns spread the floor of the deserted temples, and the mutilated statues of the gods were monuments of the fall of polytheism; numerous edifices of christian devotion were erected, and opened their spacious doors to receive the multitude of thronging proselytes.

The Pagan religion, although assisted by various expedients, gradually gave way to the  
increasing

increasing influence of christianity. Alike inadequate to its popularity and its reformation, was the sanguinary malice of Nero against its assailants, and the ingenious devices of Julian to remedy its abuses. When no longer upheld by the arm of the civil magistrate, its internal weakness sunk it to the ground, and the refusal of idolaters to suffer in its defence formed a striking contrast to the illustrious fortitude of the christian martyrs.

The barriers of national enmity and inveterate prejudice which had for ages obstructed the intercourse of mankind, were broken down; and the inhabitants of different countries with benignant looks of esteem and cordiality, met around the social hearth, or filled the solemn assembly. The Jew, enlightened by the evangelical law, no longer viewed the Gentile with disdain, or refused him the common offices of benevolence: nor did the converted Gentile any longer survey the Jew, as the hater of mankind, and the advocate for an intolerant superstition. The nations who before the glorious advent of Christ had been only distinguished by their abject and coarse barbarity, rose from the condition of rude savages to a higher elevation in the scale of reason and of morals. The Ægyptian idolater ceased to  
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bend at the shrine of Serapis and Typhon, and to exalt the sacred animals of his country to the rank of celestial spirits. The mysterious symbols of the sacerdotal hiéroglyphicks were changed for the practical and intelligible precepts of the gospel. The Parthian and Persian tribes instituted the decent rites of sepulture, abolished their incestuous alliances, and restrained the inordinate licence of polygamy. The warlike inhabitants of Scythia, of Germany, of Spain, of Pannonia and Britain forsook their gloomy superstition for the pure religion of Christ, and whilst its precepts softened their ferocious spirit, they imbibed a taste for literature and for arts. Their adoption of christianity from their Roman foes was at once an argument of its intrinsic excellence, and of their ardent and sincere veneration for truth. They relinquished the savage prospect of revelling after death in the gloomy palace of Odin, for the bright hope of a heavenly paradise. They no longer shed the blood of human victims, at the altar of their shapeless idols, but bent a willing knee to the God of mercy. The Druids, who were wont to lead the rude inhabitants of Germany and Gaul from the deep recesses of the forests to the field of carnage and death, and inspired them with the delusive hope that the soul

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would reanimate another body, were succeeded by peaceful orders of ecclesiasticks, who taught their converts the real value of life, and the true doctrine of immortality.

Thus as soon as the christian religion spread its sacred light around the world, the shades of superstition vanished, the manners of mankind were distinguished by gentleness and humanity, the rigours of war were softened, the insolence of conquest was curbed, and a solid and permanent foundation was laid, for a comprehensive and equitable system of jurisprudence and a general law of nations. The unbounded spirit of philanthropy, highly extolled indeed by the antient philosophers and poets, but never before cultivated, began to operate upon its noblest principle, by establishing the love of Man upon the love of God. The state of man in all his various circumstances, connexions, and situations was meliorated, the line of his duty was marked out with precision, his pains were alleviated by the supply of the noblest incitements to his fortitude, and his blessings were multiplied by new and inexhaustible sources of hope. The magnificent and vast scheme of providence was fully developed, by showing to man the immediate relation of a present to a future state



state of existence. The clouds of darkness and doubt which had obscured the prospect of heaven were removed by the full assurances of a glorious immortality. The triumph of vice and the depression of virtue were no longer subjects of inexplicable difficulty to human reason ; but formed consistent parts of that moral scheme the prospect of which was closed by the awful scenes of a future retribution. The christian religion united the whole human race by closer ties of affection, as children of the same Almighty Parent, as partakers of the same redemption and heirs of the same felicity. It clearly proved its divine origin by purifying the corruption, and exalting the capacity of the mind ; by subliming its moral energies, and by affording the most extensive scope, and holding out the most glorious reward for the exercise of every virtue.

From the whole of this disquisition it appears, what an important object the progress of christianity forms in the history of those people over whom its light was first diffused, and how highly it deserves to be brought forward as the cause of a revolution in publick and private manners which far surpassed the powers of man to accomplish by the exertions

of the greatest diligence, or the most refined policy. We have therefore the justest reason to conclude that the providence of the Almighty was not only active in cooperating with its votaries for its establishment, but likewise in preparing the way for its reception.

The weakness of all those causes which we have reviewed as immediately conducive to the establishment of christianity, as well as a survey of the events which preceded the manifestation of the Son of God, concur to produce this conviction. When we recollect how much the discipline of the primitive church was broken by discord, and perplexed by heresy; when we calmly consider the rage of Paganism which so frequently exercised the fortitude of the martyrs; the calumny raised against the church, which as it was in some degree occasioned by the excesses of nominal believers, was inadequately opposed by the apologists; and the dissoluteness of manners which idolatry allowed so hostile to the primitive virtues; we must necessarily be at a loss for some other cause, which is fully and completely adequate to the rapid and extensive propagation of christianity in the two first centuries after Christ. The necessity of having recourse to  
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this cause appears more evident, from considering the violence of prejudice in favour of establishments confirmed by habit, and endeared by education, the natural pride of the human heart, which disdains the puerile concession of imbibing moral instruction at the age of maturity and reflection, and more than all, the influence of universal example, which unites man to man by the closest ties, and has an immediate and imperceptible influence on every action of life. This formidable tide of prepossessions and passions augmented by all the preceding obstacles was too impetuous to be opposed by human efforts alone.

We can discern therefore no other method of finding an easy and satisfactory solution to the difficulty, than by concluding that a long and magnificent series of events were all previously arranged for the introduction of christianity,

For a demonstrative proof that the greatest empires of the world had a connexion with the advancement of true religion, under the different dispensations of Moses, and of Christ, we may appeal to the testimony of the antient predictions. Absorbed by the bright visions of futurity, the prophet Isaiah calls by name

on the conquerour of Assyria, and the restorer of Israel, two centuries previous to his birth. To the eye of Daniel, the successive monarchies of Persia, of Macedon, and of Rome were represented by the most exact display of emblematical imagery. The different periods of the Jewish history, when the Almighty raised up the nations as the instruments of his vengeance, or of his mercy, will show by what various modes they combined to execute the divine decrees. Sometimes the daughter of Babylon mocked the sorrows of her captives, whose neglect of Jehovah had been the cause of their chains: sometimes when duly humbled by their calamity, their conquerour permitted them to regain the seat of their fathers, and to restore the glories of the fallen temple.

From the ruins of preceding states arose the stupendous and august fabrick of the Roman Empire. Though long agitated by the storms of contending factions, it survived every shock of domestick tumult, and gradually extended its dominion over the most populous and warlike regions of the world,

The nations of Europe, of Asia, and of Africa, which at present compose formidable kingdoms,

kingdoms, were enrolled in the register of her tributary provinces. The privileges of the conquerours were generously extended to the vanquished, and Rome became the common country of her subjects. Wherever the legions led the way, a free admiffion was opened to arts, to laws, and to commerce; and the unrestrained intercourse of various nations promoted a general spirit of obedience and subordination. On the advancement of Augustus to the imperial throne, the violence of intestine disorders was extinguished, and the various parts of the empire enjoyed a degree of repose unknown to former ages. The love of conquest, which had for seven successive centuries exercised the courage of the Romans, subsided into sudden and lasting peace; and the disposition of the first emperours to mark out the boundaries of dominion and to silence the clamour of arms, produced a strong and astonishing contrast to the fierce and ambitious temper of their ancestors.

In the tendency of all these circumstances to some magnificent event, we may clearly discern the directing hand of the Creator of the universe. To his disposal alone, can properly be attributed that long and complex concatenation of affairs which led the Romans

by regular steps to the summit of dominion. The conflict of their passions, the various revolutions of their government, the ingenuity of the wise, and the ambition of the valiant, cooperated for one transcendent purpose. It was ultimately for this purpose that the legislators remedied the political evils which threatened the destruction of the Roman State and laid the firm foundations of general order. For this, her heroes fought with unparalleled advantage, and victory was ever ready to lead her armies to triumph. For this, Scipio gloried in the fall of Carthage, Pompey returned with the spoils of Mithridates, and Cæsar bore his triumphant eagle from the plains of Ægypt, to the shores of Britain. All their great achievements and all their splendid events, the boldness of their enterprizes and the frequency of their success, uniformly pointed to the fullness of time when the Son of God was made manifest, and were so wisely regulated as to prepare the way for the more easy progress and more ready reception of the christian faith.

The Almighty King of Kings with the same power which brought the universe into existence, superintends from the highest heaven all the nations of the earth. He views instantaneously the most astonishing effects in their remotest

remotest causes, and the long series of sublunary events, which to the human eye are distant and indistinct, appear but one object to the rapid glance of his Omniscience. At his command, the rise and fall of the mighty empires, whose history comprehends the most important transactions of mankind, were successively displayed upon the great theatre of the world. To complete his stupendous and beneficent designs a new empire was formed, and the government was given to his beloved and adorable Son. Descending from the bosom of the Father, and veiling his majesty in a human form, he graciously condescended to lay the everlasting foundations of his kingdom, and directed his followers to erect the vast and sublime superstructure. Animated by his grace, and directed by his example, his ambassadours proclaimed the glad tidings of immortality, his first followers professed with boldness the sacred truths of revelation, and his martyrs bled with exultation in its defence. Holiness, Peace, Charity, and Hope are the fruits of his laws, and all the faithful in the wide circle of the globe are his servants and subjects. When worldly grandeur shall have passed away, like the visions of the night, this spiritual empire shall unite the regions of paradise to her dominion, and flourish with increasing glory throughout the ages of eternity.





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# S E R M O N V.

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ISAIAH XLIII. 9.

*Who among the people can declare this, and shew us former things? Let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified: or let them bear and say, It is truth.*

**I**F the productions of literature be estimated by their utility, the most elevated place among writers ought to be assigned to the historian. Although the severity of truth marks out for him a more regular line of conduct than the poet, or the orator is required to pursue; yet his obligation to follow her immediate dictates is made easy, and even delightful, by proper reflections on the dignity of his labours, and the animating anticipation of the reward which will succeed them. It is his peculiar and important province to investigate the latent principles of conduct, and pursue

pursue them to their remotest consequences; to delineate the diversified picture of actions and characters, and display the revolutions of government, and the fate of empires. If his subject be judiciously chosen, and his productions be stamped with the marks of genius and fidelity, successive generations will celebrate his name as the benefactor of mankind, for giving them an imaginary existence in past ages, for introducing them to the knowledge of departed excellence, and for enabling them to profit by the conduct of their predecessors. His praise will be the constant theme of their gratitude, whilst they shun the vices, and imitate the virtues; which his works have consigned to immortality.

This approbation, however, ought to be withheld, in proportion as an author is discovered to entertain sceptical notions, and to disseminate them with caution and subtlety. Any endeavour to loosen the ties of religious duty, is an affront to the pious principles of education implanted in every cultivated mind; and an act of hostility against the general interests of society. If it has always been essential to historical decorum, for a writer to support the character of the friend to virtue and morality, how flagrant a violation of it, must

must the attempt of any one be, who undermines the credibility of that Revelation, which is their best and firmest support ?

Such a design may not unfairly be imputed to *the Historian of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire*. His disinclination to conform to the religious opinions generally received, is sufficiently evident ; for who has discovered from the most careful perusal of his works that he is an advocate for any particular establishment, or even that he is convinced by the evidences of christianity in general ? The want of such a discovery can only add to our regret, that the splendid powers of an enlightened mind, should be made subservient to sentiments, the confutation of which has so repeatedly added to the triumphs of learning and theology. Although his endeavour to communicate them to the world by combining them with the history of a most renowned people, may add to their general notoriety, it can produce no commendation from those who look upon infidelity with surprize, and upon artifice with aversion.

In the mode by which an eminent Philosopher of the North divulged his sceptical opinions, there was a boldness which was respectable

spectable and manly, and which at least entitled him to the praise of plain dealing and candour. He attacked christianity in works evidently written for the purpose; but when he came forward as an historian, he suspended his endeavours to invalidate the proofs of revelation; and if a conjecture may be indulged from a consideration of his arguments at large, his mind appears to have been influenced by a bias favourable to religious establishments and ceremonies. The *Historian of the Roman Empire* pursues a design, which as it is executed by the most ingenious stratagems, is infinitely more dangerous. His scepticism is sometimes insinuated in the language of diffident hesitation, and is frequently so distant and subtle, as to elude the force of immediate detection. The reader feels unfavourable impressions made upon his mind, which he scruples to impute to the writer, until repeated instances make it evident that it was his deliberate design to disparage our holy religion, and weaken the credit of its advocates. On no occasion therefore, was it ever more necessary, to rouse the vigilance, and alarm the apprehensions of all who are charmed by a matchless brilliancy of style, and attracted by the recital of the most important events which have occurred in the history of mankind. *Let*  
*them*

*them beware lest any man spoil them by philosophy and vain deceit, by the rudiments of this world, and not after Christ.*

The necessity of such caution, and the pernicious tendency of such principles, will be fully evident from considering how closely scepticism may be connected with a disregard and even a perversion of truth. Every historian professes to hold the scales of justice with an equal hand; but he will at once, if the weight of prejudice be suffered to preponderate, alarm the suspicions of his readers, and forfeits their confidence. For such a desertion of his duty, no other qualification is an adequate apology. The brilliancy of his imagination, and the acuteness of his judgment, the strength of his reason, and the extent of his learning, rather aggravate, than diminish the fault. His grand and primary object is to convey instruction through the medium of narrative, and this purpose can never be answered by partial representations of conduct, and mutilated sketches of character. Artifices of this kind transform the venerable portraits of history into the airy phantoms of romance, and are productive of an injury both to the dead, and to the living. The former are degraded from their proper places in the temple  
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of fame, and may be stigmatized with censure, when their conduct, if exhibited in its true light, would entitle them to praise. The latter, may be taught false opinions of mankind, and may be led to form principles of conduct subversive of their happiness and prejudicial to society. As such consequences are likely to ensue from misrepresentation, in what esteem is that historian to be held, who poisons the fountains of antiquity and recommends them as pure and uncorrupted to the world?

That Gravity is essential to the character of an historian is a principle that few will be hardy enough to deny. The simple and majestic grandeur of narrative condescends not to form an association with unbecoming levity. But if the general events of past ages require to be recorded in a manner totally free from this unsuitable mixture, it must surely be much more decorous for a writer to preserve the most strict seriousness of character, when the success of a divine revelation, which has the most intimate connexion with the best interests of mankind, and the mode in which its most upright and most sincere advocates have endeavoured to promote its glory, and diffuse its benefits, form a part of his disquisitions.

sitions. Let us imagine for a moment the divine origin of christianity, and its infinite importance with respect to the dearest interests of mankind to be out of the question, and let us place it only on a level with other subjects. If in the discussion of the principles of science, in the developement of the intellectual powers, in commenting on the maxims of legislation, or the rules of ethics, if in examining the characters of Newton, of Locke, of Montesquieu or of Bacon, a writer should indulge the sallies of humour so far as to scoff at what he could not confute, cavil at what he must know to be true, and ridicule those whom he ought to reverence; would he not provoke the indignation of the judicious, and incur the censure of the dispassionate; and would not they determine that he mistook irony for argument, that his judgment was a slave to the petulance of his wit, and that his conduct was an insult to propriety, candour and truth?

How far the *Historian of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire* is liable to this imputation, will appear to every one who peruses the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of his work, and compares them with the original materials from which they are affirmed to

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have been compiled. He has deviated from his principal subject to describe the progress and establishment of christianity, and to represent the actions and characters of its earliest professors. The chain of those events which took place in the reign of Constantine is violently broken, to introduce a long and elaborate digression, at the same time that the scantiness or suspicious nature of the ecclesiastical records, of which he complains, would have furnished him with a convenient apology for silence upon the subject : but that silence, which he affirms to be inconsistent with religious zeal is much more inconsistent with infidelity. In the chapters before mentioned we observe with concern that christianity is vilified in the persons of its primitive professors. Their real or imaginary failings are aggravated, and at the same time that no palliation whatever is afforded to their errors, every art which ingenuity can invent is employed to screen the inhumanity of their enemies. So that on many occasions, if a just and impartial estimate be made of the first christians, the sentiments of the historian will be decidedly opposed by the sentiments of his readers ; the virtue which he has degraded will be raised to distinction, and the indirect or positive censure which he has expressed, will



will be rejected with contempt, or exchanged for general and ardent panegyrick.

To shew how far the monuments of ecclesiastical can justify such a difference of opinion has been the attempt made in the preceding lectures. In order to render them more complete, it may be proper to review some passages of the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of the *decline and fall of the Roman Empire*. Such a discussion will prove the weakness of certain opinions represented as conducive to the propagation of christianity; alleviate the fathers from a charge of excessive credulity and uncharitableness; and place the cruel proceedings of their persecutors in a proper light.

Among the various instances of misrepresentation with which this particular part of the history of the *decline and fall* abounds, there are Five which immediately force themselves on our notice; we will consider them in the order in which they occur, and conclude this Lecture with some general observations.

The First consists in assigning a visionary cause for the propagation of christianity.

The historian asserts that the “assurance of  
“ a millenium was carefully inculcated by a  
“ succession of fathers from Justin Martyr and  
“ Irenæus, down to Lactantius, who was pre-  
“ ceptor to the son of Constantine. Though  
“ it might not be universally received, it ap-  
“ pears to have been the reigning sentiment of  
“ the orthodox believers, and it seems so well  
“ adapted to the desires and the apprehensions,  
“ of mankind, that it must have contributed  
“ in a very considerable degree, to the progress  
“ of the christian faith.”

That this persuasion should hasten the progress of the christian faith, is an hypothesis which it is as difficult to support by the suffrage of antiquity, as to reconcile to the conceptions of reason. For the belief of the millenium was an expectation grounded on the preconceived ideas and faith of a christian. A competent knowledge of the scriptures, a peculiar interpretation of the predictions, both of the prophets, and of our Saviour, and an implicit reliance on the mistaken sense in which they were understood by some believers, were previous and necessary steps to the reception of this opinion. It was therefore an object of hope derived through a series of preparatory circumstances from particular tenets,  
and

and consequently could have no foundation whatever, until those tenets were embraced.

When the principle is laid down as a cause for the propagation of christianity, we naturally require something more substantial than mere conjecture to prove the certainty of its existence. But can the historian appeal to facts to establish the truth of his position? Where has he obtained, among the remains of primitive antiquity, any positive information that the doctrine of the millenium was held out as an allurement for the Gentiles to become converts to the church? We may conclude that the effects of such a doctrine would have been far different from those which he imputed to it, upon very strong and very respectable evidence.

For the learned Origen thought that the opinions entertained by some respecting the millenium were too gross and sensual to form a part of the christian system, and that even the Pagan conceptions of a state of felicity were more refined and spiritual. So far is he from affording any support to the conjecture of the historian, as to remark on the contrary, that if the heathens understood that such a tenet was countenanced in the church, the

report of it would fix the imputation of weakness on christianity, and stain the purity of its sublime doctrines.

To say that a succession of fathers inculcated this opinion from Justin Martyr to Lactantius, is an assertion which may be controverted without danger of incurring the censure of petulant cavil, or precipitate contradiction. That many of them maintained it, will readily be granted; that all inculcated it, will as readily be denied. Tatian wrote a learned treatise against the Gentiles, Athenagoras the philosopher presented an elaborate apology to the Emperour Marcus Antoninus, and wrote a dissertation on the resurrection. Theophilus Bishop of Antioch inscribed three argumentative disquisitions to his noble friend Autolycus. All these, with the copious works of Clemens Alexandrinus and of Cyprian, were written within the interval mentioned. Their authors discuss the received doctrines of the church, and particularly the opinion relative to a future state; yet in what passage is the slightest intimation given of the belief of the millennium, or even of the existence of such a tenet, where is the slightest mention made? Although the historian with a degree of prudence which does credit to his corrections, has

has qualified his vague assertions in the last edition of his work, and thus eluded the force of a positive denial of his statement ; yet after all, his present text has but feeble pretensions to the praise of perfect accuracy, or manly decision of sentiment.

For if it can be proved that the sentiments of the christians were equally divided upon the subject of the millenium, the sentiment in question was not the reigning sentiment. That this equality was highly probable, will appear from the particular relations of Justin Martyr and Irenæus, and from the general accounts of other writers.

Justin Martyr, in his dialogue with Trypho the Jew, draws his arguments to prove the divine mission of our Lord, from the old testament. In allusion to the former part of their conversation, Trypho asks him, whether he had been induced to bring his proofs from the prophets in favour of the millenium, in consequence of his serious conviction of the approach of that extraordinary period, or merely to shew his dexterity in accommodating the prophetic descriptions to any subject of discussion, which his fondness for argument induced him to advance. " You cannot "

replies Justin, “suppose me capable of expressing opinions which I do not sincerely maintain; I have on a former occasion ingenuously acknowledged to you, that myself and many others, think that the millennium will certainly take place. I have likewise informed you, that there are many christians distinguished by the purity of their sentiments, who embrace no such opinion.” As Justin Martyr was himself a zealous advocate for this opinion, it may fairly be concluded that he stated the number of those who countenanced him in it, in as favourable a manner as the accuracy of truth would allow. It appears, notwithstanding, from the passage above cited, that those who rejected this opinion, were as numerous as those who maintained it. This makes an important alteration respecting the christians of that age, half of whom at least, stand thus far acquitted of the charge.

In opposition to Irenæus and the millenarians of his age, may be placed many of their contemporaries, whom Irenæus himself repeatedly affirms to have considered the passages of scripture, which seem to favour this doctrine, as figurative and allegorical. His representation of their sentiments coincides with that

that of Justin Martyr, and affords sufficient reason to conclude, that the opponents of the opinion were as numerous as in the preceding times.

Without the regular citation of other passages, it may fairly be collected from those writers who deduce the belief of the millennium from its origin, particularly Eusebius, Epiphanius, and Jerom, that they conceived it to have been limited to certain fathers of different ages, because they never represent it as the predominant tenet of the church at large.

Upon the whole, therefore, it appears, that the historian had no sufficient grounds for attributing any efficacy to this opinion in the conversion of mankind, and that the supposition of its prevalence even in the church to the extent which he describes, is destitute of support from ecclesiastical history.

The Second instance of misrepresentation consists in an attempt to invalidate the truth of prophecy.

“ In the primitive church it was universally  
 “ believed, that the end of the world and the  
 “ kingdom

“ kingdom of heaven were at hand. The near  
“ approach of this wonderful event had been  
“ predicted by the apostles ; and the tradition  
“ of it was preserved by their earliest disci-  
“ ples, and those who understood in their li-  
“ teral sense the discourses of Christ himself,  
“ were obliged to expect the second and glo-  
“ rious coming of the Son of Man in the  
“ clouds, before that generation was totally  
“ extinguished, which had beheld his humble  
“ condition upon earth.”

Here the historian evidently betrays an inclination to excite doubts relative to that most awful prediction of our Saviour, circumstantially recorded by all the evangelists, which in the opinion of the most learned expositors, has a double allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the consummation of all things. He insinuates, that it was not fulfilled in the latter sense, when the accomplishment of it was the subject of general expectation among the primitive christians. But what description of them interpreted the discourses of Christ in the literal sense he intimates, it is as vain for us to conjecture, as difficult for him to declare.

“ It was universally believed that the end  
“ of the world and the kingdom of heaven  
“ were



“ were at hand.” This assertion is as destitute of proof, as his affirmation “ that the near approach of this wonderful event had been predicted by the apostles.” We are fully aware that some indefinite expressions of St. Peter may be wrested into an allusion to it ; but that it was not his design to foretell the immediate end of the world is evident from his preparing the minds of the converts for a series of approaching trials which were to prove their faith during the establishment of christianity. When therefore St. Peter affirms, that *the end of all things is at hand*, he certainly speaks only of the fulfilment of those events which carried with them a full ratification of the truth of christianity, and accordingly, in every succeeding age of the church, these words have been applied to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the subversion of the Jewish Empire. That the apostles concluded the end of the world to be far distant from their own times, is moreover clear from the express declarations of St. Paul. For as a proof that some peculiar expressions in his first epistle to the Thessalonians were not to be strictly interpreted, as if himself and his contemporaries were to live until the second coming of their Lord and Master, he speaks on another occasion of his approaching death,

and

and the future corruptions of the church. *He laboured that he might attain unto the resurrection of the dead, and assured the Corinthians that God shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. He explicitly beseeches the converts not to be soon shaken in mind, or to be troubled, neither by spirit nor by word, nor by letter, as from us, as that the day of the Lord is at hand.*

To say that the tradition of the approaching end of the world was preserved by the earliest disciples of the apostles, is a hasty and groundless assumption. Of their earliest disciples the most eminent were Clemens Romanus, Ignatius, Polycarp, and Irenæus, who in no part of their works which remain, mention their expectation of this event, as if at that time about to happen. Irenæus indeed, held an opinion which seems to give some colour to these misrepresentations; for he maintained that the Messiah would begin his reign upon earth when the world was six thousand years old. The historian endeavours to make the supposed general expectation of the accomplishment of the prophecy in question coincide with the close of this period. Unfortunately, however, for the object he had in view, his computation of time is as erroneous, as his arguments

arguments are inconclusive. He maintains that the primitive church of Antioch reckoned almost six thousand years from the creation to the birth of Christ. This number, for which no authority is produced, is most probably that of Theophilus Bishop of Antioch, which according to the most exact statement is found to be very little more than five thousand five hundred. Thus the historian not content with the calculation of the Septuagint, which so far exceeds the Æra of the creation commonly adopted, has added to one of the longest accounts at that time received, very nearly five hundred years.

If the historian had consulted the works of some of those writers whose names decorate his note upon the passage in question, he would have found sufficient reason to correct his misstatement, and to have expressed more precisely the computations of chronology. Lactantius expressly asserts that six thousand years from the creation of the world were not completed in his time. He flourished in the reign of Constantine the Great, at the distance of two centuries from the successors of the apostles. The insinuation, therefore, of the historian respecting the prophecy, is untrue; and

and his attack upon the credulity of the early christians is weak, and easy to be repelled.

The prediction of our Lord and his apostles rest upon the strongest foundation, even the truths of the Almighty himself. They did not foretell that the world would end before the death of the generation to which Christ appeared, because, otherwise, that event would assuredly have been accomplished. They predicted, however, among other instances of the depravity of future ages, the vain enquiries of misguided scepticks, and the event has fully confirmed their veracity. *Be mindful, saith St. Peter, that in the last days shall come scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, where is the promise of his coming? For since the Fathers fell asleep all things continue as from the beginning.*

Let it abate the insolence of the supercilious caviller to reflect on the wise and wonderful dispensations of providence respecting the establishment of the gospel. Even his own efforts to depretiate its truth are included in the scheme of the evangelical predictions, and furnish of themselves clear arguments for its divine origin.

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The Third instance of misrepresentation consists in an unwarrantable charge of uncharitableness against the primitive christians.

The historian remarks that “ the condemnation of the wisest and most virtuous of the Pagans, on account of their ignorance or disbelief of the divine truth, seems to offend the reason and the humanity of the present age. But the primitive church, whose faith was of a much firmer confidence, delivered over without hesitation, to eternal torture the far greater part of the human species.”

The primitive church will be found on a fair and close examination, to be more conformable in point of humanity, with the present age, than the historian represents. Tertullian is the only father of the church on whose authority the above assertion is founded. It must undoubtedly be censured therefore as an impropriety in the historian to rest an argument upon a single authority, and to aggravate the description of a warm and precipitate writer, at the same time that the fathers who express more calm and more benevolent sentiments are passed over in silence. Is it not in the highest degree contrary to the principles  
of

of historical justice to represent the language of an individual as a tenet of the whole church? Is it candid in him to place the invectives of that individual in such a light as to make him appear to pronounce condemnation on the Pagan world at large, when his effusions were principally directed against false philosophers, against corrupters of morals, and persecutors of the faith? He professed indeed that he drew a veil over a part of the description which Tertullian gave of their future tortures; but at the same time he fully exhibits, and artfully heightens every circumstance of it, that can excite the aversion, and provoke the indignation of his readers.

In order to ascertain the more liberal sentiments of the fathers, it is to be observed, that Justin Martyr not only entertained a hope, that Socrates and those who resembled him in virtue would escape the divine displeasure in another life; but with a peculiar allusion to the general benefits imparted by the divine Logos, dignified them with the appellation of christians. With respect to the destination of the Pagans in general, in another life, it was the opinion of Hermas, Clemens Alexandrinus, Origen, and many others, that Christ and his apostles preached to their departed souls  
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in the regions of the dead, and that all those who were converted, were without distinction made partakers of the benefits of the passion. Whatever may be the propriety of their interpretation of a mysterious passage in the first epistle of St. Peter, upon which this belief was founded, at least it shewed their readiness to frame such an hypothesis, as might impart to the heathen world, the salutary truths of the gospel. The fair evidence of antiquity is therefore repugnant to the representation of the historian, and the benign sentiments of the early christians respecting the Pagans who preceded them, are proved to be correspondent with their wishes and prayers for their unconverted contemporaries.

The excellence and the expediency of the evangelical virtues may be inferred even from the contemplation of those minds which act not under their influence; for this severe charge, which is founded on no sufficient authority, and can be proved by no fair argument, would not have been made by the writer, had he been guided by that spirit of charity, which he vainly endeavours to detract from the primitive church.

The Fourth instance of misrepresentation consists in drawing wrong conclusions from facts.

The historian asserts that “ the Romans in  
“ the conviction of any of their subjects, who  
“ were accused of so very singular a crime as  
“ that of christianity, proceeded with caution  
“ and reluctance.”

To establish this assertion, inferences are drawn from the celebrated letter of Pliny to the Emperour Trajan. From thence, the historian observes, “ we may assure ourselves that  
“ when Pliny accepted the government of  
“ Bithynia there were no general laws or de-  
“ crees against the christians.”

Whoever reads this letter with attention will be more likely to draw a different inference. Pliny informs the Emperour that he had never been present at any judicial examinations of christians. This manifestly implies that they had already been brought before magistrates, and if brought before magistrates, they must have been apprehended on suspicion of infringing some standing law of the empire. Pliny does not consult the Emperour whether  
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the christians were deserving of legal severity, and therefore were the proper objects of a penal decree ; for on this subject he was sufficiently decided by expressly declaring that their obstinacy deserved to be punished. His reason for consulting the Emperour seems to have been this : He was solicitous to know whether some gradations of punishment should not be adopted, and a line of distinction be drawn between the young and the old, the recent and the early converts. His ignorance proves nothing contradictory to the existence of laws against the christians. He only speaks from his own inexperience, and sufficiently intimates that he wanted not the establishment of a new law, but the modification of an old one, in order that it might more particularly apply to various cases.

That this was the object of his enquiry will appear in a stronger light from weighing the circumstances of the affair in connection with the testimony of other writers. Is it probable that a Roman Proconsul invested with the command of an extensive province, and occupied by the administration of its weighty and numerous affairs, would have wasted his time in listening to accusations against its inhabitants for holding certain singular opinions,

which in no degree affected the tranquillity of the state, if the infringement of some law had not called for his attention? Is it probable that he would have doomed any of its inhabitants to death on the deposition of officious informers, if a law had not justified his decisions? Had not such been the case, he would have followed the example of the impartial Gallio, and have driven both the accusers, and the accused with impatience from his tribunal. Such conduct would have been far more consistent with the general character of Pliny, than to have been led upon insufficient grounds into the most wanton and unauthorised exercise of his power.

Notwithstanding the Senate had repealed the bloody edicts of Nero and Domitian against the christians, yet Trajan at the beginning of his reign, from a desire to secure the rites of Paganism from innovation, enacted that all the subjects of the empire, should either offer sacrifice, or suffer death.

The authority of the acts of Ignatius, which contain this remarkable fact, is confirmed by the proceedings carried on during the same reign against Symeon the aged Bishop of Jerusalem. He was seized by the multitude, and

and brought before the Proconsul of Judea, who deliberately condemned him to be crucified. If the multitude could not have obtained the object of their indignation under a legal sanction, they would not have brought the venerable martyr before the magistrate; and if the magistrate had not acted under the influence of the law, he would not have condemned him to an ignominious and cruel death.

With how much precipitation, Pliny proceeded against those unhappy christians who were brought before him, appears from his own circumstantial account. He informs us that he ordered those who persevered in their confession of the christian name, to be led out to suffer death, and that he put two women to the torture to extort a confession of suspected guilt. The praise of reluctance and caution, so profusely bestowed upon him by the historian, would have been more consistent with truth as well as humanity, if Pliny had solicited the determination of the Emperour, before he adopted such rigorous measures. His conduct can only be accounted for by supposing he was actuated by a sense of duty to enforce the existing laws. If however it should be granted to the historian, that Pliny

was left entirely to his own discretion, and acted not in conformity with any existing law, what treatment must the christians have experienced from magistrates of cruel and inflexible dispositions, if such were the proceedings of one, who was on all other occasions eminently humane and benevolent ?

This question may be best resolved by making some remarks on a subsequent assertion of the historian, viz. “ That the Romans  
“ were moderate in the use of punishments  
“ inflicted on the christians.”

In the constitution of laws, there ought always to be some proportion observed between the crime and the punishment. But the Romans when acting as legislators against the christians, betrayed the most flagrant desertion of every principle of equity. A member of the church was condemned for holding singular opinions, before it was discovered whether they would lead him either to the commission of crimes, or to the violation of the publick peace. He was doomed to such inflictions as were barely justifiable for the most atrocious enormities. Forfeiture of property, imprisonment, exile to solitary islands, condemnation to the mines, were the most lenient sentences pronounced

pronounced against the innocent sufferers. On other occasions, their fortitude was brought to a severer trial by the mutilation of limbs, or a death aggravated by the barbarity of insult, and sharpened by the ingenuity of torture. To refer to no other proofs, the epistle of the churches of Lyons and Vienne, will furnish as many instances of refined cruelty, as of invincible patience. If this be moderation, what is severity? If this be mildness, what is rigour? If the inference of the historian be confirmed by such indisputable facts, our opinions of the most atrocious characters must undergo a complete revolution. Nero will be esteemed a philanthropist, Domitian the father of his people, and Decius the protector of christianity.

The Fifth instance of misrepresentation consists in selecting passages manifestly inconclusive, and suppressing others of the same writers more decisive and equally connected with the subject.

The historian remarks that “ the learned  
“ Origen who from his experience as well as  
“ reading was intimately acquainted with the  
“ history of the christians, declares in the  
“ most express terms, that the number of

“ martyrs was very inconsiderable. His au-  
“ thority would be alone sufficient to annihi-  
“ late that formidable army of martyrs, whose  
“ relicks, drawn for the most part from the  
“ catacombs of Rome, have replenished so  
“ many churches, and whose marvellous at-  
“ chievements have been the subject of so  
“ many volumes of holy romance. But the  
“ general assertion of Origen may be explained  
“ and confirmed by the particular testimony  
“ of his friend Dionysius, who in the immense  
“ city of Alexandria, and under the rigorous  
“ persecution of Decius reckons only ten men  
“ and seven women who suffered for the pro-  
“ fession of the christian name.”

How far the historian is justifiable in diminishing the number of martyrs upon the authority of the writers he has here mentioned, will appear from the following considerations. In the treatise of Origen against Celsus, Celsus objected that christianity had arisen to distinction in the world by supporting a spirit of sedition, against the established government of the empire. Origen disproves the assertion by assuring him, that the christians, in no attack made by their enemies, had ever resorted to arms, but on the contrary, had yielded with the greatest submission to the most rigorous execution

execution of the laws. It had however, he observes, pleased the divine goodness, that few and such as could easily be enumerated, had at different times been cut off, in order to prevent the extermination of christianity. It is obvious to remark on this passage, that the expressions denoting a small number of martyrs, are to be understood with reference to the whole community of christians at large. Although the disproportion subsisting between them might be very considerable, as christians at that time abounded in every province of the Roman Empire, yet the quantity of martyrs might nevertheless be in itself very great. That Origen himself embraced such an opinion is clear from other passages. He says that every city and every order of men was hostile to the christian name. Again, speaking of the conduct of the Pagans of his own age, he observes that many who are well convinced that the profession of christianity will be productive of the most fatal consequences, and that a renunciation of it will ensure their security, have shewn their contempt of the world by enduring with patience the loss of life. In his commentary on the epistle to the Romans, he moreover says, that it was common to see persons who surrendered themselves with the greatest compo-  
sure

sure to persecutors, and not only submitted to outrage, but even to death.

If we proceed to examine the support which is given to Origen by Dionysius of Alexandria, we shall find that among his invaluable remains preserved in the ecclesiastical history of Eusebius, there is a circumstantial account of the Decian persecution in Ægypt. A particular relation is given of the tortures and death of seventeen persons. But does he hint that these were the only sufferers, who were exposed to the fury of the Imperial decree? So far is this from being the case, that he mentions in general terms, many other christians, who were likewise condemned to die. He particularly relates, that the persecutors rushed into the houses of the christians, and plundered them of their most valuable effects. Such was the excessive tumult, that Alexandria exhibited the appearance of a city taken by storm. Many of the brethren fled, and recollecting the consolatory expressions of St. Paul, sustained the loss of their property with joy. In addition to these circumstances, it is to be remarked that Dionysius concludes his interesting narrative with this pathetic expostulation. "Why need I describe particu-  
" larly



“ larly the multitude of those who were driven  
“ to wander in the deserts and on the moun-  
“ tains ; who perished by the bitterest afflic-  
“ tions, by hunger, by thirst, and by cold ;  
“ or who were cut off by robbers, by disease,  
“ and by wild beasts ? These disastrous events  
“ are not recorded in vain, but that you may  
“ have an authentick relation of the calamities  
“ which befell us.”

From the whole of this detail we may see by what disingenuous methods the historian has perverted the plainest facts. From a multitude of writers he brings forward Origen to corroborate his hypothesis of the small number of martyrs, when it is evident that Origen, must, on such an occasion, be a very incompetent witness. For the most cruel persecutions did not rage whilst he flourished, or probably not till after his death ; and the barbarity with which Decius, Valerian, and Dioclesian depopulated the church, can only be known from later fathers. By violently disjoining one part of his observations from the context, the sense is wrested into a contradiction of his general sentiments, as well as of the accounts of other writers. To make his testimony, thus tortured, assume a more specious air of plausibility, the historian contrasts it with the  
most

most palpable fictions and dubious martyrologies; he then brings forward Dionysius of Alexandria, and curtails many circumstances of his narrative, which were of equal, or rather superiour importance with respect to the cruelties exercised by the persecutors.

After deliberately weighing all this palpable mutilation, and sophistical management, the judicious and the learned may easily determine how far it is consistent with truth or justice to repose an implicit confidence in the statement of antient authorities thus made by the historian.

Thus has an attempt been made to shew that *the Historian of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire* is a consummate adept in the arts of misrepresentation, and that deserting the open path of truth, he has attempted to lead his readers into the intricate labyrinths of error. If the preceding developement be accurate, he has sullied the purity of christian antiquity by

I. Assigning a visionary, and inefficient cause for the propagation of the gospel.

II. Attempting to invalidate the evidence of prophecy.

III. Un-

III. Unwarrantably imputing uncharitableness to the primitive christians.

IV. Drawing wrong conclusions from facts.

V. Selecting passages manifestly inconclusive, and suppressing others of the same writers equally connected with the subject.

From misrepresentation detected under such various disguises, and so insidiously operating to the disparagement of virtue and of piety, it may fairly be concluded that the writer is as unfavourable to the first advocates of the christian revelation, as he is destitute of that sensibility which is ever alive to the unmerited sufferings of others. He recounts the most affecting calamities of the christians with cold indifference, and represents them rather as objects of contempt, than of compassion and respect. He forgets, or he wishes to forget that those who endure misfortunes with magnanimity are the most edifying, if not the most proper subjects of history; and that a particular account of Ignatius and of Pamphilus, would have done as much honour to his work, as the firmness and the piety of Strafford and of Laud have conferred on the productions of Hume. During the perusal of the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of the  
Roman

Roman History, we imagine we are surveying the dark descriptions of the first christians, given by Tacitus, whose ignorance of their real character is the best apology for his misrepresentation. We can with difficulty be persuaded that we are listening to an historian, who professes to form his judgment of facts and of men upon the liberal principles of a Philosopher, and who enjoys all the light, and all the learning of the eighteenth century.

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# S E R M O N VI.

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GENERAL EPISTLE OF ST. JUDE.

Verse III.

*Earnestly contend for the Faith which was  
once delivered unto the Saints.*

**T**HE manner in which the Socinians of the present day conduct their controversy against the established church, is equally extraordinary and artful. For not content with perverting the obvious sense of scripture, with torturing every text to their own purpose, and with slighting the plainest declarations of the proper Divinity of Christ; they have endeavoured to press into their service the proofs arising from the belief of the earliest christians. This appeal evidently shews the veneration in which antiquity is, in reality, held by all parties, and the great advantage which may be derived from its declarations. In consequence

sequence of this persuasion, the works of those who undertake to represent the sentiments of the primitive writers have been explored with indefatigable diligence by *the Author of the early opinions concerning Jesus Christ*; and all the passages which seem to confirm his argument, are exhibited in the strongest and most advantageous point of view, with copious comments, and plausible illustrations. His general plan of attack upon the divinity of Christ is conducted with a singularity of enterprize, of which it is fruitless to search for another instance. His readers must be prepared to reconcile the rage of innovation with the subtlety of paradox, and to watch the most bold and extraordinary process of historical experiment. For to their great surprize they will find, that the fathers of the church are made to contradict their own opinions; and that the books which were professedly written for the support of the faith, are changed into the instruments of its subversion.

But if the belief of the primitive christians be so important, that an endeavour is made to procure its alliance to the Unitarian cause, even by disingenuous arts; it is certainly worthy of all the exertions to retain it, which can fairly be made by its rightful possessors.

It

It is the valuable property of the church of England, and the resolution of her sons to stand forth as its guardians and defenders, neither has been, nor will be wanting. We have the animating encouragement of an apostolical injunction *to contend for the Faith which was delivered unto the Saints*. We can easily have recourse to the evidences that prove what the nature of that faith was ; so that to be slow in its profession, and irresolute in its defence would prove us unworthy of bearing that holy name by which we are called."

Still however it must be candidly confessed that the ecclesiastical student ventures on this disquisition with hesitation, and with diffidence. He sees the powers of ingenuity and diligence combined against him. He contemplates in the author of the work before mentioned an undaunted boldness, which no opposition has intimidated ; an inflexible perseverance which has been tried in many a polemical field ; and a refined sophistry which can elude the grasp of confutation. But the danger decreases as he approaches to the contest ; for a love of truth, and a sense of duty encourage him to proceed, even against an opponent so formidable and so experienced.

It will be the object therefore of the following discourse, to attempt a refutation of the three grand principles which form the basis of *the History of the early opinions concerning Christ*, viz.

I. That the apostolical fathers held the simple humanity of Christ.

II. That Justin Martyr corrupted the primitive faith by the adoption of the Logos of Plato.

III. That the pastors of the church maintained a corrupted faith, whilst the illiterate christians continued to maintain the simple humanity of Christ.

As a necessary preliminary to this discussion, we must carefully mark the distinction which subsists between the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, as contained in scripture, and the opinions formed of it, which we collect from ecclesiastical history. The doctrine stands recorded in everlasting characters, which the folly of man may misinterpret, but his power can never efface. It is asserted in appropriate phraseology, marked by peculiar and plain characters, illustrated by undeniable facts, and confirmed by the fullest testimony. The  
member



member of the church of England is desirous of settling the principles of his faith by an immediate appeal to such evidences. He determines the nature of the doctrine in dispute by the rules of legitimate criticism, and the obvious meaning of scriptural language. But his opponent, impatient of that restraint to which these limitations may subject him, adopts a new test by which the doctrine must be tried, far inferior in point of weight and importance to that which is rejected; inasmuch as he quits contemporary for subsequent evidence, and prefers the attestations of fallible men to the records of inspired evangelists.

Still, however, we are ready to admit that as far as the opinions of men can be of importance to its illustration, those of the primitive christians are so. They had the most favourable opportunities of information, and drank christianity at the fountain head. The records, therefore, which they have left us, are the best comments on the sacred text, as they show the sense in which it was first understood. Sensible therefore of the value of these records, in confirming our interpretation of scripture, we proceed to show the futility of the above stated assertions.

In the first place, let us attempt to prove that the apostolical fathers did not hold the mere humanity of Christ.

An opinion very unfavourable to their writings will be formed, if we do not so far attend to the particular object of their admonitions, as to place ourselves in that situation from which we can clearly ascertain their grand scope. To him who is not conversant with the history of the church and the particular incidents which gave rise to the epistles written by the apostolical fathers, many points may appear to have been slightly discussed, or partially represented, which in fact form only the subordinate or incidental parts of their design. When the infant church was assailed by open enemies, and internal dissensions, her teachers expatiated on the duties of charity, unanimity and subordination. We must not expect to find in their works any doctrinal points, introduced with systematic arrangements, or defined with logical precision. The primitive compositions were suited to the circumstances of the times, and whatever topick was introduced in them, had an immediate reference to the urgent exigencies of the church. In opposition to the heresies of the Gnostics and the Ebionites, the great articles  
of

of faith are stated in general terms, not as matters of private opinion, but as subjects of received belief. No ingenuity is employed to recommend them, and no arguments are brought for their support except the clear declarations of scripture, which were held to be decisive and irrefragable. The apostolical manner of writing, which is remarkable for plainness and energy, and free from philosophical subtlety, or nice refinement, is happily imitated in the literary remains of the apostolical fathers. The unaffected simplicity and earnestness of Clement, of Ignatius, and of Polycarp are very close imitations of St. John and of St. Paul.

*The Author of the early opinions concerning Christ* first appeals to the authority of these writings, then refuses to acquiesce in the plainest sense of passages which press him with insuperable difficulties, and afterwards affirms that they are greatly corrupted or entirely spurious. This inconsistency of sentiment discovers strong indications of distrust in his cause, and of doubts in what manner it can be tolerably supported. Such an attempt to shake the authenticity of these writings results from a conviction how much when fairly and fully consulted they can prove against him.

We are authorized by the most learned men of various ages to affirm their genuineness, and think the argument in favour of our creed, which may be drawn from the opinion of the first and second centuries, too valuable and important, to be sacrificed to hypothesis without solidity, and assertion without proof.

The earliest, and one of the most authentic monuments of ecclesiastical antiquity, is the epistle sent by the church of Rome to the church of Corinth, many years before the end of the first century. It was written by Clement Bishop of Rome, who is numbered by St. Paul among his "fellow labourers," and this epistle fully shows how deserving he was to be placed in so distinguished a rank. The design of it was to compose a recent dissension, and recommend the reestablishment of harmony and subordination. Now granting for a moment what has been asserted, that this epistle contains not the doctrine of the Preexistence of Christ, can it follow from thence that the writer did not maintain it? It was the professed design of Clement to write for a particular emergency, and the epistle itself is not complete. How therefore can any conclusion be drawn with respect to his sentiments at large? It is well known that Cyprian, the eloquent

eloquent and pious Bishop of Carthage, wrote an epistle to Antonianus equal in length to the epistle of Clement, in which no express mention is made of the divinity of our Lord. If this epistle had alone escaped the ravages of time, the most flagrant injury would have been done to the memory of Cyprian, by a supposition that he did not maintain this doctrine, when he is well known to have been its most zealous advocate. Equally unwarrantable would such a conclusion prove against Clemens Romanus. If however the train of his argument, and his express declarations be considered, the objector will find that he has no grounds to presume upon his silence. For as a motive to induce the Corinthians to behave with humility, Clement affirms that “ the  
“ sceptre of the Majesty of God came not in  
“ the pomp of ostentation and splendour,  
“ though he had it in his power ; but in hu-  
“ mility, as the Holy Spirit prophesied con-  
“ cerning him.” To infer from these expressions that it was the design of the writer to represent our Saviour as a mere man, seems an extraordinary perversion both of language and sense. For if our Saviour was no more than man, how could he with any propriety be entitled to the grand and dignified appellation of the “ sceptre of the Majesty of God ? ” and

thus be distinguished by a far more eminent title than is ever applied to the prophets who communicated the divine will on earth, or to the highest order of angelic beings who execute it in heaven? That his coming “in the “pomp of ostentation and splendour” cannot refer to his publick life alone, but must necessarily be applicable to his incarnation in general, is sufficiently evident from the following consideration. Clement limits his expressions to no particular period of our Lord’s existence, but speaks in general terms; and in the prophecy of Isaiah which follows the before mentioned words, his birth is alluded to in the emphatic question, “who shall declare “his generation?” If his coming referred only to his working miracles in the capacity of a publick teacher, how could he, who was restrained by a commission given to him for that purpose alone, be said to have it in his power to assume such a character of magnificence and splendour as was most agreeable to his own inclinations? We are at a loss for an example to reconcile the passage to such a supposition. Moses the greatest of mortal prophets had no such privileges; at the command of the Lord he lifted up his rod, and the sea divided to form a path for the children of Israel; but can it be asserted with the least  
show

show of probability, that he was able to lead them into the land of promise? Accordingly, we find that those privileges which exceeded the powers of his commission were neither claimed by himself, nor attributed to him by others. The whole passage of Clement exactly represents the sense of St. Paul's declaration, that *Christ being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant.* As if there was some essential difference of nature which placed the disciples infinitely beneath their Master, Christ is not mentioned so much as the direct example for them to follow, as an incitement to the emulation of their fellow creatures. For Clement proceeds to mention those whose conduct came more within the reach of their exertions. "If the Lord so humbled himself, what shall we do who are come under the yoke of his grace? Let us follow those who predicted his advent."

At the commencement of the second century, Ignatius the venerable Bishop of Antioch, who had been a companion and disciple of the apostles, was conveyed to Rome to suffer death for having professed the faith of Christ. During his journey, he wrote epistles to  
to

to various churches. To give the precepts of christianity their full weight and importance, by shewing the transcendant dignity of their Author, he enlarges upon the divinity of our Lord, and to prevent any misconception respecting the person whom he designs to characterize, he uses the most remarkable precision of language. The title of *the Lord* is invariably given both by Ignatius and Polycarp to the Son of God. There is not a single passage throughout their epistles in which it seems with any propriety of application to denominate God the Father. This appropriation however, is by no means singular, for the same may be asserted of the two epistles of St. Paul to the Theffalonians. The writers of the new testament frequently apply this term to Christ, and in the version of the Septuagint it is invariably used as an equivalent translation of the Hebrew Jehovah. We are moreover authorized by the testimony of many of the antients to say, that it was frequently applied even by the Pagans to the supreme God.

The objection which is made to the epistles of Ignatius by *the Author of the early opinions*, because Eusebius does not mention his name amongst other authorities for the divinity of Christ, will be found on examination to have  
the



no weight. Eusebius, when quoting the following words of an antient writer who proves the late origin of the herefy of Artemon, mentions a few out of many writers, who professed the doctrine of the church. “ What  
“ Artemon asserts of the mere humanity of  
“ Christ would be credible, if the divine  
“ scriptures did not contradict him ; as well  
“ as the antient works of the brethren, writ-  
“ ten in defence of the truth against the He-  
“ ticks, and the Gentiles. We may appeal  
“ to Justin, Tatian, and Clement by whom  
“ Christ is described as God. Who is unac-  
“ quainted with the volumes of Irenæus,  
“ Melito, and other ecclesiastical writers, by  
“ whom Christ is asserted to be both God  
“ and Man ? The psalms likewise, and hymns  
“ of the church written at the beginning by  
“ the faithful, celebrate Christ the word of  
“ God, and apply to him the attributes of  
“ divinity.” If in this full and decisive pas-  
sage, which is sufficient of itself to annihilate the pretensions of unitarianism to high anti-  
quity, any restrictions had been made, and the writer had affirmed that the persons men-  
tioned, composed the whole number of the orthodox writers, the objection would carry  
great weight ; but on the contrary, the ex-  
pressions are so general, as to comprize many  
more

more than are individually named, and consequently Ignatius may be included among the rest. It was not the design of Eusebius to enumerate every writer, any more than to specify the composers of the antient hymns. This indeed is evident from no notice being taken of Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Tertullian, who are well known to have been advocates for the doctrine in question. Consequently, if Ignatius be excluded because he held not the doctrine, they are excluded for the same reason, which reduces the objection to a manifest absurdity.

In the smaller epistles of Ignatius, which are proved to be genuine by many eminent scholars of the last and present century, the divinity of Christ is asserted and proved in such a manner as was best calculated to confute the errors which then began to arise. The Ephesians are commended for their diligence, and the motives which had instigated them to the performance of their duty. "They were followers of God, and excited themselves by the blood of God." They are cautioned against the impiety of those who made christianity a veil for licentiousness whilst their presumption prompted them to attempt the removal of the failings of others. As an antidote against these pretended

pretended curers of mental disorders, he directs them to “one physician carnal and spiritual, God incarnate, begotten and not made, true life in death, of Mary and of God, first passible, and then impassible.”

To silence the cavils of the proud who were offended at the ignominious death of our Lord, he states the preeminence of his divine, above his human nature: “Jesus Christ our God was born of Mary, according to the dispensation of God, of the family of David, of the Holy Ghost.” He says also, that to remove the universal darkness of the Pagan world, “God became manifest in a human form, for the newness of eternal life.” In order to encourage a diligent attendance on divine service, and to represent the importance of the ministerial offices, he reminds them of Jesus Christ according “to the flesh of the race of David, the Son of Man, and the Son of God, who was with the Father before all ages, and who finally was made manifest.” He declares the prophets to have been inspired, to convince the world of the omniscience of that Being, “who manifested himself by Jesus Christ his Son, and his eternal word; who in all things pleased him that sent him.” Convinced of the vanity and wickedness of the world, he looks with

with the eye of faith to heaven, “ where our  
 “ God, Jesus Christ, being in the Father ap-  
 “ peareth the more.” Hence likewise arises his  
 fervent desire to gain admittance to his Lord  
 and Master, by a signal trial of his constancy,  
 for which reason he intreats the Roman con-  
 verts to make no intercession for his life, but  
 to “ permit him to imitate the passion of his  
 “ God.” Addressing the Smyrnæans he makes  
 their spiritual improvement a subject of pious  
 gratitude. “ I glorify Jesus Christ, the God  
 “ who hath given you such wisdom, who really  
 “ was born of the race of David, according  
 “ to the flesh, the Son of God. He did eat  
 “ and drink with his apostles, although spi-  
 “ ritually united with the Father. He suf-  
 “ fered truly, as he also truly raised up him-  
 “ self.” He holds out the future judgment to  
 Polycarp, as a motive to perseverance in the  
 faith, and concludes his admonitions “ with  
 “ wishing him to be well continually in our  
 “ God, Jesus Christ. Expect him who is  
 “ above all time, eternal, invisible, though  
 “ for our sakes made visible; he was impal-  
 “ pable and impassible, yet for our sakes he  
 “ became subject to sufferings.”

If Polycarp the eminent disciple of St.  
 John, and the venerable Bishop of Smyrna  
 had in his epistle to the Philippians confined  
 his

his exhortations to the duties of morality alone, sufficient reasons might have been discovered, to justify his silence upon points of doctrine. He refers the christian converts to the epistle not long before written to them by St. Paul, of whose zeal in preaching the gospel, he makes the most honourable mention. He likewise asserts the sufficiency of that epistle, to edify them in the true faith. As the Philippians therefore, were so well grounded in the doctrine of the proper divinity of Christ, there was the less necessity for Polycarp to expatiate upon it. We may however discover the most plain traces of this doctrine, concerning which, St. Paul had expressed himself with so much precision and copiousness. For example, Polycarp exhorts the Philippians “to believe in him who raised our Lord Jesus  
“ Christ from the dead, and gave him glory,  
“ and a throne at his right hand: to whom  
“ all things celestial and terrestrial are subject,  
“ whom every spirit serveth, who is coming  
“ as Judge of the living and dead; whose  
“ blood God will require of every one who  
“ believes not in him.” He declares that  
“ Christ has promised to raise us from the  
“ dead.” That the faithful ought “to be  
“ subject to the church, as unto God and  
“ Christ.” Again he says, “if we entreat  
the

“ the Lord to forgive us, we ought also to  
 “ forgive : for we are before the eyes of the  
 “ Lord and God, and must all stand before  
 “ the tribunal of Christ : let us therefore serve  
 “ him in fear and reverence, as he himself  
 “ hath commanded, and the apostles who  
 “ preached the gospel to us, and the prophets  
 “ who foretold the advent of our Lord. If  
 “ we suffer for his name, let us glorify him.”  
 In short, he concludes his epistle with praying  
 “ that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus  
 “ Christ, and he himself our everlasting High  
 “ Priest, the Son of God Jesus Christ, would  
 “ build them up in faith and truth.”

No doubt can arise as to the intention of Polycarp to attribute the subjection of the universe to Jesus Christ ; the obvious sense and regular order of construction will be outrageously violated by any other interpretation of the first passage above adduced, for the different members of the sentence are respectively correlative to the same person, and that person is Christ. That such is the true sense, may moreover be collected from the application which the learned and accurate Author of the credibility of the Gospel History makes of this passage, as a parallel text to the celebrated declaration of St. Paul, that *at the name of Christ*

*Christ every knee should bow.*" Polycarp asserts that the Omnipotence of Christ will be exercised by the resurrection of the dead, and that the church is subject in the same manner to the Son as to the Father. Admitting the justness of our remark, that the appellation of *the Lord* invariably refers to our Saviour in this epistle, it is plain likewise that he is considered not only as the object of prayer, but as the forgiver of injuries. His Omnipresence is asserted to be the same as that of the Father, and from thence arises an exhortation to reverence and fear him. When he is denominated the *eternal High Priest*, his priesthood seems to characterize him as human, and his eternity as divine. The former typically expresses his character as mediator and redeemer, and the latter alludes to the attributes, which are common to him with the Father. That such were the ideas of Polycarp will be more fully shown from considering the close of his animated prayer previous to his martyrdom. "I praise and glorify thee through the eternal High Priest Jesus Christ, thy beloved and blessed Son, through whom to thee, with him, in the Holy Spirit, be glory now and for ever."

We now proceed to show, in the Second place, that Justin Martyr did not corrupt the purity of the faith by adopting the Logos of Plato.

As far as the features of an author's mind are visible in his works, it is evident that sincerity and candour were distinguishing characteristics of Justin Martyr. He seems on every topick to express his unpremeditated thoughts, in a simple and inartificial manner, and to be influenced by a natural ingenuousness, which was superiour to duplicity and evasion. His ardour in the pursuit of truth, and his alacrity in its profession will appear in the most striking point of view, when we recollect, that the sincerity of his conversion was brought to the severest trial, since his courageous avowal of the faith was the glorious cause of his martyrdom.

After attempting without effect to satisfy his curiosity by exploring the tenets of the Grecian sages, he proceeded to examine the evidences of revelation, and discovered that the christian religion was the only safe and excellent philosophy. He was far from retaining any invincible prejudices in favour of his



his former studies, or of being blindly attached to the opinions of Plato. He deliberately weighed the merits of the great founder of the academy, and with a calm and unbiassed mind exposed his contradictions of other philosophers, and his inconsistency with himself. Justin Martyr expressly declared that “as Aristotle and Plato differed so much in explaining the nature of earthly things, they are not worthy of credit, when they disagree concerning the invisible world.” If any one should accurately inspect the opinions of Plato, his opinions will be found to be repugnant to each other; on which account he cannot escape the censure of deliberate falsehood.”

Justin Martyr moreover represents that the conduct of Plato, on his return to Athens from his travels into Ægypt, exposed him to the imputation of duplicity and dissimulation. For apprehensive of falling a victim to the popular clamour, which had caused the death of Socrates, he professed a “belief in a plurality of Gods, though contrary to the evidence of his first principles. Therefore since nothing true can be derived from such teachers concerning the real nature of God, it remains that we listen to the inspired prophets

“ prophets who lived long before the philoso-  
“ phers of Greece, and taught nothing from  
“ their own imagination, but received con-  
“ sistent and harmonious instructions from on  
“ high. For it is impossible that their pre-  
“ dictions, should be the result of human in-  
“ genuity, or be imparted merely by the light  
“ of nature. In sublime subjects the philoso-  
“ phers have no accurate knowledge. What-  
“ ever is well expressed in all respects, belongs  
“ to the disciples of Christ.” We do not  
“ think the same as others; but all others, being  
“ desirous to resemble us, assert our doctrines.”

From this, and a variety of similar passages, it is plain that Justin's acknowledgment of the excellence of christianity, amounts to a deliberate renunciation of his former philosophical opinions, relative to the nature of God; and that the force of divine truth had so influenced his mind, and corrected his judgment, that he saw the defects of Plato in the strongest light, and exposed them to censure without reserve.

Still however we are ready to confess that the Platonic philosophy had many great though subordinate claims to his attention. It conveyed such sublime notions of the Deity, in  
comparison

comparison of all other systems, that he thought it could not be the production of human sagacity and invention. He therefore attributed its excellence to the light afforded by the old testament. The travels of Plato, which extended to Babylon as well as into Ægypt favoured the supposition that he had consulted the sacred volume. From this source Justin Martyr imagined that the philosopher had borrowed his most sublime speculations and more particularly the doctrine of the christian Trinity. He continually reasons upon this supposition, and from thence deduces all those constructions of the Platonic writings, and accommodations of them to scripture, which to a mind uninfluenced by the same bias, must necessarily appear forced and unnatural. In his exhortation addressed to the Greeks, and his apologies dedicated to the Emperours, which form the most considerable part of his remaining works, he recommends the prophecies as an introduction to christianity. He endeavours to prove that the philosophy, of which the Greeks and Romans were such ardent admirers, was indebted for all its excellence to the sacred books of the Jews. “ Plato derived from Moses that peculiar name of the deity, which so strongly indicates his self-existence and eternity. His

“ doctrine respecting the divine ideas was bor-  
“ rowed from the commands of the Almighty  
“ to Moses, who was commissioned to construct  
“ the ark of the covenant correspondent with  
“ the archetype, which was shown to him on  
“ the mountain. By the prophets he was in-  
“ structed to give the sublime description of  
“ Jupiter, when he drove his winged chariot  
“ through heaven, for he had read that the  
“ glory of the Lord went forth upon the che-  
“ rubim, and the cherubim lifted up their  
“ wings, and the glory of the Lord was  
“ upon them.”

From a proper attention to these passages, it is evident that the writings of Justin Martyr have been grossly misconceived, or unfairly misrepresented; and the reverse of what has been confidently asserted will be found to be the true state of the case. It was not his object to accommodate the scriptures to Plato, but to accommodate the writings of Plato to the scriptures. With respect to the articles of his christian belief, he states fundamental doctrines in clear and direct terms, as he received them by the tradition of the church, and as he collected them from the sacred books.

We

We are now advanced to the most critical point of the argument. That Justin Martyr endeavoured to bend the tenets of the academy to the principles of christianity, we are ready to affirm. That he corrupted the christian faith by the introduction of Platonic ideas we are inclined most confidently and most unequivocally to deny. We cannot fail in this stage of the disquisition to remark the evasion to which *the Author of the early opinions* has recourse. He is aware that the close examination of the genuine principles of the academy will produce the subversion of his hypothesis; for in what part of the works of Plato is the slightest mention made of the personification of a Logos? And therefore he suddenly changes the ground of contest. After fatiguing our attention with a design to delude our judgment by an ostentatious parade of the sentiments of Plato, and his followers; after raising our expectations, to suppose that Justin Martyr will be detected in ingrafting Platonism upon Christianity, he insinuates that he adopted the Logos from Philo, who improved upon the principles of Plato. So that from the concessions of the author himself, Justin Martyr is proved to have been a Platonist in name only, and with equal reason might be denominated a Pagan, because previous to

his conversion, he had conformed to the popular superstitions of his country.

Let us not be deterred by the evasion of the enemy, from pursuing him in his retreat, and examining whether the post, to which he flies, be more tenable than that which he has sagaciously quitted.

Philo an eminent Jew of Alexandria, who flourished in the time of the apostles, in different parts of his works makes use of the word Logos, to which he affixes various senses. Sometimes it denotes the mind of God, sometimes the invisible world, according to the pattern of which, the visible world was made, and in other places only wisdom, an attribute of the deity. When it is used to signify an emanation of the divine mind, it is described as an effect not permanent but occasional. In its highest sense, the Logos is the most antient Angel, the perfect Image of God, who revealed to Abraham the divine will.

However probable it may be that Philo derived some of those ideas annexed to the Logos from Plato, he could not borrow from him the application of it to a Person. His descriptions therefore of the divine Being whom he invests

invests with such lofty attributes, must be derived from some other sources, which will be found not to be remote from our observation. In the pentateuch and the prophets, whose sense Philo laboured to refine by allegory, several passages occur, which obscurely intimate the agency of the divine Word in the creation of the world, and in many subsequent dispensations. In the psalms, the Son of God is more clearly revealed, in terms expressive of the highest dignity and exaltation. According to the glosses of the antient Rabbinical writers, this was the Son of God, who was of the same substance with the Father, and who existed from all eternity. So that as from them the elevated descriptions of Philo are undoubtedly derived; vain and ineffectual is the search for that doctrine among the schools of Greece, which the schools of Greece never taught.

A tradition has prevailed in the church from a remote period, that St. Peter was preaching the gospel at Rome, during the time that Philo resided there in the quality of ambassador to the Emperour Caligula. He contracted an intimate acquaintance with the great apostle, and from the high esteem, which he entertained for the sanctity of his manners, was induced to make honourable mention of  
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the disciples of St. Mark, who were at that time educated in the celebrated school of Alexandria. It is not improbable that his intercourse with the christians might enlarge his ideas upon the subject in question, and raise his mind to a more adequate conception of the nature and attributes of the christian Logos.

But of any adoption of the sentiments or approbation of the principles of Philo by Justin Martyr, where is the positive proof? In his authentic works, where is he even once mentioned? If however we grant for the sake of argument, that all the writings of Philo were as well known to Justin Martyr, as the *Author of the early opinions* may be willing to suppose, is it probable that his sentiments merely as such, would have been implicitly embraced? Philo was a Jew, who had frequent opportunities of being converted to christianity, yet he resisted or slighted its evidences. His attachment to the law of Moses was so firm, that he laboured to establish its authority and give it the most refined interpretation. Thus tenacious of his religion, he held out no inducements to the christians to adopt his opinions. Whatever elevation of character he attributed to the divine Logos, he



he never spoke of him as the promised and expected Messiah. However conversant he might be with the predictions of the inspired prophets, and animated by their descriptions, he is altogether silent as to the Redeemer of Israel. The fathers must clearly have perceived, that all his forced refinements and airy speculations were built upon the Old testament. What therefore could induce them to borrow from the commentary, when they were in possession of the text? Why should they imitate an unskilful copy, when they possessed the bright and masterly original? They had Moses and the prophets to announce the future kingdom of the Son of God, and gradually to unfold his power and glory; they had the evangelists and the apostles, who jointly recorded his advent, fully developed his character, and clearly displayed his attributes.

If Justin Martyr had corrupted the doctrines of christianity, how comes it to pass that all the contemporary christians, all the fathers who were not educated in the schools of Plato, have passed over so striking an event in silence? We must conclude that the members of every church were grossly ignorant, or culpably indifferent, that they knew not the meaning of the sacred names of Father, Son,  
and

and Holy Spirit, which they constantly repeated, and continually employed in all the publick and private acts of devotion. We must suppose that all the bishops and pastors, who have given such numerous proofs of their defence of the truth against the incroachment of every innovation, were plunged in the most profound lethargy, or abandoned to the most culpable indifference. We must suppose, moreover, that the authority of Justin extended over the whole christian church, and that it unanimously obeyed his call to embrace a new faith. We must suppose that the peaceful philosopher of Palestine, produced the consequences without pursuing the measures of the bloody prophet of Arabia, and effected that revolution of opinion without the aid of the sword, which the sword itself, destructive as it was in the hand of Mahomet, could never fully accomplish.

If Justin Martyr had been guilty of the charge of corrupting the primitive faith, the same rigorous sentence would have been pronounced against him, which was directed against Cerinthus, Marcion, Basilides, Paulus of Samosata, and other heresiarchs of the early ages. As soon as they began to disseminate their tenets they were cut off from the communion  
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of the faithful, and their errors were combated by the united powers of scripture and reason. If the disciple Tatian, notwithstanding his learning and acuteness, was enrolled in the heretical register, for what reason was his master forgiven for a fault, which in the opinion of the church, the most splendid powers of genius, the greatest acquisitions of knowledge, the warmest professions of zeal, and even martyrdom itself could not expiate.

To this argument Irenæus adds the most satisfactory confirmation, when he refutes the Valentinians. When they affirm that all objects of sense are only the “ images of those things which really exist, they only repeat the sentiments of Plato. They transform his ideas into Eons, and make them the creators of the archetypal world, which that philosopher invented. This opinion together with the corruption and depravity of Marcion and of Saturninus was embraced by Tatian, who after the death of his master was so elated with a vain consciousness of his superiour attainments, that he laid the foundation of a new sect.”

From a complete survey of the supposed Platonism of Justin Martyr in all the various points

points of view from which it can fairly be seen, it appears evidently not to affect in the smallest degree the value of the testimony, which he bears to the faith. His avowed sentiments, as well as his general character equally militate against the accusation. The tenets of Plato, as far as they can clearly be ascertained, bear only a distant and faint resemblance to the christian doctrine. It does not appear that Justin was acquainted with the works of Philo, and if he was, they were not of sufficient importance in comparison with the scriptures for him to borrow from them. To assert therefore, that he had recourse to these authors to assist him in the alteration of his creed, is a groundless assumption, alike destitute of all probability and of satisfactory evidence.

In the Third place, we proceed to prove, that the Pastors of the church did not maintain a corrupt faith, whilst the other christians continued to be Unitarians.

That the great body of christians in the primitive times maintained a belief, relative to the nature of Christ, which was contrary to that of their teachers, seems as highly improbable in itself, as it is incapable of proof from  
fair

fair and full authorities. It is highly improbable in itself, because every one of those teachers who wrote as well as discoursed on the articles of the faith is thus made an artful innovator, and must have endeavoured to work upon the credulity of the world by representing what were merely the corrupt perversions of his own mind, instead of the genuine doctrines of the church. Such conduct stands exposed to the complicated imputation of matchless effrontery, profound hypocrisy, and deliberate falshood; and is replete with all that can fully the reputation, and undermine the credit of a man and a christian. But so totally repugnant are such injurious suspicions to the general character and conduct of the ecclesiastical writers, to their protestations and sincerity, to their integrity and piety, to their fear of God, and their charity to man, that the candid and the judicious will be disposed to dismiss without examination, any hypothesis which is supported upon such disingenuous insinuations.

The vindication of Justin Martyr from the charges just confuted more particularly tends to subvert this assertion; for if he was not instrumental to the corruption of the faith, the pretended diversity is attributed to no ostensible

oftenfible author, and derived from no acknowledged fource. As however direct proof will corroborate the preceding observations, we will endeavour to ftate a few paffages felected from a confiderable number, which ftroingly, directly, and unequivocally fupport them. Juftin Martyr in his firft apology endeavours to reconcile the faith inculcated in the fcriptures to thofe who were attached to the popular philofophy, by fhewing that Plato derived fome of his principles from the books of Mofes. “ We do not,” fays he, “ therefore, “ derive the opinions which we maintain from “ others, but all others derive them from us. “ Among chriftians, you may hear and learn “ thefe things, even from thofe who are un- “ acquainted with the firft principles of learn- “ ing, who are vulgar and untutored in fpeech, “ but wife and faithful in mind ; from the in- “ firm, and thofe who are deprived of fight ; “ fo that you may be fenfible, that thefe “ things were not the production of human “ ingenuity, but were declared in the power “ of God.”

This remarkable proof of the reception of the chriftian creed among all ranks has been misrepresented by *the Author of the early opinions*, but it is too clear to be mifunderftood.

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The previous observations on the Mosaical history of the creation, do not constitute the main argument, but is merely an incidental circumstance of it. It is not the point in debate, but a subject of illustration introduced to reconcile the heathens to that faith which the visionary system of Marcion was designed to subvert. Justin Martyr therefore clearly designed to represent how much the most illiterate of the christians surpassed the most learned of the philosophers. To say that they surpassed the philosophers, by possessing the Mosaical account of the creation is no proof of their superiority, for it was a general opinion of the primitive church that Plato himself derived his principles from the pentateuch, and the prophetic writings. But to affirm that they had full evidence of the sublime doctrines of christianity, which had eluded the discovery of unenlightened wisdom, is a declaration of superiority which is alike consistent with the context, and with the reality of the fact itself.

Not long before the close of the second century, Irenæus describes the actual state of the faith at that time, and in a full and satisfactory passage expatiates on the unity of its principles, and the universality of its extent.

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“ The Church, although dispersed throughout  
 “ the world, having heard the preaching of  
 “ the apostles, and embraced their belief, pre-  
 “ serves it with the same diligence as if her  
 “ members composed only one family. This  
 “ it unanimously preaches and delivers as with  
 “ one mouth. The languages of man are di-  
 “ verse, but the power of the tradition is one  
 “ and the same. As there is only a single sun  
 “ to illuminate the world, so the gospel ap-  
 “ pears in all places, and enlightens those who  
 “ are willing to come to the knowledge of the  
 “ truth. For neither do the churches planted  
 “ in Germany believe or deliver any other,  
 “ nor those that are in Spain, in Gaul, in the  
 “ East, in Ægypt, in Libya, or in Judæa.  
 “ Nor do any of those who preside in the  
 “ congregations, whatever be his eloquence,  
 “ profess a different creed; nor will any one  
 “ who is unlearned detract from this tra-  
 “ dition.”

The whole controversy might fairly be set-  
 tled by an appeal to the close of this memo-  
 rable passage. Irenæus as if aware that some  
 insinuations might be thrown out of a diver-  
 sity of opinion in the church, discriminates  
 between the members who composed it with  
 respect to their situation and talents, and de-  
 clares



clares however they differed in such respects, their principles of faith were still the same. This is a testimony in favour of the early belief which cannot be evaded, and among all the proofs which antiquity can furnish is one of the most convincing and irrefragable.

About twenty years after the time of Irenæus, Tertullian makes a similar reference to the general belief, in order to point out a clear distinction between the novelty of heresy, and the antiquity of the genuine faith. “ The doctrines which are generally preached, that is what Christ has revealed, can by no other means be proved than by the churches founded by the apostles, and either edified by their personal or written instructions. It is evident therefore that all doctrine which agrees with those apostolical churches is consistent with truth. So that without doubt, that must be embraced which the christians have received from the apostles, the apostles from Christ, and Christ from God.”

In order to render Tertullian consistent with himself, it is necessary to advert to his observations in another part of his works. *The Author of the early opinions* has given

such a colour to a passage extracted from the treatise against Praxeas, as to make the mere humanity of Christ appear to have been the belief of the great body of the christians who lived in the second century. A careful examination of the subject at large, will free Tertullian from a palpable misrepresentation, and show that the passage in question is so far from being capable of the sense alleged, that it proves a point which is directly the reverse; since the persons who are asserted to have held the mere humanity, were advocates in the highest sense for the divinity of Christ. Praxeas maintained that Jesus Christ was no other than the supreme God, that he was born of the Virgin, and that he actually suffered death upon the cross. This error which its author had carefully disseminated during his journey from Asia to Rome, is combated by Tertullian with metaphysical subtlety of argument, and manly vehemence of declamation. Desirous of giving a just idea of the capacity and talents of the advocates of Praxeas, he observes, that they were persons of that plain understanding, which usually characterized the majority of believers, who might, without any great impropriety of language, be called dull and senseless. Such men, he observes, when first weaned from the errors of

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of polytheism, and converted to the belief of God, expressed some reluctance against the mystery of the Trinity. Praxeas took advantage of this disposition of the common people, to inculcate his erroneous tenets. His disciples boasting that they only were the worshippers of one God, accused the orthodox believers of Tritheism. Such was their weakness as not to discern that by confounding the persons of the Deity, and making Jesus Christ the sole God, they ran into a palpable error, and that the creed of the church properly explained, was the true faith. The Latin converts of Praxeas, who he had made in Italy, and the Greek whom he had made in Asia, repeated the terms of theology which he perverted, with as much clamour and vehemence, as if they clearly understood, and properly maintained them.

By thus taking an enlarged view of the meaning of Tertullian, the passage is restored to its original signification. As translated by *the Author of the early opinions* it is an instance of invalid proof. In his version he omits a complete sentence of the text of Tertullian, which is of great importance to the general sense of the passage, because it explains in what an erroneous sense the divine unity was held by those, who in the time of

Tertullian mistated the catholick faith. This omission rendered it an easy task to turn the general purport of the argument out of its natural course, and to throw an air of plausibility over a weak opinion. By cutting off this passage from his list of proofs, the author is deprived of his fundamental support; for of all the antient evidences which he presses into his service, there is no one which he exhibits with more ostentation, which he decorates with greater parade of argument, or which he introduces with greater confidence of success. The christians mentioned by Tertullian as the followers of Praxeas were as remarkable for their deviation from the opinion of the modern unitarian, as from the true faith of the church; unless the modern unitarian will reverse his creed, and maintain him to be God whom he labours to prove to have been mere man. If he thus becomes the disciple of Praxeas, he must be combated with the weapons with which Praxeas was defeated, and the treatise of Tertullian instead of furnishing him with armour against the church, will become the instrument of his destruction.

All the authorities which have been considered, form a chain of evidence, including a period of more than sixty years, which is  
strong

strong and closely connected. The declarations stated are strictly and undeniably to the purpose. For it is very particularly to be observed, that the fathers are not speaking of any points of christianity independent of the faith. They are not discoursing on the prevalence of the christian morality, or the establishment of its positive institutions, but on the unanimous consent of the catholick church in their belief in the proper divinity of the Son of God, as constituting one of the fundamental principles of their religion.

Fortunately for the determination of the present question we are not obliged to confine our inquiries to the church alone for evidence of its primitive belief. Although the prophanè writers surveyed christianity with a superficial eye, some scattered notices of its principles may be collected from their works, which however general, are very important. Contemporary with Ignatius was the learned and accomplished Pliny. He found as soon as he entered upon the proconsulship of Bithynia, that christianity had prevailed among all ranks of its inhabitants. He was officially informed of the grand object of their religious solemnities, as well as of their institutions and manners, “ They met on stated days before the

“dawn, and sang choral hymns to Christ as  
“a God.”

Contemporary with Justin Martyr was Lucian the Syrian. In his history of the death of Peregrinus he observes, “that the christians  
“despise all things, and even death itself in  
“hopes of immortality. For their first Legif-  
“lator made them believe they were all bre-  
“thren. They adore their crucified Saviour,  
“and live according to the laws of their own  
“religion.”

In the dialogue entitled *Philopatris*, which is ascribed to Lucian, there is a passage which more fully expresses the faith of the christians of that age. It was the evident design of the writer to ridicule the catholick doctrines. The characters introduced as conversing are a christian and a heathen. The former proposes to the latter, that instead of invoking Jupiter, he should supplicate “the most High God, the  
“Son of the Father, and the Spirit proceeding  
“from the Father.” The heathen replied, that this was a belief which he could not comprehend. The value of this testimony may rise in the opinion of some, when it is recollected that such was the deference paid to it by Socinus, that he esteemed it the most  
undeniable

undeniable evidence which antiquity gave to the prevalence of the doctrine of the Trinity.

And here we could multiply the number of our proofs. We might appeal to the attestation given by the christians to the worship of Christ, when accused by the Pagans of a design to pay divine honour to the relicks of the martyred Polycarp. We could advert to the practise of the Jewish converts, who in the reign of Adrian resided at Jerusalem, and maintained Christ to be God: and we could dwell with more copious observations upon the testimony of the Emperour Julian, who expressly maintained that St. John was induced to assert the divinity of Christ in his gospel, from observing that a considerable number of the Greeks and Romans had already embraced that opinion. But a minute inquiry into these important attestations would require more time than is allowed to discourses like the present. We recommend them to the earnest attention of those who deny the early prevalence of the doctrine in question among all ranks of christians, and we hesitate not to ask in the same terms indeed, but not with the culpable precipitation of the Jews, *what need have we of any further witnesses?* An appeal is made by our opponents to the general opinion

opinion of the first christians. We have carefully investigated the proofs for that opinion, and find them to be as strong and as consistent as can be adduced for the support of any fact in antient history. The witnesses did not collect their information from vague reports, conveyed through suspicious channels, neither did they live in places remote from most of the countries of which they speak, or trust to the tradition of former ages. Their testimony is for the most part, the result of actual observation. The friends of the church are supported by their avowed enemies, and those who disagreed upon all other subjects, combine to establish the argument in question. At the same time that Ignatius vouches for the churches on the coasts of Asia, Pliny cooperates with him by his account of christianity in the spacious province of Bithynia. Justin Martyr extended his observations from Palestine to Rome; Irenæus travelled from Asia to Gaul; and Tertullian was well acquainted with the congregations of Africa. Within the period of time that these writers give a statement of the faith in all these countries, Lucian does the same for the extensive kingdom of Pontus, and not only brings an additional proof of its wide diffusion, but corroborates the credit of the writers who assert its uniformity. Their  
general



general evidences give us for that period of time, in which the corruption has been asserted to have taken place, a distinct view of unanimity in the most remarkable parts of the antient world.

To conclude — The proper consideration of the present subject would lead us into a much wider field of discussion, than is consistent with the limits marked out for disquisitions like the present. Let what has been advanced, be thought sufficient to show the weakness of their efforts, who attempt to wrest from the church of England the support of the primitive christians in the faith which she professes. We have reviewed the clearest proofs that the apostolical fathers maintained the nature of Christ to be human and divine ; that he was God incarnate ; that the incommunicable attributes of omniscience and omnipotence, and the divine prerogatives of glory, praise, and power, are frequently and fully ascribed to him.

We have seen the weakness of the aspersions thrown upon Justin Martyr ; we have remarked that he built his faith neither upon the profound disquisitions of Plato, nor the airy speculations of Philo ; but upon the solid and clear testimony of the apostles and evangelists :

gelifts: every page of his works is expreffive of the fame exalted ideas of the Son of God. We have obferved that the authority of Irenæus, in a particular paffage, is fufficient to decide the point in queftion; and that the Pagan writers, among whom the Emperour Julian ought partly to be diftinguifhed, are important and confiftent witneffes of the truth of our affertions.

Thus the friends and the enemies of chriſtianity have concurred to record in general the prevalence of that faith, which has been illuſtrated in detail. The ſentiments, therefore, of the primitive church appear to have been unanimous; and vain is it for the gainfayer to attempt to eſtabliſh a difference among thoſe, who influenced by the power of the ſame truth, united in the moſt perfect harmony.

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# S E R M O N VII.

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2 TIMOTHY III. 15.

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.*

**T**HE glad tidings of the gospel were neither confined to the Jewish people, nor to the generation which was eminently honoured by the appearance of the Messiah. It was the great object of his mission to establish a church collected from the various parts of the world, and to extend its duration from age to age. Christianity was manifestly designed by its great Author for an eternal monument of the divine will, intended to survive the decay of human institutions, and to escape even from the wreck of empires, uninjured and triumphant. This was the light appointed to shine upon every one that cometh into the world, that *all flesh might see the salvation of God.*

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In order therefore that an intention so gracious and beneficial, might be most effectually fulfilled, the history of our Saviour, the transactions of the apostles after his ascension, and their instructions upon particular emergencies, were committed to writing; by which expedient, the purity and the duration of the Christian principles have undoubtedly been secured, more particularly if it be considered that the frequent and sanguinary persecutions, which raged in the primitive times, endangered the continuance of the faith, and that numerous heresies threatened its corruption. Even its escape from these early alarms was no security for its final preservation. In passing down to successive ages it was liable to contract that mixture with falshood, which is inseparable from oral tradition, and to lose by continued corruptions its original spirit and purity.

The motives which induced the Sacred Writers to undertake their literary labours, may in some degree be ascertained from their respective situations. The urgent necessity of impressing the faith with exactness on the minds of early converts; among whom errors of an alarming tendency had actually taken root, called loudly upon some of them for written instructions.

instructions. Publick as well as private solicitations induced others to stamp on their writings the indelible characters of Christianity, and place it out of the reach of innovation.

The gospels and epistles are intended to perpetuate the important truths they contain, and to supply the place of those holy witnesses whose names they bear. They breathe the same spirit of simplicity, zeal and godliness, which distinguished their authors, *who being dead, yet speak; who endeavoured that after their decease, we might have these things always in remembrance.* They fulfil in a secondary, though important sense, the gracious promise of our Saviour, that his animating presence should continue in his church, *for they are with us always, even unto the end of the world.*

There is the strongest reason to conclude, that the books of undoubted authority were expeditiously circulated. They were not addressed to individuals in whose possession they continued in concealment, but to the rulers of large congregations; or more usually to large congregations themselves, before whom they were frequently recited. They were communicated

municated with pious diligence from church to church, and their reciprocal notoriety was sometimes hastened by apostolical injunctions. Those who received them, had full assurance of their authenticity from those who delivered them, and the multiplication of copies not only contributed to make them more generally known, but effectually secured them from the lasting injuries of interpolation.

That the gospels and epistles were generally known soon after they were communicated to different churches, may be concluded from the interesting nature of their contents. Novelty in general is calculated to excite attention. In the present case, in which novelty consisted in the developement of a recent revelation of the divine will, the most eager curiosity was roused into action. The new converts likewise sought after these authentic documents of their faith with ardour, and divulged them with zeal. They drank the waters of life themselves, and conveyed it to the thirsty who were at a distance. The testimony of history confirms the truth of these observations. The works of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which had been for some time well known to Christians in general,

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were sanctioned by the express concurrence of St. John previous to the composition of his own gospel, and the most authentick evidence remains, that at a period not later than thirty years after his death, all the gospels were recited on stated days in the general assemblies of the faithful.

As soon as they were thus divulged, they were held in the highest estimation, as the rule of faith, and practice. They were particularly consulted by teachers to confirm their admonitions, by disputants to establish their arguments, and by apologists to vindicate their cause. For such support, Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin Martyr and Irenæus were eminently indebted to them. The attestations which they afforded to those books of scripture, which they had occasion to cite, are curious and important, as they furnish a strong argument for their integrity and authenticity. Many passages are very similar, others exactly represent those which occur in our present copies. From what is known, conclusions may fairly be drawn respecting that which is not. Hence it may be presumed, that the revolutions of seventeen centuries have left the New Testament in the same state as in the primitive times. The difficulty of inter-

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mediate corruption has not only been increased in proportion to the multiplication of copies, but in proportion likewise to the number of those who inserted any part of the sacred text into their writings. Hence an argument is furnished that the stream which was not polluted at the fountain head, still runs pure and uncontaminated. If we are able to prove that it was not polluted at the fountain head, by shewing that the early fathers used and quoted our scriptures, a complete and unbroken chain of evidence might be formed, and no generation be left without witnesses to the genuineness of the Christian records.

Since this investigation is so curious and important, an attempt will be made to remove the objections raised against the high probability of the apostolical fathers having used our gospels.

II. It is intended to shew that the apostolical fathers as well as Justin Martyr, and Irenæus, made quotations from most of the epistles.

The persuasion of the primitive church that the sacred writers were divinely inspired, will be shown; and the reasonableness of the persuasion  
suasion



suaſion will be confirmed by additional arguments.

The noble author of the letters on hiſtory whoſe ſpecious eloquence is frequently the diſguiſe of unfounded aſſertions, maintains, “ that the fathers of the firſt century either  
 “ made uſe of different goſpels from ours, or  
 “ the paſſages which reſemble thoſe that occur in our goſpels, were preſerved by unwritten tradition. To ſay that they had the  
 “ works of our evangeliſts before them, is a  
 “ manifeſt abuſe of hiſtory, as they never expreſſly mention their names.”

It is an object of importance to examine theſe aſſertions with particular attention, becauſe they include the ſtrongeſt objections that can be brought againſt the opinion moſt reaſonable to be maintained, reſpecting the early reception of the New Teſtament.

The Firſt charge to be conſidered is, that “ the fathers of the firſt century might make  
 “ uſe of different goſpels from ours.”

This ſuppoſition at firſt ſight appears highly improbable to thoſe who recollect that Polycarp was the diſciple of St. John, that Ignatius

was instructed by several of the apostles, and that Clement was a fellow labourer of St. Paul, who was accompanied during his travels by the evangelist St. Luke. Connexions so intimate with these eminent instructors would naturally produce a high veneration for their sentiments, and a decided and exclusive predilection of their works. Hence arises the extreme improbability of their having recourse to any other gospels than such as were written or authenticated by those from whom they received the first principles of the faith.

The improbability becomes much greater if it be considered, that the authors of apocryphal gospels were either contemporary with the apostolical fathers; or lived at a later period. If they lived at a later period, the supposition of the writer falls weak and inconclusive to the ground: if they were contemporaries, the works of these heretical writers could be immediately referred to their respective sources, and their omissions or interpolations of the true gospels be instantly detected by being brought to the test of the uncorrupted originals. That this task was zealously performed, may fairly be presumed from the frequent allusions which are made to the heresies of Ebion and Cerinthus, and the frequent  
cautions

cautions which are given to guard against their errors. To maintain that the apostolical fathers were betrayed into the preposterous and weak inconsistency of borrowing from those whom they incessantly attacked, is to give a sanction to the absurdity of those hereticks who made Cerinthus the author of St. John's gospel, when it evidently contains a refutation of his principles.

The objections may now be fairly reduced to this dilemma ; either the apostolical fathers derived several passages which occur in their remains, from unwritten tradition, or they made use of our gospels.

In case the objector supposed, that if unwritten tradition was the source from which the apostolical fathers derived their information, the certainty of the evangelical facts, or the reputation of the evangelists would be diminished, he must have been intirely ignorant of their works, which manifestly establish the one, and encrease the other.

For let us grant, that such was really the case. It may even then be asserted upon safe grounds, that the apostolical fathers contributed no inconsiderable assistance to establish

the credibility of the gospel history. The leading facts relative to the Author of Christianity, and the principal topicks of his instructions may be clearly collected from their writings. For in them are recorded the miraculous conception of our Lord, the precise time of his appearance on earth, his institutions, his commands, the virtues which he displayed, and the duties which he recommended, his exercise of miraculous powers, his death, resurrection, and ascension, the importance of his mission, the transcendant benefits derived to mankind from his sufferings, and more especially a full and positive acknowledgment of his divine nature. In consequence of this detail, which with many other particulars of the same kind, may be collected from their epistles, the apostolical fathers are to be considered, as witnesses unacquainted with the writings of the evangelists, and deriving all their information on religious subjects, from the personal instructions of the apostles. The bare supposition has the air of an absurdity, but for the sake of the preceding concession, their ignorance, improbable as it is, shall be allowed. Their remains are even in this case undeniable vouchers of apostolical consistency, and prove that the instructions and the writings of the inspired teachers, proceeded

ceeded originally from the same spirit of divine truth. Thus Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp become doubly important as they stand in relation to the transactions of our Saviour, and to the records of his biographers. From them is received an independant detail of actions and precepts of the highest antiquity and respectability, and their general coincidence with the evangelists is as strong an evidence for the truths of the gospel, as any attestation given to the narratives of its writers.

Having thus shewn that the result of the concession would be far from proving unfavourable to the evangelical history, let us proceed to prove that the apostolical fathers quoted our gospels.

To grant an opponent some part of his requisition is frequently of small advantage to his cause. We are willing to allow, that the apostolical fathers do not express the names of the evangelists. But does it therefore follow by any fair inference, that they are not quoted, because they are not named? By no means. St. Paul does not name Aratus, Menander, or Epimenides, yet it is unanimously allowed that their expressions may clearly be traced in his epistles. The antient authors of the letter

from the churches of Vienne and Lyons, as well as Justin Martyr, maintain a profound silence with respect to the names of the evangelists, although the identical sentences of scripture abound in their productions. The authenticity of the larger epistles of Ignatius, as well as of the apostolical constitutions has been disputed in consequence of the ostentatious and unnecessary mention of the evangelists. The objections against them have proceeded from the violation of a principle, laid down by the criticks, that the omission of names is a striking characteristick of the apostolical times. The conduct of the fathers under consideration was consistent and uniform. Continued pages are cited from the old, and various passages from the New Testament; yet whilst the peculiar sentiments and style indisputably ascertain the respective writers, their names are equally omitted. Thus the portraits of eminent persons may strike the eye with such exact resemblance, that the spectator scarcely requires to be informed whose features they are, which are presented to his view.

But although the names of the evangelists do not occur, the traces of their gospels are very numerous and very evident. Ignatius  
mentions

mentions the gospel, as if written, several times, more particularly in his epistles to the Smyrnæans, and Philadelphians. In his epistle to the latter, two passages occur which more pointedly indicate the history of our Lord as recorded by the evangelists. In the course of his censures of the Gnosticks, who denied the reality of Christ's sufferings, he says, "That  
 " neither the prophecies, the law of Moses,  
 " nor the gospel down to the present time had  
 " convinced them of their errors." " The  
 " prophets call for attention, but more parti-  
 " cularly the gospel in which the passion and  
 " the resurrection are manifested to us." " Fly  
 " to the gospel as to the person of Christ,  
 " and to the apostles as the presbyery of the  
 " church." By way of illustration it may be remarked that this mode of expression closely corresponds with the style of the next century, when there could be no doubt as to the precise import of the word gospel. Tertullian declares " that from the law, the prophets,  
 " the gospel, and apostolical writings, we  
 " ought to learn our faith."

From the frequent allusions of the apostolical fathers, it seems highly probable that they refer to a collection of those books of which there was never any doubt in the church,

church,

church, and which appear to have had an extensive circulation, and to have met with an early and general reception, among all the Christian congregations. We are not however authorised to make a general and unqualified assertion, that the evidence brought in favour of this collection, is always clear and equally strong. Clement makes particular and frequent use of the gospel of St. Matthew, and of St. Luke. He sometimes exhibits passages of the former with such correctness, as to give them a claim to be adopted in preference to the common readings. If his allusions to the latter were distant and vague, they would be rendered in a great degree fixed and determinate, as he has undoubted references to the Acts of the Apostles, which were published some time subsequent to the former treatise addressed to Theophilus.

Ignatius and Polycarp took a wider range of citation, as the gospel of St. John was published before they wrote. They studiously adopted many of his phrases, and followed his train of expression. How far the gospel of St. Mark is cited by any of them, it is very difficult to determine. The shades of distinction between what is quoted from his gospel, and from that of St. Matthew are so slight, that



that they are frequently liable to be confounded by the most discerning eye. That which is borrowed from the one, may be attributed to the other, without the danger of incurring the charge of a want of critical discernment from those who are conversant with the works of Justin Martyr. The same ambiguity of reference is observable in Clement, as well as in the others. The propriety of assigning to St. Mark some passages quoted in Clement's epistle, is confirmed by recollecting that St. Mark was a disciple of St. Peter, as well as Clement, and that his gospel was written at Rome, of which place Clement was bishop.

If borrowed ideas be cited by an author, not in identical, but correspondent terms, the passage in which they are found undoubtedly constitutes the essence of a quotation. This appears to have been the opinion of the sacred writers, who quote the Old Testament from memory, and frequently represent the main import of a passage, without confining themselves to literal expressions. In the Old Testament itself, the repetition of texts is far from being perfectly the same. The apostolical fathers adopted a practice which was authorised by such venerable examples, as will appear

appear from some very remarkable passages of Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp, in which are respectively contained the substance of a quotation from St. Luke, and the exact words both of St. Matthew, and St. John.

If their opportunities of information be considered, and the plain vestiges of the evangelical history, which abound in their works; it seems most reasonable to conclude that the apostolical fathers made use of our gospels; that they mentioned them under certain general denominations; sometimes adduced passages from them with that vague representation which arises from imperfect recollection, and sometimes cited them with that precision, which indicates a recent and assiduous perusal. That the passages before stated, and many others of the same kind, which so precisely represent the conduct and the sentiments of our Lord were borrowed from tradition, amounts to nothing more than a precipitate conjecture; whereas, the proof of their being derived from our gospels is built upon strong and satisfactory arguments.

The assistance received from the epistles of the sacred writers for the establishment of the faith, and the regulation of practice, is evident  
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from the continual use made of them by the primitive writers. The first epistle to the Corinthians is expressly ascribed to St. Paul by Clement. Polycarp makes plain allusions to the Philippians, and Thessalonians; and refers, under the appellation of holy scriptures, to the epistle to the Ephesians, as well as to the other works which at that time composed the apostolical canon. The epistle to the Romans, as may be collected from the testimony of Tertullian, was preserved in the archives of their church, when Clement presided over it. His allusions to it are numerous and clear. So great has been his accuracy in stating some expressions, that an eminent editor of the Greek Testament has been enabled to correct several corrupt readings, which the negligence of transcribers had introduced into many copies of that epistle. His allusions and direct citations are likewise very strong and important proofs of the early notoriety and credit of the epistle to the Hebrews.

From the particular epistles which are expressly named, or clearly referred to, sometimes the train of argument in different words, and sometimes the exact expressions are derived. The practice respecting many others is precisely the same. Many of the other epistles  
though

though less clearly referred to, appear notwithstanding to have been imitated by these writers. Numerous passages occur in which the epistolary phrases are accommodated to new subjects, and incorporated with the style of each writer. In Clement and Ignatius, may more particularly be discerned evident traces of St. Paul. The adoption of his sentiments communicates peculiar animation to their thoughts, and energy to their language. They delight in the amplification of his ideas, and that they expand them with considerable success is evident from several passages.

We have seen from the preceding observations, that the disciples of the apostles were well acquainted with the greater part of the sacred writings. Among their immediate descendants, no one was more eminent for zeal in the cause of christianity, or faithful attestation to its records, than Justin Martyr. He speaks of the works of the evangelists, under the general denomination of memoirs and gospels. He follows the example of his predecessors in the omission of names, and cites the precepts of the gospel, as the express injunctions of Christ himself. Of the numerous scriptural passages which occur in his works, many convey general sentiments without an adherence

adherence to literal expressions, and many represent them with considerable precision.

During the age in which this writer flourished, the gospels were publicly recited on the Lord's day in the assemblies of the Christians. This curious fact ascertains the high antiquity of a custom which has prevailed throughout the universal church. It likewise proves the great estimation and wide diffusion of the gospels, so early as the middle of the second century.

Irenæus bishop of Lyons, the author of an elaborate confutation of the Gnostick heresies, left an ample account of the New Testament, which he calls with peculiar propriety of distinction, the evangelical and apostolical writings. He assigns many reasons for the gospels being only four in number, and his citations of them are very copious. He relates the different occasions on which they were composed, gives distinct characters of the evangelists, and proves that their endowments for their undertakings were imparted from on high. It is particularly to be remarked, that he usually mentions the name of the author from whom he derives his scriptural authorities; because the practice of this writer fixes  
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the Æra of formal quotation. The succeeding fathers of the church followed this example with little variation, and it is much to be regretted that so explicit a mode of reference was not introduced at a more early period, that every circumstance might have concurred to place the attestation of the apostolical fathers intirely out of the reach of cavil and controverfy. The books which Irenæus so particularly describes and so fully quotes, must have been received from his immediate predecessors ; from none of whom he is so likely to have received them as from Polycarp, who was his preceptor, and the friend of Ignatius. In these apostolical fathers we find passages similar to expressions in our gospels. The conclusion therefore is, that they, as well as the persons, to whom they afterwards communicated the sacred books, have quoted the New Testament.

Having taken a cursory survey of the evidence given by the most authentick writers of the first and second centuries to the New Testament, it is now proper to draw the line of discrimination between those parts of it, which they cite, and those, which they omit.

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The allusions to the gospels of St. Matthew, St. Luke, and St. John, even in the apostolical fathers, are very clear. St. Mark may not be so conspicuous, for reasons already given. By Justin and Irenæus all the four are fully and satisfactorily quoted. Of the Acts of the Apostles, the citations are very full, particularly in the epistle of Clement, the apologies and dialogue of Justin Martyr, and the treatise of Irenæus. The revelation of St. John is accurately described by Justin Martyr, and frequently quoted by Irenæus. All such notices must appear very important and valuable, when we consider with proper attention the integrity of the writers, their high antiquity, and their favourable opportunities of information.

Among the epistles those which are most used are the epistles to the Corinthians. The epistle to the Hebrews was evidently well known to Clement. All the rest are either alluded to, or expressly cited, except the epistles to Titus and Philemon: the epistle of James, the second of Peter, the second and third of John, and the epistle of St. Jude, are omitted by all these writers. For this silence it is not difficult to assign satisfactory reasons. The smallness and private nature of the epistle

to Philemon, might prevent it from being cited. The third, if not the second epistle of St. John, was written to a private person, and might remain for some time unknown to the church at large. The remoteness of Crete retarded the circulation of the epistle to Titus, and as the original copies of the catholic epistles belonged to no church in particular, it might not in the infancy of the church be easy to ascertain their authenticity.

How many of the above mentioned epistles were known to the primitive fathers, it is difficult to ascertain. It is highly improbable that they were unacquainted with all of them. The curious and minute observer from the frequent usage of some remarkable words, may contend that Ignatius had read the epistle to Philemon, as well as that addressed to Titus; and from a similarity of thought, he may conclude that Irenæus when he wrote the passage in his treatise on the Gnostick heresies, relative to the efficacy of good works, recollected the epistle of St. James.

Among other reasons for which we have reason to regret the loss of several works of Justin Martyr; may be mentioned, the important testimony, which they would probably have



have afforded to our gospels and epistles. If the epistles of Polycarp had alone escaped the ravages of time, they would have furnished ample and perhaps sufficient proofs of the early notoriety and credit of the sacred writings; since in his remaining epistle, short as it is, he refers to more than half the productions of which the New Testament is composed.

No distance of time, no remoteness of place, prevented the unanimous appeal which these writers made to the original scriptures. Their attestations give and receive mutual confirmation and mutual lustre. Clement flourished at Rome, Ignatius at Antioch, Polycarp at Smyrna, Justin Martyr in Syria and Rome, and Irenæus in Gaul. If circumstances conspired to bring some of them acquainted with each other, their integrity and piety exclude the slightest supposition that they entertained an unreasonable prejudice in favour of the New Testament, or united to raise its credit by dishonourable combination. Rejecting all other records, which were invented only to give a plausible sanction to heresy, they unanimously received those which were stamped with the image, and marked with the superscription of truth. One was not a preacher of the gospel

of Ebion, and another an advocate for the theogony of the Gnosticks. *They followed not cunningly devised fables, but built upon the foundation of the apostles, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.*

The gospels and epistles are never introduced with hesitation or apprehension, lest doubts should arise in the minds of Christians relative to their authority. Appeal is made to them, as to a sacred and immoveable standard of truth, which is established by the consent of all. The language therefore of the early fathers, is the language of the church. With one voice they proclaim the reception of the scriptures, and with one consent revere them, and them alone, as authentick and sacred.

To confirm these observations it is proper to remark that the epistle of Clement was written not only with the approbation, but in the name of the whole church of Rome. Polycarp addressed the Philippians in conjunction with all the presbyters of Smyrna. The epistles of Ignatius were written under the inspection of the companions of his painful journey from Antioch to Rome, and of the Christians whom he visited by the way. Justin Martyr in his apologies, makes a publick  
address

addresses to the emperours in vindication of the whole body of Christians. The confutation of the Gnostick heresy by Irenæus, derives its greatest authority and weight from supposing that he speaks the prevailing language, and adduces the general arguments of the church.

Of the uniformity of faith which may be observed in the pastors as well as in their flocks, it is curious to ascertain the cause. The universal reception of the same sacred books, is an obvious and satisfactory reason among others. The high regard paid to these books was founded on a general persuasion, that the authors of them wrote under the immediate influence of divine inspiration. The Word who was the creator of the universe, who sitteth upon the cherubim, and upholdeth all things, even he who was manifest to the world, hath given to us a fourfold gospel, which is communicated by the holy spirit.

This persuasion so sublimely expressed in the words of Irenæus, which was common to the church at large, was rational and judicious. It arose partly from the harmony which prevailed between the apostolical writings, and the apostolical tradition, which for no inconsiderable period faithfully represented the prin-

principles of Christianity ; and partly from the miraculous powers which were enjoyed by the apostles on every occasion that was instantaneously or ultimately conducive to the interests of the gospel.

They had also a *more sure word of prophecy* to establish this conviction, for our Lord kindly anticipating the imminent consternation of his disciples, and graciously desiring to supply his own absence by adequate comforts ; promised that the holy spirit should *bring all things to their remembrance*. Hence they were armed with courage equal to every outward danger, and endued with knowledge equal to every intellectual difficulty. The holy spirit revived in their minds the precepts of their Lord, and completed the scheme of evangelical instruction. As its assistance was extended to every branch of the apostolical mission, an exact narrative of our Lord's conduct and transactions, necessarily formed a grand and important object of its infallible communications.

The expediency of the divine interference to preserve the writings of the apostles from inaccuracy and misrepresentation may strike us with greater force, if we examine the nature  
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of historical evidence to the truth of facts and opinions.

Fidelity of description, and accuracy of narrative, are highly necessary for him who undertakes to record the transactions of antient times. Yet of the writers who are eminent for their historical productions, many have been betrayed into inconsistency and contradiction. The unwearied diligence of Plutarch, the elaborate conciseness of Tacitus, the extensive researches of Dion Cassius and of Josephus, did not secure them against occasional deviations from truth. If their talents however respectable, and their erudition however profound, left them still exposed to error; what cause less than supernatural can be assigned why men remarkable for defect of education and slowness of apprehension as the disciples of Christ were, should be qualified to give a statement of facts altogether harmonious and consistent, and to reach the height of historical excellence which was unattainable by superiour minds ?

The apostles have not only avoided error with regard to facts, but misrepresentations with regard to opinions. To the general conduct of the writers of old, they have furnished

a striking and illustrious exception. Every admirer of antient philosophy laments how often in his search after the characteristic marks of any particular sect, he finds himself bewildered in the labyrinth of uncertainty. The careless writer may blend those tenets, which as they are totally different in their nature, and derived from distinct sources, ought to be kept for ever separate. The neglect of accurate inquiry, may not unfairly be imputed to Plutarch, when he asserts that Plato held the doctrine of a good and an evil principle. The same fault is likewise to be imputed to that sublime philosopher himself, who hurried away by too great an eagerness to dignify a favourite sentiment with the authority of a celebrated name, afforded grounds for just complaint to Socrates, who accused him of having confounded his tenets with those of preceding ages. Nor can the great Aristotle, notwithstanding the depth of his understanding, and the extent of his knowledge be freed from a similar charge. He has asserted, that the Deity of Zenophanes was corporeal, although the tenour of his arguments plainly lead to the opposite conclusion. Now, after these deviations from accurate representation in men of the most enlarged and enlightened minds, who could discern the nice distinctions of metaphysical

physical principles, and feel the necessity of stating them with exactness, how was it possible that the illiterate fishermen of Galilee could communicate without supernatural assistance, the precise rules of the most perfect ethicks, and the sublime doctrines of the most refined theology ?

To fix the degree of inspiration which was imparted to the writers of the New Testament, is an object of much greater consequence than to explain the method in which it was conveyed. That the apostles were constantly under the divine influence, that such influence extended to scrupulous correctness in every particular, and rendered them perfectly infallible in the writings they have left us, is an opinion which its advocates will find it difficult to establish. Aware of the many objections which may be brought against them, it is not for such an hypothesis that we ought precipitately to contend. There seems however nothing repugnant to reason, nothing inconsistent with the circumstances of the case in supposing, that the Holy Spirit guarded the sacred writers from error in the grand outlines of their narration, in the statement of precepts, and the developement of doctrines.

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A divine assistance thus favourably imparted, seems to have answered the great end of its communication without extending to the revelation of other points. It at once accounts satisfactorily for those slight deviations from exact uniformity which the advocates of infidelity have magnified into apparent importance, and displayed with ostentatious parade. In the more minute circumstances of facts, the sacred writers are left to the resources of their own unassisted memory and experience, and consequently are reduced to the level of all other credible historians. Upon those momentous points which contribute to form an infallible rule and standard of faith and practice, they were guided by the hand of divine wisdom into all truth, and soar to a height of credibility which no human writer can attain.

He who peruses the scriptures with the slightest degree of attention, must be struck by a radical peculiarity of narrative and sentiment. There is sometimes a greatness of thought which surpasses the conceptions of human genius, and sometimes an unaffected artlessness, which attracts by its novelty, and delights by its sweetness. Considered solely as compositions calculated to please the fancy by  
lively



lively representations, to satisfy the judgment by exact probability, and interest the feelings by affecting representations, they deserve to share our attention with the classical remains of Greece and Rome. In the works of the evangelists may be found instances of that captivating simplicity of narration, which we admire in Xenophon; and in the epistles of St. Paul, are many examples of that sublime impetuosity of argument, which we applaud in Demosthenes. Here however the similarity must end. One circumstance there is, in which the New Testament rises to an elevation, which no other book can reach. Here presides the majesty of Truth in unadorned but awful state, and never turns aside to the blandishments of flattery, nor listens to the whispers of defamation. Here alone she preserves the same benign but unchangeable aspect, and points with equal impartiality, to the apostles at one time, deserting Christ, and at another, risking life by the bold profession of his gospel; to Peter now protesting his unalterable fidelity, and now denying his Lord.

Every sincere christian will contemplate this characteristick with sentiments of veneration and delight, and will think it a presumptive argument, that when he peruses scripture,

scripture, *the place whereon he stands is holy ground.* He regards those who deny its celestial origin for the sake of reducing its contents to the low standard of their own degrading opinion, as audacious and deluded innovators, whose temerity excites his astonishment, and whose infatuation awakens his pity. Satisfied with the external as well as internal evidence, he receives with implicit confidence this invaluable treasure, and considers inspiration as the angelick guard placed by heaven around the book of life, to secure it from the attacks of presumptuous and aspiring man.

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# S E R M O N    V I I I .

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H E B R E W S    X I I .    1 .

*Wherefore seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of Witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the Sin which doth so easily beset us; and let us run with patience the Race that is set before us; looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our Faith.*

**I**T may be remarked in all political institutions, that laws are never heard with so much attention, nor obeyed with so much alacrity, as immediately after their first promulgation. Their observance is more agreeable to the inclinations of mankind at that, rather than any subsequent period of time, by reason of the comparison made between the advantages which they secure, and the urgent inconveniences which they remove. This observation

ervation will be found to hold good not only in political but religious establishments, for Christianity itself was never embraced with more genuine sincerity, nor adorned with more pure morals, than during the earliest ages of the church. The perfect freedom of the gospel became the most valuable acquisition to those who had laboured under the yoke of the Jewish or Pagan ceremonies; and the dreary prospects of superstition were eagerly exchanged for the glorious light of life and immortality.

The view of society and manners which ecclesiastical history presents during the primitive times is particularly worthy of attention. We behold the church deriving its establishment from the apostles and even from Christ himself, distinguished equally from the Pagans, who were its avowed enemies, and from the hereticks who were its insidious friends. To the former, in its publick remonstrances it was ingenuous without weakness, and prudent without dissimulation; to the latter, in its confutations of their errors, it was condescending without timidity, and resolute without harshness. Regardless of the distinctions of rank or fortune, it invited all to take refuge from the corruptions of idolatry in its hospitable asylum, and to participate the  
comfort

comfort of present tranquillity, and the hope of future happiness. Its pastors, eminent for virtue and learning, taught with the confidence of full conviction those doctrines, which they received from the most indisputable authority; and made the edification of their flocks, the most important object of their ambition. Their power was exercised for the most salutary purposes, and they laboured with unremitting assiduity for the correction of sinners, the reconciliation of enemies, and the conversion of Infidels. No variation prevailed in the restrictions of discipline, or the confession of faith, since one system of government and one creed were not only adopted by the members of the same church, but by all the churches dispersed throughout the world.

Such uniformity appears the more extraordinary, when we recollect that it was not promoted by the machinations of human policy, nor enforced by the authority of the civil power: for this was the period, during which, Christianity was supported merely by its own native strength, and made the most rapid advances towards a complete establishment amid the threats of legal prohibitions, and the intolerance of polytheism. The vigorous tree planted by the Son of God flourished and cast  
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its grateful shade over the nations ; whilst by the strength of its roots and the firmness of its bulk it survived the repeated violence of winds and storms.

The conversion of the Emperour Constantine was eminently favourable to the church ; for from that glorious event she dated the origin of her external splendour, and her security. The Christians however, who had been trained in the rigid school of persecution to the exercise of every distinguished virtue, were succeeded by those who felt the pernicious effects of prosperity. The purity of their morals was gradually stained with licentiousness, their harmony was broken by unedifying disputations, and the vigour of their discipline was relaxed by irresolution.

The clouds of bigotry in the middle ages overspread the world, and the institutions, opinions and ceremonies, which were then by degrees introduced, not only encumbered Christianity with useless appendages, but caused a heavy depression of the powers of the mind. A long night of intellectual darkness prevailed, before mankind were sufficiently roused from the dreams of superstition to accomplish an auspicious reformation.

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Whether we consider the various causes that gave rise to this event, or the means by which it was accomplished; the extensive field of action, which it opened to the understanding by the expulsion of spiritual tyranny, the extraordinary discoveries which preceded, or the matchless exertions of intellect which followed, it may fairly be considered as one of the greatest occurrences recorded in the annals of time. True science derived its origin from this restoration of true Christianity, and learning, which had shared its corruption and decay, arose with new vigour on its revival. Their association not only afforded mutual support, but proved that reason when advanced to the highest state of improvement is most congenial with revelation, and that the latter never appears to more advantage, than when viewed by the strongest light which the former can impart. The benefits likewise conferred on society at large were similar to those which had been happily experienced during the first propagation of the gospel. The sacred oracles were laid open to all, and the fullest opportunities were afforded to the laity, as well as the clergy, of becoming acquainted with the pure and uncorrupted principles of duty. Nor was this the only feature of resemblance to the antient times; for the general conformity of

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our establishment to the primitive church has been celebrated by its own members at home, and its admirers abroad, as its most illustrious, and most distinguishing characteristick.

Prepared by a close and ardent perusal of scripture, and impressed with due respect for the authority of the early fathers, as its most faithful interpreters, the great Reformers of England came forth to execute their pious task. Their judgment was conspicuous both in expunging from the protestant ritual a long train of unedifying ceremonies, and in retaining the most decorous usages of worship. We feel a pious satisfaction in contemplating and enumerating the salutary effects of their labours, more particularly as long experience has afforded ample proofs of their inseparable connection with the best and most exalted interests of the nation.

The plan of our religious institutions was formed by fervent piety and executed with profound judgment. The fundamental articles of the faith, which they prescribe, are strictly consistent with scripture, are recommended by the belief of the antient fathers, and ratified by the decrees of the most respectable councils. The sacred edifices, whilst they are dis-  
vested



vested of the gawdy decorations, and puerile ornaments of Popery, are furnished with those appendages which give dignity to publick worship, and distinguish the functions of its ministers from ordinary occupations. A code of devotional exercises is established far superior to all other sacred compositions of human origin for simple energy of language, pure fervour of piety, and evangelical tenour of sentiment. For these distinguishing qualities it is principally indebted to those venerable forms of supplication, which were breathed from the lips of saints and martyrs, and consecrated to the service of the church by holy men of the earliest ages. It gives the most expressive and pathetick utterance to the wants and desires of the devout suppliant, and enables him to fulfil with perfect consistency, the various duties of rational and steady devotion. Engaged in the repetition of our prayers, he avoids the wild rhapsodies of the Methodist, and the cold addresses of the Presbyterian. Thus he is freed from the irregularity and abruptness of extemporaneous effusions, which are unknown until the moment they are uttered, and which as soon as uttered, the judgment of the critick must always condemn as incoherent, and the conscience of the pious must frequently reject as unscriptural. The

hierarchy, deriving its origin from the apostles, is confirmed by primitive usage, and recommended by the utility of clerical gradations. The political constitution of the country, in return for the alliance which it has formed with the church, derives from the association, additional security for the observance of the laws, and the preservation of order. The unmolested profession and free exercise of their particular worship are allowed to all who dissent from the establishment. The prudent toleration, which is allowed, equally avoids the dangerous extremes of cruel persecution, which breaks the ties of charity; and of that unbounded indulgence, which may convert religion into an engine of ambition. Thus pious in her professions, uncorrupt in her institutions, and judicious in her restraints, our church is to the sectarist no real stumbling block, and to the sceptick no more than imaginary foolishness.

While we survey in our own religious institutions the fundamental articles of belief, and principles of government, which distinguished the antient Christians; while we recognise in our forms of prayer the traces of their devotion, and practise the decent rites which they instituted; we declare by our  
conformity

conformity the greatest approbation of their conduct and sentiments upon subjects the most important. We are also more forcibly impressed by the propriety of our researches into the means by which they propagated the faith; and we moreover feel a greater satisfaction in displaying their virtues, and in vindicating them from the misrepresentation of prejudiced and uncandid writers.

Attentive to the voice of antiquity, and solicitous for the honour of our religion, we have endeavoured to invalidate the objections of *the Historian of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire* and to rectify his deviations from truth.

The proofs in favour of the continuance of miracles for some time after the death of the apostles, remain in full force, notwithstanding the ingenuity, which was exerted to shake their credibility. They are destitute neither of the arguments, nor the authority of modern writers to support them, and if the scepticism, injudiciously imputed to the present age, be so stubborn, and deeply rooted in the minds of Gibbon and of Middleton; from a number of those whose opinions are more flexible by the force of evidence, we may select Mosheim and

Jortin. These are writers who cannot fairly be accused either of bigotry or credulity; and if any discussion ought to be decided by the sole voice of authority, where can the ecclesiastical student, in the widest extent of his researches, find more candour, deeper learning, or more sound and dispassionate judgment?

The apologies of the primitive Christians have been set in a proper light, and their subjects appear to have been more judiciously chosen, than the blindness of prejudice and the fastidiousness of criticism were inclined to admit. The writers of them deserve to be restored to the rank to which former ages had raised them, and they ought also to be considered as important allies in the service of Christianity.

The primitive Christians are restored to the station so eminently due to their merit, and from the number of their virtues, which we have endeavoured to elucidate, we may fairly conclude, that their motives were more pure than the Historian has represented. Even their avowed enemies have left us ample testimonies of their exemplary conduct, and we cannot venture without the just imputation of the most unreasonable prejudice to depreciate

ciate the characters which they have drawn. The candour of the present age might reasonably be called in question if we withheld that tribute to merit, which was cheerfully paid by a Lucian and a Julian.

If our representations be conformable to the evidence of antient writers, what becomes of that state of scepticism which the Historian has described as propitious to the diffusion of Christianity? It is found to have existed only among the philosophers, and the small circle to which their opinions were confined; and consequently supplies a very inadequate idea of the general disposition of their contemporaries.

We have developed the various causes of antient persecution, and shown that the magnanimity of the followers of Jesus was tried by the most painful tortures. It has appeared in direct contradiction to the assertions of the Historian, how little Paganism encouraged the advances of Christianity by an indifference to superstitious establishments. We have observed that the heathen assumed a fierce and lowering aspect, and menaced the approach of the believer with outrage and even with death; that Persecution unsheathed her sword, and

compelled the innocent martyr either to offer incense upon the altar of her Gods, or to fall a bleeding victim at her feet.

By a particular discussion of some assertions of this Historian, which materially affect the characters of the early Christians, we have detected the futility of his charges, and as we may infer the general tenour of his unfair representations from those specimens, we may conclude that the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters are altogether unworthy of the rank they hold in his work, and ought to be consigned by every friend of justice and truth to neglect and oblivion,

We have endeavoured not only to mark the first advances of Christianity in the world, but to delineate a picture of its influence on society, and the important alterations, which it effected in publick institutions and private manners; how it removed the inconveniences and unhappiness of early times, and meliorated the general condition of human life throughout the succeeding ages,

We have brought evidences to prove the early reception of the books of the New Testament; we have ascertained the high esteem  
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in which they were held, and both stated and confirmed the sentiments of the earliest Christians with respect to the inspiration of the sacred writers.

We have moreover attempted, in our description of the hereticks who destroyed the harmony of the Christian church, to give an accurate statement of the opinions of the Ebionites, with an immediate view to rectify the misrepresentation of the *Historian of the early opinions concerning Christ*. We have seen that their pretensions to the highest antiquity, were ill founded; and that they met with direct opposition from the successive writers of the primitive church.

We have ventured to combat his fundamental principles relative to that most important article of faith, the Divinity of our Lord and Saviour. We have rescued the early Christians from his misrepresentations, and shown that their opinions when fully developed are most favourable to the church of England.

It has appeared to what degree the Ebionites endeavoured to divest our Lord of his divinity, after that the Gnosticks had attempted to explain away his humanity. The  
philosophers

philosophers of the present day at once arrogate the refined speculations and comprehensive knowledge of the latter; and model the heresy of the former into a more degrading system of their own. But their labour is as fruitless when soliciting the support of scripture, as their pretensions have been proved to be arrogant and weak, when boasting of the concurrence of the early ages. The evangelists and the apostles, the confessors and martyrs, the pastors and the universal church in the plain language of her original creeds, disavow the errors of Unitarianism, and pronounce with one voice its full condemnation.

But however satisfactory it may be to dispel the mists of prejudice, and give a clear and cloudless prospect of historical truth, the preceding disquisitions are not confined to the arguments of fruitless controversy, or the recital of unedifying facts. On the contrary, they open a wide field of the most profitable speculation, and may excite a more earnest attention to the calls of duty. The fairest and most excellent examples are held up to our inspection, let us view them with deference, and imitate them with fidelity; let us be followers of the primitive Christians, even as they were of the apostles and of Christ.

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In the ardour of their zeal and the liveliness of their faith, the first Christians appear to have excelled all the generations which succeeded them. Many Christians of the present times, however they may believe all that the apostles have spoken, are too liable to the imputation of remissness, by not adding virtue to their faith; to the evidences of revelation they give only that languid assent of the understanding, which is destitute of the warm and invigorating approbation of the heart. If all embraced with cordial affection the gospel of Christ as the dearest pledge of divine love, we should then behold in the conduct of every one that ardent piety to God, that universal charity to man, that meek endurance of insults and injuries, that strict temperance, perfect content and unruffled tranquillity, that firmness of principle and resignation of will which the Saviour of the world recommended in his discourses and exemplified in his conduct. But the diligence of labour and the ardour of hope which ought to be shown in the exercise of these virtues are directed to unworthy objects. For they too often assist ambition to climb the giddy heights of power, dissipation to seek the flowery paths of pleasure, avarice to amass her wealth, and the passions to overleap the bounds of duty. Let the

the alacrity of mankind, which is so apparent in all these pursuits, be transferred to religion, and its injunctions will appear the most engaging incitements to goodness. The difficulties of religious practice will be alleviated, and we shall enjoy the full relish of its pure and sublime gratifications. When employed in executing the commands of God, we shall never drag the heavy chain of reluctant compliance, but shall tread the path of duty with delight, and glory in the perfect freedom of the gospel.

We have in the preceding discourses remarked the profound humility, which was the most striking ornament of the primitive church. This virtue distinguishes Christianity from all other religions more than any duty, which it recommends. Duly influenced by this we are convinced that the brightest faculties of mind, the greatest attainments of learning, the fairest gifts of nature, the highest rank of honour, or the most profuse bounty of fortune, afford no grounds for pride or presumption. They are all primarily derived from the goodness of God, and are to be ultimately dedicated to his honour and service. Our various wants and infirmities contribute likewise to convince us of the expediency of this

this duty, and hourly to suggest to us our constant dependance upon the Supreme Being: Our Saviour himself by every action of his life inculcated its observance, and furnished the most persuasive arguments to *learn of him who was meek and lowly.*

But more particularly the humility which is so strongly recommended in the gospel is calculated to subdue the pride of the intellectual powers, and check the fallies of ambitious reason. We ought therefore to bring to the severest test of examination the plausible arguments of those pretenders to superiour knowledge who affect to contemn, or attempt to mutilate the revelations of the divine will. We ought to meet their prophane sarcasms with contempt, and reject their subtle insinuations with disdain. For we may be well assured that the cavils, which are wantonly thrown out at the articles of our holy faith result only from the pride and self-sufficiency of the human understanding. The caviller makes his own limited capacity the measure of his creed, and reasons upon the most weak of all principles, for he will not believe what he cannot comprehend. Instigated by presumptuous eagerness to reject the mysteries relative to the divine Essence, he confounds the

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the proofs of an article of belief with the nature of it. All however who have the judgment to discern and the ingenuofness to acknowledge the imperfections of the intellectual powers, will readily assent to the truth of many things, although they are incompetent to the solution of the difficulties which attend them.

We believe that there is a God who is an eternal Being endued with every perfection that the mind of man can conceive; but in what manner this Almighty Being exists, how his prescience can be fully reconciled with the free agency of man, how the high and lofty One who reigns in heaven above, can at the same point of time be universally present in every part of the creation, and yet be unextended, is a labyrinth of perplexity to our minds, for which our conceptions can furnish us with no clue. The mathematician informs us that a line may be supposed to approach perpetually towards another, without a possibility of ever reaching it. The ignorant may treat the assertion with ridicule as absurd, but certain it is, that the problem is capable of demonstration. The discovery of the circulation of the blood gave new and surprizing insight into the internal fabrick of the human frame;

frame ; but where is the acute chemist who after his most laborious decompositions of this vital fluid can tell what cause produces its first motion, or for what reason its action is less voluntary than that of the lungs?

Let the Philosopher therefore suspend awhile his operations against Christianity, let him direct the acuteness of his discernment and the toil of his application to develope the obscurities of metaphysical, mathematical and natural truth, before he scornfully rejects the mysteries of faith because they are not reducible to the standard of his faculties, and because the limit which terminates his prospect is not the boundary of the universe.

Wisdom has never been more fully justified by her children, and her true interest has never been more successfully pursued, than when they have ascertained with precision their own powers of mind, applied them to accessible objects, and confessed the immeasurable distance between things human and divine. Unlike the vaunting sciologists of the present day, they presumed not to tear the veil of the sanctuary and rush into the holy of holies, but firmly confiding in the evidence of divine revelation, at due distance adored its awful mysteries.

myſteries. The great, the wiſe, and the learned of the preſent times ought to think it no degradation to be meek and lowly of heart, when a perfect ſubmiſſion of the underſtanding to divine truth was the characteriſtick of the moſt ſublime poet, the moſt profound philoſopher, the moſt devout phyſiologiſt, and the moſt correct moraliſt who have adorned the circle of modern literature. All ought ſurely to bend with awe before the throne of the divine Majeſty, and acquieſce in the ſcriptural repreſentations of the divine eſſence, when they conſider the ſound and unſhaken principles of Milton, of Bacon, of Boyle and of Johnſon.

From purſuing a courſe far different from theſe teachers of truth and maſters of ſolid erudition, the antient hereticks adopted all thoſe errors which degraded them from the rank of ſound reaſoners, and rendered them unworthy of communion with orthodox Chriſtians. They exalted the tenets of their darling philoſophy to exceſſive conſequence, incorporated them with the principles of Chriſtianity, and adopted only that part of the creed, which could be accommodated to their own hypotheſis. They corrupted thoſe doctrines which they could not comprehend, and placed the  
viſionary

visionary refinements of the human intellect upon the same level with the revelations of divine truth.

By a similar abuse of the powers of an enlightened understanding *the Historian of the early opinions concerning Christ*, under pretence of reforming abuses, darkens the glorious picture of the gospel; under pretence of obliterating the stains, which its doctrines have contracted by the injuries of time, he mutilates the features of the most august personage whom the sacred writers hold up to our view. He gives an idea of the Saviour of the world no less inadequate and imperfect than might be formed of the bright luminary of day when divested of his beams, and deprived of his lustre by the temporary obscurity of a total eclipse.

*The Historian of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire* may be charged with a similar perversion of his talents. Eager to cavil where he cannot confute, and to insinuate that, which he dares not to avow, he is regardless of the consequences which might ensue from the success of his endeavours to depreciate Christianity. For if there be still so much wickedness in the world, notwithstanding the general knowledge of revelation that is disseminated among us, how deplorable would the

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state of society become, if its glorious light were totally extinguished. What obstacles would then stop the torrent of vice, which although opposed by the firm bulwark of religion, now swells with impetuosity and rage? If the unbeliever would turn his attention to the inestimable benefits which Christianity confers on mankind, if he would duly consider the aid it affords to the political institutions of his country, its salutary influence upon the conduct where laws cannot reach the commission of sin, its genial effects on the habits and relations of social life, its direct and obvious tendency to make men happy in themselves and useful to to others, he could not seriously desire its debasement. Nor can he wish to see his countrymen disengaged from the ties of a pious education and totally abandoned to licentiousness and libertinism, unless he has forfeited his right to the character of a good citizen, and is so much influenced by the malignity of a misanthropist as to rejoice in the ignorance and wretchedness of mankind.

Upon a fair estimate of the Benevolent spirit of antiquity as well as of that which marks the present times, we maintain with satisfaction as well as with justice that in the most  
conspicuous



conspicuous and splendid acts of charity the modern Christian has no reason to retire with apprehensions of inferiority from a comparison with the antient believer. The example, which was held out by a Roman matron, who erected a fabrick for the cure of diseases, has been very frequently followed, and variously improved upon. The ample and costly edifices, consecrated to health in every part of this kingdom are as salutary to the poor whom they supply with that relief, which they could not otherwise procure; as they are honourable to the rich who could not by the adoption of any other expedient, render their bounty so extensively beneficial. The humane of the present age listen with eagerness to the various and remote cries of distress, extend their concern to mental as well as corporeal diseases, and combine in their plans of benevolence the immediate comfort of individuals with the best interest of society. A benevolent zeal for the spiritual welfare of the youthful poor has gone forth, and multitudes of them are taught to devote that sacred day to the duties of piety and the acquirement of useful learning, which was formerly wasted in idleness and vice. By an institution not less novel in its plan, than excellent in its consequences, the offspring of the condemned criminal and

destitute mendicant are rescued from the corruptions of their wretched parents, and receive the bounty of subsistence with the light of education. The children of the bleak provinces and barren isles of North Britain are taught the elements of learning and religion, and thus are enabled to repel the force of popular superstitions with new vigour of mind, and acquire new patience to reconcile them to the severity of their climate. Of the various measures, which have been pursued in the metropolis of the empire to alleviate and remove the distresses of mankind, several have been adopted by the country at large. Thus the tide of riches possessed in such superiour abundance by many inhabitants of this country are taught to flow through various channels for the relief of the indigent. Every supply which they afford may be considered as an important advantage to society, because the most helpless are relieved, the most useful part of the community are restored to their ordinary occupations, and by the general effects of munificence, the quantity of human misery is lessened. Still however the triumph of the present age as well as the great and important work of Christian charity is incomplete, unless liberality be a blessing to him who gives, as well as to him who receives. This it cannot  
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be in its fullest and most desirable sense, if the principle which rouses him to action be not the love of God, and the desire of obtaining his favour. This motive was the glory of the primitive church, and rendered it a pattern peculiarly worthy of the imitation of posterity. Whilst ostentation courts the publick notice, and gives with ready hand, that applause may follow its steps; whilst profusion scatters her stores thoughtlessly and without distinction; whilst sensibility feels only a momentary impulse of compassion when the object of distress is at hand; the humanity of the gospel is calculated to supply all deficiencies, and to extend its impartial and ready assistance to all cases of wretchedness, want and calamity, without restraint or distinction. The enlarged and liberal spirit of the evangelical promises is most abundantly shown as well by giving to every one the power of sharing its advantages, as by holding forth a sure recompence for the slightest exercise of Christian kindness, since *whosoever giveth even a cup of cold water in the name of Christ, shall in no wise lose his reward.*

When we contemplate the perilous situation of the Christians of the first ages of the church, we ought to pour forth the most ar-

dent expressions of gratitude to heaven, that we live in an age when the profession of our religion does not involve us in personal danger, nor subject us to the confiscation of property, and the loss of life. We stand on the peaceful shore, and view in the remote prospect of antient times the storms which agitated the primitive converts upon the sea of persecution. Compared with such circumstances of distress and difficulty we are blessed with perfect tranquillity, true comfort and solid happiness. Still however it is not a state of sloth, and inactivity. We have duties to perform, less rigorous and painful indeed, but not less obligatory, or less connected with our eternal interest. Our warfare is not the warfare of the primitive Christians. They saw the authority of the magistrate and the turbulence of the multitude leagued against them in the most formidable confederacy. *The heathen furiously raged, and the rulers took council against the Lord and against his followers:* we on the contrary are protected by the laws of our country, and enjoy the blessings of a liberal establishment. They went forth, to attack the powers of darkness, to subvert the empire of superstition, and subdue the world to the dominion of Christ. It is our task to check the progress of infidelity, to oppose the torrent of licentiousness

tioufness and errour, and show the foundness of our principles by the integrity of our conduct.

Those who thus follow the example of the great and good, who have gone before them, will as they advance in virtue, advance likewise in wisdom. They will improve in the comprehensiveness of their views and the clearness of their understandings. They will feel a growing conviction ~~that~~ an adherence to Christianity is just and rational, especially when they remark that far from yielding to other religious institutions, its value is never more apparent than when it is weighed in the balance against them.

Let therefore the learned and the inquisitive explore all the treasures of human wisdom, and all the repositories of religious instruction; let them revolve the philosophical productions of Greece and Rome, the koran of Mahomet, the laws of Confucius and the institutes of Brama, and after a careful investigation of their excellence, let them confess with justice and with gratitude, that they fall as low in comparison with the gospel of Christ, as the character and the nature of their authors were inferior to the Saviour of the world. For where, we may confidently ask, in the widest extent of their researches, will they find the

founder of a religion foretold by a long and splendid train of prophecies, and recommended to universal reception by such an astonishing display of miracles. Where will they find a religion so rapidly and so widely spreading itself in a short period after its first promulgation, and subduing all opposition by the irresistible loveliness of truth? Where in short, if not in the gospel, will they find a plan so perfectly and wonderfully adapted to enlighten ignorance, to correct the errors of reason, to purify the affections, to excite the most ardent aspirations of hope, to exalt the happiness of man to the highest pitch of rational gratification, and to diffuse the glory of God through the whole extent of the universe.

As we thus enjoy the advantages of a religious institution so far superiour to all others, what manner of men ought we to be in all holiness and godly conversation? Let the important truths which shine with such unrivalled lustre, and of which we have such satisfactory evidence, influence our general conduct. Let our adherence to them supersede every earthly consideration, and let the love of God triumph over every attachment to the occupations and the pleasures of the world. Let charity by indissoluble ties unite us to all  
mankind,

mankind, and not only warm our hearts with the most benevolent sentiments, but stimulate us to the performance of every generous action. Let the precepts of the gospel so shine in our conduct, that the infidel and the gain-fayer may be led to confess the divine origin of our religion by its visible effect on the actions of its professors.

Finally — Let us exalt our minds to those sublime prospects which are open to the eye of faith, and which are eminently capable of encouraging the exercise of our virtues, and of securing our final perseverance. Let us always be mindful that while we fill up the measure of our respective duties, and encrease our relish for the pure gratifications of religion, we become gradually less unworthy to be admitted into the glorious society of heaven; and that in proportion as we adhere to the faith which was once delivered unto the saints, and produce its genuine fruits; in proportion as we imitate that sacred band of primitive Christians who stood forth as the guardians of their religion against all opposition; in proportion as we concur with them in copying the bright example of our common Lord and Master, we encrease our holy hope of divine favour and our pious confidence in the divine mercy; we  
diminish

diminish our apprehensions of the awful day of retribution, and are better prepared to unite with the blessed assembly of just men made perfect, in ascribing glory and honour, and power to Him, that sitteth upon the throne for ever and ever.

T H E E N D.



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# N O T E S

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## A U T H O R I T I E S.

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**P**AGE 8. l. 22. *Sharing the imperfections of other Writers, they fairly claim the same indulgence]*  
Reverentia, quam Patribus debemus, hoc unum a nobis postulat, ut iis hallucinantibus ignoscamus, utque bonâ fide et imprudentiâ eos errâsse et loquutos esse putemus. Clerici Eccl. Hist. p. 601.

Nam et labuntur aliquando et oneri cedunt, et indulgent ingeniorum suorum voluptati, nec semper intendunt animum, et nonnunquam fatigantur: cum Ciceroni dormire interim Demosthenes, Horatio etiam Homerus videatur. Quintilianus, lib. 10. c. 1.

P. 11. l. 24. *The general principles and particular sentiments*

*Sentiments of Cbrysoftom and Basil]* Waterland's Importance of the Doctrine of the Trinity, p. 428. Grotius de Jure Belli et Pacis in Præfatione.

P. 12. l. 6. *They abound in strong and solid proofs of the fundamental principles of Christianity]* Daillé on the right use of the Fathers. Eng. Translation, B. ii. p. 184. Waterland's Importance of the Trinity, p. 426.

P. 17. l. 6. *The frugality of the venerable Basil, the noble moderation of Gregory of Nazianzum, the benevolent condescension of the Empress Pulcheria, and the mildness of the amiable and learned Pamphilus]* Theodoreti Hist. Eccl. lib. 5. c. 3. Cave's Primitive Christianity, p. 3. c. 3. Lardner has collected the detached passages of Eusebius and of Jerom, which relate to Pamphilus. He has concluded his list, with a character of that incomparable Christian, drawn with his usual simplicity of language, and accuracy of observation. Credibility, Vol. 7. p. 304, 335.

P. 20. l. 23. *In the foremost rank of Christians stand the Apostles]* Potteri Prælectiones, Vol. 2. p. 234. Beveregii Codex Canonum vind. in Procemio. Grotius de Jure B. et P. in Proleg.

P. 22. l. 8. *The Works of those whose names have been recited]* Many of these Works are so voluminous, that the attention of the Ecclesiastical Student must of course be confined to particular parts of them. The following selection would, perhaps, give no very inadequate idea of the general merits

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of their authors. The Apology of Tertullian, the Dialogue of Minucius Felix, the Commentaries of Origen, and his books against Celsus, the Epistles of Cyprian, the Institutions of Lactantius, the Ecclesiastical History and Evangelical Preparation of Eusebius, the Homilies of Basil, the Orations of Gregory of Nazianzum, the Commentaries and Epistles of Jerom, the City of God by Austin, the Duty of the Priesthood by Chrysoftom, the Commentaries and Homilies of Theodoret, and the Ecclesiastical Histories of Socrates and Sozomen.

P. 23. l. 18. *Ignatius, Polycarp and Justin sealed the truth with their blood*] Eusebii Ecc. Hist. lib. 3. c. 36. lib. 4. c. 15, 16. Ruinarti Acta Sancti Ignatii, p. 9. Epistola Ecclesiæ Smyrnenfis, p. 28. Acta Sancti Iustini, p. 43. Clerici Eccl. Hist. p. 693, 726.

P. 36. l. 21. *The degrading description which the Historian has given of the Jewish Nation*] Jews Letters to Voltaire, p. 5, &c. Dictionnaire Philosophique, Articles Christianisme, Histoire des Rois Juifs, et Moise, &c. &c.

P. 34, l. 5. *That miraculous powers were exercised after the death of the Apostles upon certain occasions, is a fact supported by the unanimous and successive testimony of the Fathers; down to the reign of the Emperor Julian*] The following are the most important testimonies which have occurred in the course of my investigation of this curious and interesting subject.

subject.—Clementis Romani Epist. ad Corinth. cap. 2 et 48. Ignatii Epist. ad Smyrn. in Salutatione. Epist. ad Philadelph. Epist. ad Trallian. S. 5. Justin Mart. Dialogus, p. 247, 302. Irenæi, lib. 2. c. 56, 57. Tertulliani Apol. c. 23. Eiusdem ad Scapulam, c. 2, 4. Eusebii Eccl. Hist. lib. 3. c. 37, 39. lib. 5. cap. 3, 7. Eiusdem Demonstratio Evan. lib. 3. Origenes contra Celsum, lib. 1, 2, 3 et 7. Chrysofomi Opera, tom. 3. p. 65. Edit. Benedict. Arnobius contra Gentes, lib. 1. Fabricii lux Evangelii, p. 169, 199. Waterland's Importance of the Trinity, p. 382, 383. Clerici Hist. Eccl. p. 533.

I feel inclined to adopt the sentiments of Tillemont upon this subject. Nous aimerions mieux, tant qu'on n'aura point de preuve claire et convaincante de la fausseté de cette opinion, nous tromper avec les ecrivains qui precedent, que d'être obligé d'accuser d'une credulité indiscrete un grande nombre des plus illustres Maitres de l'Eglise. Tillemont. Hist. Eccles. tom. 1. p. 178.

P. 38. l. 19. *It is objected that the Apostolical Fathers are silent relative to the continuance of miraculous powers*] Middleton's Inquiry, vol. 1, p. 121. Jortin's Remarks on Eccl. Hist. vol. 2, p. 43, 46, 49, &c. Clementis Epistola, Sect. 2.

P. 41. l. 7. *Justin Martyr, Irenæus, and Athenagoras are said to have been unanimous in embracing frivolous doctrines, &c.*] Middleton's Inquiry, vol. 1, p. 189, 190.

P. 44. l. 6. *How are we to account for the insensibility of Christians to the cessation of miracles?*] Gibbon, vol. 1. p. 477. Chrysoftomi Op. tom. 3. p. 65.

σημεία δὲ τῆς ἁγίας πνευματος καὶ ἀρχαὶς μὲν τῆς Ἰησοῦ διδασκαλίας, μετὰ δὲ τὴν ἀναλήψιν αὐτοῦ πλείονα εἰδεικνυτο, ὑπερὸν δὲ ἐλαττοναῖ· ὅλην δὲ νῦν ἐτι ἰχνη αὐτῆ παρ' ὀλίγους. Origen. contra Celsum, lib. 7.

Possum quidem dicere necessaria prius fuisse miracula, quam crederet mundus, ad hoc, ut crederet mundus. Quisquis adhuc prodigia, ut credat, inquit, magnum est ipse prodigium, qui, mundo credente, non credit. August. de Civit. Dei, l. 22. c. 8.

P. 46. l. 14. *The Emperor Julian determined to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem*] Warburton's Julian. Gibbon, vol. 2, p. 388.

P. 51. l. 15. *The elegant Author of the Inquiry into the miraculous Powers, at the conclusion of his controversy*] Compare vol. 1. Introductory Discourse, with vol. 2. p. 251. Mosheim, Sæculum 2<sup>dum</sup>. p. 221, 222, &c.

P. 55. l. 28. *The diligence of Eusebius has rescued their names and some fragments of their works from oblivion*] Eccl. Hist. lib. 4. c. 3, 26.

P. 56. l. 22. *The Apologists expose with superfluous wit and eloquence the extravagance of Polytheism.*] Gibbon, vol. 1. p. 517. For proofs of the attachment which even the Philosophers showed to the established Religion of their country, see Hume's Essays, vol. 2, p. 464. Philosophi quamvis philosophando

sophando Deos negarent, attamen in cultu externo religionis, non fecus ac Plebecula, se gerebant; nec ullos novos Deos quos aliter colerent, inducebant. Clerici Hist. Eccl. p. 547.

P. 58. l. 14. *The Apologists insist much more strongly on the predictions which announced, than on the miracles which accompanied the appearance of the Messiah.]* Gibbon, vol. 1. p. 517. Justin Martyris Apol. 1<sup>ma</sup>. p. 55, 61, 71. Eusebii Ecc. Hist. lib. 4. c. 3. Justin Martyris Apol. 1. p. 48. Irenæus, lib. 2, c. 57. Lactantius, lib. 5. c. 3. Watson's Apology, p. 242.

P. 61. l. 19. *The eagerness of the Romans to explore the events of futurity, may be collected from the invectives of their Satyrists, the censures of their Philosophers, and the narratives of their Historians.]* Juvenalis, Sat. 3. ver. 42. Sat. 6. ver. 550. Cicero de Naturâ Deorum, lib. 3. Idem, De divinatione lib. 1. et 2. Taciti Annales, lib. 4 et 6. Aulus Gellius, lib. 14. c. 1.

P. 65. l. 3. *We are informed by the most authentick evidence of ecclesiastical History]* Euseb. Ecc. Hist. lib. 3. c. 37. Mosheim de Rebus ante Constant. Sæc. 2. p. 224.

See the curious Catalogue of 142 authors Greek, Latin, French, English and German, who have commented upon the Travels of the Apostles. Fabricii Lux Evangelii, p. 73.

P. 67. l. 6. *In the primitive Missionary we may contemplate the greatest firmness of resolution]* The admirer

admirer of Horace will recollect the similar situation of Regulus—

Fertur pudicæ conjugis osculum

Parvosque natos——

Ab se removisse, et virilem

Torvus humi posuisse vultum,

Interque mœrentes amicos

Egregius properaret exul.

Atqui sciebat quæ sibi barbarus

Tortor pararet.—— Hor. Od. 5. l. 3.

P. 69. l. 7. *There is no subject which seems to have inspired the early Fathers with such exultation, or which they describe with more lively powers of eloquence, than the general diffusion of the Gospel*] Irenæus, lib. 1. c. 10. Tertullianus adversus Judæos, c. 7. Idem in Apologetico, c. 37. Origenes contra Celsum, lib. 1. p. 6, 7, 23. Idem, περι αρχῶν, lib. 4. c. 1. Chrysostomi Homilia in Rom. 15. 18. Eusebii Præparatio Evang. c. 3. p. 8. Ουρανω δυνάμει και συνεργεια αθροως οια τις ηλιε βολη την συμπασσαν οικουμενην ο σωτηριος κηρυγαζε λογος. Euseb. Ecc. Hist. lib. 2. c. 3.

P. 70. l. 1. *The Historian labours with much solicitude to confine primitive Christianity within the narrowest limits*] Chap. 15. passim. Compare p. 509 with 512. vol. 1.

P. 77. l. 20. *The first persecution raged in the sanguinary reign of Nero*] Mr. Gibbon imagines that this persecution might arise, from the Christians

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being

being confounded with the lawless Banditti of Judas the Gaulonite. It is curious to observe that this conjecture, if it be only a conjecture, may be found in Dodwell, Dissert. Cyprian. XII. 2.

P. 78. l. 8. *The boasted harmony of the antient world respecting religious worship must be understood to have existed only under certain restrictions*] Gibbon, vol. 1. c. 2. Davis's Vindication, p. 96. Phileleuth. Lipsiensis. p. 159. Athenagoræ Apol. p. 1. Tertulliani Apol. p. 5. Euseb. Ecc. Hist. lib. 2. c. 2. Justini Mart. Apol. p. 36. Mosheim de rebus ante Constant. p. 6.

P. 80. l. 22. *In the celebration of the Bacchanalian Rites*] S. Consult. Marcianum. Taylor's Roman Law, p. 547.

P. 82. l. 7. *The calumnies which were industriously reported probably took their rise from the superficial remarks of those who had been present at the celebration of the Sacraments*] Justin. Martyr. Apol. 2. p. 128. The Servants of the Martyrs of Lyons, desirous of saving their lives at the expence of truth, confessed when put to the torture, that their masters feasted upon human flesh. Euseb. Eccl. Hist. lib. 5. c. 1.

P. 85. l. 21. *The interval of Persecution, far from becoming a state of tranquillity, was a season of awful expectation and anxious fear*] The situation of the Christians at such a time, naturally reminds us of the description of Galba, when Otho was advancing



vancing against him. Agebatur huc illuc Galba, vario turbæ fluctuantis impulsu, completis undique basilicis et templis, lugubri prospectu. Neque populi aut plebis ulla vox: sed attoniti vultus, et conversæ ad omnia aures. Non tumultus non quies, sed quale magni metûs, et magnæ iræ silentium est. Hist. lib. 1. Sect. 40.

P. 85. l. 26. *The Church was kept in a continual state of alarm]* Huc adverti debet, de publicis, gravioribus, et notioribus persecutionibus loqui qui decies Christianos vexatos esse dicunt. In provinciis enim passim perpetuo fere vim Christianis a Præsidibus et Plebe allatam esse, certissimis constat testimoniis. Mosheim. Institut. c. 5. p. 61.

P. 89. l. 18. *In the Epistles of Ignatius are found more ardent effusions of zeal, which to the Historian of the Roman Empire appear unnatural and censurable.]* Ignatii Epistola ad Romanos, Sect. 5. We may apply to Mr. Gibbon, on this occasion, some of the judicious arguments of Le Clerc, which he employs to vindicate the Martyrs from the aspersions of Marcus Aurelius. Si qui, quod interdum factum negare nolum, crudelitate suppliciorum, propinquitate mortis, speque proximæ beatitatis, extra se rapti quædam proferebant quæ supra vulgi Ethnici captum erant, an tribuenda hæc sunt *ωαρελαξαι*, obstinationi, vel perturbationi? Imò eo aut vitio aut adfectu vel maxime laborabant, qui innocentes excarnificatos occidebant, quod facere nollent, quæ  
illicita,

illicita, et a Deo improbari pro certo statuebant. Clerici Hist. Ecc. p. 694.

P. 92. l. 13. *Amidst the multitude of similar instances, with which later monuments of ecclesiastical antiquity abound*] Cotelerii Notæ in Ignatii Epist. ad Romanos, p. 26. Pearsoni Vindiciæ Ignat. lib. 2. c. 9.

P. 93. l. 9. *As no traces are to be found of such expectations in the works of the earliest Fathers*] Tertulliani Apol. ad finem. Euseb. Eccl. Hist. lib. 6. c. 42. Wake's Apostolical Fathers, p. 126. Middleton's Works, vol. 1. p. 333, 334.

P. 96. l. 15. *The conduct of Blandina among the Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne was as conspicuous and as exemplary as that of the venerable Potbinus*] Jortin's Remarks, vol. 2. p. 135.

Every reader of sensibility will be inclined to apply the observation of Scaliger on the Acts of the Martyrs in general, to the Epistle of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne in particular. Eorum lectione piorum animus ita afficitur, ut nunquam satur inde recedat: quod quidem ita esse, unusquisque pro captu suo et conscientiæ modo sentire possit. Certe ego nihil unquam in Historiâ Ecclesiasticâ vidi, a cujus lectione commotior recedam, ut non amplius meus esse videar. Animad. in Eusebium.

P. 101. 6. 1. *The Church resembled the fruitful vine.*] Ὅποιον, εἰν ἀμπέλῃ τις ἐκτεμῆ τα καρποφορησαῖνα

μερη, εις το αναβλασησαι ετερους κλαδους και ευθάλεις και καρποφορους αναδιδωσι τον αυτον τροπον και εφ' ημων γινεται. Justin. Martyr. Dial. p. 372.

Nec quicquam proficit exquisitior quæque crudelitas vestra, illecebra est magis Sectæ. Plures efficimur quoties metimur a vobis. Semen est sanguis Christianorum. Tertullianus in Apol.

P. 101. l. 6. *From the patience of the suffering Christians, the more contemplative and rational Pagans inferred the innocence of their lives, and the purity of their characters.]* Και γαρ αυτος εγω τοις Πλατωνος χαιρων διδασμασι διαβαλλομενους ακρων Χριστιανους, ορων δε αφοβους προς θανατον, και παντα τα νομιζομενα φοβερα, ενενοον αδυνατον ειναι εκ κακια και φιληθονια υπαρχειν αυτους. Justin. Martyr. Apol. p. 51.

Lactantius declaims with great spirit and elegance upon this subject. De Justitia, lib. 5. c. 13.

P. 113. l. 24. *The Historian of the Decline and Fall has made an omission with respect to the Gnosticks.]* Gibbon, vol. 1. p. 459. Epiphanius, vol. 1. p. 88, &c. Irenæus, lib. 1. c. 23, 24. Euseb. Ecc. Hist. lib. 3. c. 28, 29. Mosheim, vol. 1. p. 65.

P. 116. l. 1. *The derivation of the Ebionites is involved in some obscurity.]* Euseb. lib. 3. c. 27. Epiphanius Hær. 30. Hieronymus in Epist. ad Augustinum. Whilst so many writers both antient and modern are advocates for the existence of Ebion, I cannot cooperate with Mr. Gibbon, and Dr. Priestley in his annihilation. Compare the authorities

cited by Waterland in his Importance of the Trinity, p. 276, with Early Opinions, p. 177. vol. 3. and Gibbon, Note 22. c. 15. vol. 1. Theodoretus apud Pearsoni Vindicias, p. 2. c. 2. Grabii Notæ in Irénæum, lib. 1. c. 26. Fabricii Lux Evangelii, p. 49. Tertullianus de Præscrip. adversus Hæres. c. 33.

P. 116. l. 10. *The two Sects of Nazarenes and Ebionites have been very improperly confounded.*] Early Opinions, vol. 3. c. 8, &c. Horsley's Letters, p. 130, 378. Horsley's Charge, p. 33, 34. Howes's Observations, No. 9. Mosheimi Institutione, c. 5. p. 130, 131. Mosheim de Rebus ante Constantinum, 172. S. 58. The conjunction or rather the confusion of the Nazarenes and the Ebionites is the corner-stone of Unitarianism. It was first laid by Episcopius and overturned by Bishop Bull. The reader is referred to his *Judicium Ecclesiæ Catholicæ*, c. 2. for complete satisfaction upon this subject. The arguments and authorities brought against Episcopius will apply most exactly to Dr. Priestley. If Bishop Bull, the great Champion of the Nicene Faith, was now living he would exclaim in the words of Æneas

Suggere tela mihi (non ullum dextera frustra  
Torserit in Rutulos) steterunt quæ in corpore  
Graiùm

Iliacis campis. ————— ÆN. lib. 10. 333.

P. 117. l. 11. *From a spurious History of Christ, the  
Ebionites*

*Ebionites drew their opinions*] This seems to have been a characteristick distinction between them and the Nazarenes. Mosheim de Rebus ante Const. Sæc. 2. p. 328, 329, 330, 331. Epiphanius Hær. 30. Irenæus, lib. 3. c. 2.

P. 118. l. 18. *Jesus Christ, our inseparable Life, is sent by the Will of the Father*] For a variety of passages to the same purpose see Ignatii Epist. ad Ephes. c. 6, 18. ad Magnes. Sect. 6, 9, 10, 11. ad Philadelph. Sect. 6, 8, 9. Ad Smyrn. Sect. 1. Pearsoni Vindic. Ignat. p. 2. c. 5.

P. 119. l. 23. *The censures of Justin Martyr are directed against the same Hereticks*] My representation is chiefly drawn from the remarkable passage, Dialogus cum Tryphone, p. 234, which has been so much the subject of dispute. Although ἀπο τοῦ ἡμετέρου γένους usurps a place in the Text, yet there can be no doubt but that the legitimate reading is ὑμετέρου. This is the opinion of Waterland, Thirlby, Bull, and Horsley; and this must be the opinion of every candid and impartial critick. The interpretation of the passage by Episcopiùs and Dr. Priestley is so extremely strained, that it preserves scarcely a shadow of sense. In addition to the passages cited by Thirlby to support the various reading, may be mentioned ἐν τῷ γενεῖ ὑμῶν, p. 241. ἀπο τῆ γενεῖ τῆ ὑμετέρου, p. 274. The expression p. 231. of ὑμετέρου γένους is applied to the same persons, and fully establishes the various reading.

See

See Bulli Defensio, c. 7. sect. 7. If the present reading be allowed to stand, I suppose the ἡμετέρας to have been used merely to point out the common extraction of Trypho and of Justin Martyr. Trypho was a Jew, and Justin was a Samaritan. I submit this conjecture to the learned reader, with the utmost deference to his judgment, and the utmost diffidence of my own. The kind and tolerant manner in which Justin Martyr mentions the Ebionites is most ably and satisfactorily accounted for by Thirlby, Justin Mart. p. 234. ad Notas.

P. 120. l. 13. *Irenæus, in his elaborate work in which he confutes the various Sectaries of the second century*] Lib. 5. c. 1. The Ebionites are particularly censured in not less than ten different passages, so that Dr. Priestley cannot presume much on the slight mention made of them by Irenæus. He confutes their leading tenet when writing against Carpocrates and Cerinthus. Lib. 1. c. 25, 26. lib. 3. c. 21. ad Notas. Dr. Priestley seems to mistake the temper of Irenæus, and the genius of his age. It was not the practice of the mild and candid Bishop of Lyons to stigmatize Heretics with opprobrious epithets. So far otherwise, that he speaks in the most liberal manner of them all, and professes a truly christian regard for them, lib. 3. ad finem.

P. 128. l. 14. *Aristodemus declared to the celebrated Sage of Athens*] Xenophon, Memorabilia, lib. 4. c. 4, 15. Platonis Apologia Socratis, Cice-

ro. Tusc. Quæst. vol. 7. Clerici Hist. Ecc. c. 7, sect. 11, 12, 13.

P. 131. l. 20. *In the first rank of primitive virtues stood humility*] Clementis Epist. sect. 2. Euseb. Ecc. Hist. lib. 5. c. 24. Tertullian. ad Uxorem, lib. 2. c. 4. Ignatii Epist. ad Ephes. sect. 12. Ejusdem ad Trallian. sect. 3. Ejusdem ad Roman. sect. 3, 4. Barnabæ Epist. sect. 1, 4, 9, 17, 21. Clerici Hist. Eccles. p. 467.

P. 134. l. 3. *The primitive Christians were equally remarkable for the exercise of charity in its most enlarged and proper sense:*] Irenæus, lib. 3. c. 46. Justinii Dialogus cum Tryphone, p. 236, 254, et 323. Edit. Paris. Cave's Primitive Christianity, p. 328, &c. &c.

P. 134. l. 22. *The fairest fruit of this comprehensive virtue was beneficence*] Clement. Epist. sect. 2. Justinii Martyris, Apol. 1. p. 98. Euseb. Ecc. Hist. lib. 4. c. 29. Juliani Epistola ad Arfacium, 49. Clerici Ecc. Hist. p. 630, 698.

P. 135. l. 23. *Many rescued their fellow Christians from captivity by voluntarily occupying their places.*] *Επισταμεθα πολλας εν ημιν παρεδεδοκotas εαυτες εις δεσμα, οπως ετερας λυτρωσονται. Πολλοι εαυτες παρεδωκαν εις δελαιαν, και λαβοντες τας τιμας αυτων, ετερας εψωμισαν.* Clement. Epist. sect. 55. To this passage Cotelarius has subjoined a very curious note, in which he enumerates various instances of this romantick philanthropy.

P. 136. l. 22. *The sarcastick Satyrisk of the Philosophers*] Watson's Tracts, vol. 5, p. 201, 229. Julian in Fragment. Orationis. Clerici Ecc. Hist. p. 518. ad Notas.

P. 137. l. 17. *Their firm attachment to the established Government*] Τινες γαρ δε δικαιότεροι ὧν δεονται τυχεῖν, ἢ οἵτινες περὶ μὲν τῆς ἀρχῆς τῆς ὑμετέρας ευχομεθα, ἰνα παῖς μὲν παρὰ πατρός κατα το δικαιότατον διαδεχῆσθε τὴν βασιλειαν, αὐξιν δε και ἐπίδοσιν και ἡ ἀρχὴ ὑμῶν πάντων ἐπιχειριῶν γιγνωμενων λαμβανῆ; τῆτο δ' ἐστὶ και πρὸς ὑμῶν, ὅπως κρημον και ὑσυχιον εἶον διαγοιμεν, (forfan melius διαγοιτε) αυτοι δε πάντα τὰ κεκελευσμενα προθυμως ὑπερετοιῖμεν. Athenagoræ Legatio ad finem. Justinii Martyris Apol. Prima, p. 26. Fabricii Lux Evangelii, p. 194. c. 10. Theophilus ad Autolychum, lib. 1.

P. 141. l. 15. *The triumph of Christianity was completed partly by the subversion of the most antient and most popular superstitions.*] Justinii Apol. p. 61. Eusebii Præp. Evang. lib. 1. c. 4. Fabricii Lux Evangelii, p. 278.

P. 142. l. 16. *The parents who formerly exposed their infant offspring, awoke to the exquisite feelings of Nature*] Justinii Apol. p. 44. Clerici Hist. Ecc. p. 57.

P. 142. l. 26. *The bloody combats of the gladiators which had long been the favourite spectacles of the polite as well as the vulgar*] Eusebii Vita Constantini, lib. 4. c. 21, 25. Plutarchus in Cæsare. Ciceronis Tusc. Quæst. lib. 2.



P. 143. l. 7. *The horrid barbarity of human sacrifices]* Livius, lib. 22. 53. Lactantius, lib. i. c. 2. Clerici Hist. Ecc. p. 52.

P. 143. l. 14. *As soon as divine honours were paid to Christ, the Heathen acknowledged the weakness of their gods]* Νυνι δε θαυμαζουσιν, ει τρισαντων ετων κατειληψε την Πολιν τ' νοσος, Ασκληπιε μεν επιδημιας και των αλλων θεων μηκετ' εσης, Ιησθ γαρ τιμωμενθς, εδεμιας τις θεων δημοσιας ωφελειας ηοθετο. Porphyrius apud Eusebium. Præp. Evang. lib. 5. c. 1. An Oracle of Apollo Delphicus was given to the Emperor Julian, and is preserved by Cedrenus.

Ειπατε τῷ βασιλῆι, χαρμῆι ὡσεε θαιδαλος αυλα,

Ουκετι Φοῖβος εχει καλυθαν, ε μαντιδα δαφνην,

Ου παγαν λαλεεσαν, απεσεετο καν λαλον υδαρ.

The elegant Jortin has happily applied his critical talents to the emendation of these curious lines. By their assistance, he was enabled to illustrate the beautiful passage in the Epistle of Ignatius to the Roman, Sect. 7. Jortin's Remarks, vol. i. p. 356, 359.

P. 143. l. 19. *Whilst broken arches and prostrate columns spread the floors of the deserted temples, the numerous edifices of Christian devotion were erected]* Δελυσθαι μεν και καθηρησθαι αυτοις ναοις και ξοανοις τα πεπαλαιωμενα τῆς των εθνων απαντων πλανης ιδρυματα ιερα δε οντως σεμνα και ευσεβειας διδασκαλεια τῷ Παμβασιλει και Δημιουργῷ των όλων εν μεσαις πολεσι τε και κομ-  
μαις

μαῖς ἀνεγυγερθῆαι. Euseb. Præp. Evang. l. 3. c. 4.  
Idem de Vitâ Constantini, lib. 3.

P. 144. l. 11. *The barriers of national enmity and inveterate prejudice were broken down, &c.*] Justinus Mart. Apol. 1. p. 20. Apol. 2. p. 61.

P. 145. l. 6. *The Parthian and Persian Tribes instituted the decent rites of sepulture*] Euseb. Evang. p. 11. c. 4. Τί δ' ἐρχομεν περὶ τῆς τῶν Χριστιανῶν αἰσεσεως, ἢς ἡμεῖς οἱ δοξάζομεν πολλοὶ οὐτεσ καὶ ἐν διαφοροῖς ἀνεσημεν κλιμασιν, ἐν παντὶ ἐφνει καὶ κλιματι, οἵτινες πολλοὶ οὐτεσ ἐνὶ ὀνοματι κεκλημεθα. Καὶ οὐτε οἱ ἐν Παρθια Χριστιανοὶ πολυγαμμοσι, Παρθοὶ ὑπαρχοντεσ, οὐδ' οἱ ἐν Μηδία κυσὶ παραβαλλοσι τωσ νεκρωσ, κχ οἱ ἐν Περσίδι γαμμοσι τασ θυγατερασ αὐτων, Περσαι οὐτεσ, &c. Bardesanes Syrus apud Euseb. Præp. Evang. lib. 6. c. 10. p. 279.

P. 145. l. 10. *The warlike inhabitants of Scythia, of Germany, of Spain, of Pannonia, of Britain forsook their gloomy superstition*] Mosheim de Rebus ante Constant. Sæc. 2. c. 2, 3. Sæc. 3. c. 1, 2, 3.

P. 148. l. 3. *The Providence of the Almighty was not only active in cooperating with the votaries of Christianity, but likewise in preparing the way for its reception*] Ἐξ ἀναγκης ἀνατρεχειν ἐκδισομαι ἐπὶ τὴν τῷ αἰτιβ ζήτησιν, καὶ συνομολογεῖν μὴ ἀλλωσ αὐῖβς κερρατηκεναι τῷ τολμηματος ἢ θεοτερα καὶ ὑπερ ἀνθρωπον δυναμει καὶ συνεργια τῷ φησαντοσ αὐτοῖσ Μαθευσατε παντα τα εδνη ἐν τῷ ὀνοματι μου. Euseb. Demon, Evangel, lib. 3. p. 139.

P. 163. l. 24. *The first instance of the misrepresentations of the Historian of the Decline and Fall consists in assigning a visionary cause for the propagation of Christianity*] See Gibbon, vol. 1. p. 472. and compare the first and second Editions. Origenis Philocalia, c. 26. Photii Bibliotheca Cod. 232. Justini Mart. Dialog. 311. Irenæus, lib. 5. c. 31, 32, 33, 35. Euseb. Ecc. Hist. lib. 3. c. 39. lib. 7. c. 24. Epiphani. Hæres. 77. Hieronymus in Ezech. c. 36. Mosheimii Sæc. 3. p. 270. Perhaps all the Historian's information upon this subject was borrowed from Middleton; evident traces of it may certainly be found in the Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers, vol. 1. p. 153.

P. 169. l. 21. *The second instance consists in an attempt to invalidate the truth of Prophecy*] Gibbon, vol. 1. p. 472. Epist. Peter 2. c. 3. v. 3. c. 4. v. 7, 12, 13, 14. Gibbon, vol. 1. c. 15. Note 61. Compare 1 Theff. 4, 17 with 2 Theff. 2. 2. 2 Timothy 4. 6. Philip. 3. 11. 2 Corinth. 4. 14. Whitby's Paraphrase, vol. 2. p. 385.

P. 173. l. 4. *The number, for which no authority is produced, is most probably that of Theophilus Bishop of Antioch.*] Theophilus ad Autolychum, lib. 3. p. 135. Petavius de Doctrinâ Temporum, vol. 2. p. 267.

Even Clemens Alexandrinus, whose computations include the greatest number of years, of all the Ante-Nicene Fathers, reckons not more than 5620 years from the Creation to the Birth of Christ.

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He reckons about ten years less than the Septuagint of Riccioli.

P. 173. l. 21. *Lactantius expressly asserts that six thousand years from the Creation of the World were not completed in his time*] Sciant igitur Philosophi, qui ab exordio mundi seculorum millia enumerant, nondum sextum millesimum annum esse conclusum. Lactantius, lib. 7. c. 14.

P. 175. l. 1. *The third instance of misrepresentation consists in an unwarrantable charge of uncharitableness against the primitive Christians*] Gibbon, vol. 1. p. 473, 474. Davis's Examination, p. 29. Casauboni Exercitatio 1<sup>ma</sup>. in Baronii Annales. Justinii Apol. 1. p. 48, 69, 70. Tertullianus de Spectaculis, c. 30. Hermæ Pastoris, lib. 3. c. 14. Notæ Cotelærii in eundem locum. 1 Peter 3. 19. Prideaux's Prælectiones, p. 112. Clementis Alexand. Strom. 2. p. 379.

P. 178. l. 3. and P. 183. l. 18. *The fourth instance of misrepresentation consists in drawing wrong conclusions from facts; and the fifth consists in selecting passages manifestly inconclusive, and suppressing others of the same writers more decisive, and equally connected with the subject*] Gibbon, vol. 1. p. 530, 540. Plinii Epist. 97. lib. 10. Ruinarti Acta sincera Martyrum, p. 11. Tertulliani Apol. c. 12. Euseb. Ecc. Hist. lib. 3. c. 32. Euseb. lib. 5. c. 1. Athenagoras in Legat. c. 1. Mosheim. Sæc. primum c. 33. p. 106. Clerici Ecc. Hist. p. 702. Cave Hist. Ecc. p. 159.

P. 194. l. 6. *That the Apostolical Fathers held the simple Humanity of Christ*] Early Opinions, vol. 1. p. 92.

P. 194. *That Justin Martyr corrupted the primitive Faith by the adoption of the Logos of Plato*] Early Opinions, vol. 1. 92. vol. 2. p. 23, 42, 53, &c.

P. 194. *That the Pastors of the Church maintained a corrupted Faith, whilst the illiterate Christian continued to maintain the simple Humanity of Christ*] Early Opinions, vol. 1. p. 244, 286. vol. 3. p. 7, 235, vol. 4. p. 311, &c.

P. 197, l. 16. *The Author of the Early Opinions first appeals to the authority of these writings, then refuses to acquiesce in the plainest sense of passages, which press him with insuperable difficulties; and afterwards affirms that they are greatly corrupted, or intirely spurious*] Early Opinions, vol. 1. p. 91. Priestley's Letters to Horsley, p. 13. Horsley's Reply, p. 118. Priestley's Doctrine of the Atonement, Sect. 5. Horsley's Reply, p. 166, &c.

P. 199. l. 17. *The sceptre of the majesty of God*] Clementis Epist. Sect. 16. Early Opinions, vol. 1. p. 95, 96.

P. 202. l. 24. *The objection made to the Epistles, because Eusebius does not mention the name of Ignatius, &c.*] Early Opinions, p. vol. 1. p. 108. Euseb. Ecc. Hist. lib. 5. c. 28.

P. 204. l. 14. *The smaller Epistles of Ignatius are proved to be genuine by many eminent scholars of the*  
last

*last and present century*] These Epistles are some of the most curious and valuable remains of apostolical antiquity. It is no wonder that the Socinian is eager to overthrow their authority, when not only every page, but almost every sentence must convince him of his erroneous opinions. Dr. Priestley in his eagerness to depreciate the testimony of Lardner, and to pronounce his own infallible ipse dixit of condemnation, omits intirely the decisions of Cave, Brucker, Huetius, Petavius, Fabricius, Ittigius, Du Pin, Fleury, Tillemont, Cotelierius, Le Clerc, Grotius, Berriman, Waterland, and Bull. “ Quid felicissimos eruditissimi Primatis Armani conatus, quid conspirantem originalis Græci Codicis a doctissimo Vossio peropportunè procuratam editionem, quid Hammondi viri optimi consummatissimique lucubrationes commemor?” But his silence with respect to Pearson is the most unaccountable and extraordinary. Must Dr. Priestley be reminded at this late period of the controversy, that the honour of a complete triumph over the opponents of the authentick Epistles of Ignatius, was reserved for that great and illustrious Prelate? He entered into a systematical discussion of the inconsistent cavils and bold assertions of the learned and ingenious Dallæus, who had attempted to prove that the Epistles were spurious, It is rather the spontaneous tribute of justice, than the constrained language of panegyrick to assert, that  
the

the “*Vindiciæ Ignatianæ*” is a work which may claim one of the first places among critical disquisitions either of antient or modern times. I except not the profound criticisms of Bentley, nor the ingenious Remarks of Warton on the Poems of Chatterton.

The author of the *Vindiciæ* displays that happy versatility of attention, which can easily accommodate every literary acquisition to the present purpose, and exerts that resistless power of argument to which the arifices of sophistry however subtle, and the attachments of prejudice however rooted, must necessarily give way. We find not in any part of his Work either the fastidiousness of the pedant, or the positiveness of the dogmatist; but sound reason without affectation, and solid learning without parade. It breathes that uniform spirit of candour and moderation, which is peculiarly adapted to liberal controversy. In a cool and dispassionate manner, every subject is discussed with that exact degree of attention which it deserves. Its author on all occasions ingenuous and impartial, never lays on the false colours of misrepresentation, never brings forward personalities, when he ought to bring proofs; and never attempts to bear down his opponents with rash and empty assertion. The encomium which he has so judiciously given to Eusebius, may with the utmost propriety be applied to himself. *Ego vero Eusebium tantâ dili-*

gentiâ tantoque judicio in examinandis Christianorum primævæ antiquitatis scriptis, fuisse contendendo, ut nemo unquam de ejus fide aut de scriptis, quæ ille pro indubitatis habuit, postea dubitaverit. Vind. Ignat. Par. 1. c. 8.

Until Dr. Priestley shall confute the arguments contained in this work, vain will be his attempts to destroy the credit of the Epistles. When that glorious era of light and sound criticism shall arrive, it will then, and not sooner, be necessary for the admirers of the Epistles to allege some new arguments in their support.

If I were called upon to give an idea of the stile of Ignatius, I could not perhaps convey a more proper one, than by adopting the remark of certain criticks upon the language of Cicero. "Homines incessere audent, ut tumidiorem, et Asiaticam, et redundantem, et in repetitionibus nimium, et in compositione fractum." Quint. lib. 12. c. 10. See Jortin's Remarks, vol. 1. p. 355.

P. 207. l. 4. *Polycarp refers the Philippians to the Epistle not long before written to them by St. Paul*] Epist. Sect. 3, 11.

P. 211. l. 8. *Aristotle and Plato differed so much in explaining the nature of earthly things, &c. &c.*] Justin. Martyr. Cohort. ad Græcos, p. 2, 7, 8, 21, 22. Apol. 2. Dialog. p. 143, 152.

P. 215. l. 21. *After raising our expectations to suppose that Justin Martyr will be detected, &c.*] Early Opinions,



Opinions, vol. 1. p. 320. vol. 2. p. 25, 28, 29, 30, 36, &c.

P. 215. l. 23. *He insinuates that he adopted the Logos from Philo*] Early Opinions, vol. 2. p. 15, 18, 19.

P. 216. l. 8. *Philo, an eminent Jew of Alexandria*] Euseb. Ecc. Hist. lib. 2. c. 5. Cave Script. Ecc. vol. 1. p. 21. Philonis Op. Edit. Colon. p. 3, 5, 71, 552, &c. &c.

P. 217. l. 20. *A tradition has prevailed in the Church*] Photii Bibliotheca, Cod. 105. p. 278.

P. 219. l. 20. *If Justin Martyr had corrupted the doctrines of Christianity, &c.*] Baltus sur la Platonisme des Peres, passim. Irenæus, lib. 1. c. 31.

P. 224. l. 12. *We do not derive the opinions which we maintain, from others &c.*] Justini Apol. p. 143. Irenæus, lib. 1. c. 3. Tertullian, De Præscrip. Hær. p. 238, 243. Idem, adversus Marcion. l. 4. c. 5. Eusebius contra Hieroclem, p. 540.

P. 227. l. 24. *In order to render Tertullian consistent with himself*] Tertullianus adv. Praxeam, p. 634, 635. Cave Scriptores Ecc. p. 93. Priestley's Early Opinions, vol. 3. p. 265, 266, 267, &c.

P. 231. l. 22. *Pliny in his Epistle, Lucian in his History of the Death of Peregrinus, and his Dialogue intituled Philopatris*] Lucianus de Morte Peregrini. Ejusdem Philopatris, Sect. 12. Plinii Epist. lib. 10. Epist. 97.

P. 233. l. 3. *And here we might multiply the number of our proofs.*] Sulpitii Severi Hist. lib. 2. c. 31.

Julianus apud Euseb. lib. 4. c. 15. Cyril, l. 10. p. 327. Eusebii Præparatio Evang. lib. 1. c. 5.

P. 239. l. 21. *They were not addressed to individuals, in whose possession they continued in concealment*] Coloss. 4. 15, 16. Potteri Prælect. vol. 2. p. 31.

P. 240. l. 25. *The Works of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which had been for some time well known*] Euseb. Ecc. Hist. lib. 3. c. 24. lib. 6. c. 14. Photii Bibliotheca, No. 254. p. 1403.

P. 243. l. 3. *The noble Author of the Letters on History.*] Bolingbroke's Letters, 5. p. 143. Octavo.

P. 246. l. 2. *The leading facts relative to the Author of Christianity, and the leading topics of his instructions may be collected from the writings of the Apostolical Fathers.*] Clementis Epist. Sect. 7, 16, 21, 35, 36, 38, 42, 46, 48, 49, 58. Polycarpi Epist. Sect. 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 12. Ignatius ad Ephes. Sect. 1, 3, 4, 18, 19, 20. Ad Magnes. Sect. 7, 8, 9, 11, 13. Ad Trallian. Sect. 9, 10. Ad Roman. Sect. 3, 6. Ad Philadelph. Sect. 4, 8, 9, 10. Ad Smyrn. 1, 2, 3.

P. 248. l. 5. *The authenticity of the larger Epistles of Ignatius and of the Apostolical Constitutions has been disputed &c.*] Jortin's Remarks, vol. 1. p. 62. Dupin on the Canon, vol. 2. p. 148. Pearsoni Vindicæ, p. 1. c. 4. Lardner's Credibility, vol. 10. p. 319. Ed. 1.

P. 251, l. 16. *If borrowed ideas be cited by an author not in identical but correspondent terms, &c.*] Owen's Mode of Quotation, p. 11. Clerici Differt. 3. p. 542.

P. 252.

P. 252. l. 1. *Some very remarkable passages, in which are respectively contained the substance of a quotation from St. Luke, and the exact words both of St. Matthew and of St. John]* Compare Clementis Epist. Sect. 46. with Luke c. 6. v. 36. Ejusdem Sect. 13. with Matt. c. 7. v. 1. Ignatii Epist. ad Magnes. Sect. 8. with John c. 8. v. 29. and John c. 1. v. 1. Ejusdem Epist. ad Polycarpum, Sect. 2. with Matthew, c. 10. v. 16. Polycarpi Epist. Sect. 7. with Matthew, c. 26. v. 41.

P. 253. l. 2. *The first Epistle to the Corinthians is expressly ascribed to St. Paul by Clement]* Lardner's Credibility, v. 2. p. 63, 85, 201, 202, 220. Millii Prolegomena, p. 17.

P. 254. l. 11. *That Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp frequently expand the ideas of St. Paul with considerable success, is evident from several passages]* Compare Clement. Epist. Sect. 49, with 1 Corinth. c. 13. v. 7, &c. Ignatii Epist. ad Polycarp. Sect. 6, with Ephes. c. 6. v. 13. Clementis Epist. Sect. 36 and 55 with Hebrews c. 1. v. 3. and c. 12. v. 1. &c. Polycarpi Epist. Sect. 4, with Hebrews c. 4. v. 12.

P. 254. l. 19. *No one was more eminent for faithful attestation to the records of Christianity than Justin Martyr]* Lardner, vol. 2. p. 254. Thirlby in Justin: p. 21. Apologia prima, p. 98. It is rather doubtful how far Justin Martyr alludes to St. Mark. Jones, Lardner and Thirlby suppose that he cites his Gospel in a few instances. Compare Mark 3. 16. with  
Justin.

Justin. Mart. p. 20. Mark 8. 31. with Apol. p. 327. Mark 12. 30. with Apol. p. 25.

P. 255. l. 12. *Irenæus Bishop of Lyons left an ample account of the New Testament*] Irenæus, lib. 1. c. 3. lib. 3. c. 1, 10, 11, 14, 15. Lardner, vol. 2. p. 343, &c.

P. 258. l. 15. *The curious and minute observer, from the frequent usage of some remarkable words, may contend that Ignatius had read the Epistle to Philemon, as well as that addressed to Titus*] Lardner, vol. 2. p. 173, 174. Irenæus, lib. 5. c. 1. James c. 2. v. 23.

P. 261. l. 21. *This persuasion so sublimely expressed in the words of Irenæus which was common to the Church at large, was rational and judicious*] Irenæus, lib. 2. c. 46, 47, &c. lib. 3. c. 1, 11, 18, 21. Clement. Epist. c. 42, 44, 47. Polycarp. c. 7. Justin. Apol. p. 97. Potteri Prælectiones, vol. 2. p. 114. Dupin's Canon, vol. 2. p. 12.

P. 263. l. 9. *The unwearied diligence of Plutarch, the elaborate conciseness of Tacitus, the extensive researches of Dion Cassius, and of Josephus, did not secure them against occasional deviations from truth.*] Stradæ Prolusiones, Sect. 2. lib. 1. Warburton on Prodiges, p. 98. Jortin's Critical Remarks, vol. 2. p. 74.

P. 264. l. 9. *The neglect of accurate inquiry may not unfairly be imputed to Plutarch when he asserts that Plato held the doctrine of a good and of an evil principle.*]

*principle.*] Cudworth's Intellectual System, p. 218, 378. Brucker's Philosophia Critica, vol. 1. p. 632.

P. 274. l. 2. *The general conformity of our Establishment has been celebrated by its own members at home, and its admirers abroad, as its most illustrious and most distinguishing characteristick*] Cave Hist. Eccl. in Dedicatione. Qui Ecclesiam habeas in tuo Regno, partim jam olim ita institutam, ut ad florentis quondam Ecclesiæ formam, nulla hodie propius accedat, quam tua, inter vel excessu vel defectu peccantes mediam viam secuta. Isaaci Casauboni Præfat. in Animad. in Baronii Annales. Grotius de Veritate, p. 312.

P. 282. l. 23. *The fairest and most excellent examples are held up to our imitation*] Operæ pretium est sicut in præcepta vitæ a Christo et Apostolis tradita tanquam in normam, ita in mores et sanctimoniam primorum Christianorum tanquam in exemplum intueri; quod non sine fructu et voluptate, facturas mihi persuadeo candidas et Christum amantes animas. Fabricii Lux Evangelii, p. 195.

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If it were necessary, at the close of my work, to apologize to the publick for having pursued a train of Study with a view to polemical discussions; I think I could not justify my conduct in terms more apposite, or sentiments more rational than by citing the remarks of the learned Fabricius.

Apostoli

Apostoli quidem et horum insistentes vestigiis alii præclari viri subinde aucto adversariorum numero non dubitarunt pro asserendâ, quam profiterentur, religione, vocem adhibere et calamum, ne ulterius tacere diffidentiae signum esset, et ut ignari de fundamento spei nostræ docerentur, dubii confirmarentur, nec inimici in objectionum suarum argutiis exultarent, falsâque earum specie possent incautos decipere. Imprimis vero hoc debere se existimarunt Deo et Salvatori suo, ut quam ipse tribuerat vocem ac facultatem eam pro illius gloriâ et veritate vindicandâ impenderent libenter. Non mirum porro est hoc venisse multis in mentem; quid enim esset in quo libentius versaretur Christiani hominis meditatio et stylus, quam in explicandâ et tuendâ ab objectionibus sanctissimâ religione, sive ad animum suum confirmandum, sive ad alios erudiendos aut stabiliendos, sive ad inimicorum retundendos impetus et causationes removendas. Nec tamen ideo quisquam neget verissima esse certissimaque, quæ toties a tot præclaris ingeniis de integro demonstranda sumuntur. Religionis Christianæ Veritas, p. 30.

F I N I S.

















