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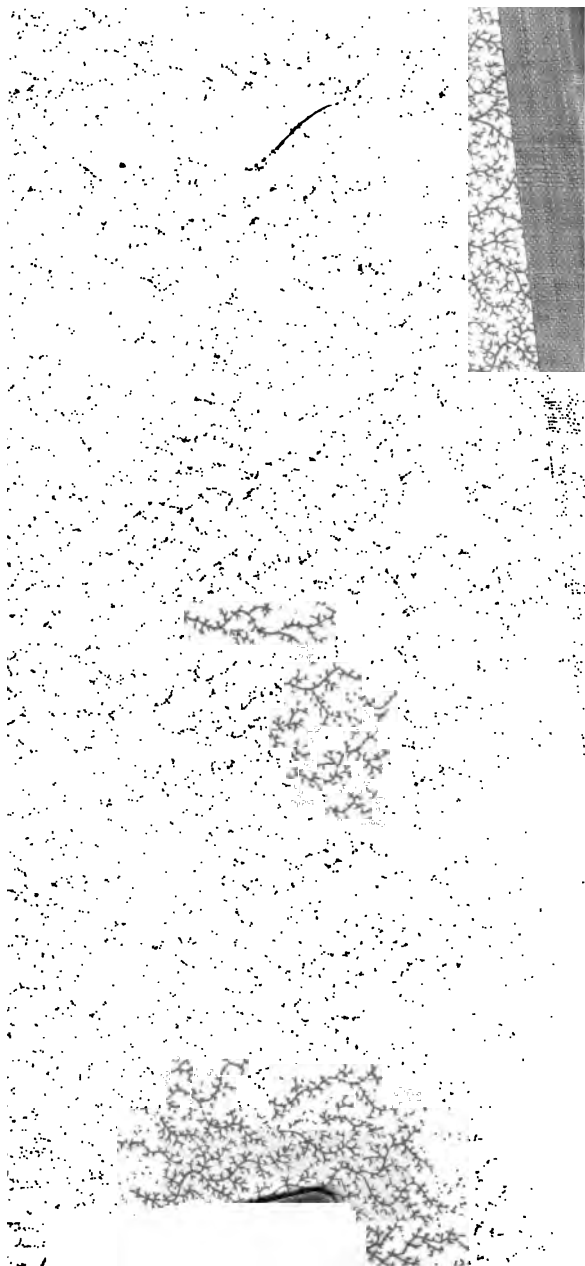
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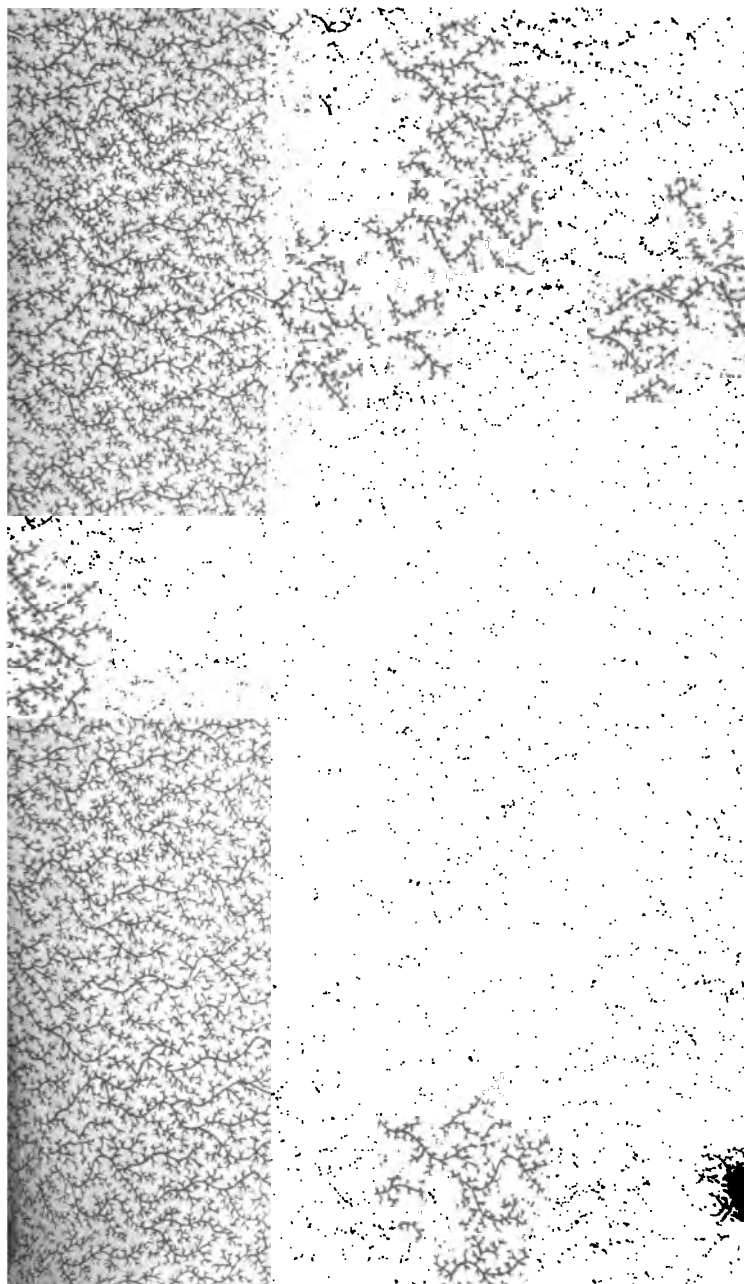
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1761  
Thomas Fletcher

DISCOURSES  
On the TRUTH of  
REVEALED RELIGION  
AND OTHER  
IMPORTANT SUBJECTS.

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By HUGH KNOX,  
Minister of the Gospel in the Island of SABA,  
in the WEST INDIES.

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*Veritas magna est, & prævalebit.*

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In TWO VOLUMES.

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V O L. I.

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L O N D O N:  
Printed for THOMAS CADELL, in the Strand.  
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W.C.

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TO HIS EXCELLENCY  
JOHN DEWINDT, Esq.

General and Commander in Chief of  
the Islands ST. EUSTATIUS, SABA  
and ST. MARTIN, and Governor of  
ST. EUSTATIUS.

S I R,

THE honour of your acquaintance and friendship, which I have enjoyed for many years past, is indeed one, though one of the smallest motives of my addressing you in this public manner, and putting the following discourses under your patronage.

As a Christian magistrate you ultimately derive that dignity and authority, with which you are invested,

from that glorious person who is represented as having this name written on his vesture and on his thigh, KING OF KINGS and LORD OF LORDS<sup>a</sup>; and whom GOD hath appointed to be head over all things, and the head of all principality and power for the good of his church<sup>b</sup>. You are a dignified minister in the kingdom of his providence, and a nursing father to his church. To whom, therefore, could I more properly address a defence of the glorious gospel of the blessed Jesus against its enemies than to a Christian magistrate, who is both the natural and sworn protector and promoter of the Christian cause and interest among men?

NOR ought it to be a small encouragement to you, Sir, in the discharge

<sup>a</sup> Rev. xix. 16.

<sup>b</sup> Eph, i. 22. Col. ii. 20.

of this important part of the duty of your station, to find that the cause you are engaged to promote and protect is the cause of God and of truth. A cause which bore up and prevailed against all the power and policy, the malice and cruelty, the ridicule and reproach of the heathen world in the first ages of Christianity. A cause which will endure the severest scrutiny of reason and philosophical disquisition, and like gold, will still appear the brighter and purer, the more it is tried.

I MIGHT also add, what will be extremely obvious to your own penetration, that the firm basis on which (as I hope will appear by the following discourses) Christianity is built, lays a high and indefeasible obligation on every Christian magistrate to exert himself for promoting, both by his

A 3                      example

example and authority, that pure morality which the gospel teaches, and for suppressing every species of public vice and disorder, which is so great and just a reproach to any Christian people.

As Christianity has a most friendly aspect upon all the true interests of human society, so it smiles with distinguished favour upon all lawful, civil authority. It gives a kind of *divine right* to the powers of this world, lawfully established, and acting according to the true design of their institution. It makes them a kind of ministers and vice-gerents of the Deity, bearing something of his image in majesty and authority, and representing his power and justice among men. It crowns them with a distinguished honour, and entitles them not only to tribute, but also to reverence,



rence, regard and an almost unlimited obedience from their subjects, and that not only from fear, but also for conscience sake <sup>c</sup>.

AN institution therefore so favourable to the civil magistracy should certainly engage every gentleman, who sustains the honour, and bears the commission of a Christian magistrate, from a principle of gratitude, as well as of justice and duty, to watch with cordial affection and unwearied assiduity, over its best interests. To use every endeavour in his power to render that name and religion honourable which puts such a distinguished honour upon himself. And this may be the more reasonably expected from the Christian magistrate, when it is considered, that the Christian revelation declareth this to be one very impor-

<sup>c</sup> Rom. xiii. 1—7.

tant end and design of his office, and that GOD hath furnished him with dignity and authority, expressly for this purpose, when it is considered that he beareth not the sword of civil power in vain, but is the minister of GOD, a revenger to execute wrath on him that doeth evil, and that governors are sent by GOD for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well <sup>d</sup>.

I must confess, I have a sensible pleasure in reflecting, that while I am using this freedom of speech, in an epistle dedicatory to a magistrate of distinction, I am using it to a Christian magistrate. To one who is, in many respects, a friend to the religion he professes; and to one on whose probity and humanity I might have filled many pages with just panegyric; but I imagined that

<sup>d</sup> Rom. xiii. 1—7. 1 Pet. ii. 14.

such hints as these were more agreeable to that plainness and simplicity of spirit which, on all occasions, become a minister of Christ; and I sincerely hope that, to a person of your excellency's good sense, they will not afford a less expressive testimony of that true and unfeigned esteem and regard with which I am,

S I R,

Your most faithful,

most devoted, and

most obedient

humble servant,

H U G H K N O X.



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## P R E F A C E.

**T**HE present growth and progress of infidelity, and the great disingenuity of infidels in repeating old objections, which have been long ago answered and confuted, and in coining new ones, which have more of shew than of substance, render the defence of Christianity of almost perpetual necessity in every age and in every corner of the Christian world: And I am persuaded that no hearty and intelligent Christian will ever imagine, that works, which have a tendency to illustrate and confirm the great arguments for the truth of Christianity, can be too much multiplied, even although they should have no great share of originality.

The first seven discourses, or (as perhaps they may be more properly termed) essays in this collection, are upon a subject of confessedly great importance. If there is a GOD; if he is the moral governor of the rational world; if mankind are his moral subjects, and accountable to him for their moral conduct; if their souls are immortal, and will be either rewarded or punished in a future state, according to their moral conduct in the present, and I believe that no sensible, intelligent deist will dispute the truth of any of these propositions, then religion is a serious thing, a matter of infinite and  
universal

*universal concernment among men! If the five articles of the celebrated Lord Herbert, the prince of modern deists, are conceded to and allowed; first, that there is one supreme GOD; secondly, that he is chiefly to be worshipped; thirdly, that piety and virtue is the principal part of his worship; fourthly, that we must repent of our sins, and that if we do so GOD will pardon them; and fifthly, that there are rewards for good men and punishments for bad men in a future state of existence: I say, if these five articles are granted, and even Lord Herbert himself affirms, that these articles have been universally believed by mankind, in all ages and nations of the world, no creature, possessed of a rational soul, can possibly have any just foundation for ridiculing or despising religion; but, on the contrary, if he thinks justly, must consider himself as having an intimate and personal concern in it.*

*Now all the particular religions, or rather modes of religion, which have ever appeared in the world may be reduced to the following, viz. Paganism, Judaism, (to which may be joined the patriarchal religion) Christianity, and pure deism, or what some chuse rather to term, the religion of nature. These have divided the world amongst them since the earliest accounts of antiquity; and seeing, there is such a thing as true religion in the world, and that this true religion is some where or other to be found among those already mentioned, and that it is a matter of great moment to know where this true religion is to be found, the investigation of this concerning truth is certainly a labour worthy the noble powers and faculties of the human soul.*

*Paganism is, doubtless, wholly out of the question, and can have no plausible pretension to be the*  
true

true religion. *Whatever a late nobleman may have advanced in favour of its being the primitive religion, it bears upon it all the marks and characters of error, ignorance and the blindest superstition. And whilst the knowledge of the unity and perfection of the divine nature continues among a civilized people, there is little danger of its ever finding a single advocate, unless in such a writer as Mr. H—e.*

*As for Mahometism, it is such an arrant and bare-faced imposture, such a jumbled and confused medley of Judaism, Gentilism and Christianity, of truth and falsehood, of sense and non sense, of probabilities, and absurd and blasphemous puerilities, that there is little danger of its ever extending beyond the confines of slavery and ignorance. The life of its founder, notwithstanding what Mr. Sale and some others have ventured to say in favour of his moral character, is not only a contradiction to all his bold and blasphemous pretensions, but even a disgrace to human nature itself. Ignorant, bold, daring, insolent, ravenous, cruel, oppressive, tyrannical, sensual, libidinous, vain, ambitious, deceitful and intolercably impious and profane, are epithets peculiarly appropriated to that crafty Arab, who first broached and propagated that religion which now bears his name. And if we examine the Koran or Alcoran, the book of his pretended revelations, we shall find, that (excepting a few just notions and sound morals, pilfered from the Jewish and Christian revelations by Mahomet's co-adjutors in his imposture) it contains nothing but absurd doctrines, corrupt morals, and childish fables, and is indeed, upon the whole, so monstrously incredible and unworthy of GOD, that it is greatly amazing how it ever gained credit with the*

*g. o. s. s. e. t*

*grosseſt* understandings. That it has, however, gained ſuch credit, and extended itſelf over a great part of the world is indiſputable: And leſt this its amazing ſpread and long continuance ſhould be deemed by ſome ignorant people an argument in its behalf, and ſhould ſeem to have the ſame weight and force in favour of Mahometiſm, as we alledge the ſame arguments to have in favour of Chriſtianity, the genius of the two religions, and the manner of their propagation; ought well to be conſidered. Attend therefore carefully to the following characters of oppoſition which appear primâ fronte between the religion of JESUS and that of Mahomet. The religion of CHRIST is pure, ſevere and ſelf-denying; that of Mahomet ſenſual and indulgent to the irregular paſſions and appetites of men; tolerating, nay, enjoining revenge, perſecution, polygamy and divorce; promiſing ſucceſs in rapine, and a future paradise of groſs ſenſual delights; enſuring ſalvation to all, even to the very devils, who ſhould only believe the Koran. The religion of CHRIST was firſt propagated without the aid of worldly power, protection, wiſdom and eloquence; yea, againſt the influence of all theſe, by the dint of truth, the evidence of miracles and propheſies, and a patient continuance in well-doing under an unparalleled load of injuries, reproaches, afflictions, perſecutions and martyrdoms: Mahomet rightly diſclaimed all pretenſions of working public miracles, and pretended that GOD had ſent him to proſelyte mankind by the edge of the ſword; accordingly he levied an army, and ſet about converting the world by this hard and unanswerable argument, BELIEVE OR DIE, ſhewing no mercy to infidels, and threatning with hell ſuch of his ſoldiers as did; thus relying more on the ſucceſs of his arms, than



P R E F A C E. xv

*than the truth and evidence of his pretended revelations. The Christian religion was first propagated in the most learned and enlightened parts of the earth, such as Judea, Rome and Greece: The religion of Mahomet in the darkest and most barbarous, and had its first, and indeed its continued triumphs over the grossest heathen ignorance and superstition; and as for the few Christians which went over to him, they were little better than their heathen neighbours, being either grossly ignorant, or apostates from the Christian church while it was torn and rent by the Nestorean and Eutichean heresies. The Christian religion flees not the light, shuns not the severest scrutiny and examination; nay, appeals to history and to the senses and reason of mankind for a proof of its reasonableness and veracity. It is so far from apprehending any danger of being convicted of falshood or imposture, of absurdity or incredibility, that it commands its votaries and disciples to search it, to try its pretensions, to examine whether the matters it contains are so or not, to prove all things and hold fast that which is best. Yea, if I may so express myself, it glories in being compared with all other religions, being, as it were, conscious that its truth must finally prevail, and that it cannot be a loser but a gainer by such comparison; whereas Mahometism shuns the light as its mortal enemy, shelters itself under the wings of darkness and ignorance, and has its strong hold in a blind and implicit faith. The prophet of Mecca expressly forbids all his disciples to dispute about religion, otherwise than by cutting off the heads of infidels and gainsayers.*

*And now, when all these things are well considered, we shall not much wonder at the spread  
and*

*and continuance of Mahometism in the east, notwithstanding all its absurdities; ingrafted as it was by the edge of the sword on ignorance and slavery, and so artfully accommodated to the prevailing taste and genius of the Arabs and Asiatics, among whom it was first propagated, and over whom it still continues to hold its usurped reign: Nor shall we wonder why the spread of Christianity, under its peculiar circumstances, should be esteemed a great miracle, and a substantial argument of its truth and divine original.*

*Again, if we examine Judaism we shall find, that, notwithstanding it bears all the characters of antiquity, divinity and truth, yet it is, at present, an obsolete and superannuated religion. If the Messiah, early promised to that nation, and long expected by it, is not already come, there is no rational prospect of his coming at all. All the periods fixed by the ancient rabbies to the prophesies of that remarkable event are long since expired: The sceptre is long ago departed from Judah, and therefore, either the Shilo is come, or the prophesy is void, and that too according to the explanations of their own ancient doctors<sup>a</sup>. The famous seventy weeks prophesy of Daniel, which was allowed by all the most noted rabbies of antiquity to point out the time of the Messiah's coming, and which, together with other predictions, raised so general an expectation of his advent among the Jews about the time of Christ's incarnation, is expired above seventeen hundred years ago, according to all the interpretations which have or can be reasonably put upon it<sup>b</sup>. The ancient rabbies were so positive that the Messiah was to appear at the expiration of*

<sup>a</sup> Gen. xlix. 10.

<sup>b</sup> Dan. ix. 24, &c.

*these*

these seventy weeks, or four hundred and ninety prophetic years, that Nehumias, who flourished about fifty years before the birth of Christ, publicly declared, that the Messiah's advent, according to this prophecy of Daniel, could not be protracted above fifty years after that time. And as to that part of the prophecy which foretels the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and of the sanctuary, Josephus expressly applies it to his own times, and to the war of Vespasian<sup>c</sup>. It is also well known to have been the current opinion of the ancient Jews, that the Messiah was to make his appearance among them during the second temple; and to fill it with his glory, and render it far more honourable by his personal presence and inhabitation than ever was the first temple built by Solomon, notwithstanding its great inferiority upon every other account<sup>d</sup>. But now it is indisputable that Titus razed this second temple to the very foundation, and caused Turnus Rufus to draw a plow over the place where it stood, by which action that remarkable prophecy was literally accomplished; Zion shall be plowed like a field. And that all the attempts of the Jews to rebuild it afterwards, by the favour and assistance of the Emperor Julian, were vain and ineffectual. So that either the Messiah is come near eighteen hundred years ago, or else these prophecies are void; and the Jews can have no reasonable expectation of his coming at all.

Besides, a number of other circumstances render it impossible for the Jews, at this day, to observe

<sup>c</sup> Jos. lib. x. chap. 12.

<sup>d</sup> Hag. ii. 6—9. Mal. iii. 1.

*their laws or know the Messiah, if he were yet to come. They have no temple, no sacrifice, nor any polity or civil government of their own, and consequently the greater part of their ceremonial and judicial laws are ipso facto abrogated and void. Their Messiah was to descend lineally from David, in the tribe of Judah, and to be born in Bethlehem; but at present they have no part of Ephraim, and their tribes and families are so confounded, that they can have no certainty in this matter, and therefore, must be exposed to unavoidable delusions.*

*On the whole it appears, that the Jewish religion, however true and divine in itself, is at present obsolete and wholly out of date. That either the whole is a fable (which none, I hope, will dare to assert, who carefully enquire into its evidences) or that their Messiah is already come, however disowned by the body of that people, their ceremonial law abolished, and a more pure, spiritual and extensive dispensation founded on its ruins.*

*It remains, therefore, that the contest about true religion lies in a very narrow compass, and is wholly between Christians and Deists, or the votaries of natural religion. The first seven discourses are an attempt to bring the chief arguments in favour of Christianity into as narrow a compass as is well consistent with perspicuity, and to answer some of the chief objections which the Deists have offered against a written revelation. I dare not venture to say that they contain any thing truly original, and I am deeply sensible that they have many defects. They are so far from being a full and compleat defence of Christianity, that many excellent argu-*

*ments*

ments are but slightly, if at all touched upon, particularly that of prophecy\*.

In these discourses I have studiously avoided the pomp of larding the margin with references; because I apprehended that to the learned such references would be unnecessary, and to others useless.

I have in some places subjoined a few notes, either to clear up some difficulty, or to illustrate and confirm some particular sentiment or opinion in the discourses.

In a word, the chief design of these discourses is not so much to beget and perfect a full conviction of the truth of Christianity, and to answer every cavilling objection which a subtle sophist might urge against revealed religion, as to confirm believers in their most holy faith, to guard youth against the snares and temptations of infidelity, and, if possible, so far to awaken persons of loose and sceptical principles, as that they might be engaged seriously to attend to the nature and consequences of their opinions, and candidly to study the argument, as it is handled more largely and circumstantially by other writers.

Whoever would desire to enter into the merits of the cause, and to see what the friends of Christianity have to say in favour of their religion, may (passing over Origen against Celsus and other ancient Christian apologists) find ample satisfaction from a legion of late and modern writers. If we go a century backwards we may consult Hugo Grotius's excellent tract on the

\* I am glad I am able to recommend to the curious reader, an excellent discourse lately published on this argument by the Rev. Gregory Sharpe, LL.D. Fellow of the Royal and Antiquarian Societies.

truth of the Christian religion; Huetius's *demonstratio Evangelica*; Lord Duplessis *on the same subject*; Mr. Halliburton *against Lord Herbert*; Mr. Locke's reasonableness of the Christian religion; Mr. Richard Baxter *on the same subject*, and Bp. Stillingfleet's *Originæ Sacræ*; to which may be added, many things in the writings of the immortal Sir Isaac Newton, and of that indefatigable searcher into the works of nature Sir Robert Boyle, in favour of Christianity.

Of somewhat later date are the ingenious Addison, the profound West, and the judicious Lyttleton, three shining ornaments of the Christian religion, and excellent advocates of the Christian cause.

But as the latest writings are, generally speaking, the best, I would earnestly recommend it to those who are infected with the plague of infidelity, to peruse and digest the reverend Mr. John Leland's view of the principal deistical writers; the learned and judicious Dr. Lardner's credibility of the gospel history; the late worthy Bishop of London's pastoral letters and discourses; Jackson's, Sykes's, Foster's, Jortin's and Stebbings's discourses on the truth of the Christian religion. There are also a number of other authors, who have wrote excellently in favour of the Christian religion, and against its adversaries, and which an honest enquirer after truth will not fail to be informed of, and to consult upon occasion. I have only particularized, these few that none of my readers may be left ignorant of those authors from whom they may expect to meet with full satisfaction in this important argument, and in whom all the deficiencies of these discourses are abundantly supplied.

I had almost forgot to leave a confession with  
my

P R E F A C E. xi

my reader, which may be deemed no less prudent and convenient, than it is honest and ingenuous; and that is, that I have been indebted to other writers for many thoughts, and some entire sentences and paragraphs, especially in the first, third and fourth of these discourses; but as these have been promiscuously extracted by short notes, from a variety of authors many years ago, when I first studied the argument, I am not at present able to make my particular acknowledgments.

As the contempt of the Christian clergy may be considered in different respects; both as a cause and an effect of infidelity, I have endeavoured to make it appear in the eighth discourse, that the preachers of Christianity are not that despicable and useless order of men which some of the Deists represent them; but that, on the contrary, so far as they act agreeable to their sacred office, they are friends to mankind, valuable and useful members of society, and are, therefore, intitled to a suitable degree of respect and esteem for their work's sake.

And as the neglect of public worship, or a forsaking of the assembling ourselves together, may be considered much in the same light with the contempt of the Christian clergy, I have taken some pains in the ninth discourse to shew the advantages of public worship, and the obligations we lie under to frequent it.

The three following discourses on family religion are plain and practical. They attempt the elucidation and enforcement of one of the greatest and most important duties of a Christian parent or master of a family. And as the timely and proper religious education of youth, and a constant course of serious exemplary devotion maintained in families, tend greatly to preserve the rising generation from liber-  
tinism

tinism and infidelity, and as the neglect of these cannot but have a pernicious influence on the interests of religion and morality in the world; so far these discourses may be reasonably presumed to subserve the cause of Christianity, and promote its interests in the world. Towards the conclusion of the second of these discourses, I have insisted pretty largely upon a duty exceedingly neglected among these islands, namely, hearty and diligent endeavours to instruct and christianize our heathen slaves. The substance of this discourse was delivered to the people of my charge, shortly after my arrival in the West Indies, and the experience and observation of near nine years elapsed since that time, confirm me in the same sentiments, and make this humane and charitable duty appear to me equally obligatory, equally practicable, and equally useful and important at this day, as it did then. I am daily more and more convinced, that that remarkable corruption of manners which prevails in these islands, has its source among our heathen slaves, who vitiate the taste, debauch the principles, and corrupt the manners of our youth of both sexes, from their very infancy; and that a general reformation of manners must begin, by throwing the salt of Christian knowledge and principles into this polluted fountain; though I am deeply sensible, at the same time, that this is never like to be done without a greater degree of zeal for the interests of religion and morality in the masters and owners of slaves, than appears any where among us at present, and that, all things considered, such a general reformation of manners is a thing rather to be desired than expected.

As for the few plain discourses which follow, I can give little other reason for adding them to the present collection than that they appeared to me to be



P R E F A C E.      xxiii

*be on subjects of some importance, and that being chiefly of a plain and practical nature, they might suit the taste, understanding and circumstances of a certain class of readers, and might prove some compensation to them for the toil of perusing the foregoing speculative discourses, which are, perhaps, not very level to their capacities.*

*I have nothing farther to add, but my most earnest and hearty prayers to the father of lights and the source of all divine influences, that he would be pleased to accompany these discourses with a divine and effectual blessing, and render them, in some degree, subservient to the honour of his great name, and to the confirmation and establishment of mankind in the belief and obedience of his son's everlasting gospel; and if but one of the meanest of GOD's human creatures should receive an advantage of this kind from the perusal of them, I shall esteem all my labour abundantly recompenced.*



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Presumptive arguments for the truth of  
the Christian revelation.

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I PETER iii. 15.

*Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.*

**T**HE apostle sets it before him, as one of his principal designs in this epistle, to fortify the minds of Christians against the severe persecutions which he foresaw were coming upon the church, that they might be enabled to give an honourable testimony to the truth of Christianity, and recommend it to others by the most substantial motives. For this purpose, he persuades them in our text, to sanctify the LORD GOD in their hearts; to behave towards him continually with that reverence, with that dutiful and obedient regard which his unequalled perfections and glories

VOL. I.                      B                      demand;

demand; this being the only method to engage his powerful support and protection under all the miseries of present life, and to embolden their minds against any dangers and sufferings to which the profession of his religion might expose them, by inspiring them with a firm and unshaken confidence in the favour of that GOD whom they thus sanctified and revered in their hearts:—And then, with regard to their enemies and persecutors, he persuades them to be always ready and prepared to make them a rational *apology* for their Christian hope and profession; be always ready, says he, to give an answer to every man who asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with that reverence, temper, and meekness of spirit, which becomes the spirit and genius of that holy religion you defend. The word which our translators render an *answer* is *απολογία* in the greek original, which signifies an *apology*, or a *rational defence*.

THE Christian hope is a very glorious and exalted hope; it is so superlatively great, that the unbelieving world esteems it absurd and ridiculous, that GOD should be supposed to make such great and precious promises to sinners, be at so much pains and expence to redeem them, and make such grand preparations for their future happiness. But as the heavens are higher than the earth, so GOD's thoughts are infinitely above the thoughts of infidels, and his ways above their ways. However, it is the indispensable duty of the Christian, both for his own satisfaction, and to stop the mouths of gainsayers, to be well acquainted with the con-

SERMON I.

2

tents and evidences of his holy religion, that he may be able and ready upon any occasion to render a reason of the faith and hope that is in him;—to shew why he believes the scriptures of the old and new testaments are the word of GOD;—wherefore he believes that Christianity is the only true religion,—and why he is disposed to hope for salvation from CHRIST, rather than from *Mabomet*, or *Aly*, or *Confucius*, or any other who has made pretences of a divine commission to instruct mankind in the way of virtue and happiness, and to glory in being thought singular in their religious opinions.

I INTEND in some plain discourses to shew the credibility and certainty of the divine revelation, that the scriptures of the old and new testaments are indeed and in truth the word and oracles of the living GOD;—a ray of celestial light, proceeding from the throne of GOD, the father of lights, and shining in this dark and benighted world, to direct its sinful inhabitants in the way of truth and eternal life; and consequently, that by rejecting this light which came down from heaven, when its evidences are fairly and clearly propounded to us, we incur a heavy guilt, and will procure unto ourselves a just and aggravated condemnation.

FROM this text, I will 1st. suggest some presumptive arguments, which, if duly weighed, must strongly dispose every honest and intelligent person to embrace the holy scriptures, as a revelation coming from God; and, 2dly. answer some objections, which are alledged by infidels,

B 2

against

against revelation in general, and the Christian revelation in particular.

I. I WOULD suggest some presumptive arguments which, if duly weighed, must strongly dispose every honest and intelligent person to embrace the holy scriptures, as a revelation coming from God. And to this purpose, let the following train of reasonings be considered.

WE readily grant that there must be such a thing as natural religion prior to revelation, and which every revelation must suppose. Let us now examine by what means the human mind comes to the knowledge of natural religion, and what are its obligations; and from hence we shall be the better enabled to judge of its defects, in the present state of things, and of the expediency and necessity of a farther revelation from GOD; and what are the proper marks and characters of such a revelation, and consequently, whether our scriptures may pretend to be this revelation.

I BEGIN then with myself; and I take it for granted, that I am conscious of my own existence; for if these perceptions of my mind, whereby I obtain this consciousness, may deceive me, then there is an end of all certainty, its very foundation being razed: For if I may doubt that I exist, there is nothing else of which I can be certain. And as I am certain that I exist, so I am equally certain that I do not exist necessarily, but that I possess only a borrowed and dependent existence, an existence which  
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can be traced but a few years backwards\*, and which having had a beginning, must needs have had a cause of existence without itself, seeing

\* As to the notion of the pre-existence of human souls, and their *metempsychosis*, or their passing from an unembodied to an embodied state, or migrating from one body to another, whatever difficulties it might be supposed to solve in the schools of *Plato* and *Pythagoras*, about the origin of moral evil, or about the gradual trial and purification of the soul, by a series of transmigrations; yet, as all the *phenomena* of the moral world are solved by the Christian scheme without it, and as it seems to have no foundation in scripture, so I conceive it is too absurd and irrational to have a place in sound philosophy. That an immaterial spirit, whose essential property it seems to be, to be conscious, to reflect upon its own consciousness, and to retain a remembrance of former conceptions and reflections, should entirely lose all remembrance of former existence, by migrating from one state to another, seems to require a poetic *Lethe* to render it probable. If this may be granted, then we may agree on the same principles, that after the last migration the soul will lose all remembrance of present things and actions. Which must overthrow the very foundation even of natural religion, as it must render all future judgement and future rewards and punishments impossible.

BUT let this be as it will, it cannot affect the present argument; seeing that whether we allow the pre-existence of human souls or not, still we shall be constrained to admit that they are not self-originate and self-existent, and therefore, that they are created spirits, who depend upon some being without them, as the cause of their existence, which must infallibly lead the mind back to some eternal, self-existent being, which we call God.

nothing can be the cause of its own existence. But whatever was the cause of my existence, must needs have in itself all those perfections which it has communicated to me, either virtually or formally, and that too in a superlative and eminent degree; seeing there is no maxim more self-evident than this, *that no being can confer any perfections upon another, which it does not possess itself.* But as I discover something within myself, whose operations exceed all the known laws and powers of matter; something which understands, wills, chooses, reflects upon itself, forms abstracted ideas, and draws mathematical conclusions from premises, which seem to have no prototypes in the material world, and therefore something distinct from matter, which we call a spirit; therefore I conclude, that the cause of my existence is endued with these powers and properties in a most eminent manner, and that he is a *most perfect spirit.* If the cause of my existence was a created spirit, he must also have some cause of his existence, and so on till some first cause, which first cause must be uncreated, self-existent, self-sufficient, and eternal. And as this first cause can neither depend on his own power or will, or the power or will of any other, for his being and perfections; hence it follows, that he never can cease to be what he is, but that he was, and is, and ever shall be, invariably and unchangeably the same.

AGAIN, when I examine the curious frame and contexture of my body, and the powers and properties of my soul: When I look abroad, and take a survey of the material world



world around me; of the grandeur and immensity of the divine works and the visible harmony and order which reigns amongst them: When I reflect on the various ranks and orders of sensitive natures, and consider how wonderfully they are adapted to the various elements in which they live; how they are taught by some surprizing instinct, to propagate their kind, to shun their enemies, and to look for their subsistence, and how many wonderful resources there are in nature for supplying the wants of all living creatures, I cannot but be struck with a deep conviction of the infinite power, wisdom and goodness, and of the universal care and providence of that being who is the cause of my existence, and upon whom, I myself, and a universe of other dependant beings, continually hang for existence and support.

AGAIN, when I consider the relation in which I stand to this prime and independant spirit, and my fellow spirits around me, as they are cloathed in flesh, I am immediately convinced of certain duties, which I owe to the one and to the other; or of a certain fitness and unfitness in temper and behaviour, founded upon these relations. For instance, I am convinced that it is fit and right I should love and reverence that being which is the cause of my existence, and the author of all my mercies; and that it would be infinitely wrong and unfit in me to hate and despise him:—That it is right and fit I should love my fellow creatures, and treat them with equity and mercy, and that

to do the contrary, would be very wrong and unfit. Thus I am convinced of *moral obligation*.

ONCE more, when I reflect upon the constitution of my own mind, I find within myself a moral sense, or a natural conscience, which appears evidently to be interwoven with the very frame of my nature, by which I have a sensible feeling of the beauty of moral integrity, and am naturally prompted to those actions which are right and fit; and by which I have a feeling sense of the deformity of moral turpitude, and am naturally disgusted at those actions which are wrong and unfit. Now when I consider this fountain being, as the cause of these relations, and the fitnesses arising from them; and when, at the same time, I reflect upon this moral sense within myself, as implanted there by him who gave me my being; I can no longer doubt but that it is the will of GOD, that I should act consonantly to this reason of things, and obey these dictates of natural conscience which he hath planted within me, as the law of my creation. This then is the foundation of *religious obligation*; and this is the source of all those virtues, moral and divine, civil, social and domestic, which have been taught by the best heathen philosophers, and which are more fully taught and more powerfully enforced in the Christian revelation.

By such a process as this, the human mind, by its own natural light, may arise to the knowledge of a GOD, and of the duties and obligations of, what we call, *natural religion*; and perhaps had man continued in a state of rectitude

## SERMON I.

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rectitude and perfection, this natural religion would have been sufficient for his direction and happiness, without any farther revelation from GOD.

BUT, if we consider, the present universal degeneracy and corruption of mankind, which many even of the wiser *Pagans* have acknowledged and bewailed; that natural blindness of mind, perverseness of will and ignorance of GOD, which overspreads the whole heathen world; we shall soon be convinced that the light of reason, or natural religion is not sufficient to bring mankind to the true knowledge and obedience of GOD; and consequently, that a further revelation of GOD's will is necessary and expedient for this purpose.

A THOUSAND to one of the whole heathen world in all ages, have had no just notions of GOD at all; but have lived in the grossest ignorance and idolatry; worshipping the sun, moon and stars, birds, beasts, fishes, plants, insects. And as a consequence of this ignorance of the true GOD, they have lived in the most unnatural and detestable vices, a catalogue of which we have recorded by the apostle, Rom. i. 29, &c. And even the few philosophers among them who arrived to the greatest eminency in the knowledge of natural religion, give us but a poor defective system of morality, and entertain some very unworthy notions about GOD. *Cicero*, who has wrote a whole book about the nature of the Gods, scarce says any thing positive, and not a single word about the life to come, but takes up his whole time in confuting the opinions of others. *Seneca* tells them

them to worship God who know him, and uses this ignorant and presumptuous expression, among many others of the same stamp, "*Let philosophy make me equal with God.*" Varro reckons up *two hundred and eighty-eight* different opinions concerning the chief good; and not one of these opinions makes it to consist in the eternal enjoyment of God. *Jamblicus*, a Platonic philosopher, has this remarkable saying, *It is not easy, says he, to know what God will be pleased with, unless we be immediately instructed by himself, or by some person he has conversed with;* which is as good as confessing the necessity of a divine revelation. *Epicetetus* says, *Every one must sacrifice according to the custom of his country.* Most of them plead for self-murder, and several other unnatural vices. Very few of them acknowledge the unity of the Godhead, and the few that did so, were reputed Atheists. Many of them, indeed, taught a specious and shining morality, but it was destitute of sufficient motives, or solid principles. A contracted self-love, or, at farthest, a regard to the external advantages of society, were the only principles which lay at the bottom of all their shining virtues; for they seem to have had no regard to the future rewards of virtue, nor any certain belief of a life to come.

AND now, if these greatest lights of the heathen world were so full of darkness, what can we expect from the mere unassisted light of nature, in matters of religion? If a few infidels in Christendom have spoke more justly of God and morality, than these masters of the heathen world, it is not because they have excelled

celled them in reason or deep thinking; but because they have learned these juster notions from that very revelation, which they ungratefully turn into ridicule and contempt.

BUT let us, for argument's sake, grant it possible, that some mere man should be enabled, by the light of nature, to make a clear discovery of the will of God, and represent mens obligations in the full extent; or, let us suppose, that such a system of truths and duties as this, could be collected from all the moral writings of the heathen world; yet such a system of religion, in order to prevail against vice, and accomplish a general reformation in the world, would require the marks of a proper authority to awaken men to consideration, and subdue their hearts to obedience.

How excellent soever reason is in itself, and how much soever it may be the boast, glory, and idol of man, yet it is most certain, that, in the present state, it is a very doubtful and uncertain thing. It is so often mimicked by counterfeit appearances, and so much clouded by lust, passion, prejudice, and private interest; that we can scarcely discern it, and even when we do discern it, we can scarcely distinguish it from illusion. Reason was one thing in the school of *Socrates*, and another in that of *Epicurus*. The *Stoicks*, the *Platonists*, and the *Peripatetics* differed widely about reason; and the reason of *Hobbes*, *Spinoza*, and *Vaninus* is mere absurdity, with a crowd of other infidels. One man is such a proud and ignorant thing, that he will not be controuled or governed by another man's reason. Hence it appears, that  
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a system of religion, however rational you may suppose it, yet needs something more than its mere rationality to give it a proper weight and momentum with the consciences of men, namely, a proper authority; but this authority no human name can give. Amongst a crowd of human names, which have set themselves up as guides to the human mind, so widely differing in their schemes and sentiments, which shall we follow? Which has most right to lead us, *Zeno* or *Epicurus*, *Hobbs* or *Bolingbroke*? Or how can one of these have more right to impose his religion on us than another, unless he could produce sufficient credentials from **GOD**, by miracles or otherwise? Besides, self-love, prejudice, and passion will be found an overbalance for all human authority, in matters purely moral and religious, and every man will judge his own reasons and opinions best, when they are only confronted by the reasons and opinions of another man. Hence you may see the necessity of an authority which is divine, to give religion its proper force.

**BESIDES**, granting that human reason had all that power and authority which it can demand; granting it efficacious enough to fix the opinions, to regulate the lives, and govern the hearts of men, yet we will find its lights greatly defective in discovering unto us many very material articles of religion. For instance, mere reason can never inform us what the proper reward of virtue, or punishment of vice; or, what degree of virtue will be rewarded;—or, what kinds or degrees of vice **GOD** will forgive;—or, if he will forgive any;—or, upon what

what terms and conditions he will forgive;— or how long the rewards of virtue, or punishments of vice will endure. With respect to these, and many other important articles of religion, human reason is not only weak and obscure, but blind and ignorant. Hence, mere unassisted reason can never free us from the doubts and misgivings of our own guilty minds, nor afford us any sufficient motives and encouragements to break off from inveterate habits of vice, and pursue a course of strict virtue amidst the flattering offers of sin on the one hand, and sufferings and afflictions on the other. Now all these considerations laid together are sufficient to convince every reasonable person of the necessity and expediency of a more express revelation from GOD than mere reason can afford us in the present ignorant and degenerate state of human nature. Now,

THE possibility of such a revelation cannot be disputed. The very beasts have a language by which they express their desires to each other. Men by words and gestures make known their sentiments to each other, and signify their will to domestic animals, in a still more perfect manner. And certainly the father of spirits can have such immediate access to human spirits, which are his own offspring, as to give them a revelation of his own will. What! Cannot he who formed the spirit of man within him, impress it with a knowledge of himself, and of his will, in such a clear and certain manner as to free it from all suspicion of deception and illusion?—this is so plain a case, that I think no infidel would dispute or deny it.

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AND as such a revelation is possible, so I think it must be allowed by all men, that it would be highly desirable. How highly, may we think, would *Socrates*, and many others of the more honest *Pagans*, who were so much embarrassed about the unity of the GODHEAD; the origin of moral evil, the nature and certainty of a future state,—I say how highly, may we imagine, would these more honest, virtuous, and inquisitive *Pagans* been pleased to have found all these doubts cleared up and difficulties relieved in a book making pretensions to divine revelation, upon the same authority and evidence with our scriptures? How many *hecatombs* would they have offered to the true GOD for such a discovery, had they found such sacrifices to have been agreeable to his will? With what joyful *Eurekamens* would they have hailed such a ray of light and truth coming down from the father of lights, and the fountain of truth? —At least, it would have well become their characters thus to have received the truth in the love of it. For, let the light of natural reason in man be supposed as clear and satisfying as we will, yet it is an evident truth of natural religion, that GOD is an infinite incomprehensible being; that he is a boundless, bottomless ocean of perfection; that many things in his nature, will, decrees and dispensations still remain profound and unsearchable mysteries to our natural reason. Would it not therefore be highly desirable, by some farther revelation, to obtain more plain, certain, express, and extensive discoveries of GOD's nature and will, and of our own nature, dependency, duty,  
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danger, privileges and hopes ; than the unassisted light of reason presents us withal ? Certainly he who would obstinately reject and refuse so noble a subsidiary to natural reason; in the present dark and perplexed state, would act a part the very reverse of wisdom ; and by shewing a contempt of farther light and direction, would prove himself to be no true philosopher, no lover of wisdom and truth.

BESIDES, many things render it highly probable that such a farther revelation of GOD's will has been actually given to men : The necessity and expediency of such a revelation arising from the universal ignorance and depravity of mankind : The relations which GOD stands in to man as their maker, their preserver, their father and their moral ruler : The essential goodness of the divine nature, which inclines us to suppose that he would not suffer a whole world of rational creatures to live in a fatal ignorance of himself, and the duties they owe to him, and to each other : The pretences made by some of almost all nations and ages to divine inspirations and revelations ; and the credit given by man to all these pretences, how wild and improbable soever, which shews the proneness of mankind to such a belief. The miracles pretended to have been wrought in confirmation of such revelations, and the laws and religions settled in consequence of them ; and the extensive and lasting credit which some of these pretended revelations have had in the world, and the wonderful changes and reformation which have been wrought both upon nations and individuals, by virtue (as it is thought) of these

these revelations. All these are strong presumptions that such a farther revelation of the divine will is already given to men, and that the true one is now actually to be found among the number of those which make pretensions to it; and that the divine goodness has not left the matter so doubtful and precarious, but that it may be easily found, and distinguished from all its counterfeits, by every honest and impartial enquirer after truth.

AND as it is highly probable, from the nature of GOD, the necessities of men, the almost universal opinion of the world, and the remarkable pretences which have been made, and accidents which have happened, that such a revelation of the divine will has been, in fact, given to mankind: I think it cannot be denied without great ignorance or strong prejudices, but that our scriptures of the old and new testament, make the fairest pretension to the characters of such a divine revelation.

I SHALL not, at present, enter upon the external characters or evidences of the bible, which tend to prove its divine original, but leave them to another occasion. I will only now point out some internal characters of our holy scriptures; some evidences taken from the revelation itself, and its founder, which, I think, must strongly dispose every honest mind to acquiesce in the more positive and direct evidences of its divine authority and original.

UPON the supposition then that GOD should be pleased to favour us with an external revelation, to enlighten our minds in the knowledge of all necessary religious truth, to direct us in  
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the practice of all necessary duty, and to lead us to the enjoyment of a happiness suitable to our natures and capacities, what could we reasonably expect that the contents of such a revelation should be? Should we not expect it to contain plain and worthy notions of the nature and perfections of GOD; just and suitable representations of ourselves, wants, weaknesses and dependence;—proper directions how to serve, please and worship the GOD who made us, and proper motives and encouragements to support and animate us in the way of our duty and obedience? In a word, should we not expect in such a revelation, a clear discovery of our state and circumstances, our relations and dependencies, together with the obligations and duties arising from them, our hopes and fears, our privileges and dangers; especially of the great end and design of our beings, the supreme happiness of our natures, and the way to pursue and obtain it? Now, if our scriptures do all this in a way which our natural reason must approve, and in a way the best calculated to answer all the supposeable designs of such a revelation; then our scriptures seem fairly and rationally to persuade us that they are no imposture, but that they are really and actually that very divine revelation which we believe they are, and we so much need. But, that our bible contains just such a system of religion, must appear to any impartial person, who will but give himself the trouble attentively to read it.

OUR bible gives us the most worthy, rational and exalted notions of the natural and moral perfections of GOD;—notions, which the wisest

and best of men in all ages, have entertained, and which appear to be only a confirmation and enlargement of the light of nature in this important article. Nor does it deliver these notions to us by a long train of dark and intricate reasonings, as the heathen philosophers did; but with an ease, majesty, and simplicity proper to GOD himself, who can easily tell us what he is, and with an authority too, which supercedes the necessity of any human reasonings. It informs us that he is a self-existent, eternal, immortal, unchangeable, and incomprehensible spirit: That he is the fountain of all life, being, motion and perfection; the creator of all things visible and invisible; upholding, conserving, sustaining, and governing all things by his infinite power, consummate wisdom, and universal providence. That he is omniscient and every where present; foreseeing and fore-knowing, in the most perfect and absolute manner, all future events, however casual, fortuitous, or contingent they may seem to created beings: That he is the father of spirits, the searcher of hearts, the moral governor of the rational world, the observer, judge, rewarder and punisher of moral actions: That he is a being of spotless purity, strict and impartial justice, inviolable truth and boundless goodness, of a most gracious and benevolent disposition towards all his creatures, not delighting in their misery, but rather in their perfection and happiness: It represents him as seated on a throne of grace, of a most merciful, placable and reconcileable nature, as far as that can be consistent with his other perfections;—as merciful and gracious, slow to anger,

ger, abundant in goodness, pardoning iniquity, transgression and sin, and receiving rebels and enemies into his friendship and favour upon such terms as may not prove derogatory to his wisdom, holiness, justice and truth: A discovery this, how comfortable and necessary to guilty creatures, and yet how little known by the light of reason! In a word, our bible gives all glory, and ascribes all perfections and blessedness to GOD, to whom alone it is due, and marks out that infinite distance which there is between him and every created nature, how high and exalted soever.

WITH regard to ourselves, it gives us our true picture, and delineates our real circumstances, punctually agreeing with our own experience. It shews us the dignity of our rational nature, and at the same time discovers to us the misery and wretchedness of our fallen, degenerate condition: It dissects, as it were, and anatomizes the human heart, and lays open all its hidden ulcers, and the most secret springs of its corruption. It gives us an unflattering picture of our own ignorance, pride, vanity, self-love, rebellion, poverty and dependance: It gives us the true origin of our present sinful and miserable condition, which so much puzzled the most able philosophers, and which is yet so necessary to be known by us, in order to our recovery, and at the same time that it shews us our misery and danger, it points out a most wise and gracious method of recovery, in which the most guilty sinner needs not despair of obtaining pardon, reconciliation and eternal happiness from GOD.

IF we consider that worship which the bible requires of us, we will find it to be every way worthy of GOD to prescribe, and of men to perform. As GOD is a spirit, so it requires of us to worship him in spirit and in truth, by the inward homage and observance of a pure, humble, and grateful soul, and although it requires several outward ceremonies and appendages, several external signs of reverence, which may be called a bodily service, for the more regular and decent performance of public and social worship; yet it utterly disregards, yea, and condemns these, when unaccompanied with inward holy affections and virtuous benevolent dispositions; and, as it capitally condemns every kind and degree of polytheism and idolatry, and limits our religious regards to the one only living and true GOD; making him the sole object of all our religious fear, hope, joy, desire and delight; so it makes the whole of our pious deportment towards him arise from the noble and solid foundation of an inward esteem, reverence and veneration, correspondent to his matchless excellencies, and builds the whole structure of our worship and obedience upon the generous principle of love; commanding us to love him who is superlatively lovely, with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind. So that the whole of that worship which the bible requires of us, may be said to consist in humility, gratitude, and the love and imitation of the most amiable, benevolent and perfect being.

IF we consider the new testament, which is the peculiar revelation of Christianity, the only rule and standard of our most holy religion;

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its positive institutions are only two, commemorative and symbolical of the grand facts upon which the Christian institution is founded, and pointing out, in a plain and sensible manner, the peculiar privileges and obligations of Christians. It recommends a most pure, spiritual and perfect worship. It inculcates a most noble and sublime morality, not consisting of a skeleton of naked maxims, an amass of dry precepts, or a cold description of moral virtues, like the common systems, ancient and modern, which may, indeed, please the curious, but are very ill calculated for reforming the profligate, as abundant experience has testified; but every way fitted for mending the heart, and exciting to practice. There we find moral and religious duties built upon their true and genuine principles, love to God, love to our neighbour, and a well regulated self-love; enforced by the most powerful and cogent motives, and living and breathing in a variety of the most finished examples; especially, in that most perfect one of the blessed JESUS. These divine philosophers lived the morality they taught, and recommended their severest precepts by their own examples; a glory and advantage which no other system of morality could ever boast! Besides, the morality of the new testament is plain and familiar, adapted to the meanest, as well as the highest capacities; it condescends to lay down rules for every rank and order of men, for every relation and condition of life; its precepts are of equal utility to public societies, to private families, and individuals. It reaches to the inward desires and intentions of men as well as their outward actions, and begins with the heart that it may

govern the life. It lays the strongest restraints upon these turbulent passions, and unlawful desires, which destroy the peace and tranquillity of the mind, disturb society, and are the source of the greatest disorders and calamities among men; and every where inculcates that purity of heart, that sincerity of intention, and that universal integrity of conduct, which evidently tends to promote the peace and order of every civil society, and the health, honour and happiness of every individual.

AND, as the morality of the gospel is incomparably excellent, so the motives, by which it is enforced, far transcend the motives of natural religion, both in their number, certainty and greatness. The amazing love of GOD in CHRIST, manifested to undeserving sinners in the gospel, must have a wonderful charm to draw, allure and constrain every ingenious mind to a cheerful obedience of its precepts. The assurance of pardon, upon sincere repentance, and of the assistances of GOD's holy spirit, in a way of duty, are solid encouragements to the most vigorous efforts in breaking off the habits of sin; and attempting a course of virtuous action, as they remove every objection which weakness, fear or guilt can suggest, and the clear and certain discoveries of the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, an impartial judgement, and an endless future state of rewards and punishments, according to the tenor of present life, are surely sufficient to rouse men from security, awaken them to consideration, and excite them to the highest degrees of zeal, diligence and activity in shunning so great a misery,



fery, and purfue fo glorious a hope \*. These are motives than which there can be none more worthy

\* I AM well aware that some of the enemies of Christianity have objected againft future rewards and punishments, as very improper motives to virtue, and have taken the liberty to calumniate the gospel, as a mercenary, fervile fcheme, upon this very account, that it has reprefented these motives in fo ftrong a light, and built fo much upon them; and, more particularly, becaufe of thofe *damnatory clauses* by which the divine author of that inftitution has enforced the belief and praftice of it upon his difciples. They tell us, it is effential to virtue that it be difinterested, and that fuch difpofitions and actions as flow from the hope of reward, and, more efppecially, from the fear of punishment, are fervile and conftained, and have in them no moral worth.

It is not poffible in the compafs of a note to enter deeply into this controversy, which, however, ought not to be wholly paffed over in filence, as it fo nearly concerns the merits of Chriftianity.—I fhall content myfelf, at prefent, with laying before the candid reader a few hints, which tend to obviate this calumny of infidels.

1ft. THE objectors feem not well to confider the frame of human nature. Hopes and fears are evidently the great fprings of refolution and action in all the common and civil concerns of life; and why fhould they not take place in matters of a moral and religious confideration? Efppecially when the reafonablenefs of this feems plainly indicated by natural confcience, which, prior to any revelation, excites to virtue and deters from vice by the very fame motives; though not altogether fo ftrong, clear, and certain. If the hopes of future rewards, and the fears of future punishments, have been generally efteemed fancies of the law of nature, why fhould the advocates of natural religion be difgufted by find-

worthy of GOD to suggest, more agreeable to the reasonable and immortal nature and lapsed condition

ing them more clearly revealed in the gospel of Christianity.

2dly. NOR do the objectors seem to consider the present corrupt and degenerate state of human nature, although this is a truth too manifest to be denied. Whatever attractions a sense of moral beauty, and a pure disinterested love of virtue and order might have to a mind, in a great measure, purified and refined from the habits of vice, and the love of sensual enjoyments; yet, suppose a man immersed in carnal pleasures, buried under the rubbish of worldly cares, enslaved to a variety of lusts and passions, and blinded by inveterate prejudices; and yet, this is really the condition of the generality of mankind. I imagine you might long enough preach lectures about moral beauty and disinterested virtue to such a man, before you would be able to call him off from his present pursuits, and engage his attention to such fine speculations, in such a manner as to reform his life. However well adapted such motives might be to pure angelic natures, or to persons of refined sentiments and advanced virtue, whose intellectual eyes are sufficiently clear to discern their beauty, and whose minds are capable of tasting and relishing their charms; yet it will be found by experience, that, with the generality of men, the fear of the Lord must be the beginning of religious wisdom;—that a salutary fear is necessary to prepare the way for a pure and disinterested love;—and that the terrors of the Lord, and the prospects of a future reward, are expedient to persuade men, sunk in sin and sense, to make a stand, and consider the merits of religion, and resolve to practise its self-denying precepts, amidst the potent solicitations of sensual pleasures, interests and enjoyments.

3dly.

condition of man, or more effectual to determine men in that course of duty which the gospel recommends.

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3dly. THE ancient law-givers and philosophers, who it is said, had no certain belief of the immortality of the soul, or a state of future rewards and punishments, yet found it necessary to propagate a firm belief of these doctrines among the people, in order to give force to their laws, and keep mankind in a state of civil order and subjection. If therefore a belief of these doctrines was necessary to obtain and secure the most valuable ends and purposes of civil government, how much more must they be so, to secure the duties of moral and religious obligation, which are much more numerous, difficult and important?

4thly. WE find, by sad experience, that all the omnipotent motives of the gospel, in their united force, have enough to do to call men off from the pursuit of sinful pleasures, and engage them to an evangelical obedience; how much less proper and effectual, then, must the gospel be, as an instrument for reforming mankind, were it robbed of its most powerful motives, and brought down to the standard of natural religion, by mutilating and weakening the rest, according to the taste of a few dreaming philosophers?

5thly. IF the Christian institution really is, what it pretends to be, namely, the most noble and effectual instrument, in the hand of GOD, for converting and saving sinners, for bringing them to a state of moral perfection and happiness, then the damnatory clauses contained in it are perfectly fit and reasonable: Because, to have left such an institution unguarded and unenforced by any sanctions or penalties, would have been to leave mankind at an entire liberty to consider it, or not to consider it, to embrace it,

IF we consider the author or revealer of the Christian institution, we shall find him to have been

it, or not to embrace it, at mere pleasure. And who does not see that men, devoted to sinful pleasures and interests, would have thought themselves well warranted to neglect a religion, which, as its precepts are extremely cross to their natural inclinations, seemed, at the same time, to leave it as a matter wholly indifferent whether they submitted to it, or not.—To this I might also add,

THAT the gospel, containing not only a promise, but also a law, it is perfectly fit that it should be guarded and enforced by rewards and penalties, and that these penalties should be suitable to the immortal nature and duration of the soul, *i. e.* eternal; and if these penalties and rewards are not imaginary and fictitious, but real and certain, as the gospel supposes, then it is highly reasonable that mankind should be acquainted of this, that so they might fully understand the unspeakable advantage of embracing the Christian institution, and the extreme danger of neglecting it.

LET us for once suppose that the Christian scheme were as disinterested as these men would have it, that it cast an impenetrable vail over a life to come, and a future state of rewards and punishments;—that it contained no other motives to obedience but such as arise purely from the reasonableness and excellency of its precepts;—that it commanded us to love and serve God, purely for his own amiableness, to practice virtue on account of the peace and serenity of mind which attends it, and to renounce fleshly and sinful lusts, because they are unmanly and unbecoming, and greatly prejudicial to the present interests of society and of individuals, and what would be the probable consequences? Why, first, such a religion would carry in itself strong presumptions of its being  
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been a very extraordinary personage, whose character, pretensions and works merit our highest attention and regard. Although he appeared in low circumstances of life, and was a person of a most humble, meek and condescending deportment, yet he speaks of himself in a most exalted strain, as the only begotten son of God, as coming down from heaven, and com-

a mere human and political invention, serving only present purposes; and therefore, thinking men would have much stronger temptations to infidelity than they now have: And, secondly, sensual men who are willing to forget the present satisfactions arising from virtue for the gratification of their passions and appetites, would freely indulge them, having no future punishment to fear.

IN a word, if mankind are really to be rewarded and punished in a future state, according to their moral character here, I think it will be very difficult to assign a reason why the gospel (supposing it to be of divine original) should not give a true and unflattering representation of this future state of rewards and punishments.

UPON the whole it seems to appear, that that life and immortality, that future state of rewards and punishments, so clearly and fully brought to light in the gospel, is so far from being an objection against the Christian institution, that it is a high recommendation of it;—it has a strong presumption that it cometh from that God, who has a more solicitous concern for the future and eternal, than for the present and temporal interests of his creatures; and, consequently, that those persons who go about to depreciate these discoveries, and represent them as improper motives to virtue, will be found strangers to the true interests of morality, and enemies to mankind, whether we consider them in a civil or religious capacity.

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ing out from the eternal Father, with whom he possessed peculiar glories before the world was;—as being sent into the world and commissioned by GOD to seek and save that which was lost;—as having power over all flesh, to give eternal life to men;—as having life essentially in himself, and consequently having power to lay down his own life and take it up again, and to raise up his disciples at the last day; as being, in some sense, one with the father, and partaking of his essential perfections and glories;—as having perfect knowledge of his father's will, and as the Christ, or anointed, fully empowered to reveal this will to sinners. As seeing the I AM who existed before *Abraham*; yea, before the foundation of the world; the alpha and omega, the first and the last, the searcher of reins and hearts, having the keys of hell and of death, and as finally to sit on a throne of glory, and summon and judge the assembled world, and distribute rewards and punishments; which last act necessarily supposes supreme authority and infinite perfection. And as the author of the Christian institution speaks thus of himself, so his apostles, who must be supposed best to know his character and pretensions, speak of him in the same language. They tell us that he was the WORD, or LOGOS, which was in the beginning with GOD, and which was GOD; that he thought it no robbery to be equal with GOD;—that he is the true GOD and eternal life;—that the world was made by him;—that by him were all things created in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, and that by him all things consist and are governed;—that he is the brightness of his father's glory, and the express image

image of his person; the image of the invisible God, having all fulness dwelling in him even the fulness of the God-head bodily; that he is every where present, the Lord and judge of angels and men;—that he is mighty to save all sinners that come to God by him, himself being without sin or guile, holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.

NOR were these vain and arrogant claims, as appears by the series of wonderful works which Christ wrought, and the astonishing proofs which he gave of the truth and justice of his pretensions. He healed the most inveterate and otherwise incurable diseases by a word, or a touch. He gave proof of his empire over the devils, by dispossessing them of the souls and bodies of men. He shewed himself the lord and ruler of universal nature, by governing its two most unruly elements, the wind and sea. He shewed his dominion over death and the invisible world, by recalling departed spirits, and raising the dead. He manifested a creating power, by turning water into wine, and multiplying bread and fish in the hands of the eaters. It was evident, that he was the searcher of hearts, and knew what was in man, by telling their inward thoughts, and the secret reasoning of their minds. He gave many plain proofs of his omniscience, which it would be tedious here to mention. His prescience of future events was manifested by a number of remarkable and important predictions. He foretold, with the greatest exactness, and in the most circumstantial manner, the cowardice of *Peter* and the other apostles; the perfidy of *Judas*; his own sufferings, death and resurrection at *Jerusalem*; the longevity of *John*;  
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the manner of *Peter's* death; the miraculous effusion of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost; the obstinacy and infidelity of the *Jews*; the conversion of the *Gentiles*; the amazing spread of the gospel; the terrible sufferings of its professors; the total destruction of *Jerusalem* and demolition of the temple by the *Romans*, and the universal dispersion of the *Jews* into all nations.

IN consequence of these amazing works, and other evidences of divinity, which were conspicuous in his life, the founder of Christianity assumed to himself an authority worthy of the son of GOD, and which, upon any other supposition, must have been the vilest sacrilege, and the most profane and diabolical usurpation. He took upon him to settle the terms and conditions of men's acceptance with the Deity: He authoritatively forgave sins, and commanded that repentance and the remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at *Jerusalem*: He accepted divine homage: He commanded men to believe and trust in him, as they did in the father; to come unto him for the greatest of spiritual blessings, even peace of conscience and eternal life; to ask all blessings in his name from the father, and to believe his gospel, and to rely on his power and grace, upon pain of damnation: He gave laws to the world, and demanded a peremptory and universal obedience, thus claiming a rightful authority over the hearts and consciences of men: He promised the spirit of his father as the enlightener, director and comforter of his disciples, and the prime minister of his kingdom, among men: He frankly declared, that all power in heaven

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was given to him, and that he was appointed as the universal judge of quick and dead.

NOTWITHSTANDING these extraordinary claims, yet we find in this person, the most astonishing proofs of self-denial, meekness, humility and condescension. He made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, Phil. ii. 7, 8. According to the flesh he descended of obscure parentage; lived in indigent and necessitous circumstances; conversed with the meanest of the people; was a man of sorrows and acquainted with griefs; submitted with the most exemplary patience to the greatest indignities, reproaches and sufferings; was ever doing good and enduring evil; discovered upon all occasions the most chearful obedience and submissive regard to the divine will; maintained the exactest sanctity of manners, and integrity of conduct, amidst perpetual trials and temptations; and, at length, freely laid down his life to confirm his doctrine, and as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, rising again from the dead, on the third day, as a proof that he came from God, and ascending visibly into heaven, in the presence of *five hundred spectators*, who all affirmed their certainty of the truth of these things, at the hazard of the cruellest persecutions, and martyrdom itself.

THIS extraordinary person made his appearance in the world about the very time when a person of that very character was expected, in consequence of many remarkable prophecies,

uttered many hundred years before his coming: These prophecies, although uttered by different persons, and in different ages, concurred in pointing out, in a very plain and circumstantial manner, his person, dignity, humility, offices, birth, life, miracles, sufferings, death, resurrection and kingdom; the particular time of his coming, and the nation, tribe, family and city from whence he should proceed: All which predictions were remarkably accomplished in him, insomuch that one of the subtlest adversaries of Christianity, in order to evade the force of this so cogent an argument in favour of his divine mission, was driven to the vain and wretched shift of supposing, that many of those prophecies were foisted into the old testament scriptures after his coming in the flesh, by some of his disciples; although the vigilance and jealousy of the Jews, in this matter, is a sufficient confutation of this subterfuge of incredulity.

AND now, when infidels set themselves down to draw invidious parallels between Christ, and the founders of other religions, they would do well seriously to consider whether *Numa Pompilius, Zoroaster, Confucius, Mahommed, &c.* ever made such pretensions as these; or having made them, have ever supported them with equal evidence as **JESUS** of *Nazareth!*

SUCH was the founder of Christianity; and if we consider the means he employed to propagate the religion he taught, and to persuade men to embrace it, we will find them agreeable to the most consummate wisdom and goodness. True religion must recommend itself to the understandings and consciences of men, by  
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the evidences of truth and divinity which attend it. Force and tyranny, trick and artifice are repugnant to its nature, and can never promote its true interests, nor facilitate its reception among men. Accordingly, the founder of Christianity studiously shunned all these methods in the propagation of this religion. He chose twelve plain men, who perfectly knew him, and who had been eye-witnesses of all his works of wonder, destitute of human power, learning, riches, eloquence, or any other external advantage, attractive of human regard, which might bias the minds, or inveigle the affections of men; that so truth might operate by its own simple force. These he sent forth as the prime apostles and ministers of his religion, having endued them with the gift of speaking different languages, and a power of working miracles, and of conferring these miraculous gifts upon others. To these he gave power and commission to make a full revelation of his will and to prosolyte all nations, to preach the gospel unto every human creature, having first poured upon them a plentiful effusion of the HOLY GHOST, to lead their minds into all necessary truth. These apostles appear, by their writings, to have been men of plain sense and great honesty; far from low artifice on the one hand, or wild enthusiasm on the other. They were consonant and unanimous in their testimony; harmonious in their doctrines; regular in their lives; indefatigable in their labours; cheerful in their sufferings; steady, zealous and intrepid in the prosecution of their great design; without any other friend but GOD and a good conscience; without any other

sword but that of the spirit ; without any other breast plate than that of righteousness ; without other shield than patience in sufferings ; without other eloquence than the evidence of truth, and the demonstration of the spirit, they went forth conquering and to conquer a world of idols, prejudices, passions and lusts ; to change the religion, the manners and the hearts of princes, empires and kingdoms. They gave the strongest proofs of their own sincerity, by sealing their testimony with their own blood ; and the strongest proof of the truth and divinity of their doctrines, by the miracles they were enabled to work. Their religion greatly recommended itself to the world, by giving them the noblest supports under the heaviest afflictions, and by rendering them not only fearless, but even joyful, amidst the greatest torments, and in the very article of death. Nor was this surprizing fortitude of mind peculiar to the apostles only, but common to thousands of inferior character, of every sex, age and condition of life, who could not all be supposed such fools as to die for a known, unprofitable lie, and to express a joy in death which they did not feel \*.

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\* I CONFESS that this, and perhaps some other arguments in this discourse, are of a mixed nature, and contain not only internal and presumptive, but also external and positive proofs of the truth of the Christian religion. And indeed, according to the manner in which I have handled the subject, I could not well avoid thus blending the arguments. I hope, however, considering the importance of the subject, the candid reader will excuse me if he should meet  
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AND although the prevalence of an opinion is no certain argument of its truth; yet when a religion like Christianity, so opposite to all other religions in the world, so contrary to the corrupt interests and inclinations of men, beginning to be preached at *Jerusalem* and *Rome*, places of the greatest learning, and where all were its enemies but a few illiterate people;— I say, when such a religion, preached by such men, under such disadvantageous circumstances, made such a swift and wonderful progress over almost the whole known world, in a few centuries, by mere dint of argument and force of evidence, in conjunction with the good lives and patient sufferings of its professors, against power, craft, malice, and all manner of opposition; it is certainly a strong presumption of its truth, and of a divine power which attended it, and was watchful over its interests.

AGAIN, if we consider the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, which to the Jews, who were strongly prejudiced against them, were a stumbling block, and to the Greeks (whose minds were intoxicated and corrupted by a vain philosophy) were foolishness; yet, upon an attentive consideration, we will find them to contain an evident display of the wisdom, power and goodness of God. The gospel supposes, or rather teaches, two truths which seem perfectly conformable both to right reason and our

with some of these same arguments reassumed and opened more at large, in a more convenient place, and that he will pardon the repetition of matter, which must naturally occur from this double representation of the same facts.

own experience of things.—First, that God is an infinitely pure, righteous and holy being, and therefore that all moral pravity and impurity is diametrically opposite both to his nature and will; and that, being the moral governor of the world, he is in justice bound to punish vice, and to make a difference between the observers and violaters of his holy law: And, secondly, that men are in a corrupt and degenerate state, prone to vice, and disinclined to virtue. In a word, that they are polluted, impotent and guilty, and that being such, they are both contrary to the holy nature of God, devoid of his moral image, and obnoxious to his governing justice. If this then is the true state of the case, it follows by consequence, that there can be no natural amity between God and man in their present state. God must look upon man as a guilty polluted rebel, and man must regard God as an offended sovereign. And however God may have gracious and benevolent dispositions towards his guilty creature, yet he can have no complacency or delight in him, nor any intimate and friendly communication with him, until his guilt is removed and his nature changed: Nor can man have any filial love to, or confidence in God, until he can have some assurance of the possibility of pardon, reconciliation, and a commenced state of friendship; otherwise, he must still regard God as an offended majesty, and himself as an obnoxious criminal. Now, although we may easily conceive how God might renew the hearts of sinners, and give them a dutiful and obedient temper, yet, that being the moral governor of the world, he should freely pardon them

them without any satisfaction to his justice, any signal mark of disapprobation set upon their sins, or any *salvo* to the honour of his righteous law, seems utterly irreconcilable with the wisdom and equity of his government. Here then comes in the necessity, at least the great expediency, of the mediatorial scheme. Let us now take a brief survey of the apparatus, symmetry and contrivance of this scheme, as it is exhibited in the gospel. GOD, who by one most simple and perfect act of intelligence, knows all things, past, present and to come, foreseeing from the ages of eternity that man would abuse the liberty of his will, and fall into a state of apostacy, had pity upon him, and (perhaps because he fell through the instigation of a powerful and subtle tempter) devised means for his recovery, while fallen angels were left remediless in their chosen ruin. For this purpose, he created a most perfect human spirit before any of the worlds or of their inhabitants\*, which being joined in personal union with  
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\* I AM sensible that this opinion, concerning the pre-existence of Christ's human soul, is a little singular, though I cannot think it without foundation in scripture. Those who would see the scripture arguments for it, and the difficulties it seems to relieve in the gospel scheme, may consult a treatise intitled, "*The glory of Christ as God-man mediator, &c.*" commonly ascribed to the late pious and excellent Doctor *Watts*, and the authors to which he refers. The various appearances of the Redeemer to men, and his various transactions with his church, in the different periods of it, before his incarnation may, I imagine, be best accounted for upon this supposition.

with the divine Logos, the second person of the ever blessed Trinity, he appointed as the creator and governor of all things visible and invisible. John i. 3. Col. i. 16, 17, 18. I Cor. viii. 6. Heb. i. 2, 10. On the foresight

His humbling himself, and divesting himself of original glories, cannot else be so naturally accounted for, and it is not easy to conceive, upon any other scheme, the possibility of a covenant of redemption. That GOD should covenant with GOD, that a trinity of personal substances, having but one simple understanding and will, should stipulate and restipulate between themselves, sounds a little harsh. But now, if we suppose the pre-existent state of Christ's human soul, we can easily conceive a covenant transaction between him and the father, wherein the one proposed, and the other consented and undertook; wherein the one commanded, and the other cheerfully submitted and obeyed; wherein the one sent and the other came, as it was written in the volume of the book, to do his father's will, and divested himself of original glories, and was made under the law, and submitted himself to the lowest degrees of abasement, contempt and suffering.—Not that I would, by any means, deny the possibility of accounting for these things, according to the common scheme of thinking, or rest the merits of so important a doctrine upon any precarious, unfounded hypothesis. All I would insinuate is this, that if the doctrine of the pre-existence of Christ's human soul is founded on scripture; if it is perfectly consistent with the most orthodox opinions concerning the natures, person and offices of the Redeemer; and if it seems rationally to solve many plausible objections urged by the Arians against the orthodox faith, and to relieve many seeming difficulties in the mediatorial scheme, I see not why it should be rejected, purely on account of its singularity.



of man's fall, GOD was pleased to appoint this glorious person, as the saviour of human sinners, and for this purpose to enter into the covenant of redemption with him, to the arduous terms of which he cheerfully submitted, on condition of divine succours which were to be communicated to him, in consequence of his personal union with the divine nature. Accordingly, as soon as man had actually fallen, this treaty of peace and reconciliation through a Redeemer commenced, and a promise of redemption was exhibited to *Adam*; which promise was repeated and farther illustrated in the various successive dispensations of the church; until, at length, in the fulness of time, this divine complex person had a body prepared for him, in the womb of an immaculate virgin, by the power of the Holy Ghost, and so became incarnate, or *Immanuel* GOD with us. This glorious God-man-mediator becoming thus incarnate, did, on the part of GOD, make a full revelation of the divine will, respecting man's duty and happiness; and on the part of man, whom he represented, whose surety he was, and in whose law place he appeared, he paid a most sinless and perfect obedience, and laid down his life as a most spotless sacrifice to answer the demands of justice against guilty man; and having thus died for our sins, he rose again for our justification, and ascended into heaven, there to exhibit and plead his meritorious sacrifice in our behalf, and in virtue thereof to solicit our pardon and acceptance with GOD, and to prepare mansions of glory for the reception of all his faithful followers at his second coming, that so he may be for ever the

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triumphant head of a happy, grateful, redeemed people to the honour and glory of God, the eternal father. Thus in all things it behoved Christ to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people, By virtue of his human nature, he was capable of obeying and suffering in the place of man\*; and by  
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\* I am sensible that the vicarious sufferings of Christ, in the room and stead of sinners, has been much spoken against, not only by infidels, but by many professed Christians. The offence taken at this doctrine seems chiefly to arise from the unreasonableness and injustice of the same matter in human societies, in which it would be esteemed not only highly injurious, but also highly impolitic, to admit the punishment of an innocent person, in the room and stead of one who is guilty in capital cases. And indeed so it would, for by this means the society must lose its best members and retain its worst; which, besides the iniquity of the thing, must prove very prejudicial to the interests of human society, and destroy the end and efficacy of human laws.— But the truth is, the two cases admit of no parallel. Christ perfectly foreknew, and freely underwent the sufferings which were laid upon him. His life was wholly at his own disposal, he had power to lay it down, and power to take it upon him again, John x. 18. His human nature had also a large and glorious reward conferred upon it by the deity, which was a noble equivalent and retribution for its short, though bitter sufferings: For because he humbled himself, and became obedient to death, therefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess

virtue of his divine nature, his obedience and sufferings had an infinite worth and merit in the sight of GOD. Hereby GOD's law was honoured, his justice satisfied, his hatred against sin displayed, his mercy magnified, and a way for the honourable exercise of that attribute towards sinners opened, so that he might appear to be perfectly just, even in justifying such sinners as believe in Jesus;—and might consult and promote

ends that he is Lord, to the glory of God the father, Phil. ii. 8—11. He was well assured that his vicarious sufferings would be pleasing to his heavenly father, advantageous to himself, advance of the divine glory, and beneficial to the souls of them for whom he suffered. Warrants and encouragements these, which no other person can possibly have in the like case.— Besides, the moral world could not suffer in the least by the impunity of those guilty persons for whom he died (as human societies suffer by the impunity of criminal members) because the very design of his dying for them, was, that of guilty rebels he might make them loyal and obedient subjects, and worthy members of GOD's moral kingdom: He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify us unto himself, a peculiar people zealous of good works, Tit. ii. 14. And those who still continue to oppose and resist his saving method, shall meet with a more aggravated punishment, in proportion to the greatness of their guilt: They shall be punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, 2 Theff. i. 9. So that you see there is an infinite disparity between the vicarious sufferings of Christ, and that of innocent members in human societies; and therefore, it is highly unreasonable to argue from the one to the other, and to conclude, that because the one would be injurious and unreasonable, therefore the other must be so too.

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the glory of every perfection while he was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, and not imputing their trespasses unto them\*. See Rom. iii. 26. 2 Cor. v. 19.

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\* THE grand objection urged against the gospel by the heathen philosophers, and which still seems to offend infidels, is, that it supposes God to have sent his only begotten son into the world to die by the hands, and in the stead of such mean, worthless creatures, as guilty men. This doctrine of Christ crucified was to them foolishness in the very abstract. They could by no means bear the thought of a dying God, a suffering divinity, a crucified saviour; nor could they bring together into their minds the distant extremes of divinity and humanity, so as to suppose them capable of being united in one person. Hence they treated the doctrine of the incarnation as an incredible romance, and regarded the sufferings of the son of God as an absurd, impious and profane fable. But this objection arises either from an ignorance of the gospel doctrine, concerning the natures and person of Christ, or from a studied intricating and perplexing of the question.

FOR although Christians in a loose, rhetorical and figurative stile, and agreeable to what they call the *communicatio idiomatum*, or the reciprocal attribution of the properties of Christ's different natures to his complex person, do speak of the humiliation, suffering, blood and death of God; *i. e.* of him who in one of his natures is God, yet they religiously deny, in strict propriety of speech, the possibility of Christ's divine nature, or its being capable of sustaining any loss, or diminution of its original and essential glory or happiness, by virtue of its union with his humanity: For as the rays of the sun can suffer no contamination by shining on a dunghill, and as the deity is essentially present in hell, without enduring any

Now, in order that sinners may become partakers of the benefits of this redemption, it is made

any pain, so the divinity of Christ was intimately united to his humbled and suffering humanity, without enduring any sense of pain, or sustaining any abatement of its primitive glory, by such union.

IF it should appear incredible that the divine nature should condescend so low, as to unite itself to a human soul and body, for the redemption and salvation of such worthless polluted creatures as sinners of mankind; we must confess indeed, that this is an astonishing instance of condescension and philanthropy!—But if we take a comprehensive view of the actual and possible designs of this mystery, we shall cease to think it incredible. Let us not therefore confine the end and design of Christ's incarnation and sufferings, merely to the redemption and salvation of a few sinners of mankind, how excellent and God-like soever this design may appear; but let us extend our views, and consider how much God's essential justice was glorified, and his eternal law honoured by the obedience and satisfaction of Christ.—Let us consider what a demonstration this gave, perhaps to ten thousand worlds of intelligent creatures, of God's hatred against sin, his love of righteousness and order, and of the riches of his exuberant mercy!—Besides, who can tell what excellent purposes this instance of God's severity and mercy may have served in other worlds, and among other ranks of beings, to us unknown, to whom, however, it may have been communicated by the great father of all spirits, for wise and, to us, inscrutable designs? Who dare positively say, that it is not a means in the comprehensive scheme of the divine government, of confirming and preserving other provinces of the intellectual world, in a state of obedience and happiness, and of promoting the perseverance, and exciting the eternal admiration, reverence

made necessary, on their part, that they believe this gospel report; become duly sensible of their own guilt, weakness and unworthiness, of the mercy of God, and the allsufficiency of

reverence, love and praise of the whole system of intellectual beings? It is not obscurely intimated in the sacred records, that Christ the redeemer, is the lord of angels as well as of men, that superior intelligences pry with desire and attention into the scheme of redeeming grace: Upon the birth of Christ these benevolent spirits are represented as deeply interesting themselves in this surprizing event, as an event which would give rise to a new tribute of glory and praise to God in the highest heavens, as well as produce peace upon earth, and good-will towards men. So that there is probably a closer connection than we are yet aware of, between ourselves and other systems of intellectual being, and although these connections may, for wise reasons, be concealed from us, in this state of our existence, yet they may, for reasons equally wise, be revealed to these other systems of being, and have a very considerable influence upon their moral conduct.

It is pitiable ignorance, and wretched arrogance of a crawling insect of this terraqueous globe, to take upon him to measure the divine dispensations by the proportion of his own short and narrow understanding, and to deny their wisdom and equity, merely because he is not able to comprehend their excellency, or penetrate all their reasons.

THE narrow and contracted views of infidels in matters supernatural, and that freedom and boldness with which they censure things, far beyond the ken of human understanding, and the decisions of human reason, puts me often in mind of Mr. *Addison's* fly, Guard. Vol. I. No. 70, than which I do not remember to have met with a finer and juster piece of railery.

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Christ; that they apply to him and rely upon him by faith for salvation, according to the representations made of him in the gospel; that they return unto God by a true and unfeigned repentance, and endeavour, after a sincere and universal evangelical righteousness, giving themselves up into the hands of the redeemer, to be pardoned and accepted through his merit, governed by his laws, sanctified by his spirit, disposed of by his providence, and saved by his power and grace.

BUT, as man is naturally averse and disinclined, even to the very means of his recovery, God has been graciously pleased to appoint the Holy Ghost, the third person of the ever blessed trinity, as the sanctifier of sinners; to enlighten their minds, to discern the reality and force of gospel truths and motives, in such an effectual manner, as that their wills, without any infringement on their natural liberty, may be powerfully inclined to a humble acceptance of the gospel offer, and to a cordial compliance with the terms of salvation. By the operations of this divine agent, in concurrence with the established means of grace, the understandings of sinners are illuminated in the saving knowledge of spiritual things; their hearts purified and quickened, in the ways of holiness; their affections spiritualized and refined; their natures changed and moulded into a divine temper and likeness, and their whole man gradually fitted and qualified for that pure and exalted happiness which the gospel promises: and although, sinners have naturally no right or title to the aids of the spirit, yet, in consequence of Christ's purchase and mediation,

tion, it is become the gift of GOD to men. A dispensation of it every where attends the preaching of the gospel, and sinners are encouraged to ask it from GOD by humble, earnest prayer; who has promised to impart it to all who sincerely ask, and who do not wilfully resist and quench its motions, with greater readiness than any father gives good things to a beloved child, Luke xi. 13. The brief sum of all which is this: Christ laid down his life, not only as a martyr, in confirmation of his testimony; but also an expiatory sacrifice made to the divine justice for the sins of men, and that a way might be opened for the honourable exercise of the divine mercy to guilty rebels. Through faith in him we obtain forgiveness, upon our sincere repentance. Being forgiven, we are esteemed righteous before GOD, for his most perfect righteousness sake. Being justified, there commences a state of reconciliation and friendship between GOD and us. Being reconciled we are intitled to the sanctifying, renewing, quickening and comforting influences of the Holy Ghost; to the constant mediation and intercession of Jesus Christ; have all needed supplies of grace from him as our head; have the sure promise of life eternal here, and the certain enjoyment of it hereafter.

THIS then is the account which the gospel gives us of the redemption, purchased for us by Christ, and the method in which we are made partakers of it. And now, does it appear at all credible, that an ignorant impostor, and a few crazy fanatics, which Christ and his *apostles* must needs have been, upon the supposition



tion of infidelity, should have been the authors of such a wise, rational and consistent contrivance as this!—

ONCE more, this gospel has in all ages had its best friends and strongest advocates amongst the wisest and best of men. Those men of almost every age, who have been most famous for deep thinking, and impartial enquiry after truth, have firmly believed, and openly defended the Christian religion, whereas very few but superficial wits, and wrong-headed philosophers, or open debauchees, have espoused the cause of infidelity: And the few writers of distinction, who have appeared against Christianity, shew so much spleen, rancour and ill-nature, in their writings, as makes it plainly appear they were under the influence of inveterate prejudices, which render them very unfit enquirers after truth. The Lords *S Shaftsbury* and *Bolingbroke* are evidently of such a character, and as for the generality of the other *English* deists, they are almost below contempt itself. Whereas, not to mention the Christian fathers, many of whom were before their conversion among the wisest of the philosophers, and not to mention the clergy, who may be allowed to have a little learning, common sense and honesty, as well as other men, Christianity has had its best friends, and ablest defenders, amongst the greatest philosophers of this and the last age, who being mere laymen, could have no interested or mercenary motives to defend its cause. Where can infidelity boast of such advocates as a *Newton*, *Locke*, *Boyle*, *Addison*, *Milton*, *West* and *Littleton* in *England*, and a *Grotius* and others on the continent; all of

which have not only been firm and devout believers of Christianity, but many of them have also written in its defence, and commented on the holy scriptures. These have all been bright and shining ornaments to Christianity, while, at the same time, the Christian religion has reflected an additional glory on their characters, and done them a real honour. Hence I would infer, that if the Christian revelation has forced its evidence upon such superior geniusses, on men of such great sagacity and deep penetration, who were confessedly so much masters of rational enquiry, it is no contemptible argument of its truth and divinity, and that the evidences for its support can stand the test of the most impartial scrutiny.

AND now, may I not defy all the philosophers and founders of religious sects in the heathen world, and all the infidels of Christendom, to produce such a system of religion as this; adorned with such glorious internal characters of truth and divinity; so worthy of GOD; so well calculated for the benefit and relief of men; headed by such a founder, or recommended to the world by such rational and essential marks of divine authority!—Alas! for the blindness of the human understanding, which cannot discern the visible characters of divinity which shine, with an unequalled lustre, in our holy scriptures, and which can stupidly prefer the dry philosophy of a *Seneca*, or the more tasteless opinions of a modern infidel, to such a grand, sublime, consistent and divine religion as our new testament contains!—Alas! for the pride and perverseness of the human mind, which will pretend to a light which it  
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has not, and will not humble itself to receive instructions even from GOD himself, although coming down from heaven with the brightest evidence! LORD do thou dispose our minds to receive the truth in the love of it: Preserve us from the foolish counsels and proud imaginations of these unhappy men; and while we detest their principles, help us to pity them above all others of the human race, and earnestly to pray that they may be brought from darkness to light, and from the power of satan to the living God. O do thou shine into their hearts, and give them the light of the knowledge of thine own glory, as it is unveiled and exhibited in the face of Jesus Christ, who is the brightness of thy glory, and the express image of thy person. Bring them to know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent, whom to know aright is life eternal. For if our gospel be hid, says the apostle, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the GOD of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of GOD, should shine unto them, 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4. An awful consideration this to infidels, if the gospel should happen to be true, and a consideration which should make them examine and tremble!

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General Objections against a divine revelation stated and answered.

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† PETER iii. 15.

— *Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.*

**T**WO things I propos'd from this text, 1st. To lay before you some presumptive arguments for the truth of Christianity; which must strongly dispose every reasonable, intelligent and honest person to receive the holy scriptures as a revelation from GOD, the father of lights; and, secondly, to answer some objections, which are alledged by infidels, against revelation in general, and the Christian revelation in particular.

I NOW proceed to the second general head propos'd, namely, to answer some objections, alledged by infidels, against revelation in general, and the Christian revelation in particular. I confess, indeed,

indeed, that these objections might seem to be more properly answered, after having said all I intend to say upon the argument; but, however, I have preferred this place for them, as I imagine, what may be said upon them, may throw some light on the remaining part of the subject.

Ist. ONE of the grand objections which infidels make against revelation in general is, that it is entirely unnecessary. For, say they, the light of nature and of reason is fully sufficient to shew every man his duty, in every circumstance and condition of life; and therefore, it is not consistent, they tell us, with the wisdom of GOD to give us a vain and needless revelation of his will, seeing he has revealed it sufficiently to every man, by his reason and natural light. To this I answer, that this is not true in fact, and therefore to argue thus, is to set supposition against fact, and to reason from possibilities against experience and certainty.

I HAVE shewed elsewhere, that mere unassisted reason and natural light has not been sufficient to lead *one* in a *thousand* of the heathen even to the knowledge of one, true and eternal GOD, and much less to give them the knowledge of his will, and of their own duty in its whole extent:—And I could wish that those gentlemen, who argue so strongly for the sufficiency of the light of natural reason, in matters of religion, would travel a little among the *Hottentots* at the Cape of *Good-Hope*, or among the *Mississippi* and *Florida Indians*, and see what fine philosophers the light of nature has made them; and what just notions it has

given them about GOD and religion. And certainly they cannot deny but that those *heathens* have as great degrees of this natural light as themselves, and are much freer from prejudice, as their minds have never been biased or prepossessed by a Christian education.

THE truth is, our baptized infidel deists have borrowed their notions of GOD, and morality from a Christian education, from reading the scriptures, and the ancient philosophers; and then endeavour to persuade themselves and others, that they have taken all these fine notions from the pure, unassisted light of nature and reason. Whereas, in truth, had these very men been born and educated among the *Hottentots* at the *Cape*, or among the *Indians* on the continent of *America*, all their boasted light of reason would not have prevented them from being as brutish canibals and idolaters as other *Indians* and *Hottentots*, among which they lived. Is it not therefore pleasant enough to hear men cry up the sufficiency of natural light in matters of religion, when they have such undeniable demonstrations of its utter insufficiency, from plain experience and matter of fact?

IF infidels will answer to this, that the heathen philosophers attained to very clear notions of the nature of GOD, and moral duty, by the mere unassisted light of nature, and that other heathens might do so too, if they would take the same pains. I answer, this wants proof. It is certain, from many passages in the writings of *Plato*, *Socrates*, *Juvenal* and others, that they had read the *Jewish* scriptures, which were translated into the *Greek* when those men wrote,

wrote, and doubtless they borrowed many of their justest notions about GOD and morality from the law and the prophets, though they do not acknowledge it: And we are morally certain, that *Seneca, Epictetus, Jamblicus, Mark Antony*, and many other heathen philosophers, who wrote since Christianity has commenced, are much indebted to the light of the gospel, for their great improvements in morality: So that, I am verily persuaded that the ancient heathen philosophers have drawn most of their celebrated sentiments concerning GOD and religion, from the scriptures of the *old and new testaments*. But,

2dly. To argue, that because our natural reason may give us some just notions about GOD and moral duties; therefore revelation is unnecessary and useless,—is but about as good sense as to argue, that because we can see the stars and planets with our naked eyes, therefore telescopes are of no use in astronomy. For although we should grant, that a man may, by his own reason, know that there is a GOD, and that he is to be feared, worshipped, loved and obeyed: yet would not a farther revelation be necessary, to give us clearer and juster notions of the nature and will of GOD, and to teach us how we may worship him acceptably to be happy in his enjoyment?—Hence, you see how weak and groundless this objection against revelation is, which is taken from the sufficiency of the light of reason, in matters of religion. But,

3dly. THE infidels object, that to suppose the absolute necessity and great expediency of a revelation, will infer that it must be universal,

extending to all ages, nations, and particular persons. For, say they, as GOD gave the natural sun to enlighten, warm and fructify the whole earth; so if his goodness disposed him to give a revelation to enlighten the minds of men, he would give it to the whole world without exception; whereas the Christian revelation is not enjoyed by the one half of the world, and the greatest part of those who have it, are said to misunderstand and abuse it.—I answer, the matter of this objection supposes the greatest absurdity, and that which is contradicted by universal experience; namely, that GOD almighty is obliged to give the same natural capacities, the same advantages for the discovery of truth, and the same outward blessings of providence to all men, without distinction. For the same reasoning which would prove that the gospel is not a revelation from GOD, because all men do not enjoy it, would equally prove that reason is not the gift of GOD, because GOD has not given as much of it to every dunce and idiot as he gave to *Des Cartes* or *Sir Isaac Newton*; for if GOD is obliged, by his goodness, to give the gospel, with the same advantages, to all nations, ages and individual persons; he must be obliged for the same reason, to give the same honour, the same power, the same riches, the same natural talents and capacities, to all ages, nations and particular persons; these being all the gifts of GOD, as well as the gospel: But this is not so in fact. GOD appears plainly to give all his blessings partially, or in different degrees, to different persons and nations. And therefore, if there is any weight in this objection, it lies as strong against the being and providence



providence of GOD, as against the truth of the gospel; and for the same reasons that it will make men infidels or deists, it will also make them atheists. Let me ask these men, why their brother infidels, the poor *bottensots*, have not the same capacities, learning and notions of GOD and religion as themselves? And when they give me a sufficient answer to this, I will also tell them why GOD has not communicated the Christian revelation with equal advantages to all the world. But,

2dly. THE gospel revelation was certainly intended for the universal good of mankind. Its apostles and ministers were commanded to teach it to all nations, and to preach it to every rational creature, Mat. xxviii. 19. Mark xvi. 16.—And it lies upon infidels to prove that it has not been actually offered to every nation under heaven. It is most certain, in fact, that it has been preached in all the four quarters of the world, *Africa, Asia, Europe* and *America*. Nor do I believe there is one particular kingdom or nation in the known world, in which there has not been endeavours used to propagate it. But if its progress has been obstructed, by persecution, prejudice and obstinacy; and its purity and simplicity corrupted by craft, ambition and mercenary motives; and its propagation neglected by those in whose power it was; its not being universal is owing to no want of care and goodness in GOD, but to the negligence and vices of men; so that the necessity of its universality may be allowed, though it be not in fact, universal.—I answer,

3dly. THAT the very similitude of the natural sun destroys the force of the objection;

for although the sun is the most universal blessing under heaven, without whose influences the whole animal and vegetable creation must necessarily perish; yet even its light and heat are given partially to the world: Some parts of the earth are deprived of its light and heat for six months together, and in the other six months, its rays shine upon them, so faintly and obliquely, as not to be able to produce any fruitfulness in the earth.

IF GOD therefore renders some parts of the earth pleasant and fruitful by the sun, and leaves others barren and desolate, for want of its chearing influences, why may he not permit the light of the gospel to shine clearer, and with more comforting rays, upon one part of the earth than another? For the cases seem exactly parallel.—But,

IF an infidel should ask me, why the gospel revelation was not given to mankind in an earlier age of the world? I might as properly ask that infidel, why God did not create the world sooner than he did?—These things being resolvable only into the sovereign will and pleasure of GOD, who giveth to no man an account of his matters, and who does things as he will, and when he will.

BUT I answer more directly, GOD did reveal his gospel as soon as there was need of it; *i. e.* as soon as man had fallen, and was become sinful. So that Christianity is very near as old as the creation, CHRIST being promised to *Adam* in the garden of Eden, and typified in all the ceremonies and sacrifices of the law of *Moses*. And if the Christian revelation was of a narrow compass at that time, so the faith  
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of believers was proportionably narrow, and had but few objects to be exercised upon.—So that I think the force of this second objection, taken from the necessity of the Christian revelation being universal, in order to its being from GOD, is sufficiently destroyed.—But infidels object,

Illdly, THAT a revelation coming from GOD for the instruction of men, must be very plain and level to the capacities of all men, otherwise it does not answer the design of a divine revelation. But the scriptures of the old and new testaments, say they, are dark, obscure, mysterious and unintelligible, and therefore cannot be a revelation from GOD, for the benefit and instruction of mankind in general.

I answer, no wonder that many parts of the scriptures are obscure and incomprehensible by us, seeing they relate to GOD, whose essence and perfections are infinite and eternal, and whom none, by searching, can find out unto perfection. The pretended obscurity of other passages may, or do, arise from our ignorance of some circumstances and customs referred to, or from the shortness of some relations and accounts, or from some small errors committed in transcribing, printing and translating the scriptures, and these are obscurities which are unavoidable in ancient books, which have been so long in the world as the scriptures: And yet these errors and obscurities in scripture are so inconsiderable in themselves, and most of them so well cleared up by ancient history, that they do not in the least affect the credibility of the revelation, nor impede its usefulness,

usefulness, but rather prove its antiquity, and shew its excellency.

THE scriptures have been written piecemeal, by different pens in different periods of the world and church. And besides the general design of instructing the church in all ages in the great truths and duties of religion, the inspired writers were led to address themselves more particularly to reform the manners of the persons among whom they lived, and to whom they immediately wrote and preached. Now this circumstance, if duly weighed, will afford a good reason why, 'at this distance of time, many passages, both of the old and new testament scriptures, should appear difficult and obscure to us, who do not fully know the reasons for which, and the emergencies and occasions upon which these passages of scripture were spoken and written. In order, for instance, to judge of the wisdom and propriety of many of the ceremonial and judicial laws of *Moses*, it is necessary we should be thoroughly acquainted with the reasons and ends of these laws, the genius and circumstances of that people, and the peculiar danger they were in of being insnared and corrupted by the immoral and idolatrous practices of the neighbouring heathen nations. A thorough knowledge of these things would greatly illustrate the fitness and excellency of many of these laws, which, from a defect of this knowledge, do now appear vain and ridiculous.

MANY of the prophetic signs, parables, emblematical actions and gestures, and many also of their particular reproofs, remonstrances and exhortations, and of the tropes, allusions and similitudes

similitudes used in their discourses, are either entirely misunderstood, or lose much of their force and significancy, or seem even ridiculous to a modern reader, for want of a due knowledge of antiquity, of the spirit, genius and customs of the ancient *Jews*; of the various species of idolatries and immoralities to which they were addicted; and especially, of the methods of instruction then in use among them and the other eastern nations. A knowledge of these things would not only set these obscurities and peculiarities, in the writings of the prophets, above ridicule and contempt; but also make them appear to be the most bold, noble and masterly strokes in all their writings. But ignorant critics, making no allowances between the times, manners and customs of the ancient *Jews* and the modern Christians, would try all things by a modern standard, and therefore must necessarily make a false judgement, in taxing with folly and impropriety, in the ancients, all things that agree not with the taste and manners of the moderns. The justness of this remark is so obvious in itself, that it needs no farther illustration.

Now as it is evident, that a great part of the old testament scriptures were addressed to the ancients, and are peculiarly adapted to the genius, customs and manners of that people to whom they were immediately addressed, they were doubtless well understood by those persons to whom they were addressed, and therefore have wholly answered their end; and if now, through an ignorance of antiquity, some of them are become obscure and unintelligible to us, I see not what argument this can be against  
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credibility and divine authority of the holy scriptures, in which all those facts, principles and doctrines, which are of perpetual use and universal concernment to the church, are handed down to us in the most plain and perspicuous manner.

As for the mysteries of revelation, which are allowed by Christians themselves to be incomprehensible, they were never revealed to us as matters of knowledge, but as matters of faith and admiration, and although all of them are above our comprehension, yet none of them is impossible, or implies a contradiction; and therefore, all of them may, and ought to be believed, as coming from GOD, with whom all things are possible, which imply not a contradiction. And certainly deists, if they have any religion at all, cannot reasonably object against revelation on account of its mysteries; seeing natural religion is almost as full of mysteries as revelation: The very being of a GOD, and almost all his works, being mysteries, as incomprehensible by us, as any mystery revealed in the gospel.

CERTAINLY, if men are not void of common sense, they will not pretend to make their own conceptions the measure of possibilities; nor bring the works and power of GOD to be tryed at the bar of their own shallow judgement! And if an infidel had a single spark of reason in his breast, I might appeal to himself, whether he cannot as well comprehend the mystery of the trinity, or of the incarnation of CHRIST, as the formation of a blade of grass, or the union of the soul and body? Or whether he cannot as easily conceive how CHRIST turned water into wine, as how a plant is  
formed.

formed out of water and earth? So that the smallest mysteries in nature, are equally as inconceivable as the greatest mysteries of the gospel:—As to the prophecies concerning CHRIST, although some of them are allegorical, mystical and obscure, yet many of them are so plain and clear, that they rather seem a history of CHRIST's life and sufferings, than a prophecy concerning them: and as for other prophecies which may seem obscure to us, they may appear clear enough to some future age of the church, when the things foretold in them shall be fulfilled; so that they cannot possibly be proved absurd or useless, by any reasonable inferences.

BUT the truth is, those who argue against the plainness and perspicuity of the holy scriptures, argue themselves to be very weak, or what is worse, very dishonest men.

FOR it is evident to a demonstration, that the great and eternal duties of morality, are nowhere so clearly and plainly laid down, nor so frequently and powerfully inculcated, as in the Christian revelation. The great duties of love to GOD, of righteousness and charity to our neighbour;—of patience, humility, meekness, sobriety, temperance and chastity;—of repentance for sin, and newness of heart and life, may be found in almost every leaf in the bible, so that *he who runs may read*, and the weakest capacity may understand, and I dare confidently venture to affirm that an ordinary capacity will find more solid instruction in morality in the 5th, 6th and 7th chapters of St. *Matthew's* gospel, or the 12th, 13th, 14th and 15th chapters of *Paul's* epistle to the *Romans*, than in the  
best

best system of human philosophy that ever was wrote. And even if we should grant that some necessary parts of the Christian revelation, are too deep and sublime for ordinary capacities, which nevertheless cannot be proved, yet GOD has in all ages appointed a ministry in his church, whose intire business and study it is to explain the doctrines of religion to the meanest capacities.

As for the real depth and obscurity of many things in scripture<sup>a</sup>, the sublimity of many doctrines, the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of the wisdom and love of GOD, in the wonderful plan of our redemption, which passeth all human knowledge, and which filleth the angelic minds with rapture and amazement; and the reasons of many things in the scheme and administration of divine providence, which we cannot fully account for in the present dark and imperfect state; they tend wonderfully to aggrandize the Christian revelation, and are so far from being objections against it, that they are undoubted signatures of its majesty and divine original. They are a security against that contempt and neglect commonly cast upon mean and vulgar things, which are easily attained and understood. The knowledge of that which is sublime raises our desires, excites our ambition, and engages our study and attention. It is fit that rational creatures should have their powers suitably exercised, and these sublime doctrines are excellently adapted to this purpose. The investigation and contemplation of these truths, are a noble exercise of our

<sup>a</sup> 2 Pet. iii. 16. Rom. xi. 33. 11. lv. 8, 9.



Christian patience, industry and diligence, tend to give great and worthy ideas of the unsearchable GOD, who is *wise in counsel*, and *excellent in working*; just and humble notions of our own ignorance and weakness, to keep us in a due dependance on the illuminating spirit of GOD for conduct and direction into all necessary truth, and to excite in us longing desires after that bright and refulgent day, when the veil of ignorance shall be taken from our minds, and in the light of which we shall discover, with infinite pleasure and ease those adorable mysteries of providence and grace, which now elude our most curious and painful researches.

HENCE you see how weak and groundless that objection is, which is taken from the mysteries of Christianity, and from the pretended obscurities of the Christian revelation. I now proceed to a

IV<sup>th</sup> objection, taken from the meanness and simplicity of the scripture stile and phraseology. *Celsus*, and many less competent judges since his days, have objected against the scripture stile and phraseology as mean, simple and unworthy the spirit of GOD. But how the meanness and simplicity of the scripture, even granting the matter of the objection to be true, should be a good argument against its credibility and divine original I cannot see; unless men would bring down GOD to the rules of human eloquence; or take it for granted, that he could not teach mankind the truths and duties of religion, in any other stile or language than that of *Cicero*, *Demosthenes* or *Thucydides*; the standards which these men have set  
up,

up, by which to try all other writings both human and divine.

To examine this matter to the bottom, and to shew at large the rashness and ignorance of this objection, would require more room than I can here spare. I shall only observe a few things briefly.

I. THE truths delivered in scripture are of too serious and important a nature to be dressed in theinsel ornaments of an affected eloquence. The more naked and simple they are, the more grand and lovely they will appear. As a diamond can borrow no additional worth and lustre, but must rather be depreciated and obscured, by being painted with the finest and most brilliant colours; so the truths of religion would rather be tarnished than rendered more amiable, by the taudry ornaments of pompous figures, measured periods, and an inflated diction. Hence we find the most learned inspired writer of the new testament, utterly disclaiming this kind of rhetorical, pompous, ornamented stile in his preaching and writing, as vain and impertinent, beneath the dignity of this subject, and alien to the genius and interest of the gospel. CHRIST, says he, *sent me to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of CHRIST should be made of none effect.—And I, brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of GOD.—And my speech, and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of GOD.—Which things also we speak, not in the*

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words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual<sup>b</sup>. The trifling and doubtful matters which were the common topics of the heathen orators and sophists, needed a parade of words and a pomp of figures, to raise them above-contempt, and to give them an air of importance and resemblance: But the truths of religion despise all such borrowed aids, they appear most lovely and charming in their own native simplicity and grandeur. Besides, had the apostles availed themselves of human rhetoric and eloquence in writing and preaching the gospel, their success would have been ascribed to these sophistical arts, and not to the power of naked truth, and the co-operation of divine influences.—Therefore it pleased God, that this gospel treasure should be put into earthen vessels, lodged in plain, unlearned men, and delivered by them in great simplicity and plainness of speech, that so the excellency of the power which attended it under these seeming disadvantages, might appear to be of God, not of man<sup>c</sup>.

2. WE ought to expect a stile and phraseology in the sacred writers agreeable to the end and intent of their writings, which was to deliver a system of truths and duties for the universal benefit and instruction of all ranks, capacities, nations and ages of men. The sublime and affected obscurity of *Plato's* stile would have been very unfit for this purpose on the one hand; as would the concise, rapid, enthy-

<sup>b</sup> See 1 Cor. i. 17. ii. 1, 4, 13.

<sup>c</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 7.

mematical stile of *Demosthenes* on the other. The more plain and popular the scripture stile and phraseology could be, the better it would be adapted for conveying divine revelations to mankind in general. And yet we might expect a peculiar elevation in the stile of some portions of scripture, where GOD and his works are described, or where he speaks himself immediately to his creatures.

THE holy scriptures may, in some respect, be compared to a *drama*, in which a variety of characters and incidents are introduced; and therefore, the beauty of the whole does not consist in an uniformity of stile and manners, however grand and sublime, but in a proper marking and sustaining of all the various characters, by a stile correspondent to the different personages and matters there introduced. Now that this propriety and distinction of characters is excellently maintained throughout the holy writings, is obvious to every unprejudiced reader. When the glorious GOD condescends to speak, he speaks with a majesty and authority suitable to his sovereign greatness. THUS SAITH THE LORD, I WILL, or I WILL NOT; THOU SHALT, or THOU SHALT NOT, is at once the supreme reason and irreversible law, from which there is no appeal, in most of these passages. The character of *Moses's* natural genius and accomplishments appears uniformly in all his writings. The majesty of a king, mixed with the piety and humility of a saint, breathes in all the writings of *David*. A strain of great sagacity, deep penetration, and universal experience, together with an air of regal dignity, mark and distinguish the writings

tings of *Solomon*. All the elegance of a courtier shines through the prophecies of *Isaiah* and *Daniel*; and the simplicity of a shepherd characterizes the writings of *Amos*. An uncommon zeal and ardour of affection animates every thing that is spoken or written by *St. Peter*; and the writings of *St. John* breathe nothing but holy love, which seems to have been the principal ingredient of his character. *St. Luke* every where shews himself the learned physician; and the nervous and emphatical writings of *St. Paul*, discover not only the depth of his judgement, and the fire and vivacity of his spirit, but also the superior advantages of his education. The spirit of God, while he led the inspired writers into all necessary truth, did, perhaps, refine and elevate their natural capacities by the grandeur of those objects he presented to their minds, but did not entirely change them. Hence we find the holy penmen writing each in their peculiar stile and manner, by which he is distinguished from all the rest; except, perhaps, in a few instances, where they were inspired with the words as well as the matter, and seem to have acted only as *amanuenses* to the holy spirit. Hence arises a charming variety in the scripture stile, which is not only a character of beauty, but also a noble argument of the genuineness and authenticity of the various books of holy writ, each being the genuine character, not only of the age in which it was written, but also the persons who wrote it.

3. THE generality of those who censure the scripture stile are very incompetent judges of this matter. They are either such as know not

the originals, and so judge from translations; or who are unacquainted with antiquity; or who want a true taste to discern and relish the beauties of that noble majesty and inimitable simplicity, which are the distinguishing characteristics of the scripture stile. It is a symptom either of gross ignorance, of great depravity of taste, or of strong prejudice, when that same simplicity which has been so much admired by the learned of all ages, in *Homer*, *Xenophon*, and other ancient authors, and which has established them as the models and standards of all fine, natural and descriptive writing, is so disingenuously decried in the holy scriptures. He who has a true relish for the beauties of these ancient and venerable *pagan* authors, can never be disgusted at the noble simplicity of the sacred writings; but will find the latter to receive much honour upon the comparison. *Longinus*, a more honest *pagan*, and more capable critic than most who now pollute their pens in defaming the holy scriptures, has ranked the writings of *Moses* and *St. Paul*, which make a considerable part of our canon, among the *tout sublime*, and has given instances to support his assertion. To judge of the old testament stile, without a critical knowledge of the Hebrew tongue, and of the customs and manners of antiquity; and to judge of the new testament stile, without an equal furniture for criticism, is plainly to prejudge the cause, and to betray one's ignorance instead of shewing their judgement. An unlearned person may, by the help of a translation, judge of the doctrines and sentiments of an original author; but not of his stile and diction, which must  
suffer

suffer extremely by the best translation; especially if the original is *verse* and the translation *prose*, which is the case with respect to a considerable part of the old testament. Let this experiment be made: Let some of the finest passages of *Virgil's Eneid* be turned into *English* prose by the ablest hand, and compared with *Moses's* second song, Deut. xxxii. or with some of the finest passages in the psalms of *David*, under all the disadvantages of our *English* translation, and I am not afraid to leave the judgement of preference to any impartial *English* reader of good taste, who, I am well assured, must decide in favour of the *Hebrew* bard. And yet, what simple and inelegant things will both of these translations appear when compared with the *Hebrew* and *Latin* originals? And upon a further comparison of the two originals, how far will the spirit, energy and poetic fire of the *Israelite* excel the cold, formal, measured lines of the *Italian*? Not to mention here the difference between their respective themes, which will render the odds, in favour of the *Hebrew* poet, almost infinite!

I DARE boldly venture to appeal to the *English* reader, whether he ever met with any thing in antiquity in the affectionate and persuasive kind, under the disadvantage of a translation, to excel the last addresses of *Moses* and *Joshua* to the children of *Israel*<sup>d</sup>? Or any thing in history more natural, moving and affecting than the scene of *Abraham's* offering up his son *Isaac* on mount *Moriah*<sup>e</sup>? Or the history

<sup>d</sup> See Deut. xxix. 29, 30, 31, 32. Josh. xxiii. 24.

<sup>e</sup> Gen. xxii.

of *Joseph* and his brethren in *Egypt*<sup>f</sup>? Or any thing more grand and sublime than many passages in the *psalms* and *prophets*<sup>g</sup>? Or any thing more tender and fit to excite sentiments of sorrow and compassion, than the lamentations of *Jeremiah*? Or any thing more masterly and convictive than the reasonings of *St. Paul*, in many parts of his epistles<sup>h</sup>? In a word, if we impartially consider the nature of the truths revealed in scripture, and the scope and design of their revelation, we will be obliged to confess that the wit of man could not have devised a more proper stile and phraseology for the conveyance of these truths to mankind, than that in which they are clothed by the sacred pen-men. Every thing in these oracles of truth is perfectly decent and in character; and there is reigning through the whole, such a mixture of inimitable majesty, immaculate purity, and undefining simplicity, as to an unprejudiced mind, speaks not obscurely their divine original, as will for ever set them above the censure and contempt of all wise and good men, and leave them no other enemies than such as are disposed to speak evil of things which they know not.

**Vth objection.** CHRISTIANITY has done more harm in the world than ever it has done good. The Christian church, say they, has been a perpetual scene of persecution, avarice, ambition and bloodshed. Millions of men have lost their lives by it, and millions are still suf-

<sup>f</sup> Gen. xxxix. 45.

<sup>g</sup> See *Psalms* l. 104, 107, 139. *Is.* 40, &c.

<sup>h</sup> See especially *Rom.* i—v. chap. *Heb.* i—ix chap.   
fering.



fering. Christians are the bitterest enemies in the world to one another, and their religion is the occasion of continual injustice, oppression and violence, and therefore it cannot come from GOD, who is the author and promoter of love, peace, harmony and justice! I answer,

THIS is indeed a lamentable truth: And CHRIST himself foretold that his religion would be the accidental occasion of all these things, which proves him to have been a true prophet. *I am come not, says he, to send peace upon earth, but a sword; for I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes shall be those of his own household*<sup>1</sup>. And again, *I am come to send fire on the earth, and what will I, if it be already kindled*<sup>2</sup>? And the prediction is so much the more remarkable, in that the religion which he came to settle in the world had so contrary a tendency, and was so unlike to produce such an effect. But to say that the Christian revelation has been the proper efficient-cause of these troubles and confusions, is the most palpable and injurious falsehood!—It is evident to every one, who knows any thing of the nature and genius of the gospel, that its principles and precepts, are directly opposite to all cruelty, inhumanity, violence, oppression and bloodshed. It commands us to be subject and obedient to magistrates; to give honour to whom honour, and tribute to whom tribute is due;—to love our neighbours as ourselves;—to forgive those that offend us, as we expect

<sup>1</sup> Matth. x. 34, 35.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xii. 49.

forgiveness of God;—to love our enemies; to bless them that curse us; to do good to them that hate us; to pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us;—if our enemy hungers, to feed him; if he be thirsty, to give him drink; to render good for evil, and blessing for cursing; to be meek under injuries; patient under sufferings;—merciful and and compassionate to the poor and afflicted;—to do good unto all men; and, if it be possible, as much as in us lies, to live peaceably with all men. Nay, the author of Christianity has forbid personal revenge in such strong terms, that the *Quakers*, and some other Christians, have apprehended, though foolishly, that it is unlawful for a Christian to take up arms against an enemy, even for the defence of his own life or property<sup>1</sup>. And can it be therefore supposed, with the least shadow of reason, that such a revelation as this can inspire men with unjust, inhuman and persecuting principles, which breathes nothing but peace, love, charity, meekness and forbearance?—The truth is, all the injustice and violence, and persecution and bloodshed which infidels have unjustly ascribed to Christianity, have proceeded from the malice, ambition and avarice of wicked men. If therefore men profess to be Christians who are not, and make a pretext of religion to perpetrate their own lusts and villanies; it is a pity the Christian revelation should be blamed for the cruelty and hypocrisy of those who are its greatest enemies, and if many *millions* of men have rather suffered the cruellest of deaths,

<sup>1</sup> See Matth. v. 39.

than to forsake the Christian religion; this is rather a strong proof of their thorough conviction of its truth and divine authority, than any argument against it. But,

VI. INFIDELS object, that if Christianity was a revelation from GOD to instruct men in the way of duty and happiness, it must unite all who profess in the same sentiments and the same practices; for as truth is uniform, so the way of duty and happiness must be uniform also: But, say they, Christians are divided into a *thousand* different sects and religious opinions, and therefore, that revelation which they embrace and believe, cannot be from GOD the author of truth and unity.

I MIGHT here, with as much shew of argument, object also against reason, and deny that it is a gift of GOD, because it does not unite the *deists* and other infidels in the same opinions about GOD and religion; so that it is with a very bad grace, that they urge this objection against Christianity; for it is demonstrable, that infidels differ much more widely in their sentiments about GOD and religion than the Christians do. Some of them deny the being of a GOD altogether.—Some believe that matter is GOD.—Some believe a GOD, but deny a providence.—Some believe both a GOD and providence.—Some believe the immortality of the soul, and a future state of rewards and punishments; others deny both, and believe that our souls perish and die with our bodies;—Some hold that virtue is its own reward, and vice its own punishment; others believe that virtue and vice are rewarded and punished in another state.—Some believe the transmigration of the soul

soul into another body; others hold that the soul goes from one planetary world to another till it arrives to a state of perfection. Some believe that the world was created; others believe it is eternal. Some believe that our souls are parts of GOD; others think they are created spirits. Some believe there are angels and devils; others deny both. Some plead for the duty of prayer; others laugh at it. Some found moral obligations upon the perfections of GOD; others on the eternal differences and relations of things, independent of GOD, and others upon the moral sense, or the dictates of conscience, and others deny that there is any such thing as morality, or virtue, or vice in the world. Now all these reject the Christian revelation, and follow the pure light of reason, as they call it; and yet you see how finely they agree in their sentiments, and into what pretty opinions their natural light has led them; and yet these are the men who make a noise about the division of Christians! Pray tell us, say they, which sects of Christians are in the right, and then we will be Christians; whether we are to follow the *Romans* or the *Protestants*? And if the *Protestants*, whether we must be *Lutherans*, or *Calvinists*, or *Arminians*, or *Arians*, or *Antinomians*, or *Anabaptists*, or *Quakers*?

MAY we not, with as much reason, ask them which of the infidels are in the right? Whether we are to be *atheists* or *deists*? Whether we are to follow *Hobbes*, or *Spinoza*, or *Vanninus*, or *Shaftsbury*, or *Bolingbroke*, or *Chubb*, or *Collins*, or *Tindal*, or *Morgan*, or *Blunt*, or *Gildon*, or what other?

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THE truth is, Christians do not differ so much in their religious opinions as infidels would have it; not half so widely, at least, as they themselves do, who pretend to be guided by the clear and unerring light of reason. The half of the differences among Christian divines are only about smaller matters, which are not necessary to salvation. I am persuaded, at least, that all real Christians, of every denomination, are exactly agreed in their sentiments about all necessary matters of faith and duty, however they may be distinguished by different names, and hold different opinions about indifferent things. And if some have called themselves Christians who really are not, and have made the bible speak nonsense and blasphemies, by broaching absurd and heretical opinions; this abuse is to be charged upon themselves, and not upon the revelation, which they have notoriously perverted to serve their own wicked purposes. And, indeed, if we are to reject the scriptures because they have been differently understood by different persons; we shall, for the same reason, be obliged to reject all natural religion, seeing there is not one article in it, not even that of the being of a GOD, which has not been both denied and differently understood! You see, therefore, how groundless and ridiculous this objection is.

VII. INFIDELS tell us, that miracles are impossible, seeing GOD has established the course of nature invariably from the beginning, and will not alter it; and therefore, the Christian revelation, which is pretended to be established by miracles, must be a vile imposture, and a ridiculous fable!

SEE

SEE how some men will talk nonsense rather than believe Christianity! This opinion of infidels must proceed, either from a notion that GOD himself, who has established the order and course of nature, cannot vary from it; or else, that GOD is determined in all his actions, either by some external necessity (and this is *Hobbes's* doctrine of necessity above the Gods); or else, by an eternal fitness of things, absolutely independent on his will, both of which are absurd and extremely injurious to the deity! For the will of GOD, directed by the dictates of his own wisdom and goodness, must be the cause of all his works; otherwise he is not a free and independent being, and to suppose this, destroys the very notion and idea of a GOD! If, therefore, GOD is an infinitely perfect and free being, he is able to do whatsoever does not imply a contradiction. But what contradiction does it imply, to stop that sun a few hours over the valley of *Jehossaphat*, which he first put in motion? Or to raise the dead, to whom he first gave life! Or to turn water into wine, which he first formed out of water? Or to restore health to the sick, or sight to the blind, or hearing to the deaf, or speech to the dumb, who at first gave life, and ears, and eyes, and tongues to all persons? Is it impossible for GOD to alter the laws he has made, or to perform things without the help of natural causes, who formed nature itself? Especially when these miraculous works were performed for the most noble, necessary and beneficent end, namely, to give credit and authority to a divine revelation.

INDEED,

INDEED, if infidels would but open their eyes, they might see as great wonders as these every day, in the works and laws of nature; which, however, are become so familiar to our senses, that they cease to be thought miracles. But,

VIII. INFIDELS tell us it is of small consequence, whether we believe Christianity or not, provided our practice be good; for morality is all. I could wish, that infidels, who talk so much of morality, would practice more of it; for it is well known that most of them have as little morality as the Christians, and a great deal less. However, I answer, this is about as good reasoning as to say, it is no matter whether the best means to attain any end be used, so the end be but attained. Or to say, it is no matter whether a house has any foundation or not, so the superstructure be good. It cannot be denied, that knowledge and good principles are necessary foundations for a good practice, unless we would adapt the old *Romish* maxim, that ignorance is the mother of devotion. Now, if the Christian revelation contains the best principles and motives of morality, our belief of those principles and motives is a matter of real importance, and of great consequence. So that, in order to our practice being good, it is of great moment to us to believe Christianity, which lays a foundation for the best practice and the purest morality. Besides, the belief of Christian revelation, is really itself a moral duty, when it is sufficiently evident that it comes from God; for it is as fit we should attend to the voice of God in external revelation, as in any common dictate of reason,

reason, and it is as wicked and immoral to reject a book, which is attended with all the internal and external characters of a revelation from GOD, as it is to injure our neighbour, and perhaps much more so. But,

IX. INFIDELS say, that the Christian revelation has not that power to reform mens lives, which Christians pretend; for many who believe the gospel are among the worst of men. A great shame this indeed, for Christians, who profess so excellent a religion, and believe they shall be saved or condemned according as they observe or neglect its doctrines! But I answer, this indeed proves that many professing Christians are hypocrites, who neither believe nor obey the gospel; but does not, in the least, affect the truth, or excellency of the gospel itself: For in order to injure the credit of the Christian revelation, infidels must prove that its doctrines have a natural or necessary tendency to make men wicked, but this they can never do. The truth is, if many Christians are wicked and immoral men, it is because they either do not firmly believe or seriously consider the principles and motives of the gospel, but give way to the power of evil habits, contracted by a wilful indulgence; and therefore, Christianity is not at all answerable for their impiety; unless infidels would have it to compel and force men to be good, by laying an irresistible necessity upon the will, which would be to destroy the very foundations of virtue, according to their own principles!

I SHALL now conclude with a reflection or two on what has been said. And,



ist. PERHAPS some of my hearers may be ready to object against all my answers to these objections, by saying that many of them are so weak and trifling as not to deserve an answer. What, may you say, are these the best reasons which deists and other infidels can offer, for their not believing and embracing the Christian religion? I answer, these are indeed some of the weightiest and strongest objections I have ever learned, either from their mouths or writings, unless perhaps you will allow, that a loud laugh against *priestcraft*; or a witty sneer at some text of scripture, may have more force and reason in it than any of these objections. And indeed this last way of reasoning, is that by which they make most profelytes among the low wits, and profane young sparks of the age, who generally understand no other reasoning. And I take the liberty to assure you, that I have set these objections also in their fairest light, and strongest point of view, that you might see their whole force; and so, by the answers, be convinced of their extreme weakness.

To what therefore shall we impute it, that men, pretending so much to reason as the *deists* do, shew so little of it when they come to argue against Christianity? Is it because they are dunces and blockheads above all other men? No, I have a better opinion of many of them than all this. Some of them are certainly considerable wits, and men of good natural parts and a liberal education. But may we not naturally and reasonably suppose, that God, in a way of righteous judgement, darkens and infatuates the understanding of such persons,  
who

who will bring the almighty's actions to their own shallow judgements, and set up their reason against GOD? Is it unreasonable to believe that GOD may give over these men to blindness of mind and hardness of heart, who despise the goodness of GOD, in rejecting the revelation of his will; and who, through an intolerable and contumacious pride of understanding, set up their own darkned reason as the adequate guide and judge in all matters of religion, and refuse to submit to that light which came down from heaven? Is it not fit and right to suppose, that GOD should pour contempt and foolishness upon that understanding which exalteth itself above his own infinite wisdom and truth, and that he should darken that reason which obstinately shuts its eyes against the evidences of divine light, thus inflicting an exemplary punishment on that very faculty of the mind, which lifteth itself up against him?—*Thus, as it is written, GOD destroyeth the wisdom of the wise, and bringeth to nought the understanding of the prudent;—and makes it appear, that (that which men esteem) the foolishness of GOD, is wiser than the wisdom of men;—so that after that in the wisdom of GOD, the world by wisdom knew not GOD, it pleased GOD, by (what some call) the foolishness of preaching the gospel, to save them that believe<sup>m</sup>. And I think the apostle has given us a very good account of this matter which may be literally applied to infidels<sup>n</sup>. Because, says he, speaking of idolaters, when they knew GOD, they glorified him not as GOD, neither were thankful; but became vain in*

<sup>m</sup> 1 Cor. i. 19, 21, 25.

<sup>n</sup> Rom. i. 21, and onwards.

*their imagination, and their foolish heart was darkened; professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.—And even as they did not like to retain GOD in their knowledge, GOD gave them over to a reprobate mind.—And that other passage<sup>o</sup>, they receive not the love of truth, that they might be saved; wherefore GOD shall send them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie, that all those may be damned, who believe not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness.* If therefore infidels can offer no good reasons for rejecting Christianity, it is owing to the badness of their cause, which cannot be defended; and if they sometimes quibble without reason, and talk downright nonsense, it seems not unreasonable to believe, that as their minds are strongly prejudiced against the truth of GOD, so GOD, in a way of just judgement, blinds their understandings, and leaves them under strong delusions, that they should believe lies; that so they may be damned who receive not the truth in the love of it, but who have pleasure in unrighteousness. It is not to be wondered then, if such men, professing themselves to be wise above GOD, should, as a consequence of this, become fools, and appear to be such by their infatuated reasonings. May the LORD preserve us from this dreadful state, and the danger and misery which attends it!—May he powerfully prevent us from shutting our eyes against the light, and from those destructive prejudices which would render us incapable of receiving the truth in the love of it!—And, seeing we have the truth so evidently on our side, let us

<sup>o</sup> 2 Theff. ii. 10, 11, 12.

examine more and more its sacred evidences, that we may be always ready to render a reason to every man that asketh us of the hope that is in us, with meekness and fear. But,

2dly. LET it not in the least weaken our firm adherence to the Christian revelation, what infidels may object against particular texts and passages of scripture; for, besides that multitudes of those particular objections are proved to be mere calumnies and falsehoods, arising from the ignorance or malice of the objectors; yet even granting that there are some lesser errors crept into our bibles, by often transcribing, translating and printing, which, I believe, no sober protestant will deny, yet they are such as do not at all impair the credibility of the scriptures, nor, in the least affect our duty and happiness. GOD never intended to give us a compleat system of *rhetoric*, or *chronology*, or *philosophy* in the bible, but only a revelation of necessary truths and duties; and therefore all that his providence is concerned for, is to preserve this revelation from such capital errors or defects as might render the scriptures incapable of answering this end. And for ought that appears, this end might have been sufficiently answered, although some entire books out of the canon of scripture, had been lost or destroyed. JESUS CHRIST lived a holy life, taught excellent doctrines, did great miracles, died upon the cross, rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, poured the spirit of light and truth upon his disciples. These are the great facts upon which the truth of Christianity is built, and therefore all the objections of infidels against Christianity are vain and trifling,

trifling, unless they can disprove these facts, upon which it is established, as upon a sure foundation. Therefore *having this sure word of prophesy, we would do well to take heed to it, as unto a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in our hearts; knowing this first, that no prophesy of the scripture is of private interpretation; for the prophesy came not in old time, by the will of man; but holy men of GOD speak as they were moved by the HOLY GHOST P.*

P 2 Pet. i. 19, 20, 21.

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## S E R M O N III.

### Positive proofs of Christianity.

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#### I PETER i. 16.

*We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty.*

**I**N our text the apostle exculpates himself before the Christians, to whom he writes, from the charge of imposing upon their credulity, by forging a cunningly devised fable, and urging it upon their belief and practice as a divine revelation coming from GOD, and assures them that the *coming of Jesus Christ*, or his manifestation in human nature, and *his power* in working miracles, forgiving sins, and redeeming souls, were not *salaciouſly* invented, or *rashly* credited by the apostles; but were believed by them upon the most *rational* and *satisfactory* evidence; three of them, *viz. James, John* and himself, having been *eye-witnesses of his majesty* as well as of his miracles, having had an ocular

lar demonstration of his appearance and resplendent glory on the mount of transfiguration, and having heard with their own ears a voice from heaven, even from the *excellent and glorious GOD himself*, declaring him to be *his well beloved son, in whom he was well pleased*, upon that solemn occasion ! See verses 17, 18. So that the apostles were well assured from this divine attestation, as well as others, that the gospel which they preached was *the truth of GOD*, and therefore could heartily and zealously urge it upon the faith and obedience of others, as a revelation of great and unspeakable importance.

I HAVE already laid before you some presumptive arguments for the truth of the Christian revelation, and answered some objections urged against it by infidels.

MY design upon the present occasion is, from these words to offer some more direct and positive arguments in behalf of the *truth, credibility and divine original* of the new testament revelation ; and to prove that the Christian ministry *do not follow cunningly devised fables*, when they preach unto the world, *the power and coming of the lord Jesus Christ* ; but that they do indeed *speak the words of truth and soberness* : And therefore, if the truth of *our gospel be hid* in a Christian country, *it is hid to them that are lost, whose minds the God of this world, even the prince of darkness, hath blinded with the most fatal and inveterate prejudices*, which if persisted in by a careless neglect, or a perverse obstinacy, must lead them to certain and aggravated misery.

BUT before I enter upon this argument, it will be necessary to make a previous remark or two, in order to the fair state of the question.

1st. As the facts upon which the truth and divine original of Christianity are founded, have happened in the world near *eighteen hundred* years ago, infidels cannot expect that we should give them an *ocular demonstration* of these facts, at this distance of time. As the gospel is a history, all that they can reasonably require is, *sufficient historical evidence* of the truth of the facts contained in it. To insist upon *any other* testimony of the truth of Christianity, is to insist upon an *absurd impossibility*: And if a person will continue to be an infidel after receiving *such* sufficient evidences of the truth of Christianity, as the nature and reason of the thing will admit; it is a manifest proof of *incorrigible obstinacy*, which would as probably reject *ocular or mathematical demonstration* as that kind of evidence which is *strictly* sufficient and reasonable. Again,

2dly. IT cannot be reasonably expected that GOD has fixed the ground of our belief of the truth of Christianity, upon such *self-evident principles* as *necessarily* to force our assent. For as GOD has placed us here in a state of *trial*, and as one part of this *trial* consists in believing upon *reasonable evidence*; so we have no reason to expect that the evidences upon which the grounds of our faith are built, should be any *higher or clearer* than what is *strictly* reasonable, that so there may be still some room left for the *virtue of believing*. If you ask me what virtue there can be in believing upon reasonable and sufficient evidence? I

answer,



answer, although it is undoubtedly true that our faith or assent must *follow* conviction, and our belief will necessarily preponderate on that side of the question where the *greatest evidence* lies; yet it must be allowed to be a virtue and happiness to preserve the mind in such a *balance* or *frame of judging*, as to give its assent only upon *sufficient* or *reasonable* evidence, without requiring *more*. And general experience teaches us, that *prejudice* as often prevents men from believing where they have *sufficient evidence*, as it engages them to believe where there is *no evidence* at all. As therefore we are not to expect that Christianity is unsupported by reasonable and sufficient evidence, so neither are we to require a degree of evidence above what is strictly sufficient, in order to our believing it.—And so indeed it is.—The evidences of the truth of our holy religion are nor *so demonstrative* as to *force* our assent, nor *so obvious* that *every* careless, debauched and obstinate infidel must *necessarily* be convinced by them. And at the same time, they are such as every person of an *ordinary capacity*, who searches with *diligence*, *honestly* and a *teachable disposition* of mind, may discover with *sufficient ease*.

Now these things being allowed, let us enquire what are the facts upon which the truth and divine original of Christianity depend, and what reason we have to believe that these facts are really true. Now the infidels themselves must allow, that if there really was such a person as Jesus Christ; if his life, character, miracles and prophecies were such as the gospel informs they were; if he really arose from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and poured out

holy ghost upon his disciples on the day of pentecost, and enabled his apostles, who were illiterate men, to speak all manner of languages, and work all manner of miracles, for the confirmation of the gospel, as is pretended—I say, the infidels themselves must allow, that if these facts are really true, then Christianity is a divine revelation come from GOD!

BUT the question now returns. “What reason have we to believe that these facts are really true, and that they are not cunningly devised fables, invented by priests and politicians to keep the world in awe, and to lay a foundation for avarice, ambition and spiritual slavery?” I answer, if these facts were of a public nature, done for the most part in open view, and before multitudes of witnesses, both friends and enemies.—If a history of these facts is given by a sufficient number of persons, who were perfectly acquainted with them, and upon this acquaintance, firmly persuaded of their truth and reality.—If these historians appear from their whole character to be persons of plain sense, great probity and undesigning simplicity, who could have no possible interest nor advantage in forging or disguising these facts which they relate; and finally, if it can be sufficiently proved, that the histories of these facts were written by the very men whose names they bear, and in that very age when the facts were done, and that these histories have suffered no material alteration in any intermediate age since they were written; where these several foundations of truth concur, they lay a firm ground, by the justest rules of criticism, to receive the accounts given of such facts as true. And I can appeal

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to infidel's themselves whether they do not firmly believe a thousand facts recorded in ancient history, which fall short of this degree of evidence.

AND yet *all* these circumstances, and a great many more, happily concur in an eminent and signal manner in favour of those facts upon which the truth and divinity of the Christian religion is founded. In order to prove this in a plain, easy and methodical manner, I shall proceed in the following method, which will amount to the same thing as the above *criteria*, or characteristics.

1st. I SHALL shew the *number* of the standing witnesses, by which the facts which support Christianity are recorded. 2dly. I shall shew their *integrity*. 3dly. Their *skill* or ability to judge of the facts which they relate. 4thly. Enquire what their *design* could be in relating those facts. 5thly. Shew the *consistency* and *agreement* of their various relations. 6thly. Produce some testimonies in favour of the truth of these facts, taken from the *professed enemies* of Christianity. And 7thly. endeavour to make it evident beyond reasonable contradiction, that the histories of those facts which are contained in our new testament, have been handed down to us *safely*, and without any *material* alteration : Which seven articles if they can be sufficiently proved, will make it appear that Christianity is *no cunningly devised fable*, but a truly divine revelation coming from GOD ; it being impossible in the nature of things, that any historical facts can receive higher evidence than this ; and therefore, if infidels cannot be convinced by such

such an evidence, it is because they are incapable of conviction.

I ACKNOWLEDGE indeed that the shewing of these particulars at *large* and pouring *all* that *light* and *evidence* upon them which they are *capable* of receiving, would require a *large volume*. But as I am limited to the compass of a short discourse, I must study *brevity*, and bring the principal evidences into as *narrow limits* as possible.

Ist. THEN I am to consider the *number* of standing witnesses, by which the facts which support Christianity are recorded, and these are principally four, *viz. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John*, who wrote, as it were, four distinct histories of the life, character, doctrines, miracles, prophecies and sufferings of Christ.

Two of these were *apostles* of Christ, *ear-witnesses* of all his doctrines and parables, and *eye-witnesses* of most of his miracles. *Mark* was a *disciple* and *companion* of *Peter*, who was one of the earliest disciples of Jesus, and although not an apostle himself, yet sufficiently certified of the truth of what he wrote. *Luke* was born at *Antioch*, and converted by *St. Paul*, he was a physician by profession, and of consequence a man of letters; which plainly appears by the style of his gospel, and his history of the acts of the apostles; both of which he is said to have written in *Paul's* hired house at *Rome*, under the emperor *Nero*; and although he was not an *eye and ear-witness* of the facts which he relates concerning Christ, yet he affirms in the beginning of his gospel, that he had *perfect understanding* of all these things. *αὐθεν*; i. e. *from above*, or by *divine inspiration*, Luke i. 3.

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Now although *four* good witnesses are sufficient to establish the truth of any fact, yet to these we may add *St. Paul*, who has written fourteen epistles to the Christian churches, which make a great part of the new testament, and his evidence is still the *stronger*, as he was by *nation* and by *prejudice*, one of the *strongest* and *fiercest* enemies against Christianity before his miraculous conversion; and therefore, his evidence may be regarded as, in some sense, the evidence of an enemy. Besides, we have *Peter*, the penman of our text, and *James* the less, and *Jude*, all of which were constant companions and followers of Christ; eye and ear-witnesses of his works and doctrines, and penmen of some part of the new testament; and therefore, all of them *standing evidences* of the truth of those facts upon which Christianity is founded. But,

IId. HAVING produced eight standing witnesses of the truth of those facts upon which Christianity is founded, and who have all given the *most solemn* testimony to it, by their writings now in our hands; we come next to shew the *integrity* of the witnesses; integrity being a *necessary qualification* in a witness. And this appears plainly in the *artless* and *undisguised* manner of their narrations. They tell us of many *strange things* which Christ did, and which they themselves were enabled to do through his name, and by a power derived from him, which they understood to be *miracles*, and leave their readers to draw the conclusion, whether the argument taken from these *strange works* is sufficient to prove the *divine mission* of Christ, or whether these things might be done according

ing to the *ordinary laws of nature*, without the extraordinary interposition of the *finger of GOD*. They never run out into fulsome or flattering praises of their master, nor make him shine in comparison with other prophets or wise men; but leave his own *words and works* to speak for him. They never conceal *their own errors mistakes* or *human infirmities*, nor those of one another, but relate them with the most artless simplicity, although some of them might seem greatly to their prejudice. *Matthew* is confessed to be a *publican*. The *quarrel of Zebudee's sons* about pre-eminence is plainly told. The *backsliding of Peter*. The *diffidence and unreasonable obstinacy of Thomas*. The *treachery of Judas*. The *cowardice of all the apostles*. The *diffension between Paul and Earnabas*. And *Paul's* withstanding *Peter* for symbolizing with the Jewish converts, are none of them *conceal'd* or *palliated*, but are all of them set in the *strongest* point of light. They deliver their testimony without *hesitation* or *doubting*, and yet not with *too violent asseverations*; not seeming in the least to doubt but that the truth of their relations would make its way in the world, by the *force* of its own evidence. And to confirm all, most, if not all of them, *John* excepted, laid down their lives to confirm their testimony to the truth of these facts which they had related, which puts their *sincerity* and *integrity* beyond all possible doubt.

IIIIdly. As we cannot doubt of their integrity, so neither can we reasonably call in question their *skill* or ability to judge of the facts which they relate. Their skill was certainly *equal* to their task, which was only to  
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give a *plain, honest* account of what they *saw, and heard, and felt, and did.*

EVERY man who has eyes and ears and common sense may do this: It requires but a small measure of discernment to distinguish between a blind man, and one who can see; between a dumb man, and one that can speak; between a sick man, and one in good health; between a dead man, and one who is alive.— It needs no great share of knowledge or penetration, to distinguish between water and wine, or to be certain whether Jesus Christ, whom they had familiarly conversed with before his crucifixion, was risen again on the third day, or ascended visibly in their presence towards heaven, or whether they were endued with miraculous powers a few days afterwards, according to his promise! Certainly the writings of the apostles makes it appear that they were capable enough of judging of these facts, which they saw, and heard, and did. They could not possibly be *deceived* themselves, in things *so obvious to all their senses, so frequently done before them, in the presence of multitudes, and which they so frequently did themselves.* in the name, and by the power of their master. To deny the apostles therefore to be *competent judges* in the matters of fact which they relate, is to deny them the *common senses and reason* of mankind. Again,

IVthly. WE are to consider what the *design* of the evangelists could be in relating these facts; for although they could not be deceived themselves, they might possibly be tempted to deceive others, and so to amuse and surprize us with *cunningly devised fables,* which  
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the apostle in our text denies that they did : And indeed *what possible view* could the apostles have in forging and broaching these facts, if they were LIES? Could they promise themselves *honour* by putting such a cheat upon mankind? No, certainly, but the greatest imaginable *contempt and ridicule*, both from Jews and Gentiles ; their doctrine of Christ crucified was to the Jews, a *stumbling-block*, and to the learned Greeks, *foolishness*, both agreeing in this reproach against the Christians, that they were the disciples and worshippers of a CRUCIFIED MALEFACTOR. Could they promise themselves *wealth* by such an imposture? No such thing, *poverty* as well as *contempt* was their certain portion. The Jews would admit them into no place of power or profit in their nation, but looked upon them as the *professed enemies* both of their religion and of their civil privileges. And what *worldly advantage* could a few *mean, illiterate* men hope for, by endeavouring to cry down the *established religion* of all the heathen nations, and to set up another, so *contrary* to it in every respect, and which laid so *severe a restraint* upon the vices, passions, and carnal interests of men? And as for carnal pleasures, not only *their own principles* tied them up from an indulgence in these, but also the *circumstances* they were in could leave them no hopes of enjoying either worldly pleasure or ease.

Nay, we must be obliged to suppose that the apostles were the GREATEST OF ALL IDIOTS if they did not *certainly know* that the propagation of such a religion would *inevitably* expose them to *shame and contempt*, to *bonds and imprisonment*,



sonment, to *abuse* and *ill-treatment*, and to the *continual danger* of their lives. And sad experience daily taught them that this was *all the reward* they were to expect from the world, for attesting and publishing the facts upon which Christianity is founded. Hence it appears very plain, that these men could have *no imaginable wordly view, design, or motive* to forge such facts, and publish them in the world; and that nothing but a consciousness of the *truth* of these facts, and of their **UNSPEAKABLE IMPORTANCE** to mankind, could urge persons in their *right senses* to such a conduct. And even if we could suppose that *two or three* of these men might be mad enough to endure poverty, contempt, persecution and death in the obstinate vindication of a **KNOWN LIE**; yet that *all* of them, and so *many thousands* besides, should be guilty of such *unparalleled folly*, is beyond all credibility. And he who can believe such a thing, I am certain can make no reasonable scruple to swallow all that the *pope* or *Mahomet* teaches, so that such cannot be infidels *for want* of credulity! But,

Vthly. **ANOTHER** proper mark of credibility in witnesses is, the *agreement and consistency* of their different relations; for, if they disagreed or contradicted each other in these matters of fact, of which they pretend to have *certain knowledge*, this would indeed destroy the *credit* and *force* of their testimony: But this they certainly do not, either in matters of *fact* or *doctrine*. The evangelists all agree in the principal facts, and yet they disagree so much in their manner of relating them, as to remove all suspicion of *collusion* or *combination* in spreading

ing a fraud. *Matthew, Mark and Luke* are principally employed in relating the *miracles* of their master, and the *parables* and other *moral discourses* which he spoke to his disciples in general; in which *Matthew*, who was an eye and ear-witness, is more *copious* and *particular* than the other two, who are more exact and particular in *time* and *place*: And *John*, who is supposed to have wrote his gospel as a supplement to the other three, in an extreme old age, probably near the latter end of the first century, omits most of the facts and discourses which the other evangelists have related; and enters into the more *mysterious* and *recondite* parts of the life and character of Jesus, as he had the honour of a *peculiar* intimacy and familiarity with him. Hence you see, that although some of these witnesses are more large and copious in their testimony than others; and although some omit what others have related, yet they maintain an *exact harmony* in all the facts, which they relate. And besides, all the *practical* writers of the new testament bear witness to the same facts, and argue from them. *Paul, Peter and James* in all their epistles, *corroborate* the testimony of the evangelists, by *building* the whole system of Christianity upon the facts and discourses, which the four evangelists have related concerning Christ; insomuch, that they all give their joint testimony to their *reality* and *veracity*.

NOR is this all. As they all agree in the *facts* which will support Christianity, so they are perfectly harmonious in the *doctrines* which are founded on these facts; although they write at *different times*, in *different places*, to *different churches*,

*churches*, and upon *different emergencies* and *occasions*, yet they deliver the *same doctrines* without variation, which cannot but give *great validity* to the united force of their testimony, and put the truth of it beyond all *reasonable* question. But,

VI. THE professed enemies of Christianity bear witness also to many of the principal facts, upon which we found its truth and divine original, which is as much as we can reasonably expect from enemies. *Josephus*, a Jewish historian of great credit in the learned world, who wrote about forty years after Christ, gives the following testimony of him. “ At this time, “ says he, lived Jesus, a wise man, if we may “ call him a man; for he did wonderful things, “ and was a teacher of men, who willingly “ received the truth, and had many both Jews “ and Gentiles his followers. This was Christ, “ adds he, who, being accused by the princes “ of our nation, was crucified by Pilate. Ne- “ vertheless they who loved him from the first, “ did not cease to love him; for he appeared “ unto them again the third day, as the di- “ vine prophets had foretold this, and many “ other things concerning him, and to this day “ the tribe of Christians, named from him do “ continue.” If any one should say, that this seems *too honourable* a testimony to come from a Jew.—I answer, *Josephus*, though a *professed* Jew, might entertain a good opinion of Christianity, and be *inwardly disposed* to embrace it, though for particular reasons, he might not think proper to *avow* his real sentiments: It is certain, however, that all the written and printed copies of his history contain this para-

graph, and indeed he could not well, as a historian, pass it over in silence.—The same *Josephus* also speaks in very honourable terms of *James* the kinsman of our lord, and of *John* the baptist. He also confirms the authority of the new testament history in many passages concerning *Herod*, *Pilate*, *Gamaliel*, *Festus*, *Felix*, and the destruction of *Jerusalem*, which was so punctually foretold by *Christ*.

*TACITUS*, *Suetonius*, *Dion Cassius*, and all the other Roman historians of the first and second centuries speak of *Christ*, of the death which he suffered, and of the Christians, and of the terrible persecutions which they endured for their *obstinacy*, as they term it; *i. e.* for their not blaspheming *Christ*, and worshipping and sacrificing to the heathen idols.

*PONTIUS Pilate*, who was governor of *Judea* when our saviour suffered, being obliged to give an account to the emperor *Tiberius* of the memorable things which happened during his procuratorship, informed the emperor, among other things, “ of the resurrection of *Christ*, “ and of his miracles, famous over all *Pala-* “ *tine*; and that he was thought by many to be “ the son of *GOD*.”

*THIS* account, it is said, so much affected *Tiberius*, that he would have introduced *Jesus* amongst the number of the Roman Gods, had not the senate opposed his motion; however it had this effect upon him, that he was ever after favourable to the Christians, and threatened death to any who should accuse them. And to this very letter of *Pontius Pilate*, *Justin Martyr* and *Tertullian* appeal in their apologetics, which were written and dedicated to the nobility of *Rome* in  
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the second century, which they never would *dared* to have done, had not *those records* of *Pilate* been then extant.

PLINY the younger, who was proprætor in *Bethynia*, under *Trajan* the emperor, about seventy-five years after Christ's ascension, after making the *strictest enquiry* into the worship and customs of the Christians, by the emperor's orders, writes him, "that the provinces of *Pontus* and *Bethynia* were like to be depopulated by the vast numbers of Christians which suffered martyrdom; and, that he could find nothing amiss in them, but that they used to meet together before day, and sing a hymn to Christ as GOD; binding themselves by oath, not to steal, rob, commit adultery, cheat or do any manner of wickedness."—These letters of *Pliny* are still extant, and common in the hands of the learned, and these passages in them not only prove the *vast progress* of Christianity a few years after the death of Christ; but are also a *noble vindication* of the innocence of Christians from the mouth of an enemy.

BESIDES, those pagan philosophers, who wrote against Christianity, and who were its bitter and avowed enemies, acknowledge the miracles of Christ. *Celsus*, a noted infidel, who lived in the second century, speaks of Jesus the author of the Christian religion, as *having lived a few years ago*, and mentioning many things about the birth, life, miracles, death and resurrection of Christ, tells the Christians, "*these things we have produced out of your own books,*" meaning the new testament; nor does he deny the miracles of Christ, but

ascribes them to magic art. *Julian* the apostate, who lived in the beginning of the fourth century, tells us, “ that *Jesus*, who lived three hundred years ago, did no memorable works, except curing the blind and lame, casting out some devils at *Bethsaida* and *Bethany* ;” and tells us, “ that none of his disciples durst say that he made the heaven and earth, but *John* only.” And *Porphyry*, a bitter enemy to Christianity, who wrote about the year of Christ two hundred and seventy, tells us, that “ *Esculapius* and the rest of the Gods had withdrawn their help of men, and that no man had received any public benefit from them, since *Jesus* began to be worshipped.” Nor do any of the Jews deny that there was such a man as *Jesus*, and that he lived in *Judea*, and was condemned and crucified at *Jerusalem*, in the very age which Christians pretend ; nay, they confess his miraculous works, as appears by their talmud, but ascribe them, like their fore-fathers, to the power of the devil.

Now, better testimonies than these we cannot expect from enemies : for had they acknowledged the divine authority and mission of Christ, they would doubtless have submitted to the gospel, and in such case their testimony would have lost the force which it now has in this view ; namely, to convince us, even by the acknowledgement of our adversaries, that there was such a man as *Jesus Christ*, who was the author and founder of Christianity ; that he did great and miraculous works in the neighbourhood of *Jerusalem* ; that he was condemned and crucified there in the reign of *Tiberius Cæsar* ; that his miracles were notour through  
*Palestine,*

*Palestine*, and at *Rome*, shortly after his death; that many believed then that he rose from the dead on the third day, and that he was the son of GOD; that about forty years after his death, multitudes every where through the Roman empire, worshipped him as GOD, and were his professed disciples, and chose to suffer the cruellest deaths, rather than not to worship and trust in him; and finally, that the books of the new testament were written in the age of the apostles, and were even in the hands of the heathen, and quoted by them in the second century;—so much we learn even at the mouth of the Jews and heathens, who were the bitterest enemies of Christianity. And this naturally leads me to the

VIIIth. AND LAST THING proposed, namely, to make it evident, beyond reasonable contradiction, that the scriptures of the new testament, in which these facts are related, upon which the truth of Christianity is founded, have been handed down to us *safely*, and *without any material alteration from the age in which they were written, till this present time.*

IF it is true, that there was such a divine person as Jesus Christ in the world, in the time of the Roman emperors *Augustus* and *Tiberius*, and that he gave a revelation of GOD's will to men, attested by a number of incontestible miracles, I think it must be allowed that the providence of the *same* GOD would be *deeply interested* in preserving such a revelation from being either *entirely lost*, or *materially altered* in succeeding ages: To suppose otherwise would be an *injurious* reflection both on the *wisdom* and *goodness* of GOD. This is an argument,

which, although I have not now time to enlarge upon it, deserves to be *seriously weighed* and *considered* by such as may be willing to grant, that GOD might have given a revelation of his will by Christ; but who seem to doubt, at the same time, that this revelation has been *falsified* and *materially changed* since it was first delivered.

HOWEVER, not to rest upon this argument alone as conclusive, I think it may be easily made appear, that the Christian revelation neither *has been*, nor *could possibly be*, materially altered since it was first written.

THAT the books of the new testament were actually written by the persons whose names they now bear, cannot be well disputed, nor do I remember that it ever has been disputed, even by the professed enemies of Christianity. *Julian* the apostate, in the beginning of the fourth century, who had wit, learning and inclination enough to have *detected* such a fraud had it been so, never calls the truth of this in question, but expressly mentions *Matthew*, *Mark*, *Luke*, *John* and *Paul* as the authors of these books. The Christian writers of the first century, although it was not their manner to name the authors, quote and allude to all the *four gospels*, and often speak expressly of the apostles as the authors of them. Nay, *Tertullian*, who lived in the year one hundred and ninety-five, appeals to some of the original manuscripts, *written by the hands of the apostles themselves*, which were extant in his time: Nor ought this to be thought strange or incredible, seeing *Quintilian* affirms that the *hand-writing* of *Cicero* was extant in his time, at the distance of some hundreds of years; and we  
may



may be certain, that the Christians would be as careful of the *original memoirs* of the apostles, as the philosophers could be of those of *Cicero*.

BESIDES, as it is certain that the primitive Christians believed the books of the new testament to contain a *divine revelation* given by *inspiration* from GOD, in which *alone* the way of salvation was to be found, and as copies of these books were in the hands of all Christians every where, who could procure them; so it is *utterly incredible* that these primitive Christians should either *designedly*, or *through negligence*, suffer these books to be *altered*; but, on the contrary, we are obliged to suppose they would use all *proper means* to transmit these *sacred records* uncorrupted and entire, as the *most valuable legacy*, to the latest posterity. If we consider also the *vast spread* of the Christian religion, through almost the whole world, in the *very age* of the apostles, and the *vast number* of copies of these books which were dispersed *every where*, where Christianity was planted, and that these books were *constantly read* and *expounded* in all Christian assemblies; it will appear *very incredible* that any *material alteration* should happen in these books in that age; seeing such an alteration could have been easily detected by every sensible Christian, and *especially* by comparing the different copies together. To this we may also add, that the *unhappy* differences in opinion, which early happened among Christians, who yet founded all their different opinions on the same original text, proved a *happy* occasion of preventing the contending parties from *corrupting* or *altering* the

scriptures, and rendered them *vigilant observers* over each other in this particular.

IN the ages immediately after the apostles, the books of the new testament were translated into the ARABIC, SYRIAC, ETHIOPIC and LATIN tongues, for the use of the Christians in those countries, which translations are *still extant*, and vary very little from the Greek original. And we may add to this, that all the Christian writers of the first, second, third and fourth centuries, whose writings we have now in our hands, although they differ from one another in some opinions, yet they quote the scripture in the *same sense*, and *nearly* in the *same words* as they stand at this day in our new testaments.

INFIDELS indeed tell us, that in the dark and ignorant times of popery, namely, about the ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries, the scriptures were taken from the people, and were only in the hands of the pope and clergy, who might alter and corrupt them as they pleased, and who were wicked enough to do so; and therefore, we cannot possibly be sure that we have the scriptures, or the writings of the first Christians now in their purity.

Now this is but a meer *ignorant* or *malicious quibble*, which can have no weight with those who know the true state of things, and can only raise a dust in the eyes of their own ignorant admirers, for it is well known that the *pope* was *never* acknowledged nor submitted to by the *whole* Christian church. So that it had been *in vain* for the Romish clergy to have attempted any alteration in the scriptures, or in the *genuine* writings of the first Christian fathers; seeing

seeing the churches of *Greece* and *Africa*, who are very numerous and learned, and who never would submit to the pope's authority, had these scriptures and writings of the fathers, as well as the Latin church, and could have easily detected such a wicked fraud, had the *latin* church dared to attempt it: But it is manifest that the popes and Romish clergy never attempted to make any considerable alteration in the canon of scripture, whatever other corruptions, or pious frauds may be charged upon them; for had they at all altered the scriptures, it would doubtless have been in favour of their own idolatrous and corrupt practices, in which they differ from the primitive church and all other Christians. But this they have not really done, seeing the very scriptures which they acknowledge, condemn those very errors which they profess and practise; and seeing they do not pretend to found these idolatrous and erroneous tenets, so much upon the scripture revelation, as upon uncertain traditions. This therefore, sufficiently exculpates them from the charge of altering or corrupting the scriptures of the new testament.

NOR is it of more force for infidels to tell us, "that all Christians have not agreed themselves in receiving all the books of the new testament as canonical, but that some whole churches have rejected some of the epistles as spurious;" for this is rather a proof of the caution and prudence of those primitive Christian churches, who scrupled to receive any thing as the word of GOD, until they were well assured that it was such; and this is an evident testimony that the primitive Christians were not so simple and credulous, as infidels would persuade us, but that they

they embraced the scriptures with the *greatest cautiousness* and *circumspection*, and not without the *highest evidences* of their *authenticity* and *divine original*, not being willing to be imposed upon *themselves*, or to impose upon *their posterity* in a matter of such *great moment*. And what makes this argument still the stronger is, that the books which they, *for some time*, rejected, contain nothing in them *peculiar*, nor any thing which they could not have learned in the *other books*, which they received and acknowledged. So that their scruples against these *books* could proceed from nothing but a *prudent cautiousness* of admitting any thing into the canon of scripture, which was not *really scripture*.

It may not be out of place to remark here also, that of all the *various readings* of scripture, which learned men, in these late ages, have collected from all the different printed copies and manuscripts, which are extant, in all the different nations and languages of the Christian world; I say, that out of all these *various readings* of the new testament scriptures, there cannot be formed *one new* article of faith, or branch of duty; which plainly shews how small and inconsiderable the *accidental alterations* are, which the scriptures of the new testament have suffered in *so long* a tract of time, and through *so many* transcribings, printings and translations.

BUT, if after all this, it should be suspected, that the first ages of Christianity might be so *ignorant* and *illiterate*, that the Christian revelation might be *altered* and *corrupted* at the *very fountain head*. I answer, that this supposition must

must also arise either from *gross ignorance*, or from a *malicious design* to raise difficulties and deistical scruples in the minds of ignorant people: For it is well known, that the Christian religion was first propagated in a *very learned* and *inquisitive age* of the world, when human philosophy was arrived to a great degree of perfection, and in *that part* of the world too where human learning and philosophy *flourished most conspicuously*, namely, in the Roman empire. And it is also as certain, that some of its professors were persons of learning and distinction, witness *Paul of Tarsus*, *Luke* the beloved physician, *Joseph of Arimathea*, *Dionysius the Areopagite*, mentioned Acts xvii. 34. *Sergius Paulus* the governor of Crete, mentioned Acts xiii. 12. and a *great company* of the *Jewish priests*, as we see Acts vi. 7. who as they were *men of learning*, so neither could they have any *worldly view* in embracing Christianity. And in the second and third centuries, many Christian converts were amongst the most learned philosophers of their time, before their conversion; who by their writings, now extant, shew themselves to be *very capable judges* of the merits of Christianity; and who could have no other motives to embrace it, but the *love of truth*, and the *power and demonstration* of those evidences, by which its divine original was established. Among these I may mention *Poly carp*, *Justin*, *Irenius*, *Arnobius*, *Origen*, *Tertullian*, *Clemens Alexandrinus* and many others, who *lived* and *wrote* between the years of Christ one hundred, and two hundred and ten. So that they are egregiously mistaken, who imagine that Christianity was first broached in

*times*

*times of ignorance and barbarity, and that none but ignorant and credulous persons embraced it: So far is this from being true, that multitudes of its earliest disciples and first defenders, were better philosophers and scholars, than those puny scribblers, who now pretend to dispute their abilities, and to cry them down as a company of ignorant and credulous fools.*

FROM the whole therefore it appears, that we have no room for doubting that the new testament has *suffered any material alteration since the age of the apostles, when it was written; but on the contrary, the greatest reason in the world to believe, that these sacred records have been handed down with the greatest purity and integrity.* And I dare venture confidently to affirm, that there is *no one ancient fact or history in the world, which has come down to the present age attended with so many, and so convincing circumstances of authenticity and credibility, as the history, facts and writings of Christ and his apostles!* So that if, after all that has been said, under the seven foregoing heads, and I freely confess, that the tenth part has not been said, which might have been said, with great advantage to the argument, yet if after what has been here said, with *great brevity and imperfection, any should doubt of the truth of the new testament history, I am obliged to believe that they are infidels by inclination and not by necessity, and therefore beyond the reach of all rational conviction; and therefore, arguments are utterly lost upon such persons.*

BUT if any should acknowledge the *truth and reality of the facts contained in the gospel history,*

history, and yet *deny* their divine original. If they should *grant* that Jesus Christ punctually accomplished the *prophecies* of the old testament concerning the Messiah, and yet *deny* that he came from GOD. If any should *grant* that he wrought the *miracles* which was ascribed to him, that he *turned water into wine*; that he *encreased the loaves and fishes* under the hands of the eaters; that the *wind and sea*, the most un-governable elements, *were obedient to his command*; that he *cured the most obstinate and inveterate diseases*, which were beyond the reach of medicine, and *dispossessed evil spirits* by a word of his mouth, or a touch of his hand, and that too, in the presence of *multitudes of enemies*, who were narrow and malicious observers; and that he *raised the dead* in the same public manner, and also *arose himself from the dead*, according to his own prediction, and in confirmation of the truth of his doctrines and divine mission; and that he *ascended visibly up towards heaven*, and a few days after *enabled his apostles*, who were ignorant and illiterate men, *to speak all manner of languages*, and *work all manner of miracles*, in the same public manner as he did, and that too, in consequence of a promise he had made them before his ascension, and that these apostles *wrote these very books which we now call the new testament*, which contain a true account of the miracles which Christ and his apostles wrought, and of the doctrines which they taught.—I say, if any person will *grant the truth of all this*, and yet *deny that the new testament is a divine revelation* come from GOD, and maintain that Christ and his apostles *might be impostors*, and that all their miracles  
*might*

might be performed by juggling tricks, or by the power and assistance of evil spirits; and that therefore, there is no certain nor sufficient rational evidence of the truth and divine original of the gospel.

THEN it will plainly follow from this scripture principle, that mankind lye under a *fatal necessity* of being deceived in things which are *most obvious* both to *sense* and *reason*; and that our eyes, and ears, and judgement, and understanding are of no *real service* to us in distinguishing between truth and falsehood, between *realities* and *appearances*;—then farewell all *credit* to human testimony, all *belief* in ancient history, and all *dependence* upon ocular demonstration!—Then error and delusion can be *no fault*, because there can be *no certain* mark to know truth from falsehoods, nor any *certain method* to distinguish between the *works of God*, and the *works of the devil*!—The plain consequence of this will be that we can have *no good reason* to believe either what we *see* or what we *hear*; and then there is an end to all human judgement, and to all reward and punishment! What *monstrous absurdities* flow from this principle of infidelity? And were it to take place as well in *civil*, as in religious matters, what *confusion*, *anarchy* and *desolation* must it *necessarily* introduce into the world!—But if we allow that there is a *GOD*, who governs the world, and that he has made us *subjects capable* of religion, and endued us with *faculties of discernment* agreeable to our present circumstances: Then we will be obliged to acknowledge, that if Christ and his apostles *really did* the works recorded in the history of the gospels and acts of the apostles,



ties, in confirmation of that *excellent system* of morals and divine truths contained in the new testament, they were most certainly *sent and assisted* by GOD; and consequently, that the gospel of Christ is not *a cunningly devised fable* but a DIVINE REVELATION coming from GOD, the father of lights: for to suppose that the *holy and wise* GOD would furnish *impostors*, with such *undoubted credentials* of divine power and authority, and set his seal in so *solemn and astonishing* a manner to a LIE, would be the vilest blasphemy!—And to suppose on the other hand, that the *devil*, even if GOD should grant him the power and permission, would enable Christ and his apostles to work *such miracles*, in confirmation of a religion which, in its nature and tendency, is so evidently *destructive* of his *power and kingdom* among men, is really as incredible as the other supposition. For were this *possible*, then *delusion* could be *no crime*, seeing the temptation would be *too strong* for humanity to resist; so that the *devil* could expect *no advantage* by promoting such imposture.

HENCE I think it follows, that if the gospel history be *true*, which has certainly been proved beyond reasonable doubt, then the new testament is a TRULY DIVINE REVELATION.

piness of men; and tells us, that he " might  
 " have added *several hundreds* besides, in which  
 " *the sacred writers* of the new testament argue  
 " from *those of the old*, in such a manner, as  
 " nothing could have justified, but a *firm per-*  
 " *suasion* that they were *divinely inspired*."

Now, from all this I would draw the following consequence, that if the new testament is a divine revelation coming from GOD, which I have been endeavouring to make evident in some former discourses, then it will follow, that the old testament must be a divine revelation also: For we cannot suppose that Christ and his apostles, being under the infallible inspiration and direction of the spirit of GOD, would have ascribed the same divine inspiration to the writers of the old testament scriptures, had they not been really possessed of it. So that he who grants the divine original of Christianity; must be obliged by consequence to grant the divine original of the Jewish religion also; seeing, the former is but, as it were, the fulfilment, accomplishment and perfection of the latter; and seeing, the latter is so abundantly attested and confirmed by the former.

INDEED the old and new testaments may be properly considered as the *two grand pillars* by which the *arch of revealed truth* is supported; so that when the foundation of either of these pillars is *undermined* or *destroyed*, revelation must fall of course. Every attack therefore upon the credibility and divine original of the old testament scriptures, *equally* affects the whole credit of Christianity. And, on the other hand, every attack upon the truth of Christianity, must  
 ..virtually,

virtually, and by fair consequence, *equally* affect the credibility of the new testament: Because these two revelations have such a *necessary dependance* upon one another, and are so *intimately connected* with each other, that they must *stand or fall* together.

Now although, to a person who is firmly persuaded of the truth of Christianity, there needs no other proof of the divine original and authority of the old testament scriptures, than the testimony of Christ and his apostles;—yet for the farther confirmation and support of your faith in this important article, I shall, in as small a compass as possible, endeavour to lay before you a few arguments, by which we may be fully convinced that the old testament is a divine revelation, that *Moses* is a true historian, commissioned and inspired by God; and that, therefore, the whole of the Jewish religion as delivered by him, and contained in the old testament scriptures, is of divine original and authority.

THAT there was such a man as *Moses* who lived about fifteen hundred years before the Christian *Æra*; that he was a very learned man; that he conducted a vast number of the descendants of *Abraham* out of *Egypt* towards *Judea*, and gave them laws which subsist, and are observed among the *Jews* till this day, and that they have ever retained a great reverence for *Moses* their law-giver, and been very tenacious of his laws, suffering the greatest injuries and cruellest deaths rather than violate them; is not only attested by the *Jews* themselves, but also by the most ancient historians of all the neighbouring nations, the *Egyptians*,

the *Grecians*, the *Phœnicians*, the *Syrians*, the *Chaldeans*, and the *Romans*. They who want a confirmation of this, may meet with full satisfaction in two books of *Josephus* against *Ap-pion*, and in the writings of other antiquaries, who have produced testimonies out of a variety of ancient historians, to prove the antiquity of *Moses*, and the original of the Jewish nation.

NAY, it is an incontestible truth, that learning, and the use of letters, were first invented in *Egypt*, *Chaldea* and *Phœnicia*; and that the *Grecians*, who afterwards propagated letters and literature to all other nations, borrowed them from the *Phœnicians*, a long time after *Moses* had written his history and laws.

MOSES is supposed, by the concurrent chronology of all antiquity, to have flourished about fourteen hundred and ninety years before the birth of Christ; and there is no profane history, which has come to our hands, except some dubious fragments, written before the return of the *Jews* from the *Babylonish* captivity, about one thousand years after *Moses*. *Herodotus*, who is termed by *Cicero*, the father of history, wrote about one thousand and fifty-five years after *Moses*. *Xenophon*, *Thucydides*, and all the other Grecian and Roman historians, whose writings are now extant, are still of later date than *Herodotus*. So that there is really no historical writings now in the world, which are not, at least, one thousand years later than the writings of *Moses*.

If it therefore be allowed that *Moses* wrote that part of the old testament, which is now acknowledged to be his, the only question will remain, whether he is a true and faithful historian

rian? Whether he has left us a just account of facts? Whether his pretended mission from GOD be real or feigned? And of consequence, whether his law is of divine original, or only a merely human and political fiction?

THE history of *Moses* may be distinguished into two parts. First, that part of it which gives an account of the creation of the world, and the other facts and incidents which happened before his own time; and, secondly, that part of it which contains the history of his own time.

WE cannot therefore imagine that he could be deceived in this last part of his history, which reports his own conduct and actions, and other things of which he was a constant eye-witness, and had the most certain knowledge.

As to the first part of his history, which continues from the beginning of the book of *Genesis* till the eleventh verse of the second chapter of *Exodus*; those who allow him to have been divinely inspired and commissioned by GOD, will not, I presume, call in question its truth. But let us see what can be said for its credibility, even upon the supposition of infidelity, that he was no more than a common historian.

1st. THEN, even suppose *Moses* to have been a common historian, who had a mind to give his people an honest account of antiquity, we cannot suppose he could be much at a loss to record the principal acts and incidents which happened before his own time, if we consider, that there was not above eight or nine generations between himself and *Adam*, by his own account.

By the chronology of the old testament, it plainly appears, that *Adam* might have conversed with *Methuselah*, and he with his son *Sem*, and he with *Abraham*, and he with his son *Isaac*, and he with his grand-son *Joseph*, and he with *Amram*, and he with his son *Moses*. So that tradition might very easily have handed down the most memorable events from the creation through so few; especially if we consider that most of these events were so very interesting to the worshippers of the true God; more particularly the covenant made with *Abraham*, and the promises which so nearly concerned his posterity. So that in these circumstances it had been impossible for *Moses* to have forged a false history of ancient times, and to have imposed it upon the *Israelites* as true; seeing most of themselves might easily have detected the cheat. Besides, it is very probable that inquisitive men of other nations, sprung from the same common root, and informed by tradition of many of the principal facts and occurrences of antiquity, might have easily blasted the reputation of *Moses's* history, had it been a fabulous legend.

BUT what gives a higher degree of credibility to the ancient history, and the most ancient tradition of almost all the nations in the world. The fragments of *Sanchoniatho*, which contain the memoirs of greatest antiquity amongst the *Phœnicians*. The antiquities of the *East Indians* preserved by *Megasthenes*. Those of the *West Indians* by *Acosta* and others; and those of *Egypt*, and the parts adjacent, by *Laertius*, *Diodorus Siculus*, and a multitude besides, give us almost the same accounts of the

the original of things as *Moses* does: Universal tradition represents the original of the material world as a *chaos*, or confused commixture of all the elements, *void* and *without form*. It informs us, with *Moses*, that darkness was anterior to light;—that the sun was not the first created light, but the receptacle of it;—that there is but one GOD, who is the principle and cause of all things, himself uncreated and unbegotten;—that he has a divine abode above the stars, where there is perpetual light and day;—that the stars were made by him, and that he informs, animates, governs and pervades all things;—that man was formed last of all the visible creation, after the image of GOD, and invested with dominion over the other creatures;—that the first man was formed out of clay, and that the souls of men are particles of divine air infused by GOD;—that, in the earliest ages of the world, the seventh day was esteemed sacred by all nations, and that their time was measured by *Hebdomadae*, or weeks;—that in the first, or golden age of the world, men lived a simple, rustic life, without the use of cloaths, or fire, or convenient dwellings; that their food was fruit and herbs, and that GOD fed them, conversed familiarly with them, and was their keeper. The history of *Adam* and *Eve*, of the tree of life, and of the serpent, has been preserved by the tradition of many nations, even the most barbarous, and the most remote from the scene of action. The story of the flood of *Noah*, with all its most minute circumstances, is recorded by almost all antiquity. The wild life and great stature of the giants. And the long lives of the antediluvians,

diluvians, reaching to near one thousand years, are mentioned both by the poets, historians and naturalists. The very place where the ark is said by *Moses* to have settled, upon the subsiding of the waters of the deluge, the very names of the sons of *Noah*, their various migrations, and the nations descended from them, are expressly mentioned by many historians, as well as poets. The building of the tower of *Babel*, is evidently alluded to in the fable of the war of the giants against heaven. The burning of *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah* is recorded by many historians of the best credit, the circumstances of whose relations agree wonderfully with the history of *Moses*. The whole current of antient history bears a surprising analogy with the book of *Genesis*, in the account of of the nations descended from *Abraham*; in the rite of circumcision used in that family; in the stories of *Isaac*, *Jacob* and *Joseph*; in the going forth of the children of *Israel* out of *Egypt*; in their crossing the red sea; in their journeying through the wilderness of *Shinar*, and in their founding the kingdom of *Judea* in *Canaan*. *Berosus*, a *Babylonish* priest, who lived in the time of *Alexander* the Great, two hundred and fifty-six years before Christ, wrote a chronological history of *Chaldea*, and the countries adjacent, from *Noah's* flood till the conquest of *Babylon* by *Cyrus*, which agrees in a remarkable manner with the chronology of *Moses*. One instance of this agreement I shall produce. He makes the drowning of *Pharaoh's* host in the red sea, which he ascribes to the power of magic, to have happened in the year after the deluge, seven hundred and ninety-four;



four; whereas *Moses* puts it in the year seven hundred and ninety-seven.

THE learned infidel may find most of the above articles, and a great many more, collected together with great labour and erudition, by the learned HUGO GROTIUS DE VERIT. REL. CHRIST. LIB. V. §. XVI. where the authors from which they are taken are referred to, and cited in their originals.

Now, this remarkable agreement between the universal tradition of all nations, and the ancient history of *Moses*, proves either, first, that the history of *Moses* has its foundation in truth, which truth has been handed down from the first families of mankind, through their various migrations and dispersions, by an interrupted tradition; although the original facts are, at this time, very much obscured and misrepresented among the barbarous nations, by such an imperfect method of conveyance; or, secondly, that these opinions of the heathen nations, in all ages, have been borrowed from the writings of *Moses*. There being no other method of accounting rationally for the agreement between heathen tradition and the Mosaic history. Now, if the former of these suppositions be granted, which is indeed the most probable, then this affords us a strong presumptive argument for the truth of *Moses's* ancient history. But if infidels will rather prefer the latter, although so very unlikely, yet even this is an irrefragable proof of the antiquity of the Mosaic history, and the great reputation it has been in, with the most ancient heathen writers.

As for that part of the writings of *Moses*, which contains the history of his own times, beginning

beginning Exod. ii. 11. and continuing to Deut. xxxii. 48. A great part of it also is confirmed by the testimonies of a number of heathen historians. The ancient rite of circumcision in all the branches of *Abraham's* family; the *Exodus*, or going forth of the children of *Israel* out of *Egypt*, under the command of *Moses*; his being taken out of the river when a child; the two tables of the law of *GOD* being delivered to him, and a great many other incidents in the history of *Moses*, and testimonies concerning his wisdom, learning, prudence and laws, and the settlement of the people whom he conducted, in the land of *Canaan*, are expressly mentioned by *Berosus*, *Hecataeus*, *Artaphanus*, *Manetho*, *Damascenus*, the writer of the *Carmina Orphica*, *Tacitus*, *Trogus Pompeius*, *Strabo*, *Longinus*, and many others, from which writers, *Josephus*, and many modern learned men, have extracted many plain and pertinent testimonies.

It must be confessed indeed, that many of these writers speak very contumeliously of *Moses* and the *Jews*:—But we shall cease to wonder at this, if we consider that the religion of the *Jews* rendered them very unfociable with other nations; they would neither eat, nor worship, nor intermarry with the heathen nations. The *GOD* of *Israel* would admit of no rival, no competitor, no companion. There was no community of *Gods* allowed among the *Israelites*, as among the heathens. And hence all other nations looked upon the *Israelites* as a morose, unfociable people, as haters of mankind and the *Gods*. And hence it is that so many of the heathen historians load the  
*Jews*

*Jews* with contumelies and reproaches. Besides, if we consider the enmity which so long subsisted between them and the *Egyptians*, it will not appear strange, that *Manetho*, *Chæremón* and *Appion*, who were Egyptian historians, should endeavour to make the character of *Moses* and the *Jews* as black and ridiculous as they could. But how unjustly and untruly they have done this, *Josephus* has made appear, in his two books against *Appion*.

HOWEVER, all the writers of antiquity have not run into this fashionable rant of declaiming against *Moses* and the *Jews*. *Strabo*, in his sixteenth book, has done them a great deal of honour. *Hecataeus* speaks very favourably of them. *Longinus*, in his treatise on the sublime, speaks very advantageously of the wisdom, capacity, learning and eloquence of *Moses*, and gives some instances of it out of *Genesis*. *Chalcidius* quotes many things out of the books of *Moses*, and calls him a most wise man, who, according to report, was indued not only with human, but also with divine eloquence. *Numenius* tells us, that *Jannes* and *Mambres* were the two magicians whom the *Egyptians* unanimously chose to resist *Moses*, the leader of the *Jews*, in the grievous calamities which he publicly brought upon the *Egyptians* (referring to the ten plagues), and this *Moses*, he tells us, had great power with God in prayer. And *Julian*, who was as inveterate an enemy against the *Jews* as the *Christians*, confesses, “ that there were  
 “ men among the *Jews* divinely inspired; and  
 “ that fire descended from heaven to consume  
 “ their sacrifices in the time of *Moses*; and once,  
 “ a long

“ a long while afterwards, in the time of *Elias*  
 “ the *Thebrite*.

Now, although this concurrent testimony of all antiquity, gives as high a degree of credibility to the writings of *Moses*, as any ancient human history can have, yet there is still room to enquire how we can prove the main point, namely, the divine original, inspiration and authority of these writings? I answer, the divine original and authority of the writings of *Moses*, is proved and established by the miracles which he wrought. That *Moses* really wrought such miracles as are recorded in his history, we have no reason to doubt, if we consider, not only that many of them are mentioned by heathen historians, although they ascribe them to the power of magic; but also, and more especially, that all his pretensions to leading and governing the *Israelites*; that the whole system of his laws moral, judicial and ceremonial, and all the rigour and severity with which he enjoined and enforced them, are entirely founded upon such miracles, and necessarily suppose them.

It is not at all to be supposed that *Moses*, who appears by all his writings, to have been a wise and judicious man, and a great lover of his people, would have enacted such laws, as many which we find in his system; or, that upwards of six hundred thousand men, besides women and children, who appear to have been mutinous and ungovernable enough, would have received them, and submitted to them, had not both *Moses* and they been convinced that they came from God. And nothing less could work this conviction, than a divine testimony,

mony, namely, a power of working miracles in the law-giver, and a plain manifestation of this divine power to the people.

THERE are several laws which must have, humanly speaking, ruined the Jewish state, had not GOD miraculously counteracted their ruinous tendency. Such was the law of the *sabbatick year*, by which they were obliged to leave their grounds uncultivated one whole year in every seven; and that of *jubile*, which obliged them to abstain from the cultivation of their land two years together, namely, every forty-ninth and fiftieth year<sup>f</sup>. Such was also that law by which all their males, from sixteen to sixty years, were obliged to appear at the temple of *Jerusalem*, three times a year, from all corners of *Judea*, namely, at the feasts of the passover, of pentecost and of tabernacles. At which times their frontiers were left entirely exposed to the incursions and ravages of the numerous and inveterate enemies which surrounded them on all sides<sup>g</sup>. Such was also the law of circumcision, which was very painful in itself, and rendered the *Jews* very ridiculous in the esteem of all the heathen nations.

BESIDES, the law of sacrifices and offerings was very burdensome, laborious and expensive. The maintenance of the priests and Levites, the building, repairs and decorations of the temple, and all the perquisites which belonged to the religious ceremonial, were very heavy and costly. The prohibition of particular meats, which were flattering enough to the

<sup>f</sup> See Levit. xxv. 1—18.

<sup>g</sup> See Exod, xxiii. 14—18.

appetite,

appetite, and the laborious washings, and cleansings, and purifyings which occurred so often, were heavy and severe restraints upon the liberties and appetites of the *Jews*. Now can it be supposed that *Moses*, who tenderly loved the people whom he governed, and who had prudence and policy enough to foresee the dangerous consequence of some of the laws, would have enacted them, had he not been assured that they came from *God*? Or can we imagine that the *Israelites*, naturally a stiff-necked, refractory and rebellious people, would have received those laws in the wilderness, had they not been eye-witnesses of the miracles wrought by *God's* power to confirm them? And yet we find that these laws and institutions have been so highly revered by the *Jews* in all ages, and so deeply rooted in their minds, that they chose rather to undergo the greatest abuses, and the severest deaths, than violate or relinquish them. We have sufficient proofs of this, not only in the canonical and apochryphical books of the old testament, but also their very enemies confess it. *Tacitus* observes, that the first thing which the *Jews* learn, is to despise the *gods*; *i. e.* the heathen deities, and to esteem the dearest comforts of life of no value in comparison of their law. And both *Hecataeus* and *Porphyry*, the Platonic philosopher, agree in testifying their firm adherence to their laws and religion, in spite of the severest tortures and most cruel deaths. Nor can all the hardships they have suffered on account of their religion, since the destruction of their state, in the least shake or alter their inviolable attachment to the laws and customs delivered by *Moses*.

To

To this we may add another argument, which is still more convincing and conclusive.

If it be allowed, that *Moses* wrote the books which now bear his name, and that he delivered them to the church of *Israel* in the wilderness of *Sinai*, then the truth of the miracles contained in these books must follow of consequence: For those books are an appeal to six hundred thousand men for the truth of these miracles, which no man in his right wits would have made, had not these miracles been true. Could *Moses*, think you, pretend to persuade such a prodigious number of people, among whom we must charitably believe that some, at least, were endued with common sense, that they saw ten miraculous plagues inflicted upon *Egypt*; the red sea divided; waters brought out of a rock; the pillar of fire and of smoke; the quails and manna; the wonderful and terrible appearance of the glory of GOD on mount *Sinai*, and that they heard the words of the law delivered from thence by an audible voice, if they really neither saw nor heard any of these things? Certainly such a bare-faced imposture as this, must have been detected by every person who had eyes, and ears, and common understanding, and must have rendered the very name of *Moses* infamous among the *Israelites* to latest posterity.

BESIDES, to suppose that any person, or number of persons, after the time of *Moses*, should forge this law, and attempt to impose it upon the *Jews*, is equally absurd and incredible: For at whatever time such a forgery is supposed to be made, we must necessarily suppose an entire revolution both in the Jewish state

and

and church; we must suppose that at the same time, all the implements of the tabernacle, the *urim* and *thummim*, the brazen serpent, the pot of manna, the ark and *cherubims*, the priests vestments and all the utensils of the Jewish worship were introduced also. We must also suppose, that all the festivals and solemnities appointed in these books as memorials of those miraculous facts recorded in them, were also brought into use at the first publication of this forgery; such as circumcision, the passover, daily sacrifices, the great day of atonement, new moons, sabbaths, sabbatick years, jubilee, the three grand festivals, tithes, the cities of the Levites, the various sacred orders, distinction between meats, abstinence from various pollutions, and numberless purifications. Now to suppose, that any person would be bold enough to attempt the broaching of such a forgery, or the imposition of such laws, and such a revolution as the introduction of them must necessarily occasion, and all this without any sufficient evidence or authority, either human or divine, really exceeds all possibility of belief! Hence, I think, it necessarily follows, that *Moses* must have been the deliverer of the Jewish law;—that the authority of these laws must have been founded on these miracles which he wrought;—and, that these solemnities of the Jewish worship must have been instituted on the fresh remembrance of these miracles, of which they are standing memorials to the Jewish nation;—and, in a word, that all the laws, observances and customs in use amongst the *Jews* must have been



been of constant use from the very time in which those books of *Moses* were written.

If therefore *Moses* wrought such miracles as are recorded in his books, I think none, who acknowledge the being and universal providence of GOD, and who attentively consider the nature of the miracles themselves, and the genius and design of that religion, and those laws which *Moses* confirmed by them, can reasonably deny that these miracles were wrought by a divine power. And if this is once granted, it will prove all that we desire, namely, the divine mission of *Moses*;—the divine original and authority of that religion, and of those laws which he delivered, and the divine truth of that history which is contained in his books.

GOD did not fully reveal his will to the children of *Israel* by *Moses*, but as he designed to train them up for a more perfect state, to lead them by degrees into the more spiritual meaning and design of the Mosaic œconomy, and raise their hopes and expectations after the more pure and spiritual dispensation of the MESSIAH under the gospel; so for this purpose, he appointed a successive order of inspired men, called prophets, whose office it was to illustrate and inforce the true spirit and meaning of the laws of *Moses*, by animated addresses to urge the people to the duties of piety and virtue, and dissuade them from vice and idolatry, and to foretell future events. This succession of inspired men, some think, is plainly promised and established by GOD, in that remarkable prophesy of *Moses*, which doubtless points out CHRIST in its remotest and most noble

sense<sup>b</sup>. *The LORD thy GOD will raise up unto thee a prophet (i. e. a succession of prophets, as by anti-christ is meant a succession of anti-christs) from the midst of thee, like unto me; unto him shall ye hearken.—I will raise them up a prophet (a succession of prophets) from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them: all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words, which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him<sup>c</sup>.* In this law of *Moses* therefore, the divine original and authority of which is sufficiently attested by miracles, this order of extraordinary ministers, called prophets, is established, their office assigned, and rules for their trial laid down, lest the people should be imposed on by false pretenders; which, nevertheless, they often were, either through prejudice, or a want of due attention to the established marks of trial<sup>d</sup>. Besides, these rules of trial, it is the current opinion of the most learned *Jews*, that one of the principal offices of the court of the *great sanbedrin* was, to try pretenders to prophecy by these established rules, which opinion seems to be countenanced by the proceedings of the *Israelites* against *Jeremiah*<sup>e</sup>. And this may also receive some light from our SAVIOUR's fixing the scene of the blood of his true prophets in *Jerusalem*, where the *sanbedrin* was constantly held<sup>f</sup>.

<sup>b</sup> Deut. xviii. 15—18.

<sup>i</sup> Vide Stilling. orig. sac. l. II. chap. 4.

<sup>k</sup> See Deut. xiii. 1—6. and xviii. 20—22.

<sup>l</sup> Jer. xxvi. 8—16.

<sup>m</sup> Mat. xxiii. 37. Luk. xiii. 33.

THIS therefore gives as valid a testimony to the writings of the other prophets, as to those of *Moses*: Besides, that many of them were enabled to work miracles and predict future events, soon to happen; which being a mark of the true prophetic spirit, procured a just and reasonable assent to the truth of the other revelations they made, and the more remote events they predicted. To all which we may add, that Christians have a still farther and higher confirmation of their veracity from the wonderful accomplishment of many of their prophecies in CHRIST and his gospel kingdom, and the testimony of JESUS and his *apostles*.

As for such books of the old testament as may be properly termed *moral, doctrinal, or devotional*, they were either written by eminent prophets. As the *Psalms* by *David*. The book of *Job*, some say, by *Moses*; others by *Ezrah*; or approved and adapted into the *canon* by inspired persons. And indeed, if this had not been the case, yet the very nature of these books is such, as plainly proves their truth and divinity, and manifests that good spirit by which they were dictated. Their doctrinal and moral parts are not only agreeable to right reason, but plainly founded on the laws of *Moses*, with exhortations to observe them, and promises of mercy, or denunciations of judgment agreeable to the genius of that dispensation. And as to the devotional parts, they are certainly the most pure, rational and sublime which can be well conceived.

As to the other historical books of the old testament, they all either assert, or suppose the books of *Moses*, and are only a continuation of

that history begun by him, and carried on through a little more than *a thousand* years. The different parts of this history were written successively, on the times when the events happened to which they refer, and appeals are every where made to the public records of the nation for their veracity. And to confirm all, a fair and correct edition of all these canonical books was given by *Ezra* shortly after the Babylonish captivity; a person every way qualified for so important a task, a descendent of *Aaron* by *Eliezar*, an eminent priest and ready scribe in the law of *Moses*, one who had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments, and a pious and zealous reformer of religion; as may be seen in the *four last chapters* of that book which goes by his name. Unto all which some add, that he was a prophet, the same with *Malachi*, and the author of that book of prophecies which closes the canon of the old testament scriptures; *Malachi* being, as they suppose, only an appellative name, importing the office of *Ezra*, as being a messenger of good tidings to *Israel*.

BESIDES these external characters of truth and divinity which attend the old testament scriptures, there are a number of internal ones arising from the writings themselves and the penmen of them, which greatly corroborate the evidence of their heavenly original, and, to an honest, unprejudiced mind, raise it even to a demonstration.

WE have already proved that *Moses* could not be deceived himself in the historical facts he relates, and that it was equally impossible to impose the belief of these facts upon a numerous people,

people, supposing them to be false or feigned. But granting this possible, yet what motives can we find to justify *Moses* in such an enterprize ! Was it to render his name immortal by glorious achievements, and transmit his fame, as a distinguished *hero* to latest posterity ? But how unlikely was the course he took to promote such an end ? He abandoned a magnificent court where he was loved and caressed ; where he was, as some say, trained up as heir apparent to the Egyptian crown ; where, by the felicity of his natural endowments and acquired accomplishments, he might have distinguished himself in a very eminent manner, and where he is actually said to have acquired great military renown, by commanding numerous armies, and obtaining signal victories : All these views of honour and preferment he abandons, and puts himself at the head of a numerous *banditti*, with a desperate design to lead them away from their lawful prince. A strange project this to acquire a lasting fame, on the supposition that *Moses* was a deceiver, led on by a boundless ambition !

NOR could avaricious views influence *Moses* in such a conduct : For what could he expect from a poor oppressed people, who hardly found the means of subsistence, as an equivalent for quitting his present preferments ? How much more probable is that account of *St. Paul*, that through the faith of possessing more durable riches and brighter glories, *he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter ; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of GOD, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season ; esteeming the reproach of GOD's chosen people greater riches, than the treasures of Egypt ; having respect unto the*

*recompence of reward*<sup>a</sup>. Besides, the whole course of his history, shews him to be at the remotest distance from all mercenary, selfish views, conferring the most lucrative post on his brother *Aaron*, and appointing his servant *Joshua* to succeed him in the government, while he left his own sons among the common Levites.

BUT you will say, he had ambition to be the founder of new laws, and the establisher of a new kingdom; and therefore, he writes his history to aggrandize himself and his nation. If this had been really his design, how differently would he have wrote? How easy had it been for him, by concealing some facts, and feigning others, to have rendered his own memory, and that of his nation not only spotless, but even illustrious. But so much is he devoted to the simplicity of truth, that the smallest foibles, the meanest circumstances of himself, his ancestors, relations and nation are divulged, and their greatest enormities are neither palliated nor concealed. *Sarah's* and *Jacob's* dissimulation; the wickedness of *Joseph's* brethren; the cruelty and perfidy of his father *Levi* and *Simcon* towards the *Schehemites*; the servile condition of the *Israelites* in *Egypt*; his own mean employment under *Jethro* in *Midian*; the murmuring and seditious temper of his sister *Miriam*; the abominable idolatry of his brother *Aaron*, although high-priest; his own unadvised words and doubtings, and his being debarred from entering the holy land upon that account; the continual idolatries, murmurings,

<sup>a</sup> Heb. xi. 24—27.

mutinies and rebellions of the people whom he governed, against the greatest demonstrations of the divine goodness; and the total destruction of that generation in the wilderness, two only excepted, upon that account, are such proofs of *Moses's* ingenuity, as are not to be found in any other historian. Nor is this peculiar to the books of *Moses*, but equally remarkable in the succeeding parts of the history of that nation. The greatest *heroes* of the nation are all along stigmatized with the blackest of their crimes. The ingratitude, disobedience and stupidity of the people; their proneness to idolatry and revolt; their unsteadfastness in the covenant of their **GOD**; and, in consequence of this, their disgraces, captivities and defeats, are no where concealed, but set in the strongest light; and their deliverances are never ascribed to their own wisdom or prowess, but to the interposition of the divine power and goodness upon their repentance. Is it, therefore, at all probable, that the *Jewish* history, as contained in the scriptures, was written to flatter the nation, or deceive posterity into a mistaken notion of their wisdom, integrity and policy as a people? And is not the continual veneration of the *Jews* in all ages, for such a history, which does them and their ancestors so small an honour, a violent presumption of its truth!

THE matter contained in the books of *Moses* is excellent in itself, and affords a strong presumption that it came from **GOD**. We have no where in antiquity any serious or probable account of the creation of the world, the formation of man, the origin of moral evil, or of the unity, purity and infinite perfection of

the DEITY, but in the writings of *Moses*. His moral and judicial laws are incomparably wise and excellent, and will be had in veneration till latest posterity, while the laws of *Numa*, *Draco*, *Solon* and *Lycurgus* are almost wholly buried in oblivion. Nay, the ceremonial law itself, however burdensome and expensive, was yet wisely calculated for the state and circumstances of the *Jews*. Its laborious service was an excellent means of inuring them to obedience, and preventing them from meditating idolatrous or rebellious changes. Almost all its precepts were levelled against the Gentile usages and superstitions, and tended to keep them separate from the heathen nations round them. It plainly pointed out the MESSIAH to come; and the multiplicity, severity and imperfection of its ordinances was a very proper foil to set off the freedom and perfection of the gospel dispensation which was to succeed it: So that the sweets of gospel liberty must needs have an additional relish upon the abrogation of that ceremonial<sup>o</sup>.

THE spirit in which the books of *Moses* are wrote, affords another not obscure, internal character of their truth and divine original. There breathes through the whole a warm, masculine and rational piety towards GOD, and the most affectionate, paternal concern for the happiness of his people, that ever was manifested by any commander. The evident scope of the whole is to celebrate the power, wisdom and providential goodness of GOD, and to humble the pride of man; to paint virtue in the loveliest

<sup>o</sup> See Acts xv. 10, 29. Gal. v. 1. iii. 19, 25.



colours, and to brand vice with the blackest characters. And as there is an unity of design, a purity of morals, and an harmony of sentiments running through the whole, so this excellent matter is clothed with a majesty and propriety of diction which is truly admirable. Had *Moses* been a fictitious writer, how natural and how easy had it been for him to have filled up the first part of his history with marvellous relations about the creation? With what pomp of language, with what waste of rhetoric could he probably have embellished that surprising scene? With what a grand *apparatus* of celestial machinery might he have made the omnipotent architect come forth to build an universe?

How many sub-agents and subalterns would a fabulous poet or historian have employed in this stupendous and multifarious work? With what solemnity would every part have been gone about, and with how many episodes, digressions and reflections would the story have been filled, in order to give it an air of the marvellous? But read the beginning of *Genesis*, and observe how differently *Moses* writes. No scope is given to fancy or invention. All is narrated with an ease, plainness and simplicity which plainly shews, that he kept close to truth, and laid down the facts just as they were presented to his mind; a manner of writing rarely, if at all, to be found in any other historians, but such as had the honour of being the *amanuenses* of the SPIRIT of truth.

NOR are these internal characters of candour, simplicity and truth peculiar to the writings of *Moses*, but conspicuous throughout all the other canonical books of the old testament,

ment, which shews that all the writers of these books, although living in different ages, and differing in their natural tempers, geniuses and dispositions, were yet moved and animated by the same holy spirit, and had their minds all impressed with the same views and sentiments of moral and divine things\*.

THE

\* I CANNOT help thinking, that this unity of design, sentiments and principles, which is obvious to every attentive reader throughout the whole canon of the old testament scriptures, affords a more powerful argument of their truth and divinity, than is commonly imagined. There is a period of more than a *thousand* and *fifty* years between the date of *Moses's* writings and those of *Malachi*; and the intervening penmen of scripture, these included, are, at least, *twenty-three* in number, most of which lived in different ages, and wrote upon different occasions and emergencies, and yet what a wonderful harmony is there between all these writers in the main principles and fundamentals of the *Mosaic* religion? Choose out twenty, or half that number, of the followers of *Zeno*, *Plato*, or *Aristotle*, who have wrote in successive ages, and some of them at the distance of a thousand years after their master, and upon examining their writings and comparing them with each other, and with those of the founder of their sect, you will find little else but perpetual wranglings and altercations; one of them differing from another, and almost all of them varying and swerving, more or less, from the distinguishing and fundamental tenets of their founder; either disputing or controverting his principles, or glossing them in different manners, and contriving them into different and contrary senses. Now how comes it, that the disciples of *Moses*, I mean the subsequent inspired writers of the old testament scriptures, are at one  
with

THE only difficulty which remains is, whether these books have been safely handed down to us without any material alteration. But this cannot be reasonably doubted, if we consider that the greatest care imaginable was taken to preserve the books of *Moses* from being lost or corrupted. A fair copy of them was safely deposited in or near the ark, and appealed to as a standard of other copies. Every king was obliged to write out a copy with his own hand. Not only the priests, but also the elders and heads of the tribes were obliged to have each a copy. The laws were constantly read and explained before the people†, and instilled into the tender minds of their children,

with their founder and among themselves, while the disciples of *Plato* vary so much from him, and from each other? I confess, I cannot imagine any other reason than this, *namely*, that *Moses* and his followers were animated and inspired with one and the same spirit of truth and concord; whereas the *Platonic* philosophers had no such bond of union, and wrote under no such guidance and direction, but followed each the natural impulse of their own minds.

† It is a disputed point among the learned, at what time the synagogue worship was set up among the Jews, some say, from the times of *Moses*; others during the Babylonish captivity, and others shortly after their return to Jerusalem, and by the appointment of *Ezra*. It is certain, upon the whole, that the institution of the synagogue worship has been of long standing among the Jews, Acts xv. 21. And it is as certain, that the reading and explaining of the scriptures to all the people, was the principal and essential part of the synagogue worship. Prid. Con. p. 1, b. 6,

with

with the greatest care and diligence<sup>p</sup>. Indeed the whole drift of *Moses's* directions in this particular, and a variety of other injunctions scattered up and down through the old testament scriptures, necessarily suppose that it was the duty of every *Israelite* to have a copy of the sacred writings in his possession, that he might make them the matter of his constant study and meditation, both for the regulation of his own conduct, and the direction of all such who might be any way under his care and influence.

NAY, so curious were the *Jews* of this sacred depositum, after their return from the Babylonish captivity, and so careful to preserve it uncorrupted and entire, that, shortly after *Ezra's* time, they appointed a profession of men, called *Masorites*, whose whole business and study it was to examine and criticise upon the true orthography of the canonical books of scripture, to determine, preserve and hand down to posterity, the true reading and pronunciation of the *Hebrew*, which was now no longer the vulgar language of the *Jews*, by affixing to it proper accents and vowel points. And to such a length did their care and scrupulosity run in this matter, that they numbered the verses, words and letters of every book in the *Hebrew* bible, and marked out which was the middle verse, word and letter in each; so that by this means, it became morally impossible that even a *dot* or *tittle* of the law, as our saviour terms it, could be lost or corrupted after the *Massorah* was completed.

<sup>p</sup> See Deut. vi. 6—9. xi. 18—21.

THERE are but two periods of the Jewish church, in which there can be the least suspicion of the loss or corruption of these sacred writings. First, in the wicked reigns of *Manasseh*, *Ammon*, and in the minority of good *Josiah*. Or, secondly, during the time of the Babylonish captivity, when the city and temple of *Jerusalem* were destroyed, and the *Jews* carried captive into the kingdom of *Assyria*, where they continued, some of them *seventy*, others *forty-eight* years in exile from their own land, and the most essential acts of their public worship. But there is abundant reason to believe, that no such thing happened at either of these times. For,

1st. IT is evident from the history itself<sup>1</sup>, that *Hilkiab*, in the eighteenth year of *Josiah's* reign, found *Moses's* original copy of the law in the temple, which might be easily known and distinguished from all counterfeits by its form, antiquity and the peculiarity of the character in which it was wrote; and we may be very certain that such pious and zealous reformers as *Josiah* and *Hilkiab* would soon disperse genuine copies of it through the whole kingdom. So that we have no reason to believe that the book of *Moses* were either lost, or adulterated at that time\*.

adly.

<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings xxii. 2 Chron. xxxiv.

\* It is indeed sufficiently evident by the surprize which both *Josiah* and *Hilkiab*, the priest, expressed upon finding the book of the law, that neither of them had seen any copy of it before. And this may be well accounted for, if we consider the two extremely corrupt reigns which preceded; which, including the eighteen years of *Josiah's* reign elapsed before this discovery,

2dly. NOR have we any greater reason to believe that these books were lost or altered, during

discovery, endured for seventy-five years. During all this while the law and worship of the true God were strange things at *Jerusalem*, and idolatry, tyranny and oppression succeeded in their place and were the only things in fashion at court. We are not therefore to wonder at the scarcity of bibles at that time among the nobility and gentry of *Jerusalem*, who had no doubt paid their court to their rulers by a contempt and disrelish of all true religion, and given themselves wholly over to idolatry and forcery; nor at the novelty of that original copy of the law, accidentally discovered in the temple by *Hilkiab*, where it had been probably hid by some pious priest in the former reigns. But it may be well supposed, that, at that very time, there were many copies of the law in the hands of private persons, who dared not probably avow or publish them, either for fear of losing so precious a treasure, or of incurring the displeasure of their idolatrous rulers; seeing, that even in the best governments, it is always a dangerous, or, at least, a disgraceful thing to profess a veneration for any thing which differs from the religion in vogue at court. And this may be the true reason why any private persons, who might have such copies in their hands, might not be willing to make them public. See an instance somewhat parallel to this, or which may, at least, support this reasoning, 1 Kings xix. 10—18.

IF it be objected, that the thirty-two last years of *Manasseh's* reign were spent in penitency and a reformation of those corruptions in religion, which had been introduced in the beginning of his reign, and that of *Josiah*, from his first advancement to the throne, expressed the most fervent zeal, and the most hearty desire for a public and general reformation of religion,

during the time of the captivity. The Babylonish captivity was no strange or unexpected event

religion, and therefore, that these two good princes would certainly take all due care to recover the scriptures, if it had been a possible thing, which would have proved the best help and most perfect model of that general reformation they had so much at heart; and consequently, that their not succeeding was a plain proof that no such copies of the law were then to be found in *Judah* or *Jerusalem*, except that which was afterwards accidentally discovered in the temple. I answer, although it is evident that *Manasseh* became a very sincere penitent after his return from *Babylon*, yet by what appears in the memoirs of his life now extant, 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11—25. It seems that the reformation he made in religion was very partial and defective, consisting only in the demolition of some monuments of idolatry which he himself had erected, in repairing the altar of the lord, and restoring the public sacrifices, and in general exhortations to his people to serve the true God, in opposition to idols. But as to any more circumstantial and exact reformation of worship upon the plan of the Mosaic ritual, we do not hear that he attempted it, or took any effectual measures to recover the Mosaic writings for this purpose. And as to the beginning of good *Josiah's* reign, it seems probable, that the scriptures had been, at that time, so long in disuse at court, and that those about him had such a faint and obscure idea of their contents, and of their utility in the business of a general reformation, as made them less jealous than they should have been in searching after them, and more surprized than otherwise they would have been upon finding them and examining their contents. But be these things as they will, it is sufficient to our present purpose that the original copy of *Moses* was at that

event to the *Jews*: The true prophets of God were continually alarming them with repeated warnings of its approach, for above *two hundred* years before it happened. And as they were assured in general of the desolations which were coming upon *Judea* and *Jerusalem*, because of their rebellions and idolatries; so they were told in particular, that *Babylon* should be the place of their captivity; that they should continue there exiles for the space of *seventy* years; and that, at the expiration of that time, they should be restored again to their ancient land and liberties; and *Cyrus the Persian*, the celebrated restorer of the *Jews*, was mentioned by name *an hundred and fifty* years before he was born. Nor were these revolutions predicted in an obscure and enigmatical manner, but in the plainest terms, and by a number of prophets<sup>r</sup>. And now, can it be supposed, that the *Jews*, who knew the reason why God had delivered them up into the hands of their enemies, and were assured of a release and restoration at the expiration of *seventy* years from the first carrying away by *Nebuchadnezzar*, and of *fifty-two* from the utter destruction of their temple; I say, is it be supposed that these *Jews* would

that time found, and that, by the care and zeal of so pious a prince as *Josiah*, it did not lye long as a hidden treasure, or a private property, but was quickly transcribed and dispersed for the public benefit of his people.

<sup>r</sup> See *Is.* xliv. 24—28. *xlv.* 1—5, *xxix.* 5—8. *Jerem.* xxv. 1—14. *xxix.* 5—14. *Hof.* iii. 4, 5. and a multitude of other places.

utterly



utterly lose their language, laws and religion, Especially when they had two eminent prophets with them in *Babylon*, and a multitude of priests, Levites, and other officers of the temple, who expected that their families would again be reinstated into their sacred offices at their return from *Babylon*? Nay, so far was it otherwise, that many of the priests, Levites, Nethinims, porters and singers had carefully preserved their genealogies, in prospect of their being again admitted to their offices, and none but such were in fact admitted\*.

No sooner were *Zerubbabel* and *Jeshua* arrived at *Jerusalem* with the first division of the exiles, which were restored by the favour of *Cyrus's* decree, but we find them setting up the Mosaic institution of worship, building an altar, offering burnt offerings, observing the new moons and all the set feasts of the LORD, fixing the courses, offices, and habiliments of the priests, Levites, and singers, and keeping the feast of tabernacles, and all these are expressly said to be ordered according to the ancient custom, as it is written in the law of *Moses, the man of GOD*, and according to the ordinance of *David king of Israel*†; which is a manifest proof that they had then in their hands the books of *Moses*, and the first book of *Chronicles*, where these laws and ordinances were recorded.

THAT the law of *Moses* and the book of *Jeremiah* were in the hands of the captives in *Babylon*, is also evident from *Daniel's* excellent prayer, where he tells us, that in the first year of the reign of *Darius the Mede*, he understood by

\* Ezra ii. 59—62.

† See Ezra iii. 2—10. vi. 18.

*books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.* And he observes, that this curse and desolation came upon them for departing from GOD, and disobeying the voice of his prophets, as was foretold and threatened *in the law of Moses, the man of GOD*<sup>u</sup>.

IT is said, Ezra iii. 12. that many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men that had seen the *first* temple, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundations of this *second* temple laid, being deeply affected with the great disparity which was like to be between these two temples in many respects, especially with regard to the many internal marks of the divine presence and glory, which attended and beautified the first temple. Now, supposing many of these men to be *seventy* or *eighty* years of age, and it is probable that many might be older, they must have been *twenty* or *thirty* at the demolition of the first temple; and can it be thought, that these men, especially such of them as were of the sacerdotal order, would, in the course of about *fifty* years, have utterly forgot their language, lost the remembrance of the peculiar duties of their office, or neglected to preserve those holy books, which were to be their peculiar study, and from which they were

<sup>u</sup> See Dan. ix. 2, 11, 13. compared with Jerem. xxv. 12. xxix. 10. and Lev. xxvi. 14, &c. Deut. xviii. 15, &c. xxix. 20, &c. xxx. 17. xxxii. 19, &c. Lev. xxvi. 14. Deut. xxviii. 15.

solemnly

solemnly bound to teach the people knowledge? It cannot be imagined.

THAT these books were not lost or corrupted during the captivity appears farther from *Ezra's* dissolving the marriages contracted between the children of *Israel* and heathen strangers. The precepts against marrying with the *heathen* were violated by multitudes, not only of the common people, but even of the princes, rulers and priests, and *Ezra's* putting these laws in execution against them, was touching them in a very tender and sensible part, wherein the honour and interest of their families, and the affection of their wives was nearly concerned. Here are *one hundred and fourteen* persons, of whom many were priests and princes of the people, submitting themselves to a violent separation from their wives, and tolerating their very names to be recorded as transgressors, for instruction and warning to posterity, and all this upon the authority of certain laws of **GOD** delivered by *Moses*\*, which laws, had they not then existed, with good and sufficient evidences of their authenticity, certainly this prohibition of *Ezra's* would never have been submitted to by such a number of men, in so delicate and interesting a point.

THE *Jews* during their captivity, being dispersed throughout *Babylon* and *Chaldea*, would in a great measure, lose their own language and adopt that of their conquerors, through the necessity of their constant dealings and conversation with them; especially the young

\* See *Ezra* ix. 10—12. and x. compared with *Exod.* xxiii. 32. *Deut.* vii. 3.

and rising generation, who were carried captive in a state of childhood, or born in captivity. And that this was really the case, is evident from this, that when *Ezra* read the law of GOD in the *Hebrew* language, before the congregation of the restored exiles, he found it necessary to employ a number of the most learned *Jews* of the Levitical order, to give the sense, and cause them to understand the reading<sup>x</sup>; i. e. not only to explain the sense and spirit of the laws, but to render them sentence after sentence in the *Chaldee* language which was then best understood by the common people. And hence they found it necessary from that time to use *targums*, or *Chaldee paraphrases*, or *versions* of the law in their *synagogues*, the *Hebrew* language being then in a great measure unintelligible by the common people. But although the *Hebrew* ceased to be the vulgar language of the *Jews* after the captivity, yet it was still had in the utmost veneration among them, and was carefully studied and well understood by their learned men. *Ezekiel* wrote his prophecies in *Hebrew* during the captivity, and so did *Daniel* a good part of his; and, excepting part of the book of *Ezra*, all the canonical scripture that was written after the captivity, was written in *Hebrew*.

BUT however, the *Jews* might adopt the language of their conquerors, it is certain they never adopted their customs, laws or religion, but still preserved their own, with a firmer zeal and more rigid attachment than ever. The captivity and desolation of their nation,

<sup>x</sup> Neh. viii. 1—9.

which

which they considered as a punishment for their manifold revolts, idolatries and deviation from their law, instead of diminishing, greatly increased their veneration for it. Inſomuch, that from that time down to the time of CHRIST, they took a moſt ſcrupulous care of thoſe *canonical* books, in part collected and revised by *Ezra*, and about *one hundred and ſixty* years afterwards completed by *Simon the juſt*.

NAY, ſo far were they from adopting the religion of *Chaldea*, that they were never chargeable with idolatry of any kind after the time of *Ezra*, which has been aſcribed, not without reaſon, to two cauſes. 1ſt. The ſevere puniſhment they ſuffered for their idolatries in the *Babylonish* captivity; and, ſecondly, the conſtant reading and explaining of the law and prophets to them in their ſynagogues from the expiration of that captivity till the time of Chriſt and downwards. By this means, their ears were ſo familiarized with that law of GOD which forbid idolatry upon the ſevereſt penalties, and the abſurd and ridiculous light in which the prophets had placed it, together with the dreadful denunciations of the divine wrath pronounced by them againſt it, and all theſe ſo remarkably verified and accompliſhed in the *Babylonish* captivity, and the many other public and national judgements which had fell upon them, in conſequence of their repeated idolatries and revolts; that for the future, they were effectually taught wiſdom in this particular. And the multitude of copies of the

⁂ See 2 Maccab. 1, 2, and 7th chapters. Joſ. Antiq. lib. 12. cap. 7.

holy scriptures which were necessary to supply the numberless *synagogues* in *Judea* and elsewhere, together with the care of the *scribes* and *Masorites* to preserve them pure and correct, rendered it a thing next to impossible that these scriptures should be lost, or materially altered, from the times of *Ezra* and *Simon the just*, till the time of CHRIST: From which time down to the present, the *Jews* and *Christians*, both holding these scriptures sacred, and both using them in the offices of their public worship, have been a sufficient guard upon each other that these writings should suffer no material alteration. So that we have all reason possible to believe that the scriptures of the old testament have come down to our hands, with all that purity and integrity which is *essentially necessary* to a divine revelation; and that whatever lesser errors may have crept into the text, yet they are such as do not at all affect the faith or practice either of *Jews* or *Christians*.

AND indeed, if we will allow what, I hope, has already been made sufficiently evident, that the old testament scriptures bear the genuine external and internal characters of a revelation coming from GOD; that they were designed to instruct the *Jews* in just and worthy notions about the unity, spiritual nature, and infinite perfection of the SUPREME BEING, to direct them in the proper and acceptable method of serving and obeying him, and to elevate and prepare their minds for the more pure, spiritual and universal dispensation of the gospel state, or the MESSIAH'S kingdom; this alone will serve instead of a thousand arguments, to assure us, that the divine providence

providence was in a very particular manner engaged and concerned to preserve such a revelation pure and entire, for answering the great designs of its original donation.

**SAINT PAUL** reckons it one of the highest privileges and greatest advantages of the *Jews*, that unto them *were committed the oracles of GOD*<sup>2</sup>. And from what has been said, it appears, that they have been very faithful to their trust in preserving this *sacred depositum*. And indeed, had they been otherwise, it is strange that **CHRIST** should never reprove them for it, as he did most frequently and liberally for their other neglects and abuses. And yet he is so far from blaming them in this particular, that **HE** and his *apostles* appeal to these sacred writings, and quote them upon all occasions as the genuine and undoubted *oracles of GOD*, and that sacred treasure of divine truth, in which were contained the *words of eternal life*, and which *were able to make them wise unto salvation*<sup>2</sup>. Which plainly shews us, that *they* were under no manner of doubt, either about the inspiration or authenticity of the old testament scriptures, and which is indeed the highest and most infallible evidence we have of their divine original.

THUS have I laid before you a number of arguments tending to prove the divine commission of *Moses*, the truth and divine original of the old testament scriptures, and their preservation in *all necessary* purity and integrity down to the present times.

THE improvement of this and the foregoing discourses, must be reserved for another occasion.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. iii. 1, 2.      <sup>a</sup> Joh. v. 39.    <sup>2</sup> Tim. iii. 15;

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S E R M O N V.

The excellency of the old testament scriptures, and their subserviency to the Christian religion.

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JOHN v. 39.

*Search the scriptures.*

**I** AM now to make some improvement of the foregoing discourses in vindication of revealed religion, and shall therefore proceed,

1st. To shew the excellency of the holy scriptures, as a motive to the duty here enjoined of searching and studying them.

2dly. I SHALL shew the right which all ranks and orders of Christians have to read and search the scriptures in their mother tongue, and their obligations to this duty.

3dly. I SHALL shew that temper and disposition of mind, with which these holy writings should be searched and read. And,

4thly.



4thly. I SHALL make some immediate application of the subject, to persons of different characters.

Ist. THEN I am to shew the excellency of the holy scriptures, as a motive to the duty here enjoined of searching and studying them.

AND here, although I have already in some measure, evinced the intrinsic excellency of the holy scriptures, as a presumptive evidence of their divine original, I shall somewhat farther insist on the same argument, as a motive to our careful and diligent study of them, And, for the sake of order and perspicuity, I shall first make some general observations on the scriptures of the old testament, and, secondly, on those of the new.

FIRST, I am to make some general observations on the excellency and usefulness of the old testament scriptures.

It is well known to the learned that there is an ambiguity in the word *ερευνατε*, here translated *search*, which may be either rendered *indicatively*, as an assertion, *you do search the scriptures*; or *imperatively*, by way of command, as in our common translation, *search the scriptures*. In both these possible translations, the sense is much the same. If the latter is to be preferred, it contains a direct command of our Saviour to the Jewish sanhedrim, to whom he most probably addresses himself upon the present occasion, to search and study the scriptures of the old testament, which, as we have before observed, were the only inspired scriptures then extant. If any prefer the former translation, it contains a declaration that this  
was

was then the common practice of the *Jews*, and a tacit approbation of their conduct. q. d. You do indeed search the scriptures, because you apprehend that in them you have the words of eternal life, and in this you do well, for these are the very writings which testify of me, and which, if impartially studied and rightly understood, would fix your regards upon me, as the promised MESSIAH. So that, however the passage is rendered, it plainly implies two very important truths; *first*, that the old testament scriptures not only contain certain and infallible characters of the promised Messiah, whereby he might be easily known when he made his appearance in the world, by every diligent and unprejudiced enquirer; but also that they contained every other doctrine which was essentially necessary to their salvation, for in them the *Jews* had the words of eternal life, and they bore an especial testimony to Christ; and, *secondly*, that it was the duty of all orders and degrees of men among the *Jews* to search and study these scriptures, as pointing out the Messiah, and containing the doctrines of eternal life.

At that time, in particular, when the *Jews* were so impatient of the Roman yoke, and and breathed so ardently after that political liberty, which they supposed the Messiah would bring them, we may well imagine that they searched the scriptures with a more than ordinary attention, in order to discover the signs of his approach. And it was probably in order to excite their solicitude, diligence and impartiality in this search, that our saviour gave them this command in our text: Although it is

too evident by the consequences, that prejudice and partiality rendered such a search, as to the generality of them, fruitless; their minds being so prepossessed with the expectations of a temporal deliverance by their Messiah, and temporal grandeur under his reign, as to render them wholly unobservant of his true character and design, so that they mistook and rejected that very person who had been the object of their most diligent search and earnest expectations. Their fatal prejudices blinded their minds and hardened their hearts against the holy one and the just. He appeared destitute of that external pomp and prowess which they had falsely preconceived as essential to their Messiah, and therefore had *no form or comeliness* to recommend him to their carnal regards, and so *was despised and rejected of men*<sup>a</sup>. Strange infatuation this! And a melancholy proof that the *Jews*, at the time of our Saviour's appearance among them, had almost entirely lost the spirit of true religion, and were incapable of conceiving any deliverance more important than one from the Roman yoke!

BUT whatever special call the *Jews* might have, at that time, to make a diligent research into their sacred records, yet I hope to make it appear, by the following observations, that these lively oracles have such an intimate connection with our most holy faith, and so direct an influence on our Christian practice, as will always render it our duty and interest to make them the object of our constant search and study.

<sup>a</sup> *If, liii. 2, 3.*

AND this I shall the more willingly attempt, as there are not a few professed Christians, who, although these ancient and venerable writings are bound under the same covers with our new testaments, and come recommended to us as a part of the same *canon*, and an essential part of the rule of our faith and manners, yet treat them with an unwarrantable degree of disregard and neglect, and seldom read or study them with that reverence and attention, which their excellency and usefulness seem to demand. The general excuse for this faulty neglect, is founded on a *false*, or, at least, an *equivocal* maxim, *viz.* "That the new testament contains the religion of Christians, and that we have little concern with any thing else than the gospel;" which such persons ignorantly suppose is confined to the new testament exclusively. Thus they seem practically to give up the old testament as the religion of the *Jews*, and confine themselves to the new testament as the religion of *Christians*; not considering, that those two religions are essentially and substantially one and the same, only differing in outward modes of administration and degrees of perfection, and that these two testaments are only two grand parts of one beautiful and magnificent whole, reflecting mutual light and perspicuity upon each other. So that one can hardly be an intelligent Christian, without possessing all the valuable knowledge of a *Jew*; and one can scarcely be a well instructed and unprejudiced *Jew*, without being disposed to embrace Christianity.

BUT to come to the point in hand. The scriptures of the old testament do abundantly recommend

recommend themselves to our diligent search and perusal, by the excellency and importance of the matters therein revealed, and the direct tendency which they have to our confirmation both in faith and holiness.

THE *origin of the universe, and the manner in which moral evil was introduced into our lower world,* are two questions of great importance; nor are they mere curious and empty speculations, but according as they are determined, must have a vast influence upon the whole of our religion; and accordingly, we find that they have exercised the most philosophical and inquisitive geniuses of all ages.

IF we consult the ancient philosophers, and indeed some who are pretty modern, for a solution of these questions, we shall meet with abundance of odd, absurd, childish and contradictory notions and conjectures, with very little which can satisfy a rational enquirer after truth.

As to the first, namely, the origin of the universe, *Aristotle*, and before him *Ocellus Lucanus*, rejecting the general report of tradition in favour of the world's creation, opened a new career for themselves and disciples, by asserting the eternity of the world, in the same manner in which it now exists. This opinion, which was founded on a maxim extremely false, when applied to omnipotence, namely, "that creation is impossible; or, that out of nothing, nothing can be produced," is loaded with absurdities. It supposes two eternal, self-existent, independent beings, namely, GOD and matter, and therefore leads directly to atheism. It supposes an eternal chain of effects without any

first link; an eternal succession of days and nights, seasons and generations, without any beginning, which is a contradiction in terms. It is contradicted by a number of *phænomena* in the natural and social world, by the late date of our earliest history, the late rise and small progress of arts and sciences, the imperfect population of our earth, the late discoveries of new uninhabited, or thinly inhabited countries, &c. &c. In short, the whole face of things demonstrates that our world has not been eternal, and that this absurd and ridiculous tenet is the *opprobrium* of the peripatetic philosophy.

THE *Stoics* also agree with the *peripatetics* in the eternity of matter, though they ascribe the formation of the world to GOD.

THE modern *Platonists* hold the eternity of the world, as a necessary emanation from the goodness of GOD, as the rays of light necessarily proceed from the sun; which is, in fact, to make GOD a necessary agent, and to rob him of that glory and perfection which results from the wise and free determinations of his will. For, if the existence of the universe is the necessary effect of the divine goodness, then his wisdom and benevolence are entirely out of the question, and his creatures owe him no thanks nor praise for that being and happiness, which he could not possibly have withheld from them, their creation being a necessary effect, and not a voluntary act of his goodness.

THE system of *Epicurus* is still more absurd and whimsical, if possible, than any of the foregoing; for he not only asserts the eternity of  
matter,

matter, but ascribes the formation of the world to a certain fortuitous concourse of small particles of matter, which he terms atoms, dancing about in an infinite space, without any efficient, intelligent cause, to direct their motions; which, it seems, in process of time, formed that beautiful and regular system of things, now called the universe. And, when he comes to the formation of man, upon this *hypothesis*, without a deity, his opinion is so odd and childish that it extorts both pity and scorn from the sensible reader. For *Censorinus* tells us, it was the opinion of *Epicurus*, “ that certain wombs were formed and nourished in the mud, which at length brought forth children, who were afterwards nourished with a kind of juice proceeding from the earth which resembled milk, until they arrived to maturity.” Such is the opinion of *Epicurus* concerning the origin of the universe and of man, which to exhibit, is sufficiently to confute.

THE *Cartesian hypothesis* of the formation of the world, by the mere mechanical laws of matter and motion, although perplexed and improbable enough, is not, however, loaded with so many absurdities as the others. For although it may be perhaps allowed, that *Des Cartes* ascribed more to the powers of matter, than can be well consistent with the universal providence of God; yet, as he supposed matter itself to be the production of infinite power, and that the deity gave those laws and that motion to it, which produced these elements and vortices by which he supposes all bodies to be formed; perhaps his *hypothesis*, romantic as it

it is, may not be thought entirely incompatible with the *Mosaic* account of the creation.

FROM this brief review of the various opinions which the reason of man, unassisted by revelation, has framed concerning the origin of the universe, we may clearly see what small hope an inquisitive mind can entertain of receiving any satisfaction from mere unassisted reason, in this important matter. And yet an important matter it must be confessed to be, if we consider how much the power, wisdom and goodness of the deity will suffer in our esteem, and consequently, how much the motives of our trust, veneration, worship and obedience of him will be weakened, if, influenced by these *hypotheses*, we deny him the prerogatives of creating, preserving and governing the world. Inasmuch, that it were easy to shew, that each of these opinions has an unfavourable aspect on all religion, and that some of them entirely subvert its very foundations! For what religious obligations can we be under to a being, whom we suppose to have no hand in forming this material world in which we live, or these bodies and spirits which constitute our being; who makes no provision for us, and has no regard to our actions; who leads an *Epicurean* life in the third heavens, without, in the least intermeddling himself in the affairs of our lower world? Or to a being, who produced the the worlds from all eternity by a mere necessity of nature, without any free determination, or wise and benevolent design, and who governs all things by the necessary laws of a stoical and invariable fatality? What veneration, what love, what gratitude, what chearful religious  
obedience



obedience could rational creatures exercise towards such a God as this, if indeed he were a God?

How much more rational and satisfactory is that account given by *Moses* of the origin of things, in the exordium of his sacred history? *In the beginning GOD created the heaven and the earth. GOD created man in his own image; male and female created he them. HE formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul,* Gen. i. 27.—ii. 7. How happy is it for plain Christians that they have such an authority as this to appeal to, for the decision of so important a question? That by a few plain words they are delivered from the senseless jargon and endless contradictions and perplexities of a vain philosophy, and that they have their doubts removed and their faith fixed and settled in a point which has so powerful an influence on the whole of their religious conduct. And as to the

2d POINT, namely, the introduction of moral evil into our lower world, it is not only a question of curious speculation, but of great importance to religion; and indeed, I know not whether the very being of all religion among men, may not, in a great measure, depend upon the right solution of it. Accordingly, we find that it has been one of the grand enquiries among all nations, from earliest antiquity, how it has come to pass that man is so corrupt, so depraved, so perverse, so prone to pursue the things which his reason and conscience disapprove, so disinclined to a life of reason and virtue, in which, however, it plainly appears, that the happiness both of individuals and societies can be only, and most effectually

promoted? How it has come to pass, that the principle of reason, which has been allowed by all to be the leading, governing and directive power of the soul, should be so shamefully baffled, subjugated and enslaved by the passions and other inferior powers and appetites of our nature? How it has come to pass, that vice, or a course of living contrary to nature and reason, is much more prevalent among men, than virtue, or a course of life agreeable to nature and reason? In a word, how it comes pass, that there is more of moral evil than of moral good among men; and that, while all the inferior creatures seem to live agreeable to their respective natures, and to obtain that perfection and happiness allotted them, man, who is confessedly the lord of all, should seem to come so far short of his; yea, should, in many cases, be a professed enemy to his own perfection and happiness, and not only to his own, but also to that of his fellow creatures, acting in direct contradiction to his own happiness and that of society? And although this disordered and depraved state of human nature was visible to all, yet nothing so much puzzled and confounded the most acute and sagacious of the heathen sophists, as to give any plausible account of its origin and introduction into the world. So that, as in all other things, of which human reason is not a competent judge, we find the wisemen and disputers of this world stumbling into the grossest absurdities, and the most contradictory opinions, about the origin of moral evil.

THE most ancient heathen lawgivers and philosophers observing this unaccountable mixture of moral and physical good and evil in the world, and not being willing to ascribe the

causality of evil to the good God, hence argued, that there must needs be two first principles of things, the one good, and the other evil; the one the author of all good, the other the author of all evil: For thus they reasoned, "if every thing must needs have a cause, and good cannot be the cause of evil; hence it would follow, that as there was a certain principle which was the cause of all good, so there must be another, which was the cause of all evil." This *Plutarch*, in his treatise of *Isis* and *Osiris*, tell us, was the most ancient and universal opinion about the origin of evil, among the *Greeks*, *Egyptians*, *Chaldeans* and *Persians*. And many are of opinion that *Manes*, who first introduced this absurd heresy into Christianity, being himself a *Persian*, borrowed it from the *magi*, the philosophers of his country. Now this opinion, besides the absurdity of its introducing two Gods, or infinite principles, to the formation and government of the world, which implies a contradiction, destroys at once, all religion and virtue, and renders it impossible that there should be either moral good or evil, reward or punishment in the world: For then all the evil in the world must be produced by the agency of this infinite evil principle, and therefore necessary and unavoidable, and therefore not moral evil, which supposes a degree of liberty in the agent, and a power of refraining from the evil action, and doing the contrary, and therefore, not justly punishable. Besides, if there were two eternal, contrary principles, the one good, the other evil, equally concerned in the formation and government of man; hence it would follow, that mankind had two masters, whom they were equally

bound to serve, the one by doing good, the other by doing evil; which equally confounds and destroys the notions of moral good and evil, of virtue and vice. This opinion also destroys all foundation of hope, trust and confidence in the good being, whose goodness and power are both necessarily limited by a malignant being of equal power and influence. So that let us view this opinion in what light we will, it appears not only self-contradictory, but also terminates in downright atheism, and yet this was the opinion which obtained most universally among those ancient sages of the heathen world, who, having lost the true original tradition of the fall of man, were left merely to the conjectures of their own reason in this important matter.

LET us now descend to the later and more improved ages of philosophy, and see whether the *Platonists, Pythagoreans* and *Stoicks*, gave a better and more rational account of the origin of moral evil, and whether their methods of solving this great *phenomenon* are not loaded with the same absurdities and liable to the same exceptions.

PLATO spoke so mystically on the subject, that his true meaning is difficult to be ascertained; sometimes seeming to ascribe the origin of evil to some kind of malignity and perverse quality inherent in matter, and at other times to some kind of active, self-moving principle, distinct from matter, which he sometimes calls a *mischievous soul*, and sometimes a *necessity resisting GOD*: Which confusion of ideas and language plainly proves, his own embarrassment to account for it, in a just and consistent manner.

manner. For no sufficient reason can be imagined why he should studiously conceal his opinion in this fundamental principle of morality, as *Plutarch* seems to insinuate, provided he had really been satisfied in his own mind about it.

PYTHAGORAS and the *Stoics* speak little less obscurely and problematically on this subject. What may be gathered on the whole from their writings, seems to amount to this, that they believed evil to be inherent in matter. They acknowledged but two principles of things, GOD and matter; and matter not being the production of GOD, but co-eternal with him and having this malignity inherent in itself, therefore they believed that GOD, in forming man, could not change this material out of which he was formed, and therefore that moral and physical evil proceed necessarily from the inherent malignity of that matter out of which the world was formed.

Now, if we push this opinion of evil's taking its rise from the malignancy of the eternal matter, or *ύλη*, of which the world is supposed to be formed;—I say, if we push this opinion to its remote consequences, we shall find it as destructive of all religion, as the former of two first principles: For if matter is eternal and independant upon GOD, then this malignancy, which is supposed to be a quality essentially inherent in matter, must also be eternal and independant on GOD; and being so, GOD can have no power over it, so as to change it, or remove it from matter; which opinion absolutely destroys his omnipotence! Besides, if the seeds of depravity, or mora

evil, are essentially inherent in that matter out of which we are formed, then we commit evil by a fatal necessity of nature, and therefore, cannot be justly accountable or punishable for it, which wholly subverts all the foundations of morality and religion. Thus we see how the wisdom of this world was puzzled and bewildered in accounting for the origin of moral evil, and how the solutions which it gave of this important question, were so far from being rational and satisfactory, that they end either in downright nonsense or atheism, and generally speaking, in both.

It must not indeed be concealed that *Simplicius*, *Hierocles*, *Jamblichus*, and some others of the later *Platonists* have spoke rationally and scripturally of the origin of moral evil, ascribing it in general to its true cause, namely, *the abuse of man's free will*: But then it is no more than justice to observe also, that not one of the heathens ever entertained this sentiment, or held this language, till after the commencement of the Christian *era*, and till the sacred scriptures, and the writings of the first Christian fathers, then every where common, had taught them to rectify the philosophy of *Plato* and *Pythagoras*, and to speak in many important doctrines, in a manner agreeable to the oracles of divine truth. We have the testimony of two Christian fathers, *Jerome* and *Eusebius*, that the celebrated *Ammonius* of *Alexandria*, was a Christian, and it is something more than probable that these just and sublime notions about the depravity of man and the manner of his recovery, proceeded first from his school, and were transplanted, by his scholars;

scholars, from the holy scriptures into the *Platonic* philosophy.

AND now ought it not to be esteemed a great privilege and blessing by Christians, that they are delivered from these erroneous and doubtful disputations of philosophers, as to the origin of evil, by plain narrative and matter of fact, in a divine revelation? From how many absurd systems, perplexing doubts and useless speculations? From how much ignorance, scepticism and inconsistent, contradictory jargon in the fundamentals of religion, have the *three* first chapters of *Genesis* alone delivered us? Where shall we find so probable, so consistent, (not to say) so well attested an account of the production of the universe, of the creation of man, and of the manner of his fall and apostacy from his maker, as is contained in these chapters. We see mankind, at present, very much depraved\*. We see the early signs, and certain

\* I know there are some writers of late, who are called Christians, and supposed to be of the clergy, who seem to insinuate, that mankind are, at present, just what they were formed originally, by the holy and gracious creator, without any adventitious natural depravity or weakness. By what authority, upon what evidence, or with what design, so odd and singular a paradox is advanced by Christians, I profess I am at a loss to understand; seeing the whole current of revelation seems evidently to suppose mankind to be universally corrupted and depraved, and the design of it, so far as a plain and impartial reader can gather, is to remedy this evil, to restore our race to its pristine dignity and innocence, and to advance it to a state of perfection and happiness, o f

tain marks of corruption and degeneracy of nature even in children, before they are capable of

which it is wholly destitute, and for which it is wholly disqualified at present. It was, doubtless, of God's mere goodness, that he created such a rank of beings as men at all, and having created them, it was of his mere goodness, that he endued them with such powers and capacities as they have. He might have made them much more imperfect than they are, and given them much more limited natural powers and capacities than they have, without any impeachment to his goodness, his justice, or any other of his perfections. But now suppose man created with just such natural and moral powers and capacities, as we find him possessed of, and it will be no easy task to vindicate the wisdom, justice and goodness of God, if we find these powers and capacities, in their very first exertions and operations, so strangely perverted, and inclining to the wrong side, which seems to be the matter of fact at present. To vindicate the goodness of God to his creature man, methinks it is necessary that God should be supposed to create him, at least, with a liberty of indifference to good and evil; otherwise his trial could not be fair, he would not have an equal chance, but would be exposed to certain misery, in and for that course of action, unto which he had the strongest natural propensity. But now, let any impartial observer of human nature candidly declare, whether this seems to be the present condition of mankind, and whether the majority of the species do not appear from their early infancy, to have the strongest propensity to vice; and that, notwithstanding all the pains which are employed to counteract the workings of corrupt nature, by a virtuous and Christian education.

If mankind were born in *equilibrio*, with an equal propensity to virtue and vice, is it not strange that



of being seduced by example. This has not been the observation and complaint of one single

the generality should not take the right turn? Especially when we consider, that the voice of natural conscience, the approbation of all the good and virtuous, the peace and tranquillity of a right mind, the remorse, uneasiness and contempt which attend a wicked life, and the influence of a good education, are all on the side of virtue. And yet, is this the case in fact? Do we not see the corruption of nature break over all the mounds and barriers which virtue and religion have set before it? And do we not see vice and corruption predominant in the world? Now, 1st, either mankind are still just such as they came from the hands of their maker at first; and then the difficulty will be, how to reconcile this with the scripture account of things? How to reconcile it with wisdom and goodness of GOD, and with those threatenings denounced against sin in his revealed word? Or, secondly, man comes now into the world in a state of degeneracy and corruption, he has derived some taint of corruption and weakness from some of his progenitors, which naturally inclines him to evil and indisposes him for good: And now, this is just such an account of things, as the scriptures seem all along to suppose, and as proves itself to be true by abundant experience. This solves many difficulties in the moral world, shews the expediency of the work of redemption, and of the means of grace and aids of the spirit, which could not be well accounted for, or justified upon any other supposition.

I CONFESS, indeed, that it is hard to account for the traduction or propagation of this moral corruption, by the principles of reason. But the fact seems to be evident, and it is easy to see which of these two opinions will be attended with the greatest difficulties;

single person, or age, or nation, but is common to all; all of every age, nation, sect and religion agreeing in this, that mankind are, at present, in a visible state of degeneracy and imperfection; that human nature bears all the characters of ruin and desolation upon it, being a strange, inconsistent, compound of dignity and meanness, strength and weakness, wisdom and folly, error and truth, virtue and vice, happiness and misery, which plainly proves, that it is not in its natural state, and is far different from what it became the wisdom and goodness of the creator at first to make it.

THUS stood the universal opinion of mankind in this matter, but the source and spring of this universal degeneracy and corruption was wholly unknown to the gentile nations, the original tradition being either wholly lost, or so blended with fable as to be wholly mistaken; and accordingly, we have seen how their wisest philosophers have erred in their solutions of it, *not knowing the scriptures*: Moses alone having handed down to us the only probable and authentic account of the fall of man, and the consequent deluge of sin and misery which hath overflowed this lower world.

ties;—that man is now just what he originally was, and what GOD designed he should be; or, that, having originally fallen from his primitive rectitude of nature, his posterity are now enfeebled and corrupted, in consequence of their descent from him. This is farther illustrated above.

BUT this is not the only instance wherein the true religion of the bible has been adulterated and perverted, by assigning to human reason a province for which it was never qualified, and for which GOD seems never to have given it to man.

all

IT is not my business, nor have I leisure at present, to vindicate the Mosaic history of the fall. This has been done to the satisfaction of all modest and sober enquirers, by much abler hands. All I would observe here is, that if *Moses* has not given us a just account of this matter, we can no where hope to find it. And yet, that such an account of it is of the last importance to the very being and exercise of true religion, will appear from the following considerations.

1st. If the origin of moral evil be not known, we can never make a just estimate of the evil of sin. For if man was made originally, and without any fault of his own, of a nature so wicked and infirm, that he was naturally disposed to evil, and indisposed to good, to follow the bent and bias of such evil inclinations, will seem living according to the original design of our nature, which cannot be thought in itself either sinful or punishable. Hence a door would be opened to all manner of vice and impiety, upon principle, and no methods taken to restrain or subdue those corrupt inclinations, which on this supposition, were in-wrought into the very original frame of man's constitution.

2dly. If the source of man's present degeneracy and corruption be not known, we shall not know what thoughts to entertain of the wisdom, holiness, justice and goodness of God.

COULD a holy GOD originally form moral creatures in such a degenerate state? Could a wise GOD form a rational creature with a nature so contrary to the law which he gave him, and every way so indisposed to promote the glory of his maker,

maker, and his own happiness? Could a good GOD subject his new formed creature to a train of necessary moral and natural evils, and entail miseries of every kind upon him and his posterity? Would we thus form and dispose of our own posterity, if we had the formation and disposal of them? And shall the compassionate *father of spirits*, the father of the universe be less good and gracious to his offspring than man! Could a just GOD create a nature so full of inconsistent and jarring principles as that of man;— give him reason, a natural conscience and a moral sense, strongly condemning the evil and approving the good, and yet give him, at the same time, turbulent passions and headstrong propensities to evil, far over-balancing these nobler faculties and better feelings of the soul, and ever prevailing against them? Could a just and good GOD make man a contradiction to himself, make him his own perpetual enemy, tantalize him with a law and rule, clear enough to condemn and torment him, but utterly unable to guide and direct him? All these questions will perpetually urge us, and never admit a satisfactory answer, if mankind is not supposed to be, at present, in a fallen and degenerate state.

3dly. IGNORANCE of the fall of man, or a supposition that he is at present in no worse a condition than when he first proceeded from the hands of his maker, will render it impossible for us to judge what estimate GOD himself will make of sin; whether he may judge it to deserve any punishment or not; or what degree of punishment he may allot to sinners: For, if the original constitution of man's nature was

as weak and corrupt, as it now appears to be, it does not appear that sin is so much a moral, as a natural evil; and, if so, then it will deserve no punishment, and if so, then even the natural evils or calamities of this life, which men suffer in consequence of what they call sin, may seem hard measure to creatures who act in all things strictly according to the original constitution of their nature; and surely it will seem much more unreasonable that God should threaten them with endless punishments.

THUS ignorance of the fall of man, or a denial of his lapsed and degenerate condition, tends to render the whole state of our affairs with God dark, perplexed and unintelligible, and paves the way for very injurious notions of the divine perfections and government, and for atheism itself.

BUT now suppose the Mosaic history of the fall to be true, and all this darkness and absurdity brightens into a rational and divine plan. Man was created upright, but he fell by the abuse of his own liberty. A taint of weakness and corruption is unavoidably conveyed to his posterity, which involves them in vice and misery. Into these circumstances they are brought, without any consciousness, or personal fault of their own, and therefore, their unhappy fate pleads for mercy; which would not have been the case, had each individual fallen from his own innocency, by personal transgression. An all-sufficient redeemer is prepared for fallen mortals. He restores without the help of man, what man lost without his own fault. Divine mercy and compassion look down with an eye of pity upon human infirmity and weakness, involuntarily contracted,

and where sin and corruption have abounded, there grace much more abounds <sup>b</sup>. Man is put under a new state of trial, proportionable to his impaired strength and hereditary weakness. All necessary helps are prepared for him, and conferred upon him, to repair the ruins of his fall, and restore him to compleat perfection and happiness. Gracious allowances are made for the unavoidable infirmities of his nature, and sincere, though imperfect, intentions and endeavours, together with an humble and unfeigned trust in the mercy of God, through a redeemer, are accepted of God, in lieu of a perfect and sinless obedience, which the law of nature would have required, without abatement, from a moral agent perfect in *suo genere*.

I HAVE dwelt the longer on these two discoveries made to us in the scriptures of the old testament, because of their manifest importance in the matters of religion; which may serve at once to enhance these scriptures in our esteem, and recommend them to our diligent search and study: For surely it must be no small character of excellence in any revelation, pretending to come from God, that it gives a rational and consistent account of the origin of the universe and of moral evil, the knowledge of which lie, in a great measure, at the foundation of all religion, as, I hope, has been sufficiently shewed.

WHAT I have farther to advance, on the excellency of the old testament scriptures, must be confined to as narrow limits as the nature of the subject will admit. And here, for

<sup>b</sup> Rom. v. 14—21.

the sake of order, we may distinguish the subject matter of the old testament revelation into history, prophecy, morality and devotion, and speak a little briefly of each of these, and of their subserviency to the faith and manners of a Christian.

Iff. As to the *history* of the old testament, allowing its authenticity, which, I hope, has been already proved, it is certainly the most ancient, noble, important and interesting of any in the world. It begins with the birth of things, carries us down through a period of about *three thousand six hundred* years, and gives us an account of all the grand revolutions and events which have happened in the world and church during that time. Nay, if we take in prophecy, as a kind of predictive history, these scriptures give us an entire scheme of providence from the commencement of time to its final period; and till the scene opens in eternity. It is true indeed, the family of *Jacob* makes the grand figure in this history, as well it may, not only because it was written more immediately for the use of the *Israelites*; but more especially, because this family was to be the scene of the most remarkable providences, and because in this family was to be born *the promised seed*, in whom all nations of the earth were to be blessed. It is no wonder that those who apply themselves to the study of the old testament, under the notion of its being a regular and well connected plan of universal history, find themselves greatly disappointed. Indeed, if the penmen of sacred history had any where proposed this as their design, unbelievers would have had good reason to object against it in this view,

view, and complain of it as a defective plan : But this is no where proposed or intimated, and therefore, it is very unfair, first to mistake the design of scripture history, and then to ridicule and reject it for not answering their own design.

It had been easy for *Moses*, had his commission extended so far, to have given a large and circumstantial history of the ante-diluvian world, tracing it through the various descendants of *Adam*, down to the deluge, and of all the branches of the family of *Noah*, down to his own time, and to have marked out the periods of this history by an exact chronology ; but his manifest neglect of this, shews that it was no part of his commission. He wrote as he was directed by the holy ghost, whose penman he was, and only recorded such occurrences and events as were suggested to him. Had he been particular and diffuse in his account of the anti-deluvian world, the *bible* must have been voluminous and unweildy, and probably, that part of his work would have been of little use to after ages, farther than to gratify a vain and idle curiosity, which was a design unworthy of GOD. Accordingly we have no farther account of these early times, than what is purely subservient to the Jewish and Christian dispensations. The apostle has given us a key, by which we may judge of the design of all inspired scripture ; *Whatever things were written aforetime, says he, were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the scripture, might have hope*<sup>c</sup>. You see

<sup>c</sup> Rom. xv. 4.

then



then that the great design of the scriptures, was not to teach us the *arts* and *sciences*, nor to instruct us in the knowledge of *universal history*, farther than these things might have a necessary tendency to beget and cherish religious faith and hope. And now, if we examine scripture history by this rule, we will find it sufficiently perfect. *Moses* establisheth our faith in the being, perfections and providence of one only living and true GOD; he tells us, how man came into the world, how, being seduced by *satan*, he fell from his primitive integrity; what ground of faith and hope GOD gave him and his degenerate offspring, in the Messiah, the promised seed of the woman, as a necessary foundation of religion to such fallen creatures. After this he does little more than give a brief genealogical account of the anti-deluvian fathers, and makes mention of the universal corruption of mankind, and of that awful exterminating judgement of the universal deluge, from which *Noah*, the father of the new world, was saved by preparing an ark, at the command of GOD. Of that period which intervened between the floods and the birth of *Abraham*, which was about *two hundred and ninety-two* years, we have but a very short and imperfect account. Of *Noah* himself, although he lived *three hundred and fifty* years after the flood, and was so distinguished a person, we have no mention after the blessing of *Shem* and cursing of *Canaan*, which happened but about a year after his enlargement from the ark. Of *Ham* and *Japheth* little more is said by *Moses*, than that to the one and his posterity were allotted the isles of the gentiles, and that the other with

his, settled and spread themselves in the plains of *Shinaar*. The whole thread of his subsequent history is confined to the posterity of *Shem*, and to that branch of it in particular, from which sprung *Nabor*, and, in their successions, *Terah*, *Abraham*, *Isaac* and *Jacob*, from whom sprung the twelve patriarchs. And if we observe the sequel of the old testament history, from the time of *Moses* and downwards, we will find the tribe of *Judah* and the family of *David*, making the greatest and most distinguishing figure through the whole. From which observation, we may safely and fairly conclude, that the chief and leading design of the old testament history was to trace out the birth of the promised seed, according to ancient prophecy, down from *Eve* through *Noah*, *Shem*, *Abraham*, *Judah* and *David* to the time of his incarnation, and to prepare and dispose things for his actual coming in the flesh. And if we do but take this observation along with us, we shall easily discern the abundant sufficiency of the old testament history for answering its principal design, which is a convincing proof of its perfection.

AN ignorant reader is disgusted with the long and tedious genealogical tables of hard names, so frequently occurring in the old testament history; but this is a necessary consequence of its brevity: The plan and design of the historians did not permit them to give a history of every particular family and person which they mention, and yet it required them to give an exact genealogical account of these persons and families; this being necessary not only to keep up a distinction between the tribes in the  
land

land of promise, and to secure each tribe and family and individual their possessions, and other legal claims and offices ; but, more specially to ascertain the descent of the Messiah, according to ancient prophecy. So that even this part of the scripture history, which, to an ignorant reader, may seem wholly trivial and useless, will appear, to an understanding instructed in the design of the history, both necessary and important.

THE proof and consideration of a general and particular providence, is one of the strongest supports of religion, and certainly no history in the world gives so frequent and evident proofs, and such strong demonstrations of this, as that of the *Bible*. This is so plain a truth, that infidels make it one of their chief objections against its veracity and credibility. GOD is often introduced on the stage of human affairs ; his manner of intercourse with mankind is represented so different in those early ages, from what it is at present ; miracles, signs, visions, voices, prophecies, shechinahs or divine appearances, preternatural mercies and judgements both to nations and individuals, occur so frequently in the old testament history, that for this very reason some of our random thinkers pronounce it wholly incredible, and compare it to the grossest rabinical fables or popish legends. But now taking it for granted, as I hope we may, that this account of facts is true, hence there will arise such an incontestible demonstration of the being of GOD, and other spiritual powers and agents, of his creation and government of all things, of his providential care, both of so-

cieties and individuals, and of his approving and rewarding of virtue, and hating and punishing of vice, as cannot be met with in any other history, and as lays a firm and solid foundation for the vigorous exercise of virtue and religion, amidst all discouragements. Nor will it appear strange, that these miraculous and extraordinary dispensations of providence are now ceased, if we consider that the reason and necessity of them have also ceased, and that it is inconsistent with the wisdom of GOD to vary from the established law of nature, for no wise end or valuable purpose. Before a sufficient revelation of GOD's will was made to man, and in order to confirm the truth of such a revelation, it was expedient that men, naturally corrupt, ignorant, and prone to idolatry and superstition, should have frequent and convincing evidences of the divine supremacy and superintendancy over human affairs, in order to keep them in any measure right in their religious sentiments and conduct. More particularly, it is scarcely conceivable how such a revelation could be given otherwise, than either by extraordinary, and, therefore, miraculous manifestations of GOD himself, like that from mount *Sinai*; or, by men who, in order to confirm their commission of revealing the divine will, were enabled to work miracles, in the manner of *Moses* and the prophets, Christ and his apostles. We are certain from experience, that less than this was not sufficient to fix men in the belief of the being and providence of one only true GOD, or to settle them in the exercise of a worship and obedience agreeable to his nature and will. But now the

proofs of GOD's providence, and the revelation of his will to mankind, being settled and determined by a miraculous dispensation of providence, as in the revelation of the old and new testaments; men are left to govern themselves by the light of this evidence already given and confirmed. So that if they will not believe *Moses* and the prophets, Christ and his apostles, they are justly left without excuse; it being highly improbable that they would believe, if they had a continual succession of preachers arising from the dead<sup>d</sup>.

AND as no other book in the world does, or can pretend to give such a history of providence as the old testament; so, neither can any other history vie with it in any excellency peculiar to history. Is antiquity a character of excellence? None certainly can vie with it in this respect. Is the grandeur and importance of the facts and events recorded, an excellence in history? In this character it is equalled by none. Is truth the proper object of history? I hope it has been sufficiently proved, that, in point of credit and authenticity, the sacred scriptures have the pre-eminence above all compositions merely human. And as the grandeur, dignity and importance of the facts and events recorded in the *Bible*, are well adapted to enlarge and ennobly the human understanding, and to beget a true sublimity of sentiment in matters of religion and morality; so the variety of useful examples it contains, are excellently calculated to cure the heart and amend the life of the at-

<sup>d</sup> Luk. xvi. 31. Joh. xii. 10, 14.

tentive believing reader. These examples are so various and interesting, so suited to all sexes, ages and conditions of life, so justly drawn and well marked, that they cannot but have a wonderful influence upon an open and unprejudiced mind. What a natural, what a venerable portrait of primitive pastoral simplicity and unaffected piety have we in the history of *Abraham*, *Isaac* and *Jacob*? What a variety of instructive and affecting incidents, in the story of *Joseph* and his brethren? How would such a piece of history have been celebrated and admired in the writing of *Herodotus* or *Xenophon*? How little is it regarded in the writings of *Moses*? Who can read the lives of *Moses*, *Joshua*, *Samuel* and *David*, without being struck with a high veneration for the zeal, piety, magnanimity, and other virtues which shone forth so illustriously, and were so seldom clouded or obscured, in the characters of those ancient worthies? Characters, which, notwithstanding the dirt thrown on some of them by the vilest of pens, will be of respectable and glorious memory while the sun and moon endure. And while we are powerfully led to virtue and glory by such venerable examples as these, we are as powerfully deterred from vice by their opposites. For how can we read the life of a *Cain*, *Pharoah*, *Abab* or *Mennasseh*, without conceiving a horror for that wickedness and impiety, which marks them out as monsters of human kind? But why should I add? seeing every reader of the least judgement and sensibility, cannot help making these reflections for himself, in favour of the excellency of the old testament history.

I SHALL

I SHALL close this article with one reflection; that whereas other historians do, for the most part, barely recite the characters and actions of men, leaving their readers wholly to their own reflections; or, if they do descend to reflections, they are often partial and unjust, as apt to mislead as to instruct an ignorant reader: The sacred historiographers do generally \* make an estimate of characters and actions, and point out to us what is virtuous or vicious, praise-worthy or blame-worthy, in the persons and facts which they record. When actions are recorded, their qualities are generally marked, and their rewards or punishments annexed. When nations or individuals meet with mercies or judgements, the true reasons are commonly assigned. And as these reflections are always just, we are hence infallibly instructed in the true nature and quality of characters and actions;—what estimate GOD makes of them, and by what temper of mind and course of life we shall certainly merit his favour, or incur his displeasure: An excellence this, peculiar to sacred history.

2dly. THE next division of the old testament revelation, the excellency of which I

\* Generally, I say, because there are some excepted cases, such as the dissimulation of *Rebekah*; the lie of *Jacob*; the treachery of *Jael*; the lie of *Rahab* the harlot, and some others, in which the nature of the actions is not sufficiently marked, but left to the reader's judgement and reflection. But then, where this happens to be the case, the quality of the action is so well explained and ascertained in other parts of the revelation, that it is impossible for an intelligent reader to mistake its nature.

proposed to consider, is *prophecy*; under which article are reduceable, sacrifices and other types, promises and threatenings: All these partaking so much of the nature of prophecy as to point out something future, either absolutely or conditionally. And now, if we consider the nature, design and use of this article, and its subserviency to the establishment of Christian faith, and the regulation of Christian practice; we cannot hesitate a moment to pronounce its excellency, and to acknowledge our obligations to search and study those scriptures which contain so precious a treasure. The hope of GOD's favour and acceptance is a necessary foundation of religion. This *Adam* possessed while he continued stedfast in the covenant of his GOD; but lost it the moment he fell from his integrity, and transgressed the positive commandment of his maker. And as he had no such hope himself, so neither could he transmit it to his degenerate posterity: So that the fall left the world absolutely destitute of any such confidence towards GOD, as might prove a sufficient foundation for religion; nor could such a hope be any otherwise obtained, than by an express declaration and promise from GOD. Such a promise, however, was graciously given, immediately after the apostacy, and a new religion set up, founded in mercy, and suitable to the circumstances of fallen man. This promise is included in that celebrated passage, *the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head.* This promise is, if I may so express myself, *the foundation of the religion of a fallen*

‡ Gen. iii. 15,

*world,*



*world, and the first link in that chain of prophecy, which reached down from Adam to Christ, its glorious end and object.* This beginning of promise and prophecy, however dark and obscure in itself, was yet all, as far as we know, that the antediluvian world enjoyed, and was doubtless sufficient for the faith and hopes of these times, in conjunction with sacrifice, another species of prophecy, which was probably instituted together with the promise, and intimated to point to the same end. When in the days of *Abraham*, about *four hundred and twenty seven* years after the flood, the whole world was falling into idolatry, and the very knowledge of the true **GOD**, as well as of his promise, was in danger of being wholly obliterated and lost, **GOD** was pleased to select the family of *Abraham*, as the repository of the divine promises. Accordingly to them was renewed the fundamental promise of the *Messiah*, in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed, and who was to descend from him; and as a seal of this covenant, circumcision was instituted. The same covenant was renewed in much the same terms to *Isaac* and *Jacob*, and by *Jacob* repeated to *Judah*; *the sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be*<sup>f</sup>. Here the promised seed is restricted to the tribe and family of *Judah*, under the name of *Shiloh*, which may import the *sent*, the *peacemaker*, the *son*, the *treasure*, or the *end*; all which interpretations are naturally applicable to the *Messiah*, and the time of his appearance in

<sup>f</sup> Gen. xlix. 10.

the flesh limited to the entire abolition of the Jewish commonwealth, when all regal and judiciary power departed from that tribe, who held it the longest of any. When *Moses* had led the children of *Jacob* out of *Egypt*, and given them a new land, lest they should imagine this law unalterable and of perpetual obligation, he gives them a fresh promise of the *Messiah*, under the notion of a prophet unto him, to be raised up from among their brethren, whom they should hear in all things whatsoever he should say to them;—to intimate to them, that the law and dispensation, which he had established, should be superseded and abolished by the new law of this great, succeeding prophet. *David*, the royal prophet, speaks of this promised seed, as his lord and his son; describes his three offices, and speaks both of his humiliation and sufferings, and of his exaltation and glory<sup>8</sup>. Upon the approach of the Babylonish captivity, when the glory had well nigh departed from *Israel*, when the sensible manifestations of the divine presence had relinquished their temple, when the people in general had cast off their dependance on *God*, trusted in an arm of flesh, and were running mad after idols; when *God* had in a great measure withdrawn the ensigns of his majesty and regal presence from them, had ceased to exercise a special and particular providence among them, and was about to deliver them captives to the king of *Babylon*, as a punishment for their apostacies and revolts; in this

<sup>8</sup> Gen. xii. 2, 3. xviii. 18. xxvi. 4. xxviii. 14. xlix. 10. Ps. ii. xvi. xxii. xl. xlv. lxix. cx. cxviii.

season of universal degeneracy, darkness and distress, when the faith of pious *Israelites* was like to meet with peculiar trials, then did God raise up *Isaiab*, *Jeremiah*, *Ezekiel*, *Daniel*, &c. to invigorate the dying faith, and support the sinking hope of his church, by a variety of the plainest, fullest, clearest and most circumstantial prophecies of the *Messiah*, in which all the circumstances of his humiliation and exaltation, of his birth, life, person, offices, miracles, sufferings, death, resurrection, ascension and kingdom, are so exactly foretold, that, by laying them all together, they seem more like a history of Christ, than a prophecy of the Messiah to come. This lively and wonderful portraiture of the promised seed being completed and perfected by *Haggai*, *Zechariah* and *Malachi*, after the captivity, the gift of prophecy ceased in *Israel* till the days of *John* the baptist, who immediately pointed him out as already come in the flesh. Hence we see that wonderful chain, series or gradation of prophecy, reaching down from the fall of *Adam* to the coming of the Messiah, and the establishment of the gospel covenant; how God at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past to the fathers, by the prophets<sup>b</sup>. How the grand universal scheme of his grace was gradually opened and manifested to the world, till at length, in the fulness of time, it beamed forth conspicuous in the all-enlightening rays of the sun of righteousness himself. This is that chain of prophecy which is so strong a confirmation of the gospel of Christ.

<sup>b</sup> Heb. i. 1.

BUT besides these literal and direct prophecies, there were others, much more significant, and not less certain, and these may be called *typical prophecies*, or representations of the person, offices and salvation of Christ. Such were most of the sacred persons, and modes, and ceremonies of divinely instituted worship from the creation of the world: For as both the patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations of religion, were only preparatory for, and introductory to the universal religion of the gospel; so we have good grounds to believe, that these prior and more imperfect dispensations, had an immediate respect to this final and most perfect dispensation, and that they virtually contained the hopes of the gospel, and the *figures and images of good things to come*. What else can the apostle mean, when he tells us, *that the law is spiritual<sup>l</sup>*. That it is *a school-master to bring us to Christ<sup>k</sup>*. That *meats, and drinks, and new moons, and other ceremonies of the law, were a shadow of things to come; but that the body is of Christ<sup>l</sup>*. That the Mosaic priests, and their gifts and sacrifices served as an example and shadow of heavenly things<sup>m</sup>. That the whole of the Mosaic ceremonial law *had a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things<sup>n</sup>*. That the law, as well as all the prophets, prophesied until *John the baptist<sup>o</sup>*. *And that Christ is the end of the law<sup>p</sup>*. Why is Christ so often compared to a

<sup>l</sup> Rom. vii. 14.

<sup>l</sup> Col. ii. 17.

<sup>n</sup> Heb. x. 1.

<sup>p</sup> Rom. x. 4.

<sup>k</sup> Gal. iii. 24, 25.

<sup>m</sup> Heb. viii. 1—5.

<sup>o</sup> Matth. xi. 13.

lamb in the new testament, and expressly termed *a lamb slain from the foundation of the world*; and *the lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world*, if the sacrifices of lambs had no reference to him, and were not typical of him? Why is that rock which *Moses* smote in the wilderness, called Christ by the apostle<sup>9</sup>, if it was no type of him? Why is Christ called our passover which was sacrificed for us<sup>r</sup>, if the pascal lamb did not, in some sense, prefigure him? Why does the apostle to the *Hebrews* run the parallel between the Aaronical priesthood and the priesthood of Christ, between the rest of *Canaan* and that of heaven, between the temporal and the spiritual covenants, and between the whole of the Jewish and Christian dispensations, if these had no reference to each other, and if the former were not typical and prefigurative of the latter? It is pretended that St. *Paul* writing to the *Hebrews*, who had a high veneration for the ceremonial law, avails himself of their prejudices, and so makes use of their sacrificial language in a figurative sense, in order the more advantageously to display the superior excellency of the Christian dispensation above the Jewish; but that he does not intend to insinuate that the Jewish religion was typical and prefigurative of the Christian. But would any Christian reader of plain common sense, apprehend this to be the design of the apostle, without making use of the key which these writers have been pleased to furnish? And is not the most obvious sense of the apostle likely to be the truest, and that which he designed when he

<sup>9</sup> 1 Cor. x. 4.

<sup>r</sup> 1 Cor. v. 7.

wrote?

wrote? I dare not indeed say, how far the generality of the ancient *Israelites* understood the spiritual and typical sense of their own religion. Perhaps this was designed for our sakes, more than for theirs; perhaps the chief intention of the typical nature of former dispensations, was to give a higher degree of lustre and evidence to the last and most perfect dispensation of the gospel, that the Christian faith might want no kind of support, which its nature and circumstances would admit of. But I am well persuaded, that, to any person of common sense, attentively perusing the new testament, and taking Christ and his apostles for his instructors, it must evidently appear, that the whole of the Jewish liturgy and ceremonial, was itself an express typical prophecy, or lively prefiguration of Christ, and the blessings of his gospel kingdom.

NOR are we to imagine that the *patriarchs* and *Israelites* were left entirely in the dark, as to the great end and mark at which all their various dispensations and typical representations pointed. The essential and great leading principles of true religion were the same in every age, in whatever variety of dresses, or different degrees of evidence or perfection they might appear, under different dispensations. *Patriarchs*, *Jews* and *Christians* have ever had one object of faith, ground of hope, and way of salvation. The faith of *Abel*, *Enoch*, *Noah* and *Abraham* was the same in substance, and as well accepted, as that of the most intelligent Christian. It is absurd to imagine that ever God left his church, in any period of it, so destitute of the means of grace  
and

and knowledge of a saviour, as that true faith, sincere obedience and eternal salvation should be things morally impossible to the members of it. If many of the *Jews* were so carnal and stupid, as to confine their faith to temporal promises, their hopes to temporal prosperity, and their expectations to a temporal Messiah, and a temporal deliverance, instead of raising their faith, hope and expectation to the spiritual promises and blessings of that everlasting covenant, which was so expressly made with *Adam, Abraham, Isaac* and *Jacob*, and so clearly confirmed and explained by their prophets, the fault was not in the darkness of the dispensation under which they lived, but in their own voluntary blindness and carnal prejudices. Christ tells the *Jews*, that *Moses* and all their prophets testified of him; that *Abraham* saw his day a-far off and rejoiced; that many prophets and righteous men had desired to hear and see those discourses and miracles which he spoke and performed among them, and had not been so privileged\*. All which plainly prove, that Christ was expected by the Jewish nation, and their faith and hope directed to him. And indeed, if we attentively peruse the psalms and prophets, we shall find such promises and threatenings given, and such sublime and spiritual hopes inspired, as can by no rules of interpretation be accommodated to a temporal covenant; but which manifestly take their rise from much higher principles, even from the faith of a spiritual and everlasting covenant through the Messiah, and from the belief of

\* Joh. v. 39. Luke xxiv. 27. Matth. xiii. 17, &c.

the soul's immortality, and a future state of rewards and punishments. Besides, what evangelical duty, what condition of the gospel covenant is not manifestly taught and inculcated in the writings of *David* and the prophets? So that it is evident, that *unto them, as well as unto us, the everlasting gospel was preached*, that in their scriptures are contained *the words of eternal life*, and that, however the fullest and most luminous manifestation of the life and immortality was reserved for the dispensation of the gospel, yet the Jews and patriarchs had a sufficiency of light to direct them into the way everlasting, and might easily have discerned Christ and the blessings of his gospel through all the shadows of their various dispensations. How many offers of mercy? How many calls to repentance, to inward purity and spirituality, to faith in GOD and the Messiah, and to a spiritual and evangelical obedience, do we meet with in the scriptures of the old testament? And can we imagine, that all these had no higher foundation than the promises of a temporal covenant, and that those to whom they were delivered could discern nothing more in them, nor expect any thing farther from them, than a happy and prosperous life in the land of *Canaan*? Certainly they did\*.

3dly. As to the *morality* of the old testament, which is the principal part of the revelation, and that for the sake of which all revelations

\* The whole of this argument is beautifully managed in those admirable discourses of the late excellent Bishop of *London*, on the use and intent of prophesy.



were given by GOD, and every external observance of religion instituted (it being the primary design of all religion to bring mankind to a right moral temper and conduct) it is certainly most excellent having its foundation in reason; in the perfections of the deity, and the frame and circumstances of human nature. We have the sum and substance of it comprehended in *ten* short precepts, delivered to the children of *Israel* from mount *Sinai*<sup>t</sup>. And we have a still more compendious summary of it delivered by our saviour<sup>u</sup>: *Hear, O Israel, the LORD thy GOD, is one LORD; and thou shalt love the LORD thy GOD with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it; thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments, says Christ, hang all the law and the prophets.* Such are the fundamental principles of the old testament morality, which are occasionally explained, enforced and applied through all the sacred books, every leaf, containing some divine precept or maxim of this heavenly philosophy. This is the pure morality of nature, of perpetual and unchangeable obligation on all mankind, in every age, so long as GOD and man continue to be what they are. It is the morality of the gospel as well as of the law; and nothing has been added by Christ, except some new motives and obligations, and a rectifying and settling of some of its precepts, which had been either mis-

<sup>t</sup> Exod. 20.

<sup>u</sup> Matth. xxii. 37—40. Mark xii. 29. compare Deut. vi. 5. Lev. xix. 18.

taken or perverted by the *Jews* (as in the article of *monogamy*—the extending of brotherly love to persons of all nations, and even to enemies—and the vast extent and spiritual meaning of the law) and a clearer revelation of its functions.

'Tis true, indeed, the scripture *ethics* are not laid down in a systematical manner, and supported by human reasonings; but they are delivered in a way much better calculated for obtaining their important end. How few are affected with dry and formal precepts? And how much fewer understand abstracted reasonings? Therefore it hath pleased GOD, in condescension to human weakness, to cast the scripture morality in a mould quite different from that of the heathen sages. The chief reasoning by which it is supported, is, *thus saith the LORD*; an argument equally obvious to every capacity, and which, when confirmed by real miracles, affords irresistible conviction. It is sufficient to prove a precept good, and wise, and equitable and beneficial, that GOD is its author; and that GOD is its author is sufficiently proved, if those who have delivered it have been enabled to work true miracles in confirmation of their commission to do so. So that the scripture morality is built on a surer foundation, than any human reasonings possibly can be; seeing, that human reasonings may deceive and mislead us, but GOD cannot. Hence it appears to be extreme rashness and impiety in any to arraign and condemn any scriptural principle of morality, at the bar of their own reason, since GOD, the author of every such principle, must be an infinitely better

better judge of the nature and fitness of things, and of his own will, than the most enlightened human understanding. So that when a revelation is once fairly proved to come from GOD, whose understanding is the only true judge of moral fitnesses, and whose will is the only proper foundation of moral obligation, it argues great presumption in weak and short-sighted mortals to dispute the goodness and equity of such moral precepts, as such a revelation contains\*.

THE scripture morality, instead of being laid down in a regular system of dry precepts and maxims, is every where intersperied through the revelation and interwoven with it; illustrated by examples, recommended by promises, and enforced by threatenings. In the *decalogue*, and some other parts of the Mosaic writings, it is enjoined under the form of commands; in the *Psalms*, it appears in a devotional dress; *Solomon* delivers it in maxims of self-government and human prudence; and the *prophets* cloath it with the ornaments of rhetoric, and apply it in a popular manner for the purposes of conviction, exhortation and re-

\* *Abraham's* offering his son *Isaac*; the children of *Israel's* borrowing and carrying away the jewels of their *Egyptian* neighbours, their exterminating the *Canaanites*, &c. and all this by the command of GOD, are actions which have been boldly censured and rashly condemned as unworthy of the deity, and inconsistent with the moral rectitude of his nature: Although all these commands are built upon this self-evident principle, That GOD may do what he will with his own; that he may bestow the kingdoms of the earth on whom he pleases, and make whom he will the executioners of his justice.

proof. *Moses* teaches morality as a science; *David* converts it into meditation, soliloquy, confession, prayer and praise; *Solomon* applies it to the oeconomy of human life; and the *prophets* preach it to the consciences of the people, and use it as the great engine of conversion and reformation of manners.

4thly. THE devotional parts of the old testament are indisputably sublime and excellent, without compare. Where can we find such just and noble descriptions of the deity, such pure and animated addresses to him, or such truly sublime and incomparable *eulogiums* on his perfections, works and providences, as are almost every where to be met with in these divine oracles? There can be no true devotion, where there is not a competent knowledge of GOD and his providence, of our own nature, obligations, wants, weaknesses and dependencies. And as the holy scriptures, by revealing all these, lay the only foundation for a true and rational devotion, so we may expect to find the most perfect examples of it, in scripture saints. And here, indeed, we find them in an eminent degree. What deep humility and self-abasement for sin? What thorough and heart-felt convictions of the emptiness of the creature, and its insufficiency to make man happy? What profound reverence and veneration for the supreme being? What lowly submission to his will? What firm trust and dependance on his power and grace? What constant and stedfast faith in his governing, directing and disposing providence? What cordial acquiescence in his ways? What earnest panting and breathing after his favour and enjoyment, as the chief good of man, do we find in the devotions

votions of the old testament saints? All good, both of a temporal and spiritual nature is ascribed to him, and asked from him; and all the evils of life, both moral and physical, are ascribed, not to a blind fate or irresistible decrees, or a viciousity in matter; but to the abuse of their own free-will, and the voluntary violation or neglect of wise and good laws, and therefore confessed and bewailed with shame and confusion of face. GOD is celebrated as the munificent author and donor of all their virtue, prosperity and happiness, and they themselves are self-adjudged and self-condemned as the guilty causes of all their vice, adversity and misery. All their good is ascribed to GOD, and all their evil to themselves; and all the affections of their hearts and expressions of their lips correspond with these sentiments. This is true devotion, and it is the devotion of the old testament.

WE have many excellent detached pieces of sublime devotion scattered up and down through the ancient oracles; as the two songs of *Moses*<sup>w</sup>. *Solomon's* prayer at the dedication of the temple<sup>x</sup>. *Ezra's* and *Daniel's* confessions<sup>y</sup>. *Habakuk's* prayer, &c. But the collection of Psalms, commonly called the Psalms of *David*, may be termed not only the common prayer book of the old testament church, but the most compleat manual of devotion in the world. Words are too feeble to express that sublimity of sentiment, that grandeur of figure and stile, and that pure flame of ardent and rapturous devotion which animate almost every line of these wonderful compositions in the original

<sup>w</sup> Exod. xv. Deut. xxxii.

<sup>x</sup> 1 Kings viii.

<sup>y</sup> Ezra ix. Dan. ix.

*Hebrew*; and, even under all the disadvantages of a mean, low translation, they exceed, in a superlative manner, every effort of mere human genius.

AND as they are incomparably excellent in themselves, so they are admirably adapted to almost every supposeable frame of the human mind, and every condition of human life. All the passions and holy affections of the soul are alternately agitated and gently moved in those holy compositions. Every chord of the well-tuned soul, if I may so speak, meets with its due and proper vibrations from some pointed and glowing sentiment in these rapturous anthems, which must needs awaken and keep up the melody of devotion in the soul; and indeed that person must be either dead, or at least asleep in religion, who cannot feel this for himself. Time will not permit me the pleasure of enlarging on this delightful topic, and of pointing out the resources of Christian devotion which are every where to be met with in this divine book; but the experience of every Christian, and the obvious nature and tendency of these seraphic poems to every attentive reader will be a sufficient proof of what I have advanced.

AND now, after having taken this brief and imperfect survey of the general contents of the old testament, can we at all doubt either of its intrinsic excellency, or its manifest subserviency both to the faith and manners of Christians? Doubtless the new testament is the more excellent and perfect revelation, and, exclusive of any other, would prove abundantly sufficient for all the purposes of our salvation. But as GOD has been pleased, as it were, *ex abundantia*, to transmit to us his antient oracles also;

also ; shall we not receive them with gratitude, and search them with diligence ? Can we have too many supports to our faith and virtue, in the dark and perplexed journey of present life ? Or shall we quarrel with heaven, and neglect its favours, because they are multiplied on our behalf ? Surrounded as we are with enemies numerous and potent, involved in the shades of intellectual darkness and prejudice, and in danger every moment of making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience on the rocks and quicksands which lye every where scattered in our way to the haven of everlasting blessedness ; shall we neglect any ray of light, any piece of spiritual armour, or any means of security and defence, indulged us by heaven, to enable us to fight the good fight of faith, and to finish our Christian course with safety and triumph ? Surely we should be unwise and ungrateful if we did. Such succours then, and such an accession of light, strength and direction may we expect from a serious and diligent study of the old testament scriptures ; and therefore, to search them is both our interest and duty.

WHAT a satisfaction must it be to the Christian, to have such an account of his own origin and that of the universe, and of the nature and reason of those circumstances of guilt and imperfection, in which he feels himself, and sees his fellow-creatures actually involved, in which his faith may acquiesce ? With what ease may he answer those important questions which puzzled and non-plussed the most acute philosophers, and for the solution of which all their natural powers and acquired accomplishments were utterly incompetent ? With what pleasure may he trace, in the sacred story, the

rise, the progress, and the consummation of things?—See the world in *embryo*, and view the great architect commanding into existence light, order, symmetry, life and happiness, out of the original *Chaos!*

Is it a small advantage and satisfaction to the Christian, that by the help of these divine oracles, he can with certainty affirm.—“ At such a time, and in such circumstances, man was created;—Thus he fell from his primitive integrity and happiness:—Such and such is the corruption and misery which his fall has entailed on his posterity:—Such are the promises of mercy and hopes of deliverance, vouchsafed him by his gracious creator, as a foundation of his future religion:—At such a time the world became so corrupt by vice and idolatry, that God saw it expedient to destroy the whole human race by an universal deluge, *Noah* and his family excepted:—At such a time, and in such a manner, God was pleased to manifest himself to *Abraham*, *Isaac* and *Jacob*, and renewed and confirmed his original covenant of grace to them and their posterity:—At such a time he appeared unto *Moses*, and enabled him by a series of miracles, to fulfil some part of his promises to *Abraham*, and lead his posterity to the land of promise, miraculously delivering them from all the power of *Pharaoh*, leading them *forty* years in the wilderness of *Shinaar*, and delivering them a law, which was promulgated from *Sinai* with all the circumstances of divine majesty, pomp and terror:—Such and such were God’s wonderful dispensations both of judgment and mercy, to this his ancient church and people, according as they



they either observed, or neglected and violated his holy laws:”—And will any say that such a history as this, is of no subserviency to the faith and manners of Christians?

WHEN a Christian considers the various manifestations of GOD to his ancient people, how often he appeared for their instruction, preservation, support, deliverance, or punishment, as the case required; is it not natural for him to make the following reflections?—“That the same unchangeable and omnipresent being is still equally concerned in the government of his church, and of individuals, although not in the same manifest and conspicuous manner:—That he who led his ancient church through the red sea, and delivered it from all the power and malice of *Pharaoh* and his hosts; he who miraculously supported it for *forty* years in the wilderness, and made it triumphant over all its enemies, has still the same gracious care of, and intimate concern about his church at present, and will continue it till the end of time:—That he who rescued *Noah* from the deluge, *Lot* from *Sodom*, *Daniel* from the hungry lions, and *Shadrach*, *Mesbach* and *Abednego* from the fiery furnace; he who sustained *Israel* with quails, manna, and water out of a rock in the wilderness, and fed his servant *Elijah* by ravens, and caused the widow’s flower and oil to increase, has still the same gracious disposition towards his own people, and will afford them all needful help, protection and deliverance, when they look unto him in the time of trouble:—That he who drowned the ancient world, who destroyed *Sodom* and *Gomorrha* by fire and brimstone from heaven, and who caused the earth to open and swallow up *Dathan* and

and his rebellious company quick to its center, has still the same sacred and inviolable regard to the honour of his laws, the same abhorrence and detestation of iniquity, and the same quarrel with impious and irreclaimable transgressors." And have not such events as these, and such reflections upon them, an evident tendency to confirm our belief of the general and particular providence of God, and consequently, to strengthen our inward veneration of him, our trust and dependance upon him, and so to quicken us in the performance of our christian duty?

As to the article of *prophecy*, it is obvious to every considerate mind, how much the predictions of the old testament scriptures, respecting Christ and his gospel, must strengthen our faith in the gospel revelation. With what wonder and delight may the believer run over every link of that golden chain of prophecy, which like the clew in a labyrinth, must infallibly lead him to Christ, as the end of the law, and the accomplishment of all the promises made to the fathers? The punctual and circumstantial fulfilment of all these prophecies, meeting in Christ, as so many *Radii* in their center, or as so many rivulets in that spacious channel, which receives and conveys them all to the ocean, affords a confirmation of faith, and a joy and satisfaction in believing, unknown to any but the inquisitive, intelligent and believing Christian. What strength and establishment must it add to the faith, and what life and vigour to the hope and joy of a Christian, to trace all the steps of providence, relating to the redemption of mankind, through all the periods and dispensations of the ancient church;

church:—To start the openings of this august scheme, and discover the rays of this morning star of prophecy, in the garden of *Eden*, and to contemplate it gathering light and perspicuity, as he pursues it down through *Abraham*, *Moses*, and the prophets, until it bursts into a dazzling flood of day, at the rising of the *sun of righteousness*? Must not this view of things communicate a joyous rapture to the believing soul, somewhat like that which we must suppose the eastern *Magi* to have felt, when the star, which had conducted them from their own country to *Palestine*, stood fixed over the house where the child *Jesus* lay? Must it not affect such a soul with exceeding great joy, and cause it, with those eastern sages, to fall prostrate before the holy child *Jesus*, and worship him, saying with the convinced disciples, *of a truth we have found the Messiah—him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write*?—To see almost every thing in the ancient law so aptly pointing out and prefiguring Christ, and the spiritual blessings of his gospel kingdom:—To see the ceremonies of the law, so plainly decyphered in the substance of the gospel:—The Aaronical priesthood and sacrifices holding forth in type and apt representation, the eternal priesthood and all-meritorious sacrifice of the son of God; and the great and universal redemption by Christ, as it were, sketched out and prefigured by the many wonderful deliverances wrought for the children of *Israel*:—In a word, to consider the whole of the patriarchal and mosaic religions, as one continued prophecy of, and

*preludium*

*preludium* to the dispensation of the Messiah, (in which light they ought certainly to be considered, if the writings of the apostles are to be regarded in their most obvious signification) adds not a little light and strength to the faith of Christians. And I am strongly inclined to think, that when it shall please the Father of mercies remarkably to enlarge the boundaries of his son's church, by bringing into it the *Jews*, together with the fulness of the Gentile nations, this glorious event will be principally brought about, by a due attention to this argument, namely, *the accomplishment of prophecy*; which is an argument, when rightly understood, equally capable of giving conviction both to *Jews* and *Gentiles*.

AND as the historical and prophetical parts of the old testament, have a direct influence upon the faith, and consequently a mediate or indirect influence upon the manners of Christians; so its moral and devotional parts have a direct and immediate influence upon their manners, and therefore an indirect and consequential influence upon their faith: Seeing the pure morality and sublime devotion of the old testament is no inconsiderable argument of its divine original, and therefore no inconsiderable support of our faith in the whole revelation: For we shall find it very difficult to persuade ourselves, that the penmen of such holy and devout writings, were capable of forging an imposture so abominable, and contrary to all the principles of sound morality, as that with which infidelity charges them; that they were capable of recording miracles which were never wrought, and other historical events which never happened, and of assuming to themselves  
powers

powers and prerogatives, unto which, they were inwardly conscious they had no title!

BESIDES; what a loss would the christian church sustain, if it were deprived of the moral and devotional parts of the old testament? The book of psalms alone, as has been just observed, is an incomparable treasure to the Christian church. It may be properly termed the *Zunda Vesta*, or fire-kindler of Christian devotion; it being impossible to read any of these excellent compositions, with a suitable temper of mind, without feeling the fire of devotion beginning to kindle in the soul. And what shall we say of the writings of the prophets, those fountains of true eloquence, fervent zeal, sound morality, and pure and hallowed devotion? How many arrows have been drawn from this quiver to strike conviction, and mortify lust? How many antidotes to expel the mortal poison of the soul? How many cordials to sooth affliction, beget patience, and cherish feeble faith, languishing love, and expiring hope?—But I forbear to add, having, I hope, said enough to evince the excellency of the old testament scriptures,—to prove their subserviency to the faith and manners of christians,—and consequently to recommend them to our careful and constant study and perusal. It now remains that I should proceed to consider the peculiar excellency of the new testament revelation, as a motive to the duty enjoined in our text: But this must be the subject of a future discourse.

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S E R M O N VI.

The excellency of the new testament scriptures, and our obligation to search them.

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JOHN v. 39.

*Search the scriptures.*

**I**N the foregoing discourse I have endeavoured largely to evince the excellency of the old testament scriptures, as a motive to the duty enjoined in the text; which injunction, altho' it was immediately addressed to the *Jews*, yet will appear to be extended to *us* also, if we consider the great subserviency of these ancient oracles to our christian faith and practice. I now proceed to the

SECOND particular under the first general head, namely, to make some remarks on the excellency of the new testament scriptures, as a reason why we should make them the matter of our most serious study and diligent perusal. And here I may be the briefer, both because the new testament is generally

generally more read and studied by christians than the old, and also because its surpassing excellency is more universally allowed, even by infidels themselves; some of whom seem inclinable to embrace it, were it not for some peculiar doctrines and mysteries which, as they pretend, shock their reason. We have before observed that the former dispensations of religion were preparatory to the gospel; that they contained in them the substance or essentials of christianity, and that they were abundantly sufficient for the salvation of the *Jews* and *Patriarchs*; and we are here about to advance an observation which does not at all either derogate from, or contradict the former, but is perfectly consistent with it, namely, that the christian revelation is far superior to the jewish, and that the dispensation of the gospel infinitely excels all former dispensations, both in point of clearness, perfection, universality and many other peculiar advantages which attend it. To prove this is the principal design of the great apostle, in his excellent and justly celebrated epistle to the *Hebrews*, and after him we may safely advance the same doctrine, and proceed to its illustration.

FIRST: The new testament scriptures are far superior to the ancient oracles in point of clearness and perspicuity. Former dispensations indeed gave a light, a light far superior to that which the Gentile nations enjoyed, a light sufficient to guide those who lived under them with open eyes, to true holiness and happiness; but which was weak and feeble in comparison of this light which excelleth. As the glimmering light of a candle to that of open day, or as the pale and feeble rays of the moon, to the

effulgent brightness of the sun in his meridian splendor, such was the light of former dispensations, when compared with the marvellous light which the glorious gospel has shed upon a benighted world. There was some degree of obscurity in the ancient oracles; there was something of cloud and shadow which rested upon former dispensations, and which the gospel has wholly dissipated. And indeed it was but fit that he who was the *light of the world*, and of *men* in all ages, should reserve the clearest and fullest manifestation of himself to his coming in the flesh. It was but reasonable to expect that some degree of darkness and obscurity should attend the peculiar doctrines of revelation, until the *sun of righteousness* himself arose, and till he who came from the father's bosom, should fully declare and reveal them <sup>a</sup>. Accordingly we find Christ speaking of himself and of his doctrine, as, in a peculiar manner, *that light which is come into the world*; not only in opposition to heathen darkness, but also to the former dispensations of true religion <sup>b</sup>; and so we find Christians termed, by way of eminence, *children of the light*, and *children of the day*, in opposition to Jews as well as Gentiles <sup>c</sup>.

THE manner in which the great doctrines of revealed religion are taught in the new testament, is far more clear and perspicuous than that in which they were taught in the old, agreeable to the superior dignity of that prophet who personally taught them. God, *who at sundry times, or in sundry parcels, and in divers*

<sup>a</sup> John i. 18.

<sup>b</sup> John iii. 19.

<sup>c</sup> 1 Theff. v. 5. Rom. xiii. 13.



*divers manners*, (namely, by types, sacrifices, signs, voices, visions, dreams, urim and thummim, prophecies and the like) *spoke in time past to the fathers, by the prophets; hath in these last days, spoken unto us by his son*; plainly and without the intervention of such comparatively obscure mediums. And therefore the apostle intimates, that it will be no small aggravation of our guilt, if we neglect so clear and conspicuous a revelation of the divine will, *which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord himself, and was afterwards confirmed by them which heard him*<sup>d</sup>. If Christ had spoke no new truths, yet he spoke, and taught his apostles to speak, the truths already revealed, in such a clear and convictive manner, as never *Patriarch* nor prophet spoke them before, which gives his gospel a pre-eminence above all former revelations. He set the great duties of the moral law in a new light, shewed their spiritual nature and vast extent, and rescued them from the false glosses of supercilious and hypocritical *Pharisees*. He taught men to love their enemies, and consider all men as their neighbours: Duties which were little known, and less practised, before his coming in the flesh<sup>e</sup>.

THE faith of the old testament church was far from being clear and determinate. It was, at most, little more than a kind of general trust in the mercy of GOD, through the mediation of a certain glorious person to be revealed in the latter time. It is evident from the testimony of St. Peter<sup>f</sup>, that the prophets them-

<sup>d</sup> Heb. i. 1, 2. ii. 1, 3.    <sup>e</sup> Mat. v. vi. vii. chap.

<sup>f</sup> 1 Pet. i. 10, 12.

selves did not understand the full force and import of their own predictions concerning the Messiah, his sufferings, his glory, and his kingdom, although they diligently searched and enquired into their meaning. They indeed saw Christ's day afar off, and rejoiced; but they saw it but in a faint and obscure light, and therefore they *earnestly desired to see those things which we see, and to hear those things which we hear, and which the angels desire to look into*, in the clearer and more luminous dispensation of the gospel<sup>z</sup>. But now in the new testament, we have a clear and manifest display of that venerable mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh. *The word, made flesh, dwelt among us, full of grace and truth*; and in his gospel we are permitted to *behold his glory*, a glory every way becoming the only begotten son of God<sup>b</sup>. We no more behold the lamb of God, darkly adumbrated in types and sacrifices; but clearly see him in his own person. We no more learn the glad tidings of salvation from obscure figures, and prophetick oracles; but hear the clear and gracious words which proceed from his own mouth. The dignity of his person, the nature of his offices, the lustre of his works, the design and benefits of his death, standing conspicuously to view in the gospel, not only enlarge and strengthen our faith, but render it clear and determinate. We distinctly *know in whom we have believed*, and to whom we have committed our souls, and the reasons of this trust<sup>i</sup>. In this sense, therefore, the *least in the gospel king-*

<sup>z</sup> John viii. 58. Luke x. 24.

<sup>b</sup> John i. 14. <sup>i</sup> 2 Tim. i. 12.

*dom is greater than* John, or any of the preceding prophets, as knowing many important truths which were concealed from them <sup>k</sup>.

THE important doctrines of the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, a judgment to come, and a future state of rewards and punishments, were but darkly and sparingly revealed in the ancient oracles; but Christ and his apostles have drawn, as it were, the vail from the invisible world, and as the apostle emphatically expresses it, have *brought life and immortality to light, by the gospel*; or as the words may be translated, have *thrown a light upon the doctrine of life and immortality* <sup>l</sup>. They have set the great things of the invisible world in a clear and amazing light before the eyes of our faith. They not only assure us of a general judgment, wherein all men shall be called to an account for the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or evil; but also set all the glories and terrors of that tremendous day before us, point out the person and retinue of the judge, give us a plan of the whole process, and of its final issue in the eternal happiness of the righteous, and the everlasting punishment of the wicked <sup>m</sup>. Nay this future happiness and misery, are almost brought down to our sight and sense. In the new testament, heaven is unveiled, and hell hath no covering; we are made *almost* to see the righteous in their glory, and the wicked in their misery, and are enabled *almost* to hear the hallelujahs of the one, and the weepings,

<sup>k</sup> Matt. xi. 11.

<sup>l</sup> 1 Tim. i. 10.

<sup>m</sup> Matt. xxv. 31, 46.

2 Theff. i. 7, 10. 2 Cor.

v. 10. Acts xvii. 31.

Rev. xx. 11. 15.

wailings, and gnashings of teeth of the other; so that until death draws aside the veil of flesh, we cannot possibly have clearer discoveries of the eternal world, or stronger obligations to obedience, than what the gospel affords us. In our present state we can arrive to little more than general and negative conceptions of either the happiness or misery of a future state; and perhaps all the power of language cannot give us a clearer idea of heaven, than a place and state of compleat and uninterrupted happiness, wherein all the powers and capacities of our natures will be greatly ennobled, and gratified by the full enjoyment of the most pleasing and delightful objects, at the remotest distance from all painful sensations;—or of hell, than as a place and state, where the miserable sufferers will be totally deprived of all both mental and corporal sensations of pleasure, and be wholly filled with anguish, horror and despair. Now these general descriptions of a happy and miserable futurity, the gospel lays before us, in a great variety of both plain and figurative language. But as to the peculiar sensations and employments which constitute this happiness and misery, here the gospel is in a great measure silent; *first*, because we have, perhaps, no language to express them, and can at present form no adequate conceptions of them; and *secondly*, if we could, such discoveries would, in all probability, be very improper for us in our present state of trial, would encroach too much on the province of faith, lessen its proper merit and efficacy, and render virtue itself in a great measure impossible.

FOR were the veil so entirely removed from futurity, as to give mankind a kind of sense and perception of the joys of the righteous, and the miseries of the wicked, there would be no more room for faith, and the wills of men would be under a kind of necessity, which would destroy the very being of virtue, and cut off all title to its reward. Such discoveries therefore the gospel does not afford us, as being very improper for us, and wholly unsuitable to our present state; but whatever lights and discoveries are best adapted to our present state and circumstances; whatever views and prospects of futurity are most fit and convenient to keep alive our religious fears and hopes, to animate us in the ways of virtue, and deter us from the paths of vice, and to lead us on perseveringly to perfection and glory, are here laid before us, with a degree of clearness and perspicuity, which nothing but the obstinacy and prejudices of infidelity can resist. So that if men will love and chuse darkness, rather than this light, no other reasons of their conduct can be well assigned, than those given by our saviour and his apostle *Paul*, either that their evil deeds have prejudiced them against opening their eyes to the light which shines around them; or that the God of this world, taking advantage of these unreasonable prejudices, hath blinded the minds of those who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine unto them <sup>a</sup>.

SECONDLY: The new testament scriptures far exceed the ancient oracles, in point of per-

<sup>a</sup> John iii. 19.

2 Cor. iv. 4.

fection and compleatness. Indeed this character of excellency has a great coincidence with the former; for their superior clearness constitute, in a great measure, their superior perfection: The perfection of any revelation consisting as much in its clearness and perspicuity, as in its fulness and compleatness. Now although the same primary objects of faith, the same covenant of grace, and the same terms and conditions of salvation are revealed in both testaments: Yet there is a great difference both as to the clearness and compleatness of the revelation. In former dispensations these things were revealed more sparingly, more obscurely, more imperfectly; under the gospel dispensation they are revealed more frequently, more clearly, more fully, and more perfectly. The gospel not only presents us with new objects of faith, and new motives to obedience; but also makes a more perfect and compleat discovery of those exhibited in former revelations. *The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*; a more ample declaration of pardoning grace, and a more abundant effusion of the holy spirit of truth, of which the Mosaic dispensation was only a shadow<sup>o</sup>. Many prophets, and wise men, and kings, under former dispensations, greatly desired to see those things which we see, and to hear those things which we hear under the gospel<sup>p</sup>. Which plainly shews that their notices of the great things of religion, were very dark and imperfect, compared with ours under the gospel. And indeed the matter of fact will be exceeding plain and

<sup>o</sup> John i. 17.    <sup>p</sup> Matt. xiii. 17.    Luke x. 24.

evident to any, who will carefully compare these two revelations together. The great and important doctrines of the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, a general judgment, and a future state of rewards and punishments; if they are at all revealed in the old testament, (for it is a disputed point) are revealed very sparingly and imperfectly; they are rather supposed than asserted, rather hinted at by the bye, than positively taught; but in the new testament how fully, how clearly, how circumstantially are these truths laid down in almost every page? The being, the perfections, the providence of a GOD, and the nature of his worship, are indeed plainly taught in the old testament scriptures, but still it must be confessed that these matters have been greatly illustrated and improved by the gospel of Christ. Such was the exterior pomp and pageantry of that worship prescribed by the jewish ritual, such and so frequent the visible symbols and manifestations of the DEITY, that it was no easy matter for a jewish worshipper to abstract his mind from material images, and to worship GOD, *who is a spirit, in spirit and in truth*. How justly therefore might the apostle, when comparing his ritual, and the worship which it prescribed, (especially as adulterated with the intermixture of rabbinical traditions and commandments of men) with that simple, rational, spiritual and perfect plan of worship laid down in the gospel; I say how justly might he term the former the *law of a carnal commandment*, and the observances which it enjoined, *carnal ordinances, and weak, worldly and beggarly elements*?<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gal. iv. 3, 9. Heb. vii. 16. ix. 10.

These gifts and sacrifices, and other observances, having chiefly a political and temporary aspect, could never make those who did the service; perfect as pertaining to the conscience; it was only *the bringing in of a better hope, the power of an endless life,* (which are chiefly exhibited in the gospel dispensation, that perfect law of liberty, which makes full provision for our pardon and sanctification) that can effect this, by establishing a spiritual worship, and urging inward holiness and purity of heart. The old testament indeed affords us a noble summary of the moral law in the ten commandments, which are frequently illustrated and applied to particular cases in the subsequent scriptures; but how much are we indebted to the discourses of Christ, and the writings of his apostles, for the true nature, spirit and extent of this law? The jewish scriptures do indeed predict the *Messiah*, with an amazing circumstantiality and exactness; but how little did the most enlightened of the *Jews* understand of the person, offices, and dignity of Christ, in comparison of the meanest christian who enjoys the light of the new testament revelation? The covenant of grace was undoubtedly promulgated under the jewish and patriarchal dispensations; but oh! in what inferior circumstances of lustre, glory, and perfection, to the light in which we now behold it! *“Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you. He that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to*

† Heb. vii. 16, 19. ix. 9. James i. 25.



*save sinners; of whom I am chief. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.* These are sentences which have more of light, of life, of comfort to the guilty enquiring soul, than the brightest which the Jewish scriptures can afford.

THUS you may easily apprehend the superior clearness and perfection of the gospel dispensation to all preceding ones, as indeed it was the perfection and accomplishment of them all.

THIRDLY. Another character of superior excellency in the new testament scriptures above the old, is the catholic and universal nature of that religion which they teach. Whatever the patriarchal religion might have been, yet we are sure the Jewish was only a local and national religion, confined to the seed of *Jacob* alone, and calculated for a limited spread, and a temporary duration. The whole fabric of its ceremonial laws and positive institutions prove this. Sacrifices were only to be offered at the temple of *Jerusalem*, and thither all the Jewish males were to repair thrice a year, which could by no means have suited the bulk of mankind. They had indeed a right to make what profelytes they could; but such was their superstitious regard to the holy land, such the restraints laid upon them by the very precepts of their religion from all familiar intercourse with other nations, and such indeed the contempt and averfion of all other nations towards them, on account of the peculiarities

cularities of their social and religious customs, that it was never in their power to make any considerable number of profelytes. How widely different from this is the genius of that religion which is taught in the new testament? The ceremonial law, which was at once *a yoke of bondage to the Jews*, and *a middle wall of partition* between them and other nations, is now totally cancelled and abolished by the coming of Christ, who is the substance typified by those shadows. He hath totally abrogated in his flesh, that which was the great occasion of enmity and alienation between the *Jews* and *Gentiles*; to which the *Jews* were so extremely attached, and to which the *Gentiles* were so irreconcilably averse, even the law of positive commandments and ceremonies contained in the Mosaic ordinances. This *hand-writing of Jewish ordinances* hath he *blotted out* and cancelled, *nailing it to his cross*; having by his incarnation, ministry and sacrifice accomplished all the purposes of its institution. So that there is now the liberty of a free intercourse for Christians among all nations, without the fear of contracting ceremonial pollutions, or of neglecting positive observances\*. The time is now come when we are neither confined to mount *Gerrizim* nor *Jerusalem* for securing the validity of our religious services, but the true worshippers may worship the father, in every place with equal success and acceptance, provided they do it *in*

\* Gal. v. 1. Col. ii. 14. Eph. ii. 14.

*spirit*

*spirit and in truth*<sup>1</sup>. None can certainly complain, that Christianity subjects its votaries to an intolerable yoke of bondage, that it lays them under a multiplicity of costly and difficult observances. It brings down religion to the standard of reason, divests it of all the pomp and pageantry of external decoration, except just so much as is necessary to accommodate it to society, and reduces it to a pure, simple, rational and spiritual service. If there are any who teach and practise Christianity in another form, who load and deform it with the antiquated ceremonies of Judaism; who teach the necessity of consecrated churches, baptized bells, altars, images and holy vestments, they teach and practise, not the religion of the new testament, but one adulterated and debased from its original purity, by the addition of human inventions. They have not stood fast in *that liberty wherewith Christ hath made them free*, but are intangled again, with a worse than Jewish yoke of bondage. The new testament teacheth a portable religion, a religion which every man may carry in his breast, and practise in the most distant and remote regions. Every place where two or three are met together, in the name of Christ, and for the purposes of his worship, is a consecrated temple, every truly Christian heart is an holy altar, and every pious wish, devout ejaculation and virtuous resolution is a sacrifice holy and acceptable unto God through Jesus Christ. And as the religion contained in the new testament is thus calculated in itself for an universal religion, so

<sup>1</sup> John iv. 21—23.

it is the exprefs and avowed design of its divine author that it should be univerfally propagated to all nations, preached to every reasonable creature, and that all nations without diftinction should be equally profelyted to it <sup>u</sup>.

FOURTHLY. Another great advantage of the new testament above the old, and of the gospel of Christ above any former dispensation, is, that it contains and exhibits the most perfect example of its divine author, and that too under the exprefs notion of a model and pattern for the imitation of all his disciples. We have indeed many shining and useful examples of piety in the old testament, both in the life of *Moses* the Jewish lawgiver, and in many other of the worthies of the ancient church; but how far do they all fall short of the glorious *Emmanuel*, of him who was holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners; who never did sin, neither was there guile found in his lips; but who lived in the highest perfection of that virtue which he taught, and recommended the most beautiful and perfect system of morals that ever blessed the world, by an example, by far, the most perfect and illustrious that ever was exhibited among mortals? This is a character of excellency peculiar to the new testament, and which no other religion can boast. Were the lives of *Numa Pompilius*, *Zoroaster*, *Confucius*, *Mahammed*, or even the most celebrated founders of religion or teachers of morality in the heathen world, to be published, with their respective systems, the one would prove a disgrace and contradiction to the other.

<sup>u</sup> Matth. xxviii. 19. Mark xvi. 15. Luke xxiv. 47,

Not so the life of Jesus ; it is the greatest ornament to, and the best commentary on that noble system of refined morals contained in his sacred pandect. Here we see the graces and virtues of the Christian system, living and breathing in its divine author, which at once exhibits to us the power and beauty of his religion, and encourages and allures us to imitation.

BESIDES, this example of Christ, which makes a very useful and important part of the gospel, is ordered in such a manner, by the providence of GOD, as to render it most extensively serviceable to mankind. The situation of Christ in his incarnate state, was that of the greatest bulk of mankind, several degrees below the middle rank of life ; by this means he was exposed to those trials and temptations unto which the generality of men in all ages are exposed, and was naturally led to the exercise of those graces and duties, which render his example the most extensively useful, that it could have been in any supposable circumstance of humanity. Are the generality of mankind in inferior stations, and in narrow and necessitous circumstances of life ? So was Christ. Are the generality of mankind exposed to reproach, division and contempt because of their poverty : liable to the temptations of Satan, the malevolence of enemies, and the perfidy of false friends, and to a variety of afflictions and sufferings ? So was Christ in a most eminent and signal manner. Are the greatest and most necessary duties unto which the bulk of mankind are called, resignation to GOD, a constant filial trust and dependance upon

upon him in all dangers, wants and difficulties; humility, benevolence, contentment with the allotments of providence, gratitude to God for all the mercies they receive, patience under afflictions, and a meek, even, quiet spirit under all the cross accidents of life, with a firm and lively trust in the goodness and mercy of God, as the great deliverer and rewarder of his people? Unto all these Christian graces and duties did the peculiar circumstances of the life of Christ more especially lead him, and in all these has he given us an eminent example, that we might follow his steps. This matter deserves our special attention, and will more and more convince us of the wisdom and goodness of God, who made his son not only a man, but also a man in a mean and necessitous circumstances of life, *a man of sorrows, and acquainted with griefs*; and of *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who for our sakes became poor, and took upon him the form of a servant*, that so his example might be the better accommodated to the bulk of his disciples<sup>v</sup>. To what I have already said of the superior excellency of the Christian revelation to all that preceded it, I shall here subjoin a brief *analysis* of its general contents, which, by directing our eyes into its various apartments, may give us a summary view of the treasures they contain.

THE four gospels are four distinct histories of the life of Christ, containing a very clear and succinct narrative of many of his principal discourses and actions, of his sufferings, death,

<sup>v</sup> Isaiah liii. 2 Cor. viii. 9. Phil. ii. 7.

resurrection

resurrection and ascension, and an easy and unlaboured representation of his character and temper; together with many particulars relative to the religious and political state of the *Jews*, which it was of great importance for us to know. The agreement of these four lives of Christ, if I may so term the gospels, in the main facts and incidents which they relate, although in a somewhat different language, order and manner, affords a strong presumption of the honesty and veracity of the sacred biographers; while their different narratives, in other respects, are supplemental to, and perfective of each other; some relating the same facts in longer detail, and with more circumstances than others, and some recording what the others have entirely omitted: So that from the whole we are enabled to gather a very comprehensive, though concise history of the life of Christ. But what is of greatest moment, these four together, and perhaps each of them separately, have written the substance of the gospel of Christ, or all the necessary and essential parts of that covenant of grace established between GOD and man: So that had all the new testament, excepting the four gospels, or perhaps excepting any one of them, been entirely lost, and had this alone been handed down to us with sufficient certainty, there is no reason to believe that we should have been at any loss to have known the will of our master, and the way of salvation through him; these gospels together, and each of them separately, containing in themselves all the *doctrines* necessary to be believed, and all *duties* necessary to be performed in order to salvation. This seems necessarily

necessarily implied in the words of St. *John*<sup>2</sup>, compared with the four first verses of St. *Luke's* gospel, and the first verse of the Acts of the apostles\*.

BUT

<sup>2</sup> John xx. 31.

\* If this therefore be true, it ought to banish the fears of some timorous Christians, who, by the sophistry of infidels as well as papists, may be brought to doubt that many inspired books of the new testament are now lost, and that many errors are crept into these books which we still possess; and that, consequently, the Christian revelation, even supposing it to be true, is yet far from being perfect, and therefore can by no means, at this day, answer the ends for which it was published. For although these premises should be granted, yet the conclusion drawn from them will by no means follow; seeing, the same providence which gave this revelation and intended its perpetuity, is equally concerned to preserve its integrity, so far as that is necessary to answer its general design. Now supposing the genuine facts on which the truth of Christianity is founded, together with the essential articles of that covenant of grace which Christ came to publish, are handed down to us, with no material alterations; the faith of Christians still stands secure, and we have still canonical scripture enough in our hands to direct us in all the necessary branches of our faith and practice.—If any should object, that this is to advance the gospels to the prejudice of the other canonical books of the new testament; that by making them absolutely sufficient, the others of consequence must be supposed superfluous and redundant, which implies a reflection on the wisdom of God, who cannot be supposed to do any thing in vain. To this I answer, we must distinguish between absolute necessity, and expediency or utility. I am  
far



BUT now although there may be a bare sufficiency in the four gospels for all the purposes of our faith and practice, in order to salvation, yet it hath pleased Christ, for the farther establishment of our faith, and for the more particular and circumstantial direction of our Christian practice, to make a large addition to his original gospel, by the writings of his apostles, which compleat and close the canon of the new testament scriptures. No one who firmly believes, and attentively considers the gospel of our Lord, as recorded in the four evangelists, can hesitate a moment to pronounce

far from insinuating, that because the gospels have a bare sufficiency, the rest is therefore vain and superfluous: As, in the blessings of providence; God has not only consulted our necessities, but also provided for our pleasure and conveniency; so he also seems to act with regard to the blessings of grace: He gives line upon line, and precept upon precept in condescension to our weakness. He not only reveals all necessary truths and duties, but often repeats them, and that in a variety of lights, that he who runneth may read, and he who readeth may certainly understand: Duties laid down in general maxims in one place, are applied to particulars in another. So that although the four gospels, or even any one of them, may contain all things necessary to our faith, practice and salvation, yet the subsequent books of the new testament, are of great utility and conveniency to the Christian church. All scripture is profitable, though it may not be absolutely necessary; and although the acts and epistles may not be necessary to the very being of Christianity, yet they are necessary to its well being; and are highly expedient to illustrate the gospels, and to confirm the faith and animate the practice of Christians.

the apostles abundantly qualified for this work. For, besides the integrity and simplicity of their lives, and the intimate acquaintance the most of them had with their divine master, and his doctrines during his abode with them, they had the largest and the most express promises of the presence and guidance of his spirit to enlighten their minds, to refresh their memories, to teach them all things, to guide them into all truth, to testify of himself unto them, to shew them things to come, to put words into their mouths, and to abide constantly with them as their comforter and director. For this promise of the spirit they were commanded by their master to wait at *Jerusalem*, and accordingly ten days after his ascension it was poured out upon them in a most public and signal manner, accompanied with the power of speaking all kind of languages, and of working all manner of miracles, even equal to those which he wrought himself\*. And now do not such promises received from Christ, and such powers exerted in his name, entitle the doctrines and writings of these apostles to a due degree of credit and veneration from all who sincerely believe the divine mission of Christ? And can it be thought that after all they were left to error, fanaticism and delusion in their sermons and epistles to the Christian churches\*? As to the expediency and

y Matth. x. 19, 20. Luke xxiv. 49. John xiv. 16, 17, 26. xv. 20, 27. xvi. 7, 13. xx. 21. Acts i. 4, 5.

z Luke xxiv. 49. Acts i. 45. ii. 1.

\* A certain late nobleman, of known candor and penetration in theological matters, has, in one of his

and utility of the additions they have made to the original gospel of their master, it may be fairly inferred

his rambling essays, employed a good deal of his eloquence in endeavouring to shew, not only the profaneness and unintelligibility of St. *Paul's* gospel (as he terms the epistles) but also its opposition and contrariety to the much complimented gospel of Christ. The gospel of Christ, it seems is one thing, and the gospel of *Paul* another. Christ is a republiher of natural religion; *Paul* a vender of absurd, profane and trifling nonsense. In what manner his lordship has made good this assertion may be seen in his fourth essay. It is by making St. *Paul* the teacher of passive obedience and supralapsarian-predestination, doctrines no where to be found in his writings. His lordship is at great pains to shew us the absolute compleatness and sufficiency of the gospel of Christ, who is the finisher as well as the author of our faith, without the addition of St. *Paul's* gospel, or any other. In order therefore to cut up the roots of all artificial theology at one blow, he shews us the absurdity and almost blasphemy of admitting any other revelations than that which Christ made in his own person: This, says he, is to suppose that Christ executed his commission imperfectly; that he left his followers without sufficient grounds of faith and obedience; that those who were converted by him, and who died before the supposed imperfection of his revelation had been supplied by the apostles, especially by St. *Paul*, lived and died without sufficient means of salvation. A revelation made by God, it seems, must be compleat and perfect from its first promulgation. The covenant of grace must have been made all at once; otherwise every new article of belief or duty must change the covenant. *Ergo*, all subsequent revelations are spurious productions, *Paul* and all other gospel writers are villainous impostors for imposing their

inferred both from his own words, and from the nature of those authentic writings which they have

their additions to the gospel of Christ, under the notion of inspired writings, and all theologers from that age to this, who have paid any regard to the apostolic writings, are either fools or knaves! This is the natural conclusion from his lordship's reasoning; and these premises, thus fixed, makes way for his lordship to deal his blows plentifully upon the whole tribe of gospel-makers and theologers. Now though it were perhaps a much easier task to cut up the roots of his lordship's sophistry, than it was for him to cut up those of theology, yet a marginal note affords too narrow limits for the task, which however has been sufficiently done already by much abler hands. Nevertheless, as I have presumed to bring his lordship's name in question, and to start an opinion of his, which, if just, would invalidate the authority of the greater part of our new testament, it seems necessary that I should say something in support of what I have ventured to advance, namely, that his reasonings on this head, are sophistical and inconclusive. And,

1st. His lordship has brought many heavy charges against *Paul* without condescending to make one of them good.

2dly. By his lordship's manner of reasoning, we are led to infer, that *Paul* and the other apostles have greatly adulterated the gospel of Christ, by adding new terms and conditions to the covenant of grace which he established, and loading it with a number of new doctrines and duties, and thereby, *horrendum dictu*, have changed the covenant. This is indeed a dreadful charge, yet his lordship has thought proper to leave it, upon the credit of his own veracity, without the least shadow of support from the epistolary writings of the apostles.

have left us, and which are justly included in the Christian *canon*. A few days before our Saviour's

BUT is this in fact the case? Have any of the apostles presumed to alter the original covenant of their Lord, or to annex to it new terms and conditions of salvation which he has not annexed? I believe that none, who are competently acquainted with the new testament scriptures, will dare to affirm it. Upon what conditions did Christ promise eternal life to his disciples? Was it not on condition they should believe in him, repent of their sins, and lead a holy life? And is not this the current doctrine of all the epistles? The apostle ought to be named who hath required any other conditions of salvation than these. They have indeed frequently explained and enforced these conditions of the covenant in all their epistles to the churches, and this, I apprehend, is perfectly agreeable to their office as preachers of their master's gospel: But the question is, did they make new ones, or change the old? If not, they stand perfectly clear of his lordship's charge.

As there is a wide difference between explaining, illustrating, and enforcing the conditions of a covenant already made, and adding new ones to it, by which the covenant is indeed altered; so, I apprehend, that both new truths and duties may be added for the illustration and perfection of a prior religion, without making any material alterations in God's covenant with mankind.

THE great condition of salvation of obtaining the divine favour under every dispensation of religion, I take to be, faith in the promises and declarations of God, and obedience to his revealed will, however these revelations are made, provided they are well attested. This constitutes the sum total of all true religion. Now, if we fix on this bottom, it will appear of little consequence how many, or how

Saviour's passion, he tells his apostles that he had *many things to say unto them, which they were not*

*few*, the truths or duties are which God hath revealed, in any of his dispensations. Suppose him to have revealed five truths to *Adam*, as the objects of his faith, and five duties as the rule of his practice—*Adam* in believing these five truths, and observing these five duties, performed all that God required of him; he kept the covenant of his God. But now let us suppose that this number of truths and duties were doubled to *Noah*, does not *Noah* become instantly obliged to enlarge his faith and obedience, according as their objects are multiplied by the divine authority? Let us suppose that the *credenda* and *facienda* of religion are still farther multiplied to *Moses* and the *Israelites*, and increased yet to a greater number in the gospel of Christ, and what impeachment can all this be to the justice and goodness of God, seeing he requires from mankind, under each of these dispensations, only according to the doctrines revealed to them, and the duties enjoined upon them? And seeing the conditions of God's favour and eternal happiness are still the same for substance under each of them, namely, faith in the promises and declarations of God, and obedience to his revealed will?

Let us apply this reasoning to the present case. Suppose St. *Paul* and the other apostles, in the name and authority of their master, and under the sanction of those miracles which he enabled them to work, had in their ministry declared some truths, and enjoined some duties which Christ had not expressly revealed or enjoined in his personal ministry, would there be any inconsistency or absurdity in all this? Did Christ any where say that the canon of scripture was completed by him, and that no heed was to be given to declarations of his apostles after his death?

Nay,

*not yet able to bear*, by reason of remaining prejudices, but that he would in due time send his spirit

Nay, does he not intimate quite the contrary, as we shall see anon? But now although this concession might be easily made to us, by the enemies of Christianity, yet we do not need it: For, excepting a few prophecies which have nothing to do with the covenant of grace, the friends of his deceased lordship may be challenged to shew one new doctrine or duty, which is essential to that covenant added, by the apostles, to that revelation made by their divine master, unless they will make such out of their explanations, illustrations and enforcements of his original gospel. Christ preaches the duties of faith, love, hope, repentance, prayer, humility, patience, meekness, &c. &c. St. Paul and the other apostles explain and recommend these duties, by their proper motives, in their epistles. Christ foretels the rejection of the Jews and the conversion of the Gentiles †; St. Paul explains those events at large, adding the future restoration of the Jews from the old testament prophecies †; Christ speaks of the resurrection of the body; St. Paul largely explains this doctrine and shews its *modus* †. Indeed he tells us that he shews us a mystery concerning the quomodô of this resurrection ¶; but what is this mystery or new doctrine to the covenant of grace? However welcome or profitable such discoveries as this may be, yet no one will say they are essential to the covenant of graces or necessary to our salvation! Being revealed, we are indeed bound to believe them, and we have a great reason to bless God for the superabundant exuberance of light and knowledge which he hath given us; but supposing such matters as

- † Matth. xxi. 41. Luke xx. 16. Matth. xxiii. 37. John x. 16.

‡ Rom. ix. 10.

¶ 1 Cor. xv. 1 Thess. iv. 13, &c. ¶ 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52.

spirit which would remove these prejudices, and guide them into all truth, and shew them things

these had been still kept secret from us, till the event had made them appear, who would dare to say that the covenant of GOD's grace would have been therefore defective? Or who can be confident to affirm, that the revelation of such mysteries make any change in the original covenant as published by Christ?

3dly, His lordship has made such concessions himself, as necessarily overthrow the whole fabric of his own reasoning. He speaks of Christ and his gospel, as contained in the four evangelists, in the highest terms of respect; he terms Christ the Messiah, the son of GOD, who was sent by the father to make a new covenant with mankind, he tells us, that he proved his divine mission by miracles, and enforced his doctrines, by promising rewards and threatening punishments, and he every where speaks of his gospel, the writings of the four evangelists, in terms of the greatest veneration, as a complete system of true religion? Now these concessions being made, all that he has said both against the old testament scriptures, and epistolary writings of the new, falls to the ground. For is it to be imagined, that the son of GOD would have every where referred to the old testament scriptures as inspired and authentic writings, and quoted *Moses*, the prophets, and the *Psalms* as prophesying of himself, and as the ground work of true religion, if they are indeed such as his lordship represents them? And if it be true indeed, that this son of GOD promised a large effusion of the spirit to his apostles after his ascension, and commanded them to tarry in *Jerusalem* in expectation of this event; if he promised that this spirit should lead them into all necessary truth, and teach them things which they were not able to bear in his life time, but should



*things to come*<sup>a</sup>; which plainly proves that some farther revelations than those which he had made in his own personal ministry, were expedient for the future well-being of his church; and that the apostles were the persons appointed by their master, to make these revelations, under the guidance of that spirit which he was to pour out upon them. Besides, we learn that the forty days which Christ spent among his disciples after his resurrection, were employed by him, not only in convincing them of that important fact, but also in *speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*<sup>b</sup>. Now what these things and revelations should be, we are left wholly to conjecture: Perhaps these things may signify such directions as their master thought proper to give them, concerning the propagation of his gospel, and a brief summary of the various treatment and success they were to expect? The new truths and revelations which *they were not yet able to bear*, might refer to the abolition of the Jewish ritual, the

should be able to bear after his resurrection, and this effusion of the spirit<sup>c</sup>; is it consistent in this gentleman to treat the writings of these very persons, who had such promises of guidance and assistance from their divine master, as cabalistic, absurd, and even blasphemous theologers. But the truth is, his lordship is a miserable advocate of a wretched cause, a shuffling, inconsistent writer, who attacks Christianity with far less judgement than the famous tallow-chandler.

<sup>a</sup> John xiv. 17, 26. xvi. 12, 13. Mark iv. 33.

<sup>a</sup> John xvi. 12, 13.

<sup>b</sup> Acts i. 3.

coalition of the *Jews* and *Gentiles* into one church, and all others which we find actually revealed in the acts, epistles and revelations.

THE acts of the apostles is the most important and authentic ecclesiastical history which we have since the death of Christ according to its present title, it gives us the lives and acts of the apostles for about *thirty* years after the Lord's ascension. Here we drink in primitive and apostolical Christianity at its fountain head, without the intermixture of human inventions, or monkish superstitions. Here we see the simple and elegant structure of the Christian church, without the voluminous creeds, confessions, liturgies and canons added to it by modern hands, or the adventitious string of vestments, ceremonies, fopperies, powers and dignities annexed to it by anti-christian architects, which debase its dignity and deform its original simplicity. Here we see the rapid progress, and amazing spread of Christianity, not by the authority of *emperors*, the force of arms, the power of *popes*, the terror of inquisitions, the intrigues of *cardinals*, the arts of temporising missionaries, the pomp and parade of decorated churches and gaudy vestments, or the charms of eloquence, but by the dint of plain truth and powerful conviction, supported by zeal, integrity, unwearied diligence, unconquerable patience, and a power of working miracles in those who preached it, and finally sealed by their blood. In a word, this history of the lives and labours of the apostles, lets us into the true genius and spirit of primitive unadulterated Christianity, and of its first preachers ; greatly illustrates the argument  
of

of its truth and divinity; affords a noble key to the prophetic writings of the old testament; and, whensoever the Christian church shall be sufficiently exempted from prejudices to attempt it, will prove an excellent foundation on which to build a farther reformation of church government, discipline and worship.

THE epistles, which were generally written in the same period which the history of the acts includes, were, excepting the few catholic or general epistles, wrote to particular persons or churches, and all of them on particular occasions and emergencies. Their subject matter is various, but may be comprized under the general terms of didactic, hortatory and polemical; *i. e.* they are chiefly employed in confirming and establishing the great doctrines of the gospel by suitable arguments, in enforcing its morals by proper motives, or exhorting to the practice of piety and virtue, and in confuting the errors, and removing the prejudices of those to whom they are written: And hence it is evident, that in order to a thorough understanding of these epistles, we should not only be well acquainted with the spirit, genius and general design of the gospel; but also with the general state of things at that time, with the general opinions and prejudices both of the *Jews* and *Gentiles*, and the particular errors and heresies which the apostles had in view when they wrote these epistles. Without this we shall be often in danger of mistaking the sense of the apostles, and of drawing general doctrines and conclusions from expressions and arguments which were used by them only in a limited and restrictive sense. If  
we

we consider the epistles in this view, they will appear to be of vast importance to the Christian church; here we see the original gospel of Christ commented upon, its doctrines illustrated, its morals enforced, its promises applied, its conditions explained, its threatenings denounced, and its enemies characterized, not by fallible men, but by the pen of inspiration itself. Here we have an excellent rule for explaining and establishing religious truths and duties, for rightly dividing the word of truth, and for applying general principles and precepts, to particular cases;—and here we have a noble model for religious controversy, and see with what kind of zeal, spirit and temper we ought to convince gain-sayers and contend for *that faith once delivered to the saints* \*.

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\* When I recommend the apostolic writings as a model and pattern of polemical divinity in our days, I would be understood to do it with some degree of caution and reserve. It should be always remembered, on this occasion, that Christ and his apostles were inspired persons, that they spoke and wrote under the unerring influences of the spirit of truth, and that many of them had a peculiar power of discerning the spirits of men. This therefore qualified and authorized them to pronounce upon doctrines and men with a degree of boldness, confidence, severity and freedom, which would be quite out of character in any polemical or controversial writers of our day. To give but two instances among many which might be produced, our blessed Saviour thus addresses the Pharisees †; Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

† Matth. xxiii. 33.

As for the book of revelations, which is supposed to have been written by the apostle *John*, about the year of Christ ninety-six; besides, the proofs it contains of our Saviour's proper divinity and of his constant care of his church; besides, those invaluable epistles to the seven principal churches of *Asia*, dictated by Christ himself in his glory, and those excellent specimens of pure morality, and sublime devotion which it exhibits; it gives us a prophetic view of the state of the Christian church in every period of the world, points out its future enlargements, victory and triumph, and leads forward our thoughts to the last scene and final issue of things, to that great decisive day, and that unchangeable state of happiness or misery which awaits us in the eternal world, according to the deeds done in the body. And however dark and obscure some parts of this prophetic

St. *Paul* also, being filled with the holy ghost, thus addressed *Elymas* the forcerer †, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? Now, however just and proper these forms of address may be in the mouths of inspired persons, who were under a full inspiration of the holy ghost, and who perfectly knew the hearts, principles and dispositions of the men whom they addressed; yet I imagine they are no precedents to us, who have no just pretensions to the same powers, or the same extraordinary commission, under which these persons acted. And least of all does it become controversialists, who deal in disputable matters, to attack their opponents in such language as this, which the holy spirit thought only applicable to persons of the worst principles, and the most infamous and abandoned characters.

† Acts xiii, 10.

book may be to us who live, as it were, in the middle age of the church, yet the time will come when its most mysterious contents will be clearly understood by the church of God.

AND now having thus largely, and I hope clearly, shewed the excellency of the holy scriptures, as a motive to the duty here enjoined of searching them, I proceed to the

II<sup>d</sup>. thing proposed. To shew the right which all ranks and-degrees of Christians have to read and search the scriptures in their mother tongue, and their obligations to this duty. And here I shall be as brief as possible, both because it is sufficiently done by others, and because the Protestant world seem at present to be very sensible of this right, and the invaluable advantages flowing from it. And *first*, it cannot be denied that the scriptures were written for our learning, that they were given by GOD that they might be read and understood by his creatures of mankind. This is so self evident, both from the nature and reason of the thing, and from a vast multitude of plain declarations themselves<sup>c</sup>, that it can admit of no dispute. The only question is, whether these scriptures ought only to be read in their originals, and that by the *clergy* alone; or whether it is proper that they should be translated into the mother tongues of every Christian country, and put into the hands of all-Christians, without distinction, laity as well as *clergy*, and read by every sex, age and order of

<sup>c</sup> Josh. i. 8. Psalms i. 2. cxix. 105. Isaiah viii. 20. Hosea viii. 11, 12. 1 Cor. x. 11. Rom. xv. 4. John xx. 31. 1 John ii. 1. Jude ver. 3. 2 Pet. iii. 1. 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

men? The present church of *Rome* holds the former part of the question, all protestants the latter; on which side the truth lies, it is my business at present briefly to examine. And,

1st. ANTIQUITY is certainly against the present church of *Rome* in this point. Had GOD intended to seal up the scriptures of the old testament from the common use of the *Israelites*, under an unknown tongue, he would probably have ordered them to be written in hieroglyphics, as the theology of the Egyptians was, or at least in some language not commonly understood by the children of *Israel*, and which would have only been learned and understood by the priests and other authorized expounders of the law; and in this case it would have been reasonable to expect some positive prohibition in the law itself against the common and indiscriminate reading of the scriptures. But nothing of all this. The scriptures were at first written in *Hebrew*, which was the vernacular tongue of the seed of *Jacob*; and so far is the law of *Moses* from containing any prohibition of the common use of the scriptures, that it plainly intimates the obligation of all to search, and read, and study them, and diligently to teach them to their very children<sup>d</sup>. The prophets in their sermons always addressed the people in a known tongue, and wrote their prophecies in the same language in which they spoke them, and we find them expressly charging the people to *seek out of the book of the LORD, and to read*<sup>e</sup>. And we

<sup>d</sup> Deut. vi. 6—8. xi. 18, 21. xvii. 18, 20. xxxi. 11, 12, 13, 22. Joth. i. 8.

<sup>e</sup> Isaiah xxxiv. 16.

find the good king *Josiah* himself, reading the words of the law, in the ears of all the people, both small and great <sup>f</sup>. In like manner when the *Israelites* had well nigh lost their language in their seventy years captivity at *Babylon*, *Ezra* made a collection of the canonical books of scripture, and wrote them in the *Chaldee* character, and read them in the presence of all the people, and caused them to understand the reading, translating them sentence by sentence into the *Chaldee* language, which was then the common language of the *Israelites* <sup>g</sup>. And for this purpose, we find, that at this very time, or soon after, *Chaldee targums* or versions of the scriptures were made, that all the people might enjoy the scriptures in a language which they understood. And that many copies of the scriptures were dispersed among the people of *Israel* after this time is evident, from the story of *Antiochus*, who commanded all who had the books of the law, to deliver them up, and who put many to death in whose custody these books were found <sup>h</sup>. Again, when by the conquests of *Alexander*, many of the *Jews* were carried to *Alexandria* in *Egypt*, by his successor *Ptolemy Lagus*, and, by being there incorporated in a *Macedonian* colony, their vernacular tongue became *Greek*, we see they found a means of having their scriptures translated into that language, which version is now called the *septuagint version*, and which proved of vast service, diffusing the light of the ancient oracles through the heathen world, and in making way for the

<sup>f</sup> 2 Kings xxiii. 2 Chron. xxxiv.

<sup>g</sup> Neh. viii. 2, 8.

<sup>h</sup> 1 Mac. i. 57. Jos. p. 410.



more quick and effectual spread of the gospel. And it is abundantly evident from *Philo* and *Josephus*, and from a variety of passages in the new testament, that the scriptures of the old testament, were read and understood by all ranks of people, without exception or restraint, about and after our saviour's time. Our saviour and his apostles, in their conferences with the *Jews*, frequently put these questions: *Have ye not read in the scriptures? What saith the scriptures? Doth not the scriptures say so, and so?* and the like; which forms of speech are manifest appeals to those sacred records, which every one was supposed frequently to have read and consulted. The *Bereans* are highly commended for searching the scriptures daily, as the touchstone of *St. Paul's* doctrine<sup>l</sup>. *St. Paul* speaks it with applause; that *Timothy* had known the scriptures from a child, which no doubt he had learned by the pious care and industry of his grandmother *Lois*, and his mother *Eunice*, his father being a *Gentile*<sup>k</sup>. Nay not only the *Jews* of both sexes, and all ages, but even proselytes of other nations were allowed to read and study the scriptures; as appears from the story of the Ethiopian eunuch of queen *Candace*, who read the prophecies of *Isaiab*, one of the most difficult books of the old testament, as he rode in his chariot, and that too although he did not understand it; and yet we find that *Philip* the evangelist made him no reproaches on this account, but assisted him in the interpretation<sup>l</sup>. And here it ought well to be observed, that

<sup>l</sup> Acts xvii. 11. <sup>k</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 15. <sup>l</sup> Acts viii. 28, &c.

Christ and his apostles, are so far from discouraging or forbidding the Jewish laity from reading the scriptures, (which they certainly would have done, had it been improper or unlawful) that they every where recommend it to them, and highly approve their conduct in this respect, as is evident from our text, and from a multitude of scriptures already quoted, and which might easily be produced upon this occasion. Again,

If we come down to the new testament times, we shall find the gospels and epistles written and published in the Greek language, which was then most universally understood and used throughout the *Roman* empire. Christ and his apostles preached to the people, and prayed with and for them, in a language which all understood, and these same discourses and doctrines were written in the same language, for the common use and benefit of the church in all ages. The apostles write and direct the most of their epistles, not to the clergy only, but to whole churches; to the faithful in Christ Jesus; to all the saints at *Rome*, at *Philippi*, in *Achaia*; to the twelve tribes; to the strangers scattered through *Pontus*, *Galatia*, *Cappadocia*, *Asia*, and *Bithynia*; to all that in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ without exceptions <sup>m</sup>. And not only so, but these apostles suppose and command that their epistles should be read to, and by all the churches to whom they direct them, and even

<sup>m</sup> Rom. i. 7. 2 Cor. i. 1. Gal. i. 2. Phil. i. 1. 1 Theff. i. 1. James i. 1. 1 Pet. i. 1. Rev. i. 4.

to other churches<sup>a</sup>; which certainly includes something more than a bare privilege or toleration to every Christian to read the holy scriptures; it is an exprefs obligation laid upon them to perform this duty.

IT may be farther observed here, that all the Christian fathers, for the first six centuries after Christ, earnestly and repeatedly recommended the constant study and perusal of the holy scriptures to men and women, to young and old without distinction, even to novices who were newly initiated into the Christian church by baptism. It were easy to quote a vast number of exprefs and pertinent testimonies of this kind from the writings of *Origen, Jerom, Alex, Chrysofome, Austin, Basil, Cyril,* and others, were they not to be met with in almost every writer on this subject. And that the scriptures were in the hands of multitudes during the time of the heathen persecutions, for 300 years after Christ, is evident from the tortures and martyrdoms inflicted by the Roman emperors, upon numbers of Christians of all degrees and both sexes, in order to make them deliver up their bibles to be burnt; and those who through fear of torment and death delivered them up, were stigmatized with the reproachful name of *Traditores*, and were obliged to undergo a long and severe penance for this piece of cowardice, before they were admitted again to the communion of the church. Besides, this still farther appears, from the numerous translations of the scriptures into the *Latin,*

<sup>a</sup> 2 Cor. i. 13. Eph. iii. 3, 4. Col. iv. 16.  
1 Theff. v. 27.

*Syriac, Armenian, Coptick, Ethiopick, Arabick, Gotbick, and Saxon* languages, some of which were supposed to be made in, or near the time of the apostles; and all of them before the eighth century:—And for what other purposes could these versions be made, if it was not that the vulgar and unlearned of all these nations, might be able to read the scriptures in their own language? For to what purpose were it to make versions for the *Clergy*, who must be supposed sufficiently learned to understand the scriptures in their originals?—

THUS you see whether we consider the languages in which the scriptures were first written, the manifest design of writing them, the interest which all ranks and degrees of men have in the doctrines and duties revealed in them, the practice of the Jewish and christian churches in all ages, till the eighth and ninth centuries of the *Christian Æra*, who universally recommended the study of them to all men without distinction, or the versions of them which have been made into the vernacular tongues of all ages and nations, for the common benefit of the people; it will evidently appear to be the design of providence, that all ages, ranks and degrees of men, should read the holy scriptures, and that no man or order of men upon earth, have any colour of right to abridge them of this privilege.

THE two chief pretences which the church of *Rome* urges against the free and unlimited use of the scriptures in the vulgar tongues, are  
 1<sup>st</sup>, That the minds of the vulgar are in danger of being corrupted, and their impure affections of being inflamed by the vicious examples  
 recorded

recorded in scripture; and 2dly, That such a general use of the scriptures, would unavoidably occasion a number of heresies and errors among the ignorant, who would wrest them to their own destruction. As to the

1st. BESIDES its being a vile and groundless slander, manifestly derogatory to the immaculate holiness and purity of the sacred page, which never mentions vice, but with a manifest design to expose it<sup>o</sup>; which contains the noblest antidotes against every species of impurity, and has the most evident tendency to purge the mind from every corrupt affection <sup>p</sup>. I say, besides this, it is a bold impeachment of the wisdom, holiness, and goodness of God, to suppose that he has given such a revelation of his will for the rule of mens moral conduct, as cannot be read without imminent danger of debauching men's minds, and leading them to the commission of those very crimes from which it was designed to deter them! Besides, if the bible is so loose and obscene a book, that it is not safe for young or ignorant persons to read it, why did God at first publish it in a language understood by all? Why are there not some prohibitions contained in the scriptures themselves, against such a common and dangerous use of them? Why has the church in all ages actually indulged and commanded such use of them, without apprehending these dreadful consequences of it, until the eighth or ninth century of the Christian *Æra*? Surely if this objection has any force in it, it will equally

<sup>o</sup> 1 Cor. x. 6, 11.  
<sup>2</sup> Tim. iii. 16, &c.

<sup>p</sup> Psal. xix. 7, 13. cxix. 9.

militate against the expediency of publishing the scriptures at all, or at least of publishing them at first in a known tongue, as against translating them at this day for common use, into the vernacular tongues of Christendom.

EITHER the scriptures have in themselves a natural tendency to debauch men's minds and corrupt their manners, or they have not: If they have, then they are unworthy that GOD should have published them, or that any man should read them! If they have not, then the fault lies wholly in the corruption of wicked men's hearts, who pervert them to a use contrary to their natural tendency: But if nothing may be used, which is capable of being perverted and abused, then there is an end to all kind of enjoyments, seeing it is evident that the best things, and the most necessary and innocent enjoyments may be abused, and perverted to serve the worst purposes. As to the

2d OBJECTION, that a general use of the scriptures would unavoidably open the door to a number of errors and heresies in the Christian church, as the ignorant would not fail to wrest them to their own destruction; it equally reflects upon the reputation of the scriptures, and the wisdom and goodness of GOD, as the former. The scriptures themselves recommend it to us *to meditate in GOD's law day and night; to teach it to our children; to apply to the law and to the testimony*, as the touchstone of every religious doctrine; *to search the scriptures*, and commend the BEREANS for examining the doctrine of the apostles by the light of those unerring oracles. In the same language speaks the primitive church. *Irænaeus* tells us, *that the*  
reason

*reason why hereticks fall into errors, is because they know not the scriptures; which is the very reason our blessed saviour gives why the Sadducees denied the resurrection of the dead: Ye do err, says he, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of GOD<sup>a</sup>. Theophylact tells us that nothing can impose upon those who search the holy scriptures; for this, says he, is the candle by which we discover the thief. Jerom and Chrysostom, in many places urge Christians to search the scriptures with all diligence, for this very purpose, that they might be enabled to avoid all errors and heresies, and to recover others who were seduced and drawn away from the truth. Thus speak the holy scriptures; thus speaks the primitive church in its purest period. But now the modern church of Rome flatly contradicts all this; insinuates that the bible is a dangerous book, full of snares and stumbling blocks to the unlearned, and therefore confines it wholly to the search and study of the clergy, and forbids the laity to look into it! Why? lest it should unavoidably draw them into errors, and they should wrest it to their own destruction. This is vastly charitable to be sure! As if a man should deny me food, lest I should surfeit myself; or blind my eyes, lest I should lose my way!*

**BUT** is not this paying a very unhandsome compliment to the book of life, to suppose that an unlearned man, of plain common sense, may not read it without the danger of erring damnably! Is not this to set the wisdom of modern Rome above the wisdom of the primitive apostolick church, and even above the

<sup>a</sup> Matt. xxii. 29.

wisdom of GOD, who every where recommends the reading, search, study and meditation of his word, to all men in general, as the only unerring standard of religious truth, and rule of religious duty! And to speak in the most favourable terms, is not the remedy worse than the disease? If a few men should be in danger of abusing this liberty, and turning the wholesome bread of life into a mortal poison, by the chemistry of their own mental corruption, should it therefore be withheld from all? Is there no other method to restrain men from wandering, than by putting out their eyes? Is there no way of withholding men from gluttony and drunkenness, than by forbidding them the use of meat and drink? Must all men be denied the most innocent and salutary privileges and enjoyments, lest a few should wickedly pervert and abuse them? Surely there is no shadow of reason in this! But if we should even grant the validity of this charge against the holy scriptures, it will prove too much, and can be of no service at all to the church of *Rome*. It will prove that the scriptures should not be read at all, either by the clergy or laity. If we carefully trace the rise of all the corruptions in the Christian church, whether in doctrine, worship, discipline or morals, we shall find by much the greatest number of them broached and propagated by the *clergy*. It requires much more learning and sophistry than the generality of the laity are masters of, to draw plausible errors from the fountain of truth, and to impose corrupt doctrines and heretical systems upon mankind, as the genuine truths of the gospel. Nor can it be supposed that the *Romish church* herself



herself would ever have been able to impose so many antiscrptural doctrines, and ceremonies of worship, upon so great a part of Christendom, had not the scriptures been first industriously secreted from the laity, and all the arts of wit and sophistry used to palliate and varnish the errors and absurdities thus introduced. In short there are few of those numerous errors and heresies, which have so much infested and disfigured the Christian church, which may not be easily traced up to some corrupt designing priest, as their first inventor and propagator.—And if so, it will follow, that of all men, the *clergy* ought to be least trusted with the reading of the scriptures, seeing they have of all men, the most perverted and abused them. But the truth is, the great reason why the church of *Rome* forbids the laity to read the scriptures, seems to be, lest this privilege should lead them to detect the errors and heresies of their priests! Sure, had the scriptures a fair hearing in popish countries, the *grand mystery* of that corrupt religion could not be long concealed from the laity!

THERE is but one text in the whole bible, which seems, in the least, to favour this practice of the Romish church; namely, that celebrated text <sup>r</sup>, where the apostle, speaking of some things in *St. Paul's* epistles, which are *hard to be understood*, which, says he, *they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, to their own destruction.* From this passage of scripture the Romanists argue the obscurity of scripture, as a reason why

<sup>r</sup> 2 Pet. iii. 16.

ignorant men should not read it, lest they wrest it to their own destruction, as they are here said to do. Now in order to obviate this seeming difficulty, the following things ought to be observed.

1st. THIS text itself proves that unlearned and unstable men, read the epistles of St. Paul, and the other scriptures at this time, otherwise they could not have wrested them to their own destruction.

2dly. THE ἀμαθεῖς\* and ἀστηρικτοί, unlearned and unstable men here mentioned, do by no means signify the laity, in opposition to the clergy; but men ignorant of the great fundamental truths and principles of Christianity, and those who were wavering and unsettled in their principles, halting between two opinions, and in a state of hesitancy and suspense between *Gentilism* or *Judaism*, and *Christianity*. So that these unlearned men of St. Peter's, might be great adepts in the philosophy and mythology of the times; for in any other sense Peter was an ignorant and unlearned man himself.

3dly. THE apostle speaks not here of an universal, but only of a partial obscurity in scripture; he says there are *some things*, or *some passages* in St. Paul's epistles, δύσνοητα, hard to be understood, not impossible to be understood;

\* The pious and critical D. Doddridge translates ἀμαθεῖς *unteachable*, which, if it were a just rendering, would take off much of the apparent difficulty from this text; but I confess I cannot find any passage where ἀμαθεῖς properly signifies *unteachable*.

† Acts iv. 13.

which

which things, together with other scriptures, not the candid, diligent and teachable enquirer after truth, but the *unprincipled* and *unsteady*, wrest to their own destruction.

4thly. IT ought well to be observed that the apostle does not in this place prescribe the laying aside of the scriptures, as a remedy for this evil, which certainly would have been a very proper place for mentioning such a restriction, had it been necessary or convenient: No, he seems evidently to recommend quite a different remedy; he tells them *to beware of being led away by the error of the wicked, and of falling away from their own stedfastness*, and for this purpose he exhorts them, *to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ* †.

So that you see this text is so far from serving the purposes of the *Romish* church, in this argument, that it really makes against it.

BUT the whole of this argument proves more than the mere privilege of all Christians to read the scriptures; it proves our obligation to this duty. Hath GOD *written to us the great things of his law*? they ought not to be as a *strange thing to us* †. Has he condescended to lay before us a system of written laws and rules, for the government of our lives, and the attainment of our greatest happiness? and shall we not vouchsafe them a perusal? Hath he published unto us the grand charter of our pardon and privileges; and shall we neglect to study and peruse its important contents? The scriptures are written and directed *to us, to all Christians, to all men*, which implies a manifest obligation *on us, on all Christians, and on all men*, who are favoured

† Acts iv. 17, 18.

‡ Hof. viii. 12.

with so invaluable a treasure of divine truth, to study and peruse them. And this obligation must appear to be very strong and indispensable, if we consider the majesty and rightful authority of him who lays it upon us, the gracious design and intention of God's laying before us his revealed will, and the infinite concern which every man has in the truths and duties contained in these sacred records. We cannot perhaps offer a greater affront to a mortal superior, than to refuse him a hearing, when he speaks to us of things which concern his own rightful authority, and our own duty and advantage; or not to open and peruse such letters as he may direct to us under the publick seal of his authority. And do not such as will not hear when the LORD speaketh; or who neglect to search the scriptures which are the *Letters Patent* of the universal king, stamped with the broad seal of heaven, shew the highest contempt of the divine authority, and the greatest neglect of infinite mercy? Would we thus treat the letter of a friend, the last testament of a father, or the patents of an earthly monarch? We rejoice in being protestants; we exult in the rights of private judgment, and in the privileges of perusing our bibles in a known tongue! But alas! what will all this avail us, if we slight the privilege which we claim, neglect the duty which we acknowledge, and misimprove the price which is put into our hands to get wisdom! What will all this avail us, if we suffer our bibles to lay by us as sealed books, which through our shameful neglect of them, neither serve to enlighten our understandings, nor warm our hearts, nor direct our practice?

We

We bewail the ignorance of the *Papists*, who *may not* read the bible; but what odds can there between a papist who *may not* read the bible, and a protestant who *will not*? Both, surely, must be equally ignorant: all the odds is, that the protestant neglects an obligation which he confesses, and a privilege which he claims; the papist acts according to principle, although led astray by an erroneous conscience: The protestant is therefore criminal, and the papist rather unfortunate!—For shame then, let us act as consistent protestants, as consistent Christians. Let us not act as *those fools who having a price put into their hands to get wisdom, have no heart to improve it*; but, like the noble *Boereans*, let us daily search the scriptures, in which are contained the words of eternal life; that so, desiring as new born babes, the sincere milk of the word, we may spiritually grow thereby; grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the practice of every good work <sup>v</sup>. Let us make the testimonies of GOD our daily counsellors, read with our own eyes, and judge with our own understandings, those doctrines and duties which GOD hath directed to us in his word. This is the only method to maintain us in our steadfastness, and to preserve us from being led away with the error of the wicked, from being tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the slight of corrupt men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive <sup>w</sup>. It is certainly the most excellent and

<sup>v</sup> Prov. xvii. 16. Acts xvii. 11. 2 Pet. iii. 18.

<sup>w</sup> Psal. cxix. 24. 2 Pet. iii. 17. Eph. iv. 14.

useful furniture of our souls, to have the word of Christ abiding and dwelling richly in them. A soul thus furnished can never be at a loss to overcome the wicked one, and repel all his fiery darts; can never be at a loss for pious thoughts and useful meditations; can never be at a loss to teach, admonish, and comfort others in all wisdom. Thus to know the holy scriptures, is to be *wise indeed unto salvation*; and indeed unless we thus know them, unless we are thus frequently conversant with them, how can we meditate upon them day and night? How can we teach them diligently unto our children, and make them the subject of our frequent conversation \*? I now come in the

III<sup>d</sup> PLACE, To enquire into that temper and disposition of mind, with which we should search and study the holy scriptures.

I<sup>st</sup>. IT is evident that a full and rational conviction of this truth, *that the scriptures are the word, and will of God*, is necessary in order to our reading them as it becomes Christians. As a firm belief of the being and providence of God is the only foundation of all religion, both natural and revealed, so an equal conviction that the scriptures are the word of God, is the only adequate foundation of all Christian religion. And as total infidelity wholly subverts the foundation of Christian obligation and practice, so every degree of doubt and suspicion concerning this fundamental truth, tends to weaken our Christian obligations, in exact proportion to its prevalency in the mind. In a word, our reli-

\* Col. iii. 16.    1 John ii. 14.    2 Tim. iii. 15.  
Psalm i. 2.    Deut. vi. 6, &c.

gious obedience will partake of the complexion of our faith: If this is strong, that will be proportionably firm and constant; if this is weak, wavering and uncertain, that will be proportionably fickle, irresolute and inconstant. It is impossible that men should duly attend to truths which they do not firmly believe; or that they should pay a religious obedience to laws, of the divine original of which they have not a firm, full and convictive persuasion. *As he who cometh unto GOD, must believe that he is; so he who cometh to search the scriptures, as the divine and infallible rule of his life and conduct, must believe that they are from GOD.* This was the glory and excellency of the *Thessalonians*, that they received the doctrine of the apostles, not as the *fallible word of men*; not as a merely human testimony, but as a divine testimony, with full assurance of faith, as the *word of GOD, which wrought effectually only in such of them as thus believed* &c.

THIS is a matter of great and real importance, and ought so to be considered by Christians, who would build their religion on a rational and immoveable foundation. A faith which is merely implicit, or hereditary, (if I may so speak) is liable to be shaken or overthrown by every cavil, banter, or sophism of infidelity, as a building which has no solid foundation. And surely every man who has a just value for his religion, who knows the importance of settled and established principles, and who understands the danger of scepticism and apostacy, should see well to it, that he builds

on sure foundations, in a matter of so great moment, and that he is able to render a reason of the faith and hope which is in him; especially in this sceptical age, when every *minute philosopher* assumes the right of disputing it. Nor, blessed be God, is it so difficult a matter as some may be apt to think, for the plainest Christians to obtain a rational conviction of the truth of their religion. Infidelity, which seems to be the reigning evil of the age, has, by the vigilant providence of him who is ever attentive to the interests of his own truth among men, in a great measure, wrought its own cure. Never certainly has the foundations of Christianity been more clearly and firmly established, than they are at present, by a vast number and variety of able and worthy *contenders for the faith, once delivered to the saints*. So that together with the infection, every honest enquirer may have the antidote at an easy rate.

To establish this fundamental truth is the design of the foregoing discourses, which, how meanly soever executed, may, I hope, have some good effect on minds not wholly corrupted, by the power of prevailing prejudices. But however this may be, yet it is indisputably certain that the scriptures can never obtain their proper effect upon the hearts and conduct of men, unless they are read and searched under a full conviction that they are indeed and in truth the word of God.

2d: If we would search the scriptures to advantage, we must do it with minds free from all prejudice, and possessed with an ardent love of truth, under whatever unpleasing forms it may appear. Are we convinced that the  
 scriptures



scriptures are the word of GOD, and that they have been transmitted down to us entire and uncorrupted, as to all the essential truths and duties which they contain? It follows that we should receive them with all simplicity and readiness of mind; that we should not come to the study of them with any prejudices or preconceived systems or opinions of our own, but bring our souls to them as melted wax to the seal, with a disposition to receive those impressions which they tend naturally to make upon them: After a fair and impartial examination of the sense of scripture we must resolve to follow wheresoever it leads us, to believe every doctrine which it clearly exhibits, and to perform every duty which it plainly enforces, endeavouring to divest the soul of every passion and prepossession which might militate against such an obedience of faith. If we bring our own passions and prejudices with us to the search of scripture, it is evident we are in danger of prejudging the cause which we come to examine, of wresting the scriptures into a conformity with our own prepossessions, and, as the apostle expresses it, of *restraining the truth in unrighteousness*<sup>2</sup>. We cannot be proper judges in a cause where we are determined what sentence to pass, before a proper examination of the evidence. As therefore we acknowledge GOD to be the author and finisher of our faith, the sole arbiter of all religious doctrines and duties, and that this arbitration is made in his unerring word, which is the ultimate judge of all religious controversies, his testimony and authority should preponderate

<sup>2</sup> Rom. i. 18.

over all other considerations, and awe the soul into an entire submission to, and complacency with, whatever he has exhibited, as the rule of our faith and duty. With this temper should we *incline our ear to wisdom, and apply our heart to understanding; seek her as silver, and search for her as for hid treasures.* With this temper should we *search the scriptures, and receive the truth in the love of it, that we might be saved<sup>a</sup>.* Thus did the Bereans receive the word with all readiness of mind, and search the scriptures daily, that they might know assuredly whether the apostles doctrines were agreeable to the analogy of faith: They received the word into *good and honest hearts,* and that too with a prudent precaution against all danger of imposition and delusion<sup>b</sup>, This simplicity, integrity and docility of mind which is so necessary and excellent a disposition in order to our searching the scriptures, and receiving the truth in the love of it, is well expressed by the apostles *James* and *Peter.* Wherefore, says the former, *lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness; i. e. all filthy lusts, and malignant passions, and prejudices, and receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls<sup>c</sup>.* And to the same purpose the latter, speaking of the word preached to them in the gospel, recommends it to them, that, *laying aside all malice, and guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and evil speakings, with all the simplicity of new born babes, they would desire the sincere and unsophisticated milk of the*

<sup>a</sup> Prov. ii. 2, 4. 2 Theff. ii. 10.

<sup>b</sup> Acts xvii. 11. Luke viii. 15.

<sup>c</sup> Jam. i. 21.

word,

word, that they might grow thereby<sup>d</sup>. If we would indeed search the scriptures as those who love the truth, and hunger and thirst after righteousness, every prejudice must be laid aside, every clamorous passion silenced, every perverse imagination and high thought which exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, must be cast down, and with clean hands, and pure hearts, we must draw water out of these fountains of truth, and wells of salvation. We must, like meek, humble and teachable disciples, sit down at our master's feet, and learn from him the words of eternal life.

3dly. It becomes us to search the scriptures with great reverence and attention of spirit. If we regard the scriptures as the word of God, and not of men, we will certainly read it, and hear it read, with the profoundest reverence and attention. *Where the word of a king is, says Solomon, there is power<sup>e</sup>.* We acknowledge this of earthly monarchs, and therefore we hear their words and declarations with such marks of attention, esteem and veneration as is suitable to their majesty and sovereign power; with how much greater awe and reverence of spirit should we read and hear the words of the living God, the universal king? *If I be a father, where is mine honour? And if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto them that despise his name!* And yet we are told that he hath magnified his word above all his name<sup>f</sup>. To use his word therefore irreverently is a gross profanation of

<sup>d</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 1, 2.

<sup>e</sup> Eccles. viii. 4.

<sup>f</sup> Psalms cxxxviii. 2. Mal. i. 6.

his name. It is said of the worthy and celebrated Mr. *Boyle* that he never mentioned the name of GOD, without a *reverential pause*, expressive of his awful regard for it. Surely this truly pious man was not more deficient in respect for the word of GOD, than for the three letters which call up the idea of his existence! When the prophets would solemnize the minds of the people, and call up their attention to the messages with which GOD had charged them, they frequently break out into such apostrophes or exclamations as these, *hear, O Israel, for the LORD speaketh! Hear ye the word of the LORD!* and the like; and indeed, what could be better adapted to excite reverence and attention? It well becometh all created nature to attend with awful reverence, when the GOD of nature speaketh. The voice of the LORD is powerful, and full of majesty, the earth trembleth and shaketh, and the foundations of the hills are moved at his presence, the angels, who excel in strength, do his commandments, hearkening with reverend attention to the voice of his word; and shall men, feeble, guilty worms of the dust, regard that sovereign, powerful, venerable word with indifference, which created, sustains and governs universal nature? Surely when the LORD speaketh, it becomes the sons of men to attend with the profoundest reverence and awe of him who speaketh from heaven! When GOD spake to the children of *Israel*, from *Sinai*, they were seized with fear, and stood afar off, and so terrible were the *phænomena*, that *Moses* himself did exceedingly fear and quake: Now, although GOD speaks to us in his word with  
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more mildness, yet he does it with equal majesty, and therefore equally claims our reverential regard <sup>g</sup>. When *Ezra* read the law of GOD to all the people, it is said, that the ears of the people were attentive unto the book of the law; and that, in token of their reverence, they bowed their heads and worshipped the LORD with their faces towards the ground <sup>h</sup>. It is recorded to the honour of *Josiah*, that his heart was tender, and that he humbled himself before GOD, and rent his clothes and wept, when he heard the words of GOD against *Judea*, and the inhabitants thereof <sup>i</sup>. And GOD has expressly promised, that he will in a peculiar manner regard *that man, who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembleth at his word* <sup>k</sup>. *Hear the word of the LORD, saith Isaiah, ye that tremble at his word; the LORD shall appear to your joy, and they that hated you shall be ashamed* <sup>l</sup>.

THE pure and humbling doctrines of revelation will find the best entertainment in humble and contrite hearts. St. *Austin's* well known recommendation of humility, as the best qualification in a learner of divine truth, is no less agreeable to the nature and reason of things, than to the plain declarations of GOD's word. Pride, self-sufficiency and inattention, are both natural and moral obstacles to the acquisition of divine truth. They not only incapacitate the mind for religious knowledge and improvement, but justly provoke GOD to withhold that grace and assistance which we

<sup>g</sup> Heb. xii. Exod. xx.

<sup>h</sup> Neh. viii. 3, 6.

<sup>i</sup> 2 Chron. xxxiv. 26.

<sup>k</sup> Isaiah lvii. 15. lxvi. 2.

<sup>l</sup> Isaiah lxvi. 5.

might reasonably expect in a humble and reverential search after divine truth. GOD *resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble*<sup>m</sup>. The Messiah was anointed of GOD to preach the gospel to the *meek*; and GOD is said to hide the great things of it from the wise and prudent, from the haughty philosophers and self-conceited *Pharisees* of the age, and to reveal them to *babes, i. e.* to those who, with a reverend and teachable simplicity of spirit, desired to know the truth, as it is in Jesus. And the same teacher which came down from GOD has assured us, that the meek, the lowly, the poor in spirit, and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, are the only blessed and happy persons; these being the prime qualifications of a searcher after religious truth, and a disciple of the meek and lowly Jesus<sup>n</sup>.

WHEN we address ourselves to the reading or hearing of GOD's word, we should make a solemn pause, and consider with whom we have to do! Whose word it is that we are about to read or hear! Such a recollective pause as this, would do no more towards solemnizing our minds, exciting our reverence, and raising our attention than any arguments which I can offer on this subject. It would place the fear of GOD before our eyes, and make us afraid to trifle with his word, or to use it with irreverence and neglect in his immediate and heart-searching presence! It would put us precisely in that temper and situation, in which *Cornelius* and his household found

<sup>m</sup> Prov. iii. 34. James iv. 6. 1 Pet. v. 5.

<sup>n</sup> Isaiah lxi. 1. Matth. v. 3, 6. xi. 25, 29.

themselves

themselves before the apostle°. *Now therefore we are all here present before GOD, to hear all things that are commanded thee of GOD.*

THIS then is that reverend and attentive frame of spirit of which we should labour to be possessed, while we search and study the scriptures. I shall now lay before you a few common practices among Christians which betray a shameful want of this reverence and veneration for the word of GOD. And,

1st. THERE is a slothful and inattentive manner of reading the holy scriptures, too common among many who would be thought to be very religious, which, nevertheless, discovers a great irreverence for the lively oracles of GOD. Numbers, who do not wholly neglect the reading of the scriptures, do yet read them in so drowsy and inattentive a manner, or with so slight and trifling a frame of spirit, that it plainly appears they are wholly regardless of what they read, and are not at all concerned to profit by it. They seem to have tasked themselves with a certain number of chapters, and provided they can but read these over, within the time limited, as a school boy does his lesson, they seem to think they have done their duty. Ask them the general contents of the chapter they have but just read, and they know nothing of the matter; perhaps their mind and attention was ranging after some foreign subject. This is a plain proof that such persons read purely for the sake of reading, without any valuable purpose; that they neither understand what they read, nor are concerned to under-

° Acts x. 33.

stand it, nor receive any rational nor spiritual advantage by it. They never put that important question to themselves, which *Philip* put to the *eunuch*, *understandest thou what thou readeſt* P? And indeed how can they either understand or profit by reading the scriptures, who thus read them without either reverence or attention, and without any rational end or purpose which can be imagined\*.

2dly.

P Acts viii. 30.

• It deserves well to be considered, whether the common practice of teaching children to read the scriptures as a school book, in almost all Christian countries, may not tend greatly to lessen their reverence and veneration for that sacred book, all their lifetime afterwards. They are put to read the Bible before they are capable of knowing its sacred character, indeed before they are properly instructed to distinguish it from other books. They are tasked in it, and corrected if they have not their task. And is it not natural to think, that by this means, the Bible becomes cheap, if not disgustful to them almost ever after? That their tender minds contract a rude familiarity with it, bordering upon contempt, and also some degree of aversion arising from a sense of the pain and uneasiness they once suffered in learning to read it. If this is true, does it not concern Christians to lay aside a custom which is attended with such dangerous consequences? For this suppose, that, in the place of the new testament or psalter, *Aesop's fables*, *The oeconomy of human life*, or some other plain, moral and entertaining book was put into the hands of children as soon as they begin to read, and such kind of books continued until they can read distinctly. Let this then be the business of a first school. Afterwards, when children are about  
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2dly. ANOTHER rude and irreverent manner of using the holy scriptures, too often practiced, is, a quoting of them in a familiar and indiscreet manner in our common conversation. A turning of scripture words and sentences into quibbles, points and ludicrous witticisms, upon every occasion, either in a way of jest and ridicule, which is unsufferably profane; or, at best, in a quaint and flippant manner, to shew our wit and ingenuity in accommodating scripture to the common occurrences of life. This is as the prophet expresses

nine or ten years old, and have learned to read distinctly, when their minds begin to open, and reason to exert itself, let us suppose a second school ready to receive them, in which they are to read the scriptures with a due degree of reverence and attention, under a master properly qualified, whose sole study and business it should be to instruct them, in a proper manner, in the principles and duties of revealed religion, to lay down before them, in plain and familiar lectures, the history, chronology, and the morality of the Bible; to point out to them the internal and external evidences of the truth of revelation, the method of reading, explaining, defending and applying it in the conduct of life; and in a word, to give them brief and plain instructions in all kind of biblical science, and all this with a degree of seriousness and solemnity, which might tend to raise in their tender minds a lasting reverence for the holy scriptures, and a high sense of their excellence and importance! *Quere*, does not some institution of this kind seem necessary to a truly Christian education? And might it not under God, prove a means of putting an effectual stop to the present enormous growth of prevailing scepticism and infidelity?

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it, a *perverting of the words of the living GOD* <sup>9</sup>. It is a prostitution of sacred things to common and profane uses, as *Belshazzar* used the golden vessels of GOD's house to drink wine with his concubines, and pour out libations to his idol gods <sup>r</sup>. And indeed it is such an abuse of holy writ, as tends to render it cheap and vile, to bring it into contempt, and to take off all that reverence and veneration which we justly owe to the sacred records of heavenly truth.

3dly. ANOTHER gross profanation of this venerable book of GOD, and which is utterly inconsistent with the profound respect we should have for it, is the making it a bone of contention, a subject of angry wranglings and alterations; those vain janglings, those perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, those foolish questions and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; those profane babblings and unprofitable strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmising, furious controversies, and anti-christian anathematizings, so justly and emphatically exposed by the apostle <sup>s</sup>. To which may be added, as a yet more audacious profanation of scripture, a wilful torturing and wresting of it, to serve wicked or vain-glorious purposes; a forcing it into our service by subtle and sophistical interpretations, to support some favourite system or hypothesis, purely, perhaps, for the sake of argument and contradiction, and in order to secure the honour of a victory

<sup>9</sup> Jer. xxiii. 36.

<sup>r</sup> Dan. v. 4.

<sup>s</sup> 1 Tim. i. 4, 7. vi. 4, 5, 20. 2 Tim. ii. 14. Titus ii. 14, 16, 23.

over some puny adversary. This is *to handle the word of GOD deceitfully*, in the worst sense of the expression, and is such a gross and disingenuous profanation of scripture, that words are not able to express its vileness; and yet, alas, that person must be an utter stranger to religious controversy, who has not seen too much of this in numbers of our polemical writers. Once more,

4thly. A HASTY and precipitate application of scripture to the proof of doctrines and opinions, betrays a want of due reverence for sacred oracles. It is a custom too common with divines, both in their sermons and treatises of divinity, to accumulate a number of scripture passages indiscriminately, without examining or considering their propriety or validity *pro hic & nunc*, in support of the present argument. Where two or three plain and pertinent texts are sufficient, they are apt to produce a dozen or a score *ex abundantia*, the one half of which, perhaps, have no manner of relation to the doctrine they are brought to prove, unless it be in the mere sound of some of their words or phrases. In hasty pulpit compositions, perhaps such a far-fetched application and accommodation of scripture may be dispensed with, or even in practical treatises, where such a use of scripture may serve to illustrate or enliven the discourse. But where this liberty is taken in systems of divinity, and where such *mal-a-propos* scriptures are clapt in, like rotten buttresses, to support the weight of creeds, confessions and catechisms, which I know to be often the case, they tend greatly to hurt the cause

cause which they are brought to support: For when men of loose principles look into these books, and find the venerable doctrines of Christianity propped up with such texts of scripture as are not able to bear their weight; they hastily conclude that they have no better foundation, and hence take up a prejudice against all the doctrines of Christianity as founded upon quibble and sophism. A due reverence for the *Bible*, and a prudent concern for the honour of our holy religion would teach us, to raise no more doctrines upon scripture, than what it is fairly able to bear; and to build these doctrines on the firmest and surest foundations; and consequently to use the best means in our power of trying the strength and solidity of these foundations before we venture to build upon them! And this would naturally teach us a cautious and discreet use of scripture, in proving and establishing all the tenets of our holy religion.

4thly. IN reading the scriptures we should freely indulge all the innocent passions and affections of the soul, as they are naturally excited by the passages which we read. Every power and feeling of the mind should have its proper play and exercise. The holy and just laws of GOD should excite our esteem, our love and approbation. *Oh! how I love thy law, says David, it is my meditation all the day; how sweet are thy words unto my taste, more to be desired are they than gold, sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb. I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right*<sup>†</sup>. The survey of

<sup>†</sup> Psalms xix. 10. cxix. 97, 103, 128.

his glorious works and adorable perfections recorded in his word, should prostrate our souls in the lowest humility, and excite in us wonder, veneration and praise. His promises should engage our faith, excite our hope, and fill us with joy and peace in believing. His threatenings and terrors should make us stand in awe, and we should be afraid of his judgements. The vicious examples recorded in GOD'S word should be read with a suitable abhorrence of their deformity, and with a lively hatred and indignation against sin, and a holy compassion for those who are under its fatal influence and condemning guilt; and, while we read the lives and actions of pious and holy men, our hearts should be fired with a noble emulation, and engaged to imitate their examples.

IN a word, the divine oracles contain subjects so important in themselves, and so interesting to us, that they should not be read in a dull and formal manner, but with a holy warmth of affection, and with a suitable exercise of all the powers and movements of the soul. As the hearts of the disciples *burned within them, while Christ talked with them, and opened unto them the scriptures* <sup>u</sup>; so ought ours when we read them. We should worship GOD in this, as well as in all his other ordinances, by the exercise of devout affections and holy resolutions, endeavouring to have our minds transformed, our hearts sanctified and regenerated, and our souls renewed by the incorrup-

<sup>u</sup> Luke xxiv. 32.

tible seed of GOD's word, which abideth and endureth for ever \*.

5thly. WHILE we read the scriptures we should by no means neglect the duty of prayer. We are taught to consider GOD as the father of lights, and the giver of every good and every perfect gift; and accordingly, *if any man lack wisdom, he is taught to ask it of GOD* x. The wise man expressly asserts, that the LORD giveth wisdom, and that *out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding*; therefore he recommends it to us *to cry after wisdom, and to lift up our voice for understanding*, as well as to *seek for her as silver, and search for her as for hid treasures* y. St. Paul prays for the Ephesians that GOD, the father of glory would give them *more and more of the spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the knowledge of Christ, that the eyes of their understanding might be enlightened to know the hope of his calling*. By which he cannot mean the mere external revelation of GOD's word, for this they had already, but plainly intimates that it is the office of the holy spirit, who first indited the scriptures, to enlighten the understandings of men in the knowledge of them, and to set them home with evidence and power upon the heart z. And the same apostle tells us elsewhere, that GOD, *who at first commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shone into his heart*, not only by the outward revelation of his word, but by the inward operation of his spirit, *to give him the light of the*

\* Rom. xii. 2. James i. 18. 1 Peter i. 23. John xvii. 17.

x James i. 5, 17.

y Prov. ii. 3, 4, 6.

z Eph. i. 17, 18.

*knowledge*

## SERMON VI.

knowledge of the glory of God in Jesus Christ<sup>a</sup>. We read also of God's giving the apostles an understanding they might know him that is true, and certainly intimate some improvement of the faculty itself, as we external revelation of the object<sup>b</sup>.

The royal psalmist, who was certainly well instructed in the critical and rational knowledge of the divine law, who loved it, who made it the subject of his daily meditation, and who had arrived to a degree of knowledge in it above all his teachers, yet found the necessity of a higher and more divine kind of instruction in it, and therefore frequently prays, *open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law;—make me to understand the way of thy precepts;—teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes, &c.*<sup>c</sup>. Is it not hence evident, that David conceived divine teaching and illumination necessary in order to an effectual knowledge and practice of the divine law? And may not abundant experience convince us that the clearest and most convictive notions of duty in the head, are not, in general, sufficient efficaciously to determine the will to a course of correspondent practice, and that something more than a bare rational conviction is, in many cases, necessary for this purpose? Had not the *Israelites* a clear and distinct knowledge both of that law and of its divine authority and original, which they heard delivered from mount *Sinai*? And yet how quickly did they

<sup>a</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 6.

<sup>b</sup> 1 John v. 20.

<sup>c</sup> Psalm cxix.

rush into idolatry against the express letter of that law; for which GOD complains of them as infidels? *How long, says he, will this people provoke me? How long will it be ere they believe me<sup>d</sup>?*

FROM all which, I think, is abundantly evident that the aids and influences of that spirit of GOD which at first indited the scriptures, is necessary in order to our reading them with spiritual profit and improvement, and that it is therefore our duty, while we read the scriptures, to implore and expect the illumination and assistance of this blessed spirit to improve our natural faculties, to fix our attention, to open our eyes that we might understand the scriptures, and to represent the truths of revelation, in such a just and powerful light to our souls, as that they may strike and pierce the heart, and subdue it to the obedience of faith. Such kind of assistances seem generally necessary for the great purposes of practical religion; such, I think, GOD hath promised in his word, and such he will not withhold from those who diligently and earnestly seek them.

BUT as, on the one hand, we should do due honour to supernatural assistances, so on the other, we should beware of running into the enthusiastic absurdity of new lights and blind impulses, as though the aids of the spirit were intended to supersede the necessity of the written word, or to give new and contrary revelations, to those which are already given in the scriptures of truth. Where the authority of the word is laid aside, this light within must

<sup>d</sup> Numb. xiv. 4.



prove a blind guide, and a wild delusive infatuation. The word of GOD is the only complete and perfect rule of religious truth and obedience. By this, if we would not be deceived and deluded, we must try not only our own spirits, and those of others, but also all the inward motions and impulses, which are apt to pass themselves unexamined upon persons of pious dispositions, strong imaginations, and weak understandings, as the operations of the spirit of GOD. We must *to the law, and to the testimony; for, if they speak not according to these, they are strong delusions, and lying imaginations, which have no light of truth in them* °.

THE office of the holy spirit in this respect, so far as I understand it, is neither to give new powers or faculties to the soul, nor yet to present new objects of faith before it, but only to shed a greater degree of light on the objects of faith already revealed, to fix the attention of the soul upon these objects, and to strengthen and improve its natural faculties. The difference between the knowledge of a regenerate and unregenerate man, does not seem to consist in this, that the former understands any proposition or doctrine of scripture in a different sense from the latter; but that he has a more clear, lively, realizing, and practical sense of the same truths. Any two men, of sound faculties, who believe the truth of scripture, must be persuaded in general of the omniscience and the omnipresence of GOD from the hundred and thirty-ninth psalm, and of a future

° Isaiah viii. 20.

judgment from the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew's gospel. But in how different a manner do these great truths strike and affect different persons? In the wicked they are only vague, ineffectual notions, floating in the head; they believe them as truths in which they have no interest or concern, and which, therefore, can have no power or influence upon their temper or conduct: In sincere believers, they are firm persuasions, settled in the heart, efficaciously influencing the will, and governing the life and conversation. It is the character of that faith, which is the gift of God, and of the operation of his spirit, that it begets a *confident expectation of things hoped for*, and a *powerful conviction of things not seen*; it gives such a present being and reality to its future and invisible objects, as not only convinces the believer of their certainty, but engages him to act according to such conviction, to act *as seeing him who is invisible, and having respect unto the recompence of the reward*<sup>f</sup>. And, in truth, we can never be said to pay the homage of faith unto God, until our faith answers the end for which the things to be believed were revealed; *i. e.* until we comply with, and submit to the revelation of God, according to its true intent and purpose, which is certainly a correspondent obedience; and therefore it is termed by the apostles, the obedience of faith, or that faith, &c.<sup>g</sup> Now I take it to be the peculiar office and province of the holy spirit, to beget and cherish this kind of faith in the hearts of men, while they read and hear the

<sup>f</sup> Heb. xi. 26, 27.

<sup>g</sup> Rom. i. 5.

word;

word; and therefore, while we are thus employed, it is our duty to seek unto GOD, by humble and earnest prayer, for this blessed influence.

6thly. WE should read the scriptures with serious self-application. The scriptures were written *for our learning; that we might believe on the son of GOD, and have life through his name; that we might not sin; that we might be warned by them, and have patience, comfort and hope from them. They were given by inspiration of GOD (for holy men of GOD spoke them, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost) and are profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness.* They are given for a lamp to our feet, and a light to our paths, and we are to take heed to them, as a light shining in a dark place till an eternal day dawns upon us. Both old and young are to cleanse and direct their ways, by taking heed thereunto, according to GOD's word. It is not only the food and physic, but also the mirror of the soul. We are to look stedfastly into this perfect law of liberty, and contemplate ourselves in it, as a man beholds his natural face in a glass, that by this means we may discover the features, complexion and prevailing temper of our souls; cleanse every spot and stain of pollution which might tarnish their moral beauty; deck and adorn them with the ornaments of virtue and holiness, and so learn to order our conversation aright<sup>h</sup>. Now for these important purposes the scriptures are given to all

<sup>h</sup> Rom. xv. 4. John xx. 31. 1 John ii. 1. Psalm xix. 11. 2 Tim. iii. 16. 2 Peter i. 19, 21. Psalm cxix. 9, 105. James i. 23, 25.

without exception. Divine wisdom crieth and lifteth up her voice unto all, *unto you, O men, doth she call, and her voice is directed unto the sons of men, without distinction*<sup>1</sup>. Every man and woman unto whom the word of this grace cometh, hath a personal interest and concern in it. GOD hath published his law and covenant for the use of all men, and every human creature unto whom they are promulgated, ought to consider himself as having as much interest and concern in this divine revelation, as any other human creature. Every individual of the human species should consider the *Bible* as a law and rule of life directed to himself in particular, by the father of his spirit, his sovereign lord and judge. Now this view of the matter, will naturally engage us, not only to a constant and attentive perusal of the holy scripture, as the touchstone of our conduct, and the model of our lives; but will also teach us to search and study it, with a peculiar self-application, to consider all its general promises, offers, threats and precepts, as directed to us in particular, and to apply and improve them accordingly. A man who reads the holy scriptures, under this conviction, reads them for himself, and not for others; he applies them directly to himself, and makes his own practical improvement, the great aim and design of his searching the scriptures. And, indeed, we can never hope to reap any real benefit or spiritual improvement from reading the scriptures, unless we do it with some measure of attention and self-application, laying

<sup>1</sup> Prov. viii. 1, 4.

our hearts open to its genuine impressions, and submitting our lives and tempers to be corrected and regulated by its sacred precepts.

7thly. AND to conclude. As the great end of our knowledge is practice, so we should read the scriptures with holy resolutions and honest endeavours of performing the will of GOD, there revealed. *If ye know these things, says Christ to his disciples, happy are ye if ye do them<sup>k</sup>. We know the fate of those, who know their master's will, and yet prepared not themselves, neither did according to his will, they shall be beaten with many stripes<sup>l</sup>. We have abundant proofs not only of the folly, but of the guilt and danger of an unfruitful knowledge of divine things<sup>m</sup>. It is not those who read or hear GOD's word, but those who keep it, who shall be truly blessed<sup>n</sup>. Christ is the author of eternal salvation, only to those who obey him<sup>o</sup>. And those who obey not his gospel, whatever knowledge they may boast, shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the LORD, and from the glory of his power<sup>p</sup>. Not the readers or bearers of the law are just before GOD, but the doers of the law shall be justified<sup>q</sup>. We are commanded to be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving our own selves. It is he who looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, who is not a forgetful*

<sup>k</sup> John xiii. 17.

<sup>l</sup> Luke xii. 47.

<sup>m</sup> Matth. vii. 21, 27. Luke vi. 46. xiii. 25, 28. Matth. xi. 20—24. John iii. 19. 1 Cor. xiii. 1, 3.

<sup>n</sup> Luke xi. 28.

<sup>o</sup> Heb. v. 9.

<sup>p</sup> 2 Theff. i. 9.

<sup>q</sup> Rom. ii. 13.

*bearer, but a doer of the work*: It is this man only that shall be blessed in his deed<sup>r</sup>. The seed in the parable, which fell in the good ground, signifies they who, in *an honest and good heart*, having read or heard the word, *keep it, and bring forth the fruits of repentance and righteousness, with patience*<sup>s</sup>. The word of GOD contains not only a promise but a law, and it is absolutely necessary that we *obey the latter*, as ever we hope to *inherit the former*. That was a noble and necessary resolution entered into by the *Israelites*, when *Moses* read the book of the covenant in their audience: *All that the LORD hath said, say they, will we do, and be obedient*<sup>t</sup>. This therefore should be our constant resolution and endeavour when we read the scriptures, namely, to reduce them to present and future practice, to use them as our daily counsellors and instructors, and to take daily lessons of duty, comfort and support from them. The *shield of faith* and the *sword of the spirit*, are pieces of Christian armour, of which we will have constant need in our *Christian warfare*, and with which we may effectually repel all the fiery darts of the wicked one. The word of GOD is the best defence in the time of trial and temptation, the best comforter in the time of affliction, and the noblest cordial at the hour of death. That was a wise and useful advice given by the royal preacher<sup>u</sup>. *Bind the commandment continually upon thine heart, and tie it about thy neck. When thou goest, it will lead thee; when thou sleepest,*

<sup>r</sup> James i. 22—25.

<sup>s</sup> Luke viii. 15.

<sup>t</sup> Exod. xxiv. 7.

<sup>u</sup> Prov. vi. 21, 22.

*it shall keep thee ; and when thou wakest, it shall talk with thee.*

THUS have I shewed you, at sufficient length, the excellency of the holy scriptures, as a motive to the duty of searching them, enjoined in the text, and also endeavoured to point out the warrant which all have for performing this duty, and the best method of discharging it. It only now remains that I should make some special application of the whole argument ; but this must be reserved for a separate discourse.

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## S E R M O N VII.

A practical application of the foregoing subject.

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2 PET. ii. 1, 2. JUDE iii. 2 COR. iv. 4.

—*There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.— It was therefore needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.—But if our gospel is hid, it is hid to them that are lost.*

**M**Y design in this discourse being only to make some special application of the foregoing subject, these scriptures, which I have prefixed to it, are not to be considered as its text or theme, properly speaking; but rather



rather as a *motto*, which has at least a remote coincidence with the general subject. Without therefore entering into an examination of the particular meaning or design of these texts of scripture, in their respective connections, I shall proceed directly to the particular application of the argument for the truth of Christianity.

1st. To unbelievers, or deists.

2dly. To the young and rising generation, who, although not yet tainted with loose principles, may be in danger of falling into the fashionable scepticism of the age. And,

3dly. To professed Christians, whose religious principles are fixed upon a rational conviction of the truth of Christianity. And,

1st. I WOULD address myself to avowed unbelievers or deists, and if I might obtain a hearing from such, I would beg leave to enquire in the

1st place, THE *cui bono* of their argument against the Christian religion? It is certainly the part of a wise man to propose to himself some end or design in all his actions, and to regulate his zeal and industry in all his pursuits by the importance of the end which he proposes. It is the mark of a wrong and distempered mind to be zealous in the pursuit either of trifles or uncertainties. We justly suspect the soundness of that emperor's intellects who employed an hour or two of every day in catching flies, and we would rightly pronounce a man fit for *Bedlam*, who would employ his whole time, study and substance in quest of the philosopher's stone or perpetual motion. When therefore,

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we see a number of men, who arrogate to themselves the character of rational enquirers after truth, so zealously employed in discrediting the Christian religion, which has prevailed in the world for *eighteen centuries*, and stood the test and scrutiny of so many ages: When we see them employing all the engines of learning, argument, wit, banter, ridicule, and calumny against it, we must either conclude, that they are a little wrong-headed; or that, having discovered some great cheat or evil in Christianity itself, they mean to discredit it for the most important purposes.

ALL who have enlarged and extensive views of human nature, must be convinced that religion is connatural to the human mind. It is generally agreed, that religion is the prime characteristic of humanity; and that man should rather be denominated a religious, than a rational animal. Many of our fellow animals seem to be endued with something like reason, but none that we know of on this terraqueous globe, man excepted, seems to have any capacity for religion; and this capacity and propension is so common to the human race, that no nation has yet been discovered without some vestiges of it. Men will have some religion or other; insomuch that when they are in the dark, as to its true object, rather than baulk their religious propensions, they pay their devotions to the brute creation, or worship *gods* of their own manufacture. This, to me, affords a strong presumption that man was made for religion, and that he who made him for his service and enjoyment, has implanted

implanted this capacity and these propensions in the very frame of his nature.

AND if we still extend this enquiry, we will find that religion is not more natural to man, than it is necessary, perhaps to the being, at least to the good and well-being of society. It is evident, at least, that the wisest and best of men have been of this opinion in all ages. Hence, we find, that it has been the principal concern of law-givers and philosophers, to establish some form or other of religion in their respective kingdoms and common-wealths. They saw the necessity of virtue and public fa. . to the very being of society, and could not help seeing that these never could be secured without the aids of religion: For indeed, set aside religion, set aside the belief of an invisible power, who is the moral governor of the world, the witness and judge, the rewarder and punisher of men's actions, and what is there left to bind men's consciences, to restrain their passions and appetites, and to oblige them to a rational and virtuous conduct? What can the wisest and best human laws effect, where there is no reverence of an oath, and what but religion, a sense of a ruling providence, and a firm persuasion of a future state of rewards and punishments can give validity to an oath, which is the greatest engine of human government, and the very hinge on which it turns? For upon what is the solemnity of an oath founded, if it be not upon the firm belief of a sovereign invisible power, which is the present witness of all our actions, and who can and will reward veracity, and punish falsehood? And what security could society have for

for its best interests, nay, how can we suppose it to subsist or hang together, without the religion of an oath.

IF therefore it be evident to a demonstration, that the Christian religion, of all others, is the most friendly to the interests of society and human government; not only as it fixes the solemnity of an oath, upon the firmest bottom, the firm belief of an invisible, omnipresent, omniscient, moral governor of the world, the the accountableness of moral actions, a final impartial judgment, and an endless state of retribution according to the deeds done in the body; but also as it inculcates universal benevolence, purity, honesty and integrity of character and conduct, under the severest penalties, and by the prospect of the highest rewards; and recommends, in a particular manner, all due honour, submission and obedience to the lawful ruling powers of this world: I say, if it be evident to a demonstration, as doubtless it is, that this is the peculiar genius, tendency, and design of the Christian religion, then it will follow, that those who wantonly endeavour to unsettle mens minds in the belief of this religion, to ridicule its doctrines, weaken its obligations, enervate its penalties and sanctions, and bring its authority into contempt and discredit in the world, are in reality, how little soever they may design it, enemies to civil society. I do indeed charitably believe that the generality of our deists are not apprehensive of this, and that they intend no such thing, and yet I think it manifest that their principles and conduct have a direct tendency to this end.

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FOR, to be serious, what can unbelievers design by their writings and arguments against Christianity, but its utter extirpation out of the world? And supposing their arguments and raillery had their desired effect; suppose they could profelyte all Christendom to the principles of scepticism and infidelity in one day, what would be the probable consequence? Do you really believe in your consciences, that the inhabitants of *Christendom* would be better men, better subjects, better members of society; that they would be more pure, peaceable, chaste, honest, virtuous and industrious, if they were all infidels; or, that in this case, the interests of society would be more promoted; public peace and order better maintained; trade, commerce, arts, sciences and manufactures flourish more than they do at present? Are you really persuaded in your own minds, that, if the *Christian Bible* were discarded, and *Mr. Hobbes's* principles, or those of the first philosophy, adapted in its place, the Christian world would be the better for the change? I believe that you are not, and if so, you act as the intentional enemies of human society, by endeavouring to sink the credit and invalidate the authority of the Christian religion.

BUT that I may a little farther trace the probable consequences of such an innovation as you propose! What, if by endeavouring to bring back the Christian world to the religion of nature, you should reduce the greatest number of them to universal scepticism, or absolute atheism, and by bringing off their minds from the principles of Christianity, you should leave them without any kind of religion;

gious principle at all? This consequence must surely be extremely shocking to every sober mind, and yet is it not to be apprehended? Is it not to be feared? When thinking men come once to be persuaded of the falsehood and imposture of religion, which has been held sacred and divine, not only by the multitude, but by the wisest and best men of all ages, the truth and divinity of which is so plausibly recommended, not to say powerfully demonstrated, by a multitude both of external and internal proofs, supported by the current of antiquity, hated by the vicious and profane, and loved and approved by the wise, the virtuous, and the good. I say, when thinking men are once brought to regard such a religion as an imposture, are they not like to doubt the truth of religion in general, and either stick in the mud of universal scepticism, or fall into the sink of atheism itself? I could wish that experience itself did not come in to the aid of this suspicion, and that there were not too many living examples of men, who having abandoned the principles of Christianity, have also with them lost all sense of moral obligation, and renounced almost every principle of natural religion! But there is still a farther consequence to be apprehended from such an innovation. As the more thinking part of men would be in danger of falling into universal scepticism; or, which is but a step lower, into *Epicurean* atheism, the more vulgar and ignorant herd of mankind would be in equal danger of falling gradually into the grossest idolatry and superstition. It has been before observed, that mankind are naturally

prone to religion, and it may here be added, that none are more liable to its impressions than the more plain and simple part of the species, who lead a country life, follow rustic employments, and have the grand and majestic scenes of nature continually before them: These having the great machinery of the universe always under their eye, and having but few avocations from the contemplation of it, by the giddy pleasures, hurry and intrigue of active life, and having their minds thereby filled with solemn thoughts of that great and invisible power which actuates the whole, form the most religious and devout, although perhaps the most superstitious part of every nation. Now let us suppose, for once, that the light of Christianity was wholly extinct in *Christianity*, and what would be the probable consequence with regard to this party of men? It is evident, that their natural propensity to religion would still remain. The pure religion of nature would be found too subtile and abstracted for their grosser minds, and therefore, having no sure guide to their thoughts, no leader of their devotions, no stated solemn worship for their religious instruction, and to keep alive the principles of *monotheism*, and of a spiritual service in their souls, they must of course gradually sink into the grossest ignorance, superstition and idolatry, and return to the detestible and ridiculous *polytheism* of ancient *Egypt*, *Greece* and *Rome*; and the fabulous age of nymphs, satyrs, genii, heroes, idolatrous priests and inhuman sacrifices, would in all probability return again.

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AND now, let me ask a sober and intelligent deist, what he would think of this new face of things in *Christendom*? Whether he would really think it preferable to that which at present obtains? Or, whether he can, in his conscience, approve the conduct of those who pursue such measures, which seem, at least, to have a remote and probable tendency to produce such a change and such consequences? However imperfect and ineffectual the Christian dispensation may be supposed to be, and whatever errors, superstitions and failures in character and conduct, may actually prevail in *Christendom*, yet I imagine, no sober and candid deist would prefer the religious state of ancient *Egypt, Greece, Rome, or Britains* to that of modern *Christendom*. What then must we think can be the view or design of those who use their utmost endeavours to extirpate the Christian religion, which, even by their own confessions, must be allowed to be one of the best popular religions, which ever prevailed in the world? But,

2dly. If the project of infidels should take, if Christianity were fairly extinguished, What religion is it you propose to substitute in its place? Surely it is not your design to extirpate religion of every kind and under every form? Such an attempt would be no less wicked than vain and absurd! Religion is too sacred, venerable and necessary a thing in itself, and has too deep a hold, and too powerful an advocate in the human breast, to be wholly banished from the earth; and if it could, it is easy to see that the consequences of such a revolution would prove destructive of society, and fatal to the

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the human race. Charity therefore would strongly incline one to think, that the design of our deists, in their attacks upon Christianity, is not the total extirpation of religion, but only its reformation; or to substitute a true and efficacious religion, in the place of one which is false and ineffectual. Such a design is no doubt truly noble and excellent in itself, and could the deists accomplish it, to the general satisfaction of mankind, they would doubtless meet with all due encouragement, and approve themselves the friends and benefactors of their species! But now, in order to this, they must first pave the way by proving the Christian religion to be false and absurd, and then exhibit in its stead, one founded on better authority, more clear, consistent and authentic, and better adapted to the use, capacity and moral improvement of mankind in general. But now, has either of these been actually done by the enemies of Christianity? Has any of the numerous advocates of infidelity proved, in a rational and satisfactory manner, either that Jesus Christ never existed, or that the religion which he taught proceeded either from imposture or enthusiasm? Has it been yet made evident, either that Christ wrought no real miracles, or that his miracles were inadequate proofs of his divine mission, or that the doctrines and precepts which he taught are unworthy of GOD to reveal, or inconsistent with each other, or absurd and pernicious in themselves?

IF the deists have sufficient vouchers, either from reason or tradition, to prove the falsehood or absurdity of the Christian religion, why do

they not produce them, and so put an end to the dispute? We have seen indeed abundance of doubts, objections and cavils raised against the Christian religion, and against what religion have they not been raised? But nothing satisfactory and decisive has been yet offered against the great fundamental facts, upon which the weight of its truth and divine original is rested! Why then are not these firm and stately columns fairly removed, and then it will fall of itself to the ground, and all the power and cunning of priests and politicians, will never be able to prop it up?

If unbelievers have a strong *body of reserve*, as they would sometimes insinuate in their writings, if they have stronger reasons to produce for their infidelity, than any they have yet offered, why do they not now bring them upon the field, in aid of their shattered forces? Surely there never was a more favourable opportunity than the present age affords, for shewing their whole strength. The press is under no kind of awe or restraint, and the world seems ready to hear any thing they can say in defence of their cause. We live in a free-thinking and free-speaking age. No man is persecuted for his religious opinions, and surely never had free enquiry a fairer scope for its excursions than at present. Why then do not the deists of the age, seize the favourable opportunity, and give Christianity that fatal blow which has so long been meditated and threatened against it? And if, upon the whole, they find their power inadequate to the attempt, why do they not candidly and ingenuously give up the cause which they cannot maintain, and

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cease

cease to perplex the minds of their fellow-creatures with vain *sophisms* and equivocal, ineffectual reasonings?

BUT supposing you had overthrown the Christian religion, what have you offered better to substitute in its place? Although wits, authors, courtiers and philosophers may live contented without any popular religion at all; or may feed themselves unto satiety on the thin, unsubstantial diet of their own airy notions, and fine-spun systems of philosophical speculations; yet the bulk of mankind can neither understand such a religion, nor be contented with it! It might be thought therefore, that these reformers of the world and advocates for truth, would not leave the multitude without a guide; but that, out of their great benevolence, they would draw up a system of religion, level to the capacities of the many, and far preferable, in every respect, to the Christian system. But in which of the deistical writers is this system to be found? Must mankind be delivered from the superstition and fanaticism of Christianity, only that they may be left a prey to ignorance, and exposed to still more gross superstition or more furious enthusiasm? Is it really better, upon the whole, that men should be ignorant heathens than superstitious Christians? If not, why do not these lights of the world set up a *beacon* to direct their wandering fellow-travellers in the true way to virtue and happiness? Why have we not some book published with some such title as this, “ *The true system of pure and un-*  
“ *corrupt natural religion, adapted to the capacities*  
“ *of all ages, men and nations, and demonstrated*

“ *to be the perfect law and truth of GOD.*” Such a book as this, answering its title, and recommended to the world by proper authority, would doubtless be of great service to settle men’s religious principles, to unite them in the same *creed*, to guard them against the fooleries of *superstition* on one hand, and the extravagancies of *fanaticism* and *mysticism* on the other. And, oh, what a happy world would it be, when all men would be of one faith, of one heart, and of one practice ! But where can we meet with any thing of this kind, in the writings of our modern deists ?

THE heathen philosophers of old, wrote compleat systems of natural religion for the reformation and direction of mankind. *Plato, Seneca, Epictetus, Tully, M. Antoninus* and many others, have obliged the world with excellent works of this kind ; but our present *theists* in general are wholly without system, and most of them without principle. Lord *Herbert* deserves, perhaps, an exemption from this charge. He seems to have been an honest, consistent theist. He has some excellent principles, and does not leave his readers wholly without a guide. He is indeed the prince of the deistical writers, whether we consider his judgement, his piety, or his candour ; and there is little doubt but that he would have become a sincere convert to Christianity had he lived in the present enlightened age. *Hobbes* and *Bolingbroke* have indeed some principles, but they are the principles of *irreligion*. A certain voluminous foreign writer, who has excelled in most kinds of composition, and whose works would have been the delight and admiration of every class of readers, were it not for the rude and disin-

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genuous strictures upon Christianity with which they every where abound, has confined the whole of natural religion to that single precept; “do to others, as ye would that others should do to you.” With what propriety and justice let reason itself determine. In a word, the great design of our modern deists seems to be, the extirpation of Christianity, without the least attempt to substitute any other, much less any better religion in its place. The religion of *Plato* and that of *Christ* are treated with equal contempt, and one cannot easily conjecture what principles or what system these men would have us to adapt. Not their own surely, for they seem to have none. Not those of others, for these they generally condemn in the lump. What follows then, but that we must be all atheists?

NOT so, says the unbeliever, we recommend you to no *human* systems or opinions. These are all either defective, corrupt, unintelligible or obscure. Follow the pure light of nature, that eternal law written by the finger of the deity on your heart, and you can never err under the direction of such an infallible guide. You look for systems and revelations; you have one; the most perfect and luminous, if you would but look into your heart, and read it there!—And here there is shuffled promiscuously before us a number of hard names and vague, indeterminate phrases, which, as they are used by the generality of the deistical writers, are full as unintelligible, as the most profound and uncouth terms of the mystic divines, *Behmen* himself not excepted; such as *law of nature, light of nature, eternal law of*

*reason, light of reason, reason of things, right and fit in temper and conduct, ideas of moral excellence, and the like.* These terms, not very clear in themselves, and essentially different in their precise meaning and signification, the deists have either artfully or inadvertently confounded together, and used them as nearly synonymous terms, thus raising a dust before the ignorant, and giving a vain and empty, though a taking and insinuating pomp to their stile and arguments. But now when we come to define these phrases, and severely to examine their meaning and extent, we are still much in the dark.

THE law of nature when applied to a moral subject, and confined to man, seems to signify no more than a system of moral truths and duties, within the reach of human knowledge, arising from the relations, connections, and dependencies which subsist between man and the rest of the moral world. This law of nature is, to be sure, very clear and intelligible in itself, and a most noble and perfect rule of human conduct; it being that very nature and reason of things, so often mentioned by moral writers. But then the question is, has every individual of the human race a clear, comprehensive knowledge of this natural law? Is it wrote upon the hearts of all men, in such plain and legible characters, that no man can mistake or be ignorant of any of its essential truths or important sanctions? Are all men self-instructed in it; or, at least, may every man by such an use of his powers, (as is consistent with the general indolence of mankind, and the various avocations of this life,) easily and certainly obtain the knowledge of it?

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THE question is not, whether the knowledge of this law, in its just extent, is absolutely attainable by man? Or whether a few men, like *Socrates*, may have actually attained it, by a rare felicity of natural genius, and an indefatigable exercise of their rational powers, in the search of moral truth? But whether mankind in general have, or may do the same? For if this be not allowed, it can never be that plain, perfect, easy, universal and adequate rule of moral conduct which deists cry it up to be.

THE law of nature, is in itself a perfect, fixed, invariable thing; whereas, in truth, as it affects individuals, it is only a personal and relative thing, proportioned to the various capacities, attention, or instruction of men. So that there is a wide difference between the *law of nature*, considered as a system of knowable truths, and the *light of nature*, or that particular portion of moral truths and duties, which every individual can find out for himself, as the rule of his duty.

Now it is quite unfair, if not ridiculous, to preach up this law of nature as an all perfect and all sufficient rule of moral and religious conduct for men, unless it could be proved that all men have an adequate knowledge of it. But universal experience seems to contradict this: For we find that mankind do not possess the knowledge of this law of nature, as an universal instinct; but that they gradually acquire it by observation, instruction, and the painful and laborious exercise of their rational powers. The more ignorant and barbarous any people is, the less perfect notices they seem to have of this law, and some nations there are, in whom

the traces of it seem almost wholly obliterated. Nay not only do mankind differ widely in the degrees of their knowledge of this supposed innate science; but what is yet more observable, they seem to differ in their notions about this law itself, of which any one may be quickly convinced, by considering the diametrically opposite customs, laws and practices of different barbarous nations; which, as they are all supposed to be founded upon this law of nature, would be in a great measure uniform, if this law appeared in the same light and under the same view to all.

Now I cannot see how the necessity or expediency of a divine revelation, can be superseded by this natural law, otherwise than by supposing every individual man endued with the knowledge of it, in a perfect and adequate manner: For if men may be, and generally are, ignorant of the principles of this natural law, to all the intents and purposes of regulating their moral conduct, I see not what perfection or universality it can claim, above any written revelation.

LET it here be observed once for all, that I am far from denying either the being or excellency of the law of nature, or the universality of its influence, in some measure, upon the moral conduct of men. But the question is, whether all men have such a knowledge of its precepts and sanctions, as renders any farther and clearer revelations of GOD's will either absurd, impossible, or unnecessary for the great purposes of morality and religion: For if this cannot be granted, the law of nature, or the light of reason, may be still an excellent, useful  
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and necessary gift of Heaven; and yet any farther revelation of God's will very necessary and expedient at the same time; for these being both the gifts of the same kind and beneficent God, they must needs have a consistency and agreement between themselves.

FROM the whole therefore it appears, that to extirpate the Christian religion, upon a pretence that the law of nature, as now generally apprehended and understood by mankind, is sufficient for all the purposes of morality and religion, would be a rash and injurious attempt. To leave every man to find out this law for himself, would be just to leave the world as it is:—Nay it would be worse; it would be to throw back *Christendom* into its ancient state of ignorance and idolatry: Suppose it possible for one of these apostles of infidelity to speak to the whole world of mankind at once, and to exhort them, as one man, to burn all their books of morality and religion, which were only calculated to mislead them in their enquiries after truth, and to corrupt their minds with errors and prejudices, and to apply themselves wholly for the future to the study of this law of nature, written on their hearts. And suppose all mankind willing to obey this exhortation. How long do you imagine would the world adhere to this pure and simple law of nature? How soon would they betake themselves to the *polytheism* and idolatry of the ancient *Egyptians*; and apply themselves to the worship of every element and creature from which they either received any benefit, or feared any injury? In a word, what nation or kindred of the earth, has ever yet adopted this pure natural law for the system of  
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their religion? A strong presumption this, that God did never intend it as the sole religion of man! But you are not willing that mankind should be entirely left to find out this law of nature for themselves. You would have a system of moral truths, deduced from the light of nature, drawn up for the instruction of men; and you would have publick lectures of this first philosophy read to them at stated periods, in the manner prescribed by the emperor *Julian*. But what man has reputation and authority enough to impose such a system on mankind? Will you still leave room for free enquiry and debate? If so, no one conceivably system will be found to answer the end. Every man will embrace or reject your principles, as they agree or disagree with his own notions. And whereas men are kept within some bounds by a persuasion of that divine authority which accompanies the scriptures; no human authority, how great and respectable soever, will have any weight to keep men steady in their adherence to any human system; seeing one man's reason may be justly deemed as good as another's, and no one man can have a rightful power to impose his religious opinions on another man's conscience. Hence the consequence would be, that the altercations of Philosophers would take place of the disputes of divines; and the new religion would load the world with equal cost, and much greater inconveniencies than the old. If the world therefore must have a popular religion; and if Christianity is certainly the best calculated for a popular religion of any that can be conceived, (laying wholly aside the argument of its truth and divine authority,) those who  
would

would wantonly and thoughtlessly attempt to extirpate it out of the world, ought certainly to be considered as the enemies of mankind. But 3dly. For all you know or can prove to the contrary, the Christian religion may still be true and divine. Who has yet successfully attempted to prove, either that there never was any such person in the world as Christ, or that he was an impostor, and his religion a fable? The truth of Christianity has been often *doubted* and *disputed*; but has it ever been fairly *disproved*? Christianity has been loaded with many a *slander*; but has it ever yet been convicted of *falsehood* and *imposture*? Its doctrines have been *impeached* and *calumniated*; but have the foundations, upon which their truth is grounded, been ever *overthrown*? Is it so easy a thing, do you imagine, to prove this negative, that *Christianity is not a true religion*? And yet one would imagine that nothing but the strongest demonstration should be admitted against a religion, the authenticity of which is favoured by a vast number (at least) of plausible arguments;—a religion which has spread so far, and prevailed so long in the world, against all possible opposition;—a religion which has been embraced and approved by the wise and good of every age; approved and embraced after the severest scrutiny, and most candid examination, and most cordially approved and embraced by the most pious, virtuous, and good of heart.

BUT you say, you have seriously and impartially examined the merits of the cause, and weighed the arguments for and against Christianity, and upon the whole you can see no reason to believe.

TAKE

**TAKE** care that you do not deceive yourself in this matter. If I could be allowed to use the words of an old Jewish prophet upon this occasion<sup>a</sup>; I would say, that *the human heart is deceitful above all things*; and that men are as often deceived by, and concerning themselves, as they are by and concerning others. Are you certain that your mind has been, and is free, impartial and disinterested in this matter? Experience may convince us that we easily believe that which we wish to be true, and as easily doubt of, or disbelieve, that which we wish to be false. Are you certain that you would be as well pleased to be convicted of the truth of the Christian religion, as of its falshood and imposture? If not, your mind is not in a proper frame for judging, you prejudge the cause, and are under the power of a prejudice, which will keep your eyes shut against the proper degree of evidence. Permit me therefore to ask you seriously the following questions.

1st. **HAVE** you read *the apologies for Christianity*, with the same temper, openness of mind, and desire of conviction, as you have *the writings of infidels against it*? When you have met with any considerable objection against the Christian religion, either in the writings or conversation of infidels, have you immediately applied to the advocates of Christianity, to see what could be said on the other side of the question; and when you have not got sufficient satisfaction from one Christian apologist, have you applied to another? If you have not taken this course, your infidelity is wholly unjustifi-

<sup>a</sup> Jerem. xvii. 9.

able: You have not been a fair and impartial enquirer after truth, and however exceptionable Christianity may be in itself, yet it has not been so to you, upon rational principles.

2dly. DID your *first* and *earliest* prejudices against Christianity arise from an unbiassed dislike to the doctrines of Christianity as incredible, or to its laws as immoral?—In other words, did your present infidelity first arise from a rational persuasion of the incredibility of scripture doctrines, the impossibility of scripture miracles, and the immorality of scripture precepts? Or, on the other hand, did you receive the first impressions of infidelity from the ludicrous representations of sceptical witlings? *It is of great importance to know, in what manner you received the first impressions of scepticism.*—Perhaps at present you may imagine you have some reasons for your unbelief; but were these reasons the first causes and motives of it? If not, they are greatly to be suspected. For however a man may change his opinions, yet the change must needs be wrong on his part, if it is not founded on apparent reason. Now it is evident that the first impressions of infidelity may be made otherwise than by rational conviction.

A young man, urged by the *impetus* of some powerful lust, begins to judge hardly of those Christian precepts and obligations, which forbid its gratification. While under this conflict between lust and scripture principles, he unbosoms himself to a libertine, his intimate acquaintance, who laughs at his scrupulous conscience, insinuates that our natural desires and inclinations ought to be gratified, that religion is only an engine of human invention, and gives him  
a book

a book which inculcates the free indulgence of all the natural appetites and desires. The young man greedily sucks in the poison, thinks he perceives a wonderful beauty and force in the reasonings of the infidel, which coincide so exactly with his own inclinations, and from that moment begins to doubt of the truth and reasonableness of Christianity, and daily strengthens himself in his infidelity, by studying the deistical writers.—In this case you see, *lust*, and not *reason* or *conviction*, made the first impressions of infidelity on the soul.

ANOTHER has had a liberal education, and has served an apprenticeship; he is of a sprightly turn, a contradictory temper, a considerable volubility of tongue, has a taste for singularity, and a talent for wrangling. At his first entrance on the stage of life, he meets with deistical books and loose companions. Armed and accoutred with a few deistical sophisms, he tries his strength on a circle of weak and ignorant Christians, poses, and puts them to silence, and so comes off an imaginary conqueror: The pride of his heart, his taste for singularity, the vanity inspired by one or two such conquests, operates imperceptably on his own mind, and at length induces him to imagine that that cause must needs be weak, which he so easily controverts. Here then it is evident, that *pride* and *a taste for singularity* and *contradiction*, made the first impressions of infidelity.

A THIRD has been baptized, and had, what we call, a Christian education. He has grown up without any doubts of the truth of his religion, and equally ignorant of the great evidences and principles on which its truth is founded.

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He is very sober, regular and pious in his outward deportment, of a modest, bashful nature, and is, perhaps, a real enemy to all profanity. Towards the noon of life, he falls into loose company, which is the great corrupter of principles and manners. The gaity, good humour, affability, and seeming friendship of these companions, throw him off his guard. In this chearful circle, the Christian religion, or some of its parts or appendages, is set up as the mark of ridicule. The young man is shock'd, begins to look serious, and perhaps to express his disapprobation of such unmannerly freedoms with matters which he has so long held sacred. Upon this he is laugh'd at, and severely rallied. From raillery they proceed to argument, and here he is easily put to silence. He still frequents this company, becomes gradually ashamed of his religion, and at length becomes a compleat adept in infidelity.—Here then the first impressions are made by *shame and cowardice*, co-operating with a *profound ignorance of the grounds and reasons of the Christian religion*.

I MIGHT here add that many seem to receive the first impressions of infidelity from the most senseless prejudices, such as the hypocrisy of some Christian professors, the failings and ill lives of some of the Christian clergy, the enthusiasm and mistaken zeal of some Christians, and the bigotry and superstition of others, and the like. Just as if it were a sufficient proof of the falshood of any religion, that all its professors did not well understand it, or live up to its sacred dictates!

ON the whole, therefore, if your unbelief has taken its rise from any of these sources, and  
not

not from solid and rational conviction, it is wholly unjustifiable, both at the bar of reason, and in the sight of GOD.

3dly. ARE you able to prove to your own satisfaction, that Christ was an impostor, and that his religion is a cunningly devised fable? And are you really persuaded, that on a death bed, and in the near prospects of your dissolution, you could freely subscribe to all that infidels have said and wrote to the discredit of the scriptures, and of revealed religion? If you are not thus certain in your infidelity, how dare you to treat these venerable records with so much insolence and contempt! What if the cause you are opposing, with so much zeal and virulence, should prove at last to be the cause of GOD!— Surely then, until you have obtained a clear demonstration of the falshood of Christianity, you should, at least, oppose it with great modesty and reserve, lest you should be found to fight against GOD.

CONSIDER seriously what the consequences must be both to yourself and to the world, if you should chance to be wrong in your infidelity.

1st. To yourself. If GOD is indeed the author of the Christian religion, he has certainly afforded sufficient evidences of its truth to all, of every age, who will make the proper enquiry; for to imagine that GOD has given a revelation to the world, and yet left the evidences of it *equivocal* and *uncertain*; so that a sincere enquirer after truth, after using all due diligence, might still be left without sufficient reasons for the belief it; would still be a high imputation on the wisdom and goodness of GOD:  
Especially



Especially if we reflect, that the gospel itself contains several damnatory clauses against those who do not believe it, when it is fairly propounded.

THE author of the Christian religion has repeatedly said, *he that believeth not, shall be damned*,—and that *he who believeth not, is CONDEMNED already*, BECAUSE HE HATH NOT BELIEVED *in the name of the only begotten son of God*<sup>b</sup>. And one of his chief apostles has peremptorily affirmed, that *if the gospel is hid, it is hid to them that are lost, and whose mind Satan has blinded with lusts and prejudices*<sup>c</sup>.

Now, on the supposition that this religion is divine, its evidences must needs be fully sufficient to convince every sober enquirer of its truth and divinity; otherwise *damnation and perdition* would not be expressly threatened against all who will not believe it. For if the evidences of Christianity are either so *obscure and equivocal*, that after all due pains used, a man may not see them, or be convinced by them; surely it would be highly unjust to pronounce damnation against him, for not doing that which, to him, may be impossible.—And yet thus it is with the Christian religion: If it should happen to be true, the unbeliever must needs, by the very tenor and declaration of that religion, fall under the hottest displeasure of God! Think then, for thy soul's sake; think but for a moment, what thy case must be, if this gospel, which thou now despisest, should at last prove to be the gospel of the blessed God! Think

<sup>b</sup> Mark xvi. 16.

John iii. 18.

<sup>c</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

what thy guilt must be, in rejecting a revelation, which God himself hath vouchsafed to confirm by the most illustrious attestations;—in refusing the testimony which he has given of his son, and in pouring contempt on the richest instance of his love and grace both to thyself, and to the world of mankind! Think that, if this should indeed be the case, all the curses of that despised book, and particularly that—“*He that believeth not, shall be damned,*” stand in full force against thy immortal spirit!—Besides; consider the additional guilt which lies upon you, from your zealous, and, perhaps too often successful attempts, to draw others into the same snare! The seeds of infidelity, which you are industriously sowing both by your tongue and pen, are like to grow and flourish abundantly in unwary hearts; and in process of time, to produce a plenteous crop in the world! If the gospel is true, and the consequences of men’s wicked actions are justly chargeable upon them; what must be the guilt, what the condemnation of those deistical writers, who have, perhaps, been the means of perverting *thousands from the right ways of God*, and leading them into the paths of error and perdition! I tremble to make the inference, and only pray those who are concerned, seriously to lay it to heart!

2dly. CONSIDER the consequences of your infidelity, as they respect and regard the world. If Christianity should be indeed of divine original: If it is an institution most friendly to all the interests of virtue and civil society in the world: If it contains the purest and most excellent moral precepts, and enforces them by the  
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most powerful motives and sanctions which can be possibly imagined; where can be the merit of attempting to destroy so excellent an institution? Can you have any hopes of promoting virtue and good order among your fellow creatures, while you endeavour to sap the very foundations of the Christian religion, which is the strongest support of virtue and good order in the world? If society will ever prosper and flourish; if mankind will ever be virtuous and happy, it must be by the exertion of such principles, and the practice of such precepts, as the Christian religion contains. What then can the friends of virtue and society mean, by removing the most powerful restraints to vice and wickedness? "If (as an excellent advocate for Christianity observes on this subject) it be so hard to restrain the corruption of mankind within due bounds, even taking in all the aids of religion, and the amazing power of those motives which it furnisheth; what could be expected if all these were discarded, and men were left to gratify their passions without the dread of a supreme governor and judge? Surely then, however unfavourable to Christianity your private sentiments might be, you ought, for the sake of the publick, to conceal them if you would approve yourselves true lovers of your country, and zealous for the liberty and prosperity of it; and not take pains to propagate principles, which, in their consequences, must have the worst influence on the peace, the welfare and good order of the community."

BUT as nothing I can say, is likely either to be read or regarded by *veterans* in infidelity; I

would now address myself to the *rising generation*, who are just entering on the dangerous tour of the world, and who, not having yet imbibed strong and inveterate prejudices against the Christian religion, may be better disposed to receive advice from a hearty friend to their best interests.

YOUTH is an age of inexperience, and therefore needs a guide. Reason itself is a faculty in man which has its dawn, its growth, and its perfection; it gathers strength from the increasing knowledge and experience of men and things; and although there is no period in life in which our reason should not be vigorously exerted; yet in its infancy and nonage, we should watch cautiously over its determinations and decisions.

THE natural heat, confidence, and precipitancy of youth, is also another great reason for caution against rash and final determinations of judgment. Young undisciplined minds, have in them a kind of natural impetuosity, which renders them averse to deliberation, and impatient of delay. They cannot endure the labour and circumspection which is necessary in order to make a right judgment, but hurry on with a restless *impetus*, towards the conclusion. Hence it is that we find them so often making wrong and false judgments; either drawing *false conclusions* from *true premises*, or *general conclusions* from *particular premises*. Inexperience therefore and precipitancy, being the two great sources of error in youth, they cannot be too often, or too earnestly urged against drawing too hasty conclusions, or forming too hasty judgments, in matters of great importance! Nor can they be too earnestly advised to pay a due regard to  
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the reason and judgment of more knowing and considerate persons than themselves, until their own reasoning powers acquire a degree of ripeness and maturity, in some measure equal to the important task of forming final determinations in such matters. It's true indeed, that when a proposition lies before the mind, the terms of which are in any measure understood, the mind cannot well restrain itself, from forming some judgment about its truth or falshood, according to present probabilities; but it may and ought to reserve a place for a future judgment, upon further knowledge and clearer evidence, and should never come to a final and absolute determination, until something equal to demonstration, or the highest degree of moral certainty, strikes it with a full conviction, either of the truth or falshood of such proposition. For if we proceed not thus cautiously in forming decisive and final judgments, about matters of consequence, we shall ever lie open to the danger of error and delusion, in things which concern our highest interests; and the consequence will be, that, finding ourselves often deceived in our hasty judgments and opinions, we shall begin at length to distrust our own faculties, and fall into a state of universal scepticism.

A YOUNG person indeed, during the nonage of his reason, cannot act more prudently than to believe and adhere to generally received opinions; having no strength to walk by himself, he ought willingly to submit to the manuduction of others; but still with this reserve, that when he is capable, he will examine, judge, and choose for himself. Many, it is true, have neither capacity nor opportunity to do this for themselves,

themselves, in the matter of their religion. In such God will no doubt graciously make allowances for the prejudices of education, and accept the sincerity of their intentions. But where capacity and leisure permit, the duty of examining first principles seems to be indispensable, seeing religion is in itself a matter so very important, that to embrace it merely upon the reason and authority of others, discovers a degree of neglect and indifference which is wholly inconsistent with sincerity.

BUT the great scope and design of all this reasoning, is to make young persons apprehensive of the great *risque* they run, in concluding too hastily against the truth of the Christian religion. And here it were easy to shew farther, that whatever temptations young men may have to credulity, yet they have much stronger ones to infidelity, so that their strongest guard should be against this extreme.

AND here, if I might be allowed to hazard a *paradox*, I would say that *all mankind are born infidels*,—i. e. they are born with such natures and dispositions, as strongly incline them to infidelity. I will not here enter into the dispute about original sin, or that present corruption of human nature which is supposed to proceed from it. I will only advance a matter of fact, which I imagine will be allowed by all; namely, that *the period of infancy and childhood are wholly sensual*; that our bodily senses and appetites are our first masters and instructors, and have us, in a manner, wholly under their government and influence, for the first 10 or 12 years of life;—that the various passions and appetites of our corporeal nature are generally very strong before

before reason begins to dawn, or, at least, to assert its dominion; that during this period of life, sensual objects are continually surrounding us, and provoking and irritating these passions and appetites of our natures; and (which is worst of all) that our indulgence of these passions and appetites, however it may be discouraged by the precepts of our nurses and instructors, is yet far more powerfully recommended by their examples.—From our very cradles, we are witnesses of the vices and irregularities of our parents, and others around us, and therefore can hardly believe them to be serious, when they dissuade us from those very vices, which themselves practise. O! but says the infidel, our priests and nurses instil the principles of Christianity into us, with our very milk: We are taught to say the *Lord's prayer* and the *creed* before we can well speak: Afterwards, the *bible* is put into our hands, and we are taught to believe it to be the word of God, upon the pain of hell's torments;—anon, the tender mind is filled with a set of *catechisms* and *confessions*, and priestly instructions, which rivet and confirm the prejudice in favour of Christianity.

I CONFESS indeed that something like this is commonly the case among Christians;—but still I would ask the infidel if such an education as this, at such an age, is a sufficient counterpoise to the principles of a corrupted and sensual nature, which oppose it? In the youth, passions and sensual inclinations are strong, but reason is weak and feeble;—he learns by rote a few Christian doctrines and maxims, which he does not understand; what influence there-

fore can these have either in forming his mind, or directing his manners, at an age when he can neither reason upon them, nor apply them to practice? All this while, however, he is not indifferent to sensual objects, nor a stranger to sensual enjoyments; his various appetites and passions are encreasing in strength, and craving their respective gratifications. His nature is growing daily more and more corrupt by the power of evil habits, and the influence of evil example; and while he is yet but a child in understanding, in malice, pride, intemperance, &c. he is a man. Thus far it is evident that the balance is on the side of infidelity; the slight impressions which a superficial Christian education has made, putting but a feeble restraint upon the appetites and passions of a nature corrupted by indulgence, and tainted by evil examples. Let us now suppose the youth to be 12 or 14 years of age; now first of all, generally speaking, the higher powers of the mind begin to unfold and display themselves. Now therefore is the proper season to instruct youth in the principles of religion; and yet this is the precise time when all care of this sort generally ceases, and when the work of religious education is presumed to be already accomplished. The youth is sent abroad into a corrupt and ensnaring world, with a few abstruse definitions of religion floating in his memory, the very terms of which he scarcely understands. He has learned his catechism by rote, and this is thought sufficient armour against the attacks of infidelity on the one hand, and the allurements of debauchery on the other. Now it is  
easy



easy to see, that one of these things will happen to him.

1st. IF he is a studious youth, of a naturally modest and virtuous disposition, and falls into good company, he will employ his dawning reason in examining the principles of his religion, and this examination will probably end in a rational conviction of the truth and excellency of the Christian religion, and fix his religious principles upon a right bottom.

2dly. SUPPOSE him to be of a studious and inquisitive temper, and yet strongly disposed to forbidden pleasures and sensual enjoyments, and that he happens to fall into bad company at his first setting out in the world, and the event will probably be as follows. His strong prepossessions in favour of practical libertinism and sensuality, will prejudice him against the principles of his religious education. He will feel the opposition so strong between the natural dispositions of his own heart, and the pure and holy precepts of the Christian religion, that he will despair of ever reconciling them. In the belief of this impossibility, he will be strengthened by observing the *too* general disagreement which there is between the lives and professions of numbers of Christians, perhaps of many of his own instructors. From this very moment, he will begin to wish that Christianity were false, that he might obtain a plausible freedom from its restraints.

HE will indeed examine the principles of his religion, but it will be under the influence of strong prejudice, and with great partiality. He will wish for reasons to disbelieve its truth, and this will make him ingenious in inventing sophisms.

phians. His companions will be active in helping on the delusion; they will strengthen his doubts, and put the writings of infidels into his hands. He will find these books and arguments so agreeable to his own wishes, and so indulgent to his vices, that henceforth he will renounce his religion, and commence infidel.

3dly. LET us suppose the youth to be viciously disposed, and at the same time to be of a slothful inactive disposition, and averse to all religious enquiry. The consequence, in all human probability, (for I here exclude the supernatural methods of divine grace) will be this. He will never attentively consider the impossibility of his being saved in the course of his sins, according to the tenor of the gospel: He will therefore endeavour to reconcile the practice of an infidel, with the faith and hope of a Christian: He will not indeed renounce the principles of his education, because he will not take the pains or trouble to examine them; if he did, he would probably become a speculative infidel. But the same sloth and inattention which prevents him from examining the evidences of Christianity, keeps him from discovering the inconsistency of his life with his profession of it. He therefore *professes that he knows God, and believes in Christ; but in works he denies them, being abominable, disobedient, and unto every good reprobate*<sup>d</sup>. He says his prayers, repeats his creed, and performs the round of outward Christian duties, and by the help of some false notions of religion, deceives himself into a groundless presumption that he shall be

<sup>d</sup> Titus i. 16.

saved,

faved, although in heart, in temper, and behaviour he still continues to be a practical infidel. This is indeed the most common case in the Christian world; 'tis the case of all wicked professors of Christianity. The speculative infidel professedly denies Christ; the wicked Christian practically dishonours him: The former is a fair and open enemy; the latter a treacherous and deceitful friend; and indeed it is hard to determine which of the two does most disservice to his interest in the world.

FROM the whole therefore it seems evident to me, that the prejudice of education is no such mighty thing as the deists would seem to insinuate.—It may indeed go a great way in forming and fixing men's opinions and conduct, as to the modes and externals of religion, and as to the different sects and denominations, into which the church of Christ is unhappily divided: But in point of making men true and sincere believers of Christianity itself, and regulating their practice upon this belief, it seems to have but a feeble influence. And young persons, upon the whole, appear to have much stronger temptations to infidelity, than to credulity.—The early and strong propensities of nature towards forbidden objects, and that at a season of life when reason has little or no influence.—The power of evil example, and the seduction of evil company, lie heavy in the scale of infidelity; whereas in that of credulity lie only the too scanty and infrequent documents of Christian priests and nurses, (as the deists affect to express themselves) and GOD knows, generally speaking, a very slender and superficial Christian education, at a period of life  
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when the mind is scarcely capable of either receiving or understanding any fixed principles of religion\*.

UPON the whole therefore, my young friends, you may apprehend the danger you are in of taking the wrong turn, at the critical juncture of your first going abroad into the world. Your strength is small, and your enemies are many and powerful. You have a corrupt nature, which will strongly dispose you to infidelity, and you will not fail to meet with books and companions, who will second the corruptions of your own hearts, and tempt you to cast off all religion, as a priestly incumbrance and restraint upon your natural liberty. All the engines of

\* If this reasoning is just. Quere, is it not a loud call to a more rational method in the Christian education of young persons, than that which at present generally prevails? Does it not appear most proper and reasonable, that youth should be first grounded in the belief of the truth of the Christian religion itself, before they are instructed in the doctrines and duties of that religion? The most of our catechisms and forms of instruction for youth, take two great points for granted, which it seems to me, ought first of all to be rationally proved and explained to their tender capacities, namely, that Christ is the son of God, and the scripture the word of God. Does it not therefore seem reasonable, that the first catechism or summary of instruction put into the hands of youth, should be one tending to prove, in the plainest and easiest manner possible, these two great and fundamental points, and to answer the chief objections of infidels against them. And quere, If this method were taken, whether it might not tend to inspire youth with a higher degree of reverence and veneration for the scriptures, and to put a stop to the amazing growth and progress of infidelity.

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wit, banter, sophistry and ridicule, will probably be levelled against you. You will be represented as priest-ridden bigots, as persons of narrow principles, and of a weak understanding. Your lusts and appetites will be flattered with a prospect of free indulgence; and your vanity will be flattered with the hopes of being esteemed great geniuses, of having vanquished the narrow prejudices of your education; and of having freed yourselves from the fetters of spiritual slavery and priestly dominion. All this will appear very agreeable to your own innate vanity and corruption; and against all this your ignorance and inexperience will have nothing to oppose. You have indeed been taught to believe that the Christian religion, into which you have been baptized, came from GOD; but you have never been duly instructed in the grounds and reasons of this belief; and therefore can give no reasons of the hope that is in you, and have no arguments whereby you may stop the mouths of gainsayers. Judge therefore, whether it be fit that you should too hastily conclude against the truth and divine original of a religion, which you so little understand. And be persuaded to give the Christian cause a fair hearing, trial and examination before you reject it, and go over to the camp of its enemies. — Consider

ist. THAT true religion is, in itself, an excellent and amiable thing; and that it cannot possibly be despised or ridiculed by any, without the greatest stupidity of understanding, or badness of heart. That that virtue which true religion inculcates, is not only necessary to the well

well being of individuals and society, but is also the brightest ornament of human reason.

2dly. **CONSIDER**, that it is not a sufficient proof of the falshood and impossure of any religion, either that it is the publick religion of our country, or that we have received it from our ancestors; or that it has been taught us by priests and nurses; or that some hypocrites and wicked men profess it; or that many who pretend to wit and reason disbelieve it, and hold it in contempt. All these things may happen to a religion, and yet at the same time it may be very true and excellent. The marks of truth or falshood in any religion, are not to be sought for merely from the opinions of men, or from the universality of its reception, or the contrary; but from its nature, spirit, design and tendency, and the external evidences which accompany it.

3dly. **CONSIDER** that although your having received the Christian religion from your ancestors, its being the publick religion of your country, and your having been baptized into it, are not in themselves sufficient reasons why you should not reject it, upon a full and rational conviction of its falshood; yet they are reasons why you should not wantonly reject it, without such a conviction. There is certainly such a respect due to the memory of our forefathers, to the publick faith of our country, and to the vows of our baptism, as should make us cautious of publickly renouncing our Christian faith, without very solid and substantial reasons for such a conduct. In my opinion, a rational and valid plea for infidelity in a Christian country; can be founded in nothing less, than a firm persuasion

perswasion of the falsehood of Christianity, and that upon a thorough and impartial examination of its evidences. A man who would renounce the religion of his forefathers and of his country, although a false one, upon any other ground than this, would certainly act against reason, and therefore could never justify his own conduct. Be therefore perswaded,

4thly. THAT you can never answer it at the bar of your own reason and conscience, to renounce the Christian religion into which you have been baptized, without a previous, due and impartial examination of the validity of its evidences and pretensions. In order to confirm you in this perswasion, consider that if the Christian religion should happen to be true and divine, your guilt in renouncing it will be unspeakably great, and your case inexpressibly deplorable. *He that believeth not,* says the founder of Christianity, *shall be damned.* *If our gospel be hid,* says one of his apostles, *it is hid to them that are lost.* *They who deny the Lord that brought them,* says another, *bring upon themselves swift destruction.* On the supposition, therefore, that the Christian religion is divine, this *damnation*, this *destruction*, and this *perdition* must belong, in a peculiar manner, to those who, although they live in Christian countries, either *through sloth*, will not enquire into the validity of its pretensions, or *through prejudice*, shut their eyes against the evidences of its divine original. As therefore, in rejecting Christianity, you run the hazard of incurring the highest displeasure of God, if it should prove to be from him; this should reasonably engage you to the most strict and impartial examination

examination of its evidence, before you can venture to reject it. This examination ought therefore to be made with the utmost solicitude to know the truth, and with all that care and solemnity of spirit, which the importance of the matter requires. If it has been made in early youth, without obtaining the desired satisfaction, a decisive judgment should be suspended for a time, and the inquiry should be carefully renewed, at an age when the powers of the mind have arrived to a greater degree of strength and maturity; and no help or assistance should be neglected, where a matter of so great importance, as the choice of our religion, is depending.

IT is a just and solid maxim, that no man should be condemned before he is heard. You will therefore be wholly inexcusable, if you pass sentence against Christianity before you give an attentive and impartial hearing to its friends and advocates as well as to its enemies. To put you upon your guard in this matter, the following directions and remarks may be of some use.

1st. If you must needs have your closet furnished with the writings of a *Collins, Tindal, Morgan, Bolingbroke, Voltaire, D'Argens, &c.* be sure you confront them with a *Grotius, Stillingfleet, Sherlock, Leland, Lardner, Foster, Sykes, Fortin, &c.* and be sure that you read these two kinds of authors with the same unbiaſſed view, namely, *to discover truth.* Christianity demands, it requires no more than a fair and unprejudiced hearing. Use the antidote together with the poison, and there is little danger of its proving mortal. Believe, at least, that  
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the Christian *apologists* may be as honest men as their deistical opponents, and this will help you to read their apologies without prejudice or prepossession; which is the only temper of mind in which you can hope to discover *on which side the truth lies*.

2. THE deists will not permit you to take the doctrines of *Moses* and the prophets, or of Christ and his apostles, upon the authority of their authors; they are calling you every moment to try the credibility of sacred history, and the spirit and tendency of scripture doctrines and precepts by the *touchstone of reason*. They profess to treat the sacred records with no other kind of respect than what is due to their *intrinsic merit*. Let this be a caution to you, to treat their own writings with the same degree of freedom and severity. Let not the title of a *nobleman*, a *philosopher*, or a *minister of state* warp your judgment, or bias you in favour of the arguments of the writer. Suffer not your understanding to be dazzled, or your judgment to be seduced by a flash of wit, or by a flow of rhetorical language, and well turned periods. Strip the arguments of infidels of their flowery ornaments, and try their weight and solidity in the scales of cool and deliberate reason. Try also the *spirit and temper* of these writers. They are perpetually complaining of the want of temper and charity in Christians, both towards each other, and those who differ from them. Would to God there were less justice in this charge; but with how bad a grace does it come from the mouths or pens of the deists, the general strain of whose writings consists in ridicule, sarcasm,

and even the lowest species of scurrility, not only against the priests, but even the doctrines and mysteries of a religion, which has been long held sacred and respectable by the wisest and best of men? And judge from that *spirit of rancour and malevolence* which characterizes by much the greatest number of the deistical writers, whether these are the men with whom we are likely to be set right in our moral and religious opinions. I will not say indeed that gross superstitious and glaring absurdities in religion, are not proper objects of satire and ridicule; but when a man has a sincere intention of setting the world right in a matter of such importance as religion, methinks he should first seriously attempt to convince them that they are *fools*, before he takes the liberty publicly to laugh at their *folly*. Publicly to ridicule a religion which is had in high and general esteem is unmannerly: But, together with ridicule, to employ scurrility and rancour against so respectable a body as the Christian world, betrays *great badness of heart*, and is wholly inconsistent with the *true spirit of philosophy*. *Ex pede Herculem*; by their fruits therefore ye may know them; and the nature of their cause may be, in some measure, judged by the arts with which they generally endeavour to manage and support it. Again,

CAREFULLY examine and consider the *scope* and *tendency* of the deistical writings. Judge for yourselves, but do it impartially, whether the general tendency of them be not to unsettle mens minds in moral and religious principles of every kind. They indeed pretend to have a great veneration for natural religion, and for the  
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the principles of morality, and it would be too bare-faced and shocking to do otherwise; but the best *critèrion* by which you can judge in this case, is to try the effects of their writings upon your own minds. I dare appeal to your own experience, whether, after reading the works of a *Bolingbroke*, a *Chubb*, a *Morgan*, or a *Tindal*, you do not perceive your minds beginning to be tinctured with a kind of universal scepticism, with regard to matters of religion and morality; whether you do not feel the reverence and awe of a deity, and the motives and obligations to natural religion and moral virtue, to be sensibly weakened in yourselves, and whether you do not feel within yourselves a greater liberty and propensity to vice and impiety of every kind than before. This is an excellent test of writings which pretend to rectify men's opinions in matters of morality and religion; it is a demonstration to the heart, if I may so speak, that their *scope* and *tendency* is bad, when they loosen these obligations and destroy these motives, which they pretend to strengthen and confirm.

AND now while you are thus employed in an impartial examination of the *arguments*, the *spirit*, and the *tendency* of infidelity, try the pure and unsophisticated religion of Jesus, as it is recorded in the new testament by the same rule. Attentively consider not only the evidences of its authenticity and divine original, but also its *spirit* and *tendency*. And having done this, weigh the two causes together in the balance of deliberate and unprejudiced reason; and I will venture to risque my salvation, that

the decision will be made in favour of Christianity.

3. BEWARE of being led astray by the *specious sophisms* of infidelity. The deists seeming to be sensible that their cause can be but slowly carried on by fair and sober reasoning, have endeavoured to establish ridicule as an universal test and *criterion* of truth; and indeed, it must be confessed, that they have applied this touchstone with wonderful success against the Christian cause. They have laughed abundantly at revealed religion, and it is not to be wondered that they have drawn numbers into the laugh, seeing risibility is so catching a distemper, and there are so many of our species who do little else than laugh. But whoever will take the pains to examine this *criterion* by reason, for say what they will, reason must be allowed to be the ultimate test of truth, seeing that even the pretences of ridicule itself must be finally tried by reason, will find that this test is very fallacious. Experience will convince us that the wit of man can set the most serious things in a ludicrous light, and expose them to the ridicule of vain and light minds. And those must be but very little acquainted indeed, either with the learned and active world, who do not see daily instances of this; so that it can be no certain proof either of the folly of a man or of an opinion, that they are laughed at. When a deist therefore takes the liberty to be *arch* and *merry* upon any of the histories, doctrines, prophecies, or miracles of revealed religion, you would do well to consider that this in itself, is no certain proof of the falsehood, absurdity, impossibility, or incredibility  
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of these things ; it only proves that the infidel would represent them as being such. The rule of judging in these cases, must not be founded on the wit, the humour, or colouring of the infidel ; but on the general evidences of the revelation, and the nature and circumstances of the history, miracle, &c. which is taxed with absurdity.

ANOTHER art of infidels is to raise *difficulties*, and to start *objections* against *particular, detached parts* of the Jewish and Christian revelations, and to argue from the supposed absurdity or incredibility of these, that the whole revelation is false and incredible. Two things I have here to remark, 1. That this is very unfair in conversation, as very few Christians can be supposed so well furnished in scripture knowledge and criticism as to give an immediate, satisfactory reply to every difficulty with which they may be posed. It is an *adage* founded upon truth, that *a fool may ask a question, or start a doubt, which ten wise men cannot quickly resolve.* 2. This is a method of protracting the dispute *ad infinitum.* To satisfy a cavilling deist as to every difficulty he might suppose, and every objection he might raise against every verse or passage in the *Bible*, would be a task as endless as it would be impossible. The authenticity and divine authority of the holy scriptures depending upon the truth of certain facts and circumstances, and the real existence of certain internal characters ; these being once fairly proved and established, the truth and divinity of the whole revelation follows of course. Our dispute with the deists therefore, is not about *certain detached precepts*, the reason

of which neither of us may be well able to comprehend; or *certain detached scraps*, or *passages of scripture*, the obscurity or seeming absurdity of which may be owing to our ignorance of certain ancient customs, or to bad translations, or to some smaller errors crept into our present copies, or to some other causes perhaps, at present, uninvestigable, but about *certain marks and evidences of truth* and divinity accompanying the *whole revelation*. And although it is certainly the duty of Christian divines, to answer all the reasonable objections of infidels, against every part and passage of divine revelation, a task which I wish they would set more particularly before them, in their comments and annotations upon holy scripture, yet I apprehend their not being able to do this, in every instance, to the full conviction of unbelievers, does not affect the merits of the Christian cause, which may be supported by abundant evidence, notwithstanding a confessed ignorance of many passages in the Christian revelation. The book of nature is the deist's *Bible*, and will he therefore reject the whole as spurious, because there are many passages, many *phenomena* in this great volume that he cannot understand, that he cannot account for? I believe not. The application is easy. Besides, the deists seem to be vastly assuming, exceeding presumptuous in many of their objections against revelation. They first set up to themselves a set of arbitrary principles, by which they try and limit the perfections of God, and these arbitrary principles they make the test of revealed doctrines and duties. Is it not extremely presuming, for instance, to affirm, that it is inconsistent

consistent with the wisdom, and justice, and goodness of the supreme being, to give the children of *Israel* a commission to rob the *Egyptians*; to conquer and destroy the *Canaanites*, and inhabit their land; to command *Abraham* to offer up his son *Isaac*, as a test of his faith and obedience, &c. ? If the history which records God's condescension to *Abraham*, and his intimacy with him; and which relates his extraordinary commission to *Moses*, and the miracles by which he confirmed it, is once proved to be true, it will follow of consequence, that God did certainly give these commands; and, be this as it may, yet methinks it is a bold and daring assertion, that such commands are unworthy of God, and inconsistent with his acknowledged perfection! May not God do what he will with his own, and make whom he pleases the ministers of his pleasure? However wicked it might have been in *Abraham* to attempt the offering up of a human victim, and that too of the fruit of his own loins, to his maker: However wicked it might have been in the *Israelites* to leave the land of their captivity, loaded with the spoils of their *Egyptian* neighbours, or to take the lives and possessions of the *Canaanites* from them; yet let it be but granted, that these actions were commanded by the HIGH POSSESSOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, and their nature is wholly changed. Nor is it to be feared that these extraordinary actions should ever be drawn into precedent, seeing that in order to justify the *like actions*, upon any other occasion, the *like reason, authority and circumstances* must be supposed to attend them.

ANOTHER very disingenuous artifice which the deists in general have used, in order to sink the credit of Christianity, and lessen the influence of its teachers among the populace, is *their universal uproar against the Christian priests, of all sects and denominations*, as being, to a man, either weak or wicked; either knaves or fools. In nothing perhaps have infidels more betrayed their want of justice, candour and ingenuity, than in this heavy and indiscriminate charge against the whole body of the Christian clergy, and nothing in all their writings, I imagine, is more adapted to disgust an intelligent and unprejudiced reader than this charge; especially, if the spirit and temper with which it is urged be duly considered. One indeed can hardly believe that they are serious themselves in this wholesale slander: But however this may be, its general tendency, and its service to their cause is sufficiently evident. For, if they can once bring the sacred order under a general *odium* and contempt, their ministry will be very little frequented, their doctrines will be very little regarded, and thus their work will be more than half done, in converting, or rather perverting the Christian world to infidelity. This is so sensible an argument, that it needs no farther illustration.

WOULD to GOD however, that there were less ground for this heavy charge, as to numbers of the Christian clergy in all ages. But is it sound logic to argue from a part to the whole? Would it be fair to judge of all the Roman emperors by the characters of a *Nero* or a *Heliogabalus*? Would these gentlemen themselves be willing to try the cause of deism  
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By the lives of a few scandalous debauchees, who have been of their persuasion, and propagated their principles? Nay, would they be willing that the merits of their cause, and the tendency of their principles should be judged of by the private characters even of a *Bolingbroke*, a *Voltaire*, or a *D'Argens*? In these cases they would no doubt plead the frailty of human nature, and tell us that principles and doctrines must be tried by other rules, than the lives of men who teach them. But is their charge against the Christian *clergy* just, in that latitude in which they urge it? Will they refer us to church history for monsters of ignorance, ambition, avarice and cruelty among the Christian *bishops* and *clergy*? We admit the charge; but we can refer them to the same history for men of a far different character. *History*, as one somewhere observes, is a stream, in which light things swim, and heavy things sink. How few, comparatively, of the characters of the *clergy* are brought down to us in ecclesiastical history, and those only such as being in places of high eminence in the church, and exposed to strong temptations, made the greatest noise in the world? Whereas the vast number of inferior *clergy*, who quietly pursued the duties of their calling, and among whom we might justly expect the brightest examples of piety and virtue, are wholly unnoticed; they are sunk in the stream of time, and all their virtues are buried in oblivion. Do you live in a part of the world where you have a general acquaintance with a number of the Christian *clergy*. I might appeal to your own experience for a confutation of this ungenerous charge. Do you

you really believe, upon reasonable evidence, that all the *clergymen* of your acquaintance, or the major part of them, are such as the deistical writers represent them to be, either fools or knaves? Must not candour and justice incline you to judge far otherwise concerning many within the verge of your own acquaintance? And if justice and candour should oblige you to believe that there are more *clergymen*, among those whom you know, of a worthy and respectable character than otherwise, why should you not judge of the order in general by this sample? In a word, you will be liable to great abuse and deception, if you settle your idea of the Christian *clergy* in general, either from the writings of the deists, who too plainly shew their prejudices against that order of men, to have their representations of it credited; or from ecclesiastical history, which generally confines itself to a very few distinguished characters; which while it passes over private virtue and sequestered merit in silence, dwells largely upon the cabals of *heresiarchs*, the altercations of *church councils*, the squabbles of *polemical divines*, the intrigues of *popes* and *cardinals*, and the ambitious or avaricious schemes of *prelatical statesmen*.

If you would indeed form a just idea of the Christian *clergy*, you must do it from a candid observation of the lives and writings of those whom you know, and then, after making just allowances for the frailty and imperfection of human nature in general, and for the prejudice of education and the influence of example, you must endeavour to extend this idea to the whole order, in all ages, and of all sects and denominations.

denominations. And even if this general idea of the Christian *clergy* should not prove to be as worthy and respectable as could be wished, you are not rashly to judge of the Christian religion by the lives and characters of the Christian priests.

4. ONE piece of advice more, and I have done. There are another class of writers which call themselves Christians, and as we have no certain evidence against them, charity obliges us to believe them, whose writings nevertheless you would do well to read with a proper degree of caution and circumspection. In this class may be numbered *Gordon* and *Trenchard*, the celebrated authors of *Cato's letters*, the *Independent Whig*, &c. and some others. These writers are highly to be esteemed for their firm attachment to the principles of civil and religious liberty, and for their noble opposition to priestcraft and tyranny of every sort. Their writings are also distinguished by a peculiar vein of humour and pleasantry, which renders them extremely agreeable to the generality of readers; and they may doubtless be read both with pleasure and advantage by persons of fixed principles and true discernment; but there is, in authors of this stamp, such a strain of keen raillery against the priests of all religious establishments, and against all the modes and ceremonies and appendages of religion, and such a boundless liberty of sentiment in religious matters, as must give offence to many pious men of all denominations, and as, in my humble opinion, renders them very unfit to be put into the hands of ignorant, inexperienced youth, whose religious principles are  
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are not well settled. I must freely confess; that I am sometimes led to doubt of the real friendship of these writers to the Christian cause, notwithstanding their own pretences, and the strong efforts of my charity in their favour. They speak indeed very honourably of the Christian religion, and of its excellent founder; but one is at a loss to know under what form they would have this religion to make its appearance among men; or in what manner they would have the Christian church to be instructed and governed. The liberty they plead for seems to be a kind of anarchy without rule, without form, without order, and without any kind of external appendage, or mode, or ceremony, however necessary to hold together the body ecclesiastic, or to distinguish it from any other. They are redundant in the praise of worthy *clergymen*, but then their character of a worthy *clergyman* is drawn in such bright and angelic colours, as plainly to exclude the possibility of such a *clergyman*, except in idea; he must have such learning, such talents, such principles, such virtues, and so spotless a conduct, that he is *rara avis in terris, nigroque similima cygno*. So that by excluding the possibility of such a *clergyman*, one would be almost tempted to imagine, they intended to exclude the order itself out of the world. They point their satire so keenly and indiscriminately against all priests, especially established priests, that one would be sometimes led to doubt they intended to wound Christianity herself, through the sides of her priests, and that they believed the whole Christian priesthood to be as knavish and superstitious,

the priests of *Baal*. In a word, their stile and manner, in treating of religious matters, is more like that of satyrical enemies, than of rational reformers and sober advocates for a well judged liberty of sentiment, and decency of worship.

I WOULD not be understood to judge the intention of these writers, or to say they had any real design of putting the *fool's cap* on the head of Christianity itself, by representing the exterior garb in which it almost every where appears, in so ridiculous and contemptible a light. Perhaps their only design was to reform the Christian *clergy*, and to reduce Christianity itself to its primitive simplicity. A noble design! But I will be bold to say, that their writings have had, generally speaking, another effect; and that the present, so much complained of, contempt of the Christian clergy, and consequently of the lessons they teach, is more owing to writers of this class, than to the most inveterate and barefaced deists. The reason seems plain. The latter are consulted with caution and reserve, as professed enemies;—the former are read without suspicion, as Christians of a liberal cast, as the friends and advocates of civil and religious liberty; hence we easily adopt their sentiments, and imbibe their prejudices, and if they should even offer us poison, yet it is rendered so palatable by the vehicle in which it is presented, that we are apt to swallow it, without any fear or apprehension of its mortal effects. They teach us first to laugh at the priests, and then we are easily induced to despise their office, and disregard their administrations. When we once come to regard a *clergyman*

*gyman* in his sacerdotal vestments, as a *merry-andrew* in his *fool's coat*, (and some of these pieces would excite an idea little less ludicrous in a light mind) we shall not long preserve any respect for his person, or any veneration for his instructions. Now, if writings of this stamp have an evident tendency to inspire the light and unprincipled minds of youth, with a contempt of the Christian *clergy*, and, by a common association of ideas, with a contempt of *their office, and instructions*; this, I apprehend, is a sufficient reason why young persons, who are not well instructed in the evidences of the Christian religion, should either wholly avoid the reading of such books, or at least read them with great caution, and under the influence of proper correctives.

*Fas est et ab hoste doceri*; even the most virulent enemies of our religion might teach us many lessons, which we would do well to receive with all humility and readiness of mind;—they might teach not only popish, but even protestant communities to exercise greater candour and moderation towards each other, to strip the Christian religion of many modes and usages which are so far from being useful or ornamental, that they are only a disgrace and incumbrance to the most pure, simple, and rational religion in the world; and to reform many things, both in doctrine, discipline and worship. With views like these, the writings even of professed infidels may be read with advantage, by confirmed Christians of mature judgments: But for young and untutored minds, to search the volumes of Libertinism and infidelity, in quest of a *few useful lessons* which they may contain, would seem  
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to me a too bold and hazardous experiment; seeing that, in a field where so many *flowery poisons* are blended with a few *salubrious simples*, their judgment might not prove sufficiently strong to make the necessary distinction, and the consequence might prove fatal.

I SHALL now conclude this subject with a brief address to professed Christians; and that, *first* as their character and conduct may influence the present argument; and *secondly* as they stand related to their own hopes and expectations of future blessedness.

Ist. THEN, my brethren, I suppose you to be firm and rational believers, rooted and grounded in the faith of our most holy religion, and, in being such, you must certainly have a zeal for the promotion of Christianity in the world, in proportion to your apprehensions of its excellency, and your firm persuasion of its divine authority. Believing the Christian religion to be true, you cannot but deem infidelity to be one of the most dangerous and fatal errors; and that spirit which breathes in the religion of Jesus, if you have indeed imbibed it, will inspire you with sentiments of the most tender pity and compassion for those unhappy men, who pour neglect and contempt upon that religion, which you profess and believe to be true and divine.

IF these therefore are our sentiments and feelings, as Christians, does it not become us carefully to examine our own character and conduct, and to see whether there is nothing in this, which may tend to promote the cause of infidelity, and increase the number of unbelievers among us? Our holy religion repeatedly

enjoins us to *give no offence, either to Jew or Gentile, or to the church of God;—to have a good report of them that are without;—to act and behave in such a manner as to give no just cause to the enemies of God to blaspheme, or to our adversaries to speak reproachfully of us;—not to lay a stumbling block, or rock of offence before our weak brother;—to become all things (as far as we lawfully may) to all men, that we may gain some;—to adorn the doctrines of God our saviour,—and to let our light so shine before men, that others, seeing our good works, &c.*

OUR blessed saviour intimates, that in the course of things, *offences will come*, but he pronounces a dreadful *wo against those by whom they come*<sup>e</sup>.

IF therefore it should be found, on the great day of universal audit, that we, who are the professed disciples of Christ, have, by a character and conduct, inconsistent with the doctrines of Christianity, given cause of scandal and offence to any, and thereby proved in any measure accessory to their infidelity, our guilt must needs be highly aggravated. And surely there never was a time, when Christians of all denominations had a louder call to make this examination than the present, when the principles of infidelity are making such an amazing progress in almost all Christian countries, and when unbelievers are boldly taxing the principles and practices of Christians, as one of their chief arguments for infidelity and apostacy.

<sup>e</sup> See 1 Cor. x. 32. 1 Tim. v. 14. Rom. xiv. 13. Luke xvii. 1, &c. &c. &c.



1st, THEN, it behoves every denomination of Christians seriously to consider, whether any of the doctrines they hold and profess, are repugnant to the light of reason, to the perfections of GOD, or to the general tenor and purport of the Christian revelation; and whether, by holding and professing such doctrines, and charging them upon the Christian revelation by false glosses, and ignorant criticisms, they do not lay a stumbling block in the way of their weak brethren, cause the adversary to speak reproachfully, and promote the cause of infidelity. We esteem it one of the chief glories of our religion, that it will stand the severest test of right reason, and that, however some of its doctrines and mysteries may exceed the utmost limits of human comprehension, yet none of them are absurd, or repugnant to the dictates of right reason; which itself is also a revelation from GOD. It were much to be wished, for the glory of GOD, and the honour of Christianity, that many doctrines held by various denominations of Christians, were impartially tried by this test, compared with the unadulterated light of holy scripture; and that such as did not fairly endure this trial, were for ever discarded from the Christian scheme. Although it is an invidious task to mention particulars, yet I will venture to mention, among those doctrines which seem to require this *fiery trial*, those of *absolute reprobation, particular redemption, the insalvability of the virtuous heathen, transubstantiation, the ubiquity of Christ's corporeal presence, human absolution, human indulgences, the transferring of human merit, the worship of images, angels, and departed spirits, &c.*—I am indeed

well persuaded that *trimming* and *temporizing* will never be of any real advantage to the cause of Christianity; and that Christians go the wrong way to work, when they labour to accommodate the Christian revelation to the principles of infidels, and reduce the gospel to the standard of natural religion. The attempt is in itself impossible, and this impossibility is so evident, that every attempt towards it, tends to confirm infidels more in their prejudices. The Christian *creed* may as well be rendered monstrous by *contracting* it too much, as by *extending* it too far. And when unbelievers perceive that Christians seem ashamed of some doctrines, which are plainly revealed in the scriptures, and they seem willing to be rid of them at any rate; this cannot but increase their prejudices against the Christian scheme in general, when some seemingly essential parts of it are thus given up by its most rational advocates. And I heartily wish that some of our modern refiners and improvers of the Christian scheme, may not have run too great lengths into this extreme, and have thereby unwarily laid a stumbling block in the way of unbelievers.

HOWEVER let not this remark be misconstrued as intended to discourage the freest and most impartial examination of religious doctrines and principles. The *scriptures explained by right reason*, (and not *fathers*, or *councils*, or *assemblies*,) is the properest test of religious truth. Let *this ax* therefore *be laid to the root of every commonly received doctrine of Christianity*; and whatever tree, whatever doctrine, beareth not good fruit, agreeth not with the analogy of scripture, and the dictates of right reason,  
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bringeth not forth the fruits of holiness and moral perfection, however deep it may have been rooted by time, or however far spread by prejudice, *let it be cut down and cast into the fire, as a useless and pernicious cumberer of Christ's vineyard.* A wicked world will always furnish a sufficient number of enemies to the purity of our holy religion, let us not increase the number, by loading it with absurdities of our own invention, which deform its native comeliness and simplicity, and prove an obstruction to its propagation in the world.

IT will little avail the advocates of Christianity, to affirm that these doctrines are falsely charged upon the Christian revelation; for while these doctrines are still taught by Christian divines, while they stand conspicuous in the *creeds* and *confessions* of almost all Christian churches, and while the belief of them is made an exclusive term of communion in almost all Christian societies, unbelievers will not fail to impute them to Christianity itself, and treat the Christian revelation according to the opinions which they form of these doctrines. And if this is indeed the case, how much should it be the care of the whole Christian church, that they give no just cause of offence to unbelievers, by professing and maintaining absurd and unscriptural doctrines of religion?

2dly. IT no less behoves Christians to be unblameable and unreprieveable in the *modes of their worship*, than in the *tenets of their religion*. We glory in the purity, simplicity, and spirituality of our worship. We bless ourselves in that the gospel of Christ has delivered us from the troublesome and expensive yoke of the jew-

ish ceremonial, and from the childish fopperies, idolatries and superstitions of heathenism, and that it has taught us to pay a reasonable service to our God, *who is a spirit*, and who requires from us a pure and spiritual worship. And indeed if we understand our religion, as it is laid down in the new testament by our Saviour and his apostles, we shall have abundant reason to admire the noble simplicity of Christian worship, and the reasonableness of that service which is demanded from us. But now if we look abroad into the Christian world, and compare the modes and ceremonies, the carnal commandments and human inventions which take place in most Christian churches, with that plan of Christian worship which is either plainly laid down, or clearly intimated in the gospel, shall we not be immediately struck with the amazing disparity? The one *plain, simple, rational*;—the other, in many instances, *complicated, burthenome and ridiculous*: The one *a reasonable service*;—the other *a ludicrous mimickry*; a service more befitting the idol *Gods* of the heathens, than the FATHER OF SPIRITS! Does it not therefore highly become every sect and denomination of Christians, to remove this *stumbling block*, this *butt of raillery*, out of the way of unbelievers, by purging their worship from that load of antisciptural ceremonies and inventions, which are so far from adding to the decency and majesty of Christian worship, (which is the thing pretended) that they have been found by the experience of ages, to render it more contemptible in the eyes of all rational Christians, and to make it the sport and proverb of infidels.

3dly,

3dly. ANOTHER grand pretence for infidelity is the *bad morals* and *wicked lives* of professing Christians. It is insinuated that they are no better, but rather worse than other men. They are contrasted by infidels with the *Jews*, *Mahometans*, and even the *Heathens*, and are ever made to suffer by the comparison. And this charge, however unfairly, is not laid upon the men, but upon their religion. It is plainly insinuated that Christianity, under the management of its priests, has a tendency to promote the vices and disorders, with which its professors are, in a special manner, stigmatized. It is not my business to enquire in this place, either whether the fact is true, or whether the reasoning upon it is just.

THE allegation, whether made in reality or pretence, is of too great importance to be disregarded by any who have the religion of Jesus truly at heart; and the little influence which the Christian religion has upon the lives and tempers of many of its professors, however unjustly it may be charged on Christianity itself, is yet in fact a great disgrace to our holy religion, and has been made use of as a plausible pretence for the conduct of infidels. As well as I remember it was a reproach cast upon our religion, by one of its ancient enemies; *si Christus bene docuisset, Christiani sanctè vixissent*: If Christ had taught holy doctrines, his disciples would have led holy lives. Now although the ignorance and falshood of this may be easily proved; yet it will not be so easy a task to remove the prejudice which the wicked lives of Christians does to the honour and interests of our holy religion. Accordingly we find that the  
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writers on the side of infidelity harp most frequently, and perhaps most successfully upon this string; they take a peculiar pleasure in rehearsing and exaggerating the vices and infirmities of Christian priests, and Christian nations, and in setting them beneath all other priests and nations in the world, in this respect. If a *Christian priest*, and a *Brachman*, *Dervise*, or *Tolopin*, are compared together, the Christian priest is always the *worst* man. If a *Christian* and *Turkish* layman are compared together, the *Turk* is always the *best* man. And indeed to speak ingenuously, I have little doubt but that a general reformation of manners in *Christendom*, would go farther towards the conversion of *Jews*, *Heathens* and *Infidels* of all sorts, and towards promoting the honour of our holy religion, than all the fine things we are able to speak or write in its defence. If we were careful to adorn the doctrines of GOD our Saviour by lives correspondent to our professions; if we had our conversation honest in the sight of *Jews*, *Heathens* and *Infidels*; they would in all probability be induced by our good works which they beheld, to glorify GOD in the day of visitation; and even those who could not be reclaimed, would at least be ashamed falsely to accuse our good conversation in Christ<sup>f</sup>.

How much ought it therefore to be our endeavour, as Christians, that this reproach should be wiped away from us, and this stumbling block and rock of offence should be removed out of the way of infidels; that *the house of Levi might be purified*, the *priests of our religion* cloathed with righteousness, and that *all who wear*

<sup>f</sup> 1 Peter ii. 12. iii. 16.

*the Christian name*, should, for the honour of their sacred religion, *make conscience of departing from iniquity*, and acting agreeable to their sacred profession.

SECONDLY, and to conclude; do we indeed believe and profess the religion of Jesus, and hope to obtain eternal life under the influence of this belief and profession? But how vain is this profession, and how fallacious will these hopes prove, if we obey not the commands, and comply not with the conditions of salvation contained in this religion?

ALAS! What can it avail us that Christianity is a true and divine religion, and that we can prove it to be such, if, at the same time, it be found that we treat this truth as a mere uninteresting speculation, and that our lives and conversations are inconsistent with its hopes, and diametrically opposite to its saving designs! What can it avail us to *demonstrate the truth of a religion which contains the sentence of our own condemnation*, and to the sacred dictates of which we pay no practical regard! At the very same instant that a wicked man believes the truth and divine original of Christianity, if he truly understands the scope and tenor of its contents, he must as truly believe that he is condemned by it to the heaviest punishment, if a speedy and effectual repentance prevent it not! All therefore that a wicked person can expect from a firm assent to the truth of the Christian religion, is an aggravation of his future condemnation: With such it will undoubtedly fare worse than with the inhabitants of *Sodom and Gomorrha* in the day of Judgment! The blind *Heathens*, and misguided *Mahometans*, will receive

ceive a *lighter* sentence, a *more tolerable* condemnation! How much better would it have been for such, that *they had never known the way of righteousness*, than after they have known and believed it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them, and to *hold the truth in unrighteousness*<sup>z</sup>. Every person who truly believes the gospel, must believe, that without repentance and sincere holiness there can be no salvation<sup>h</sup>. That the *wrath of God is therein revealed, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness*<sup>i</sup>. That *tribulation and anguish are determined upon every soul of man, who obeyeth not the truth, but unrighteousness*<sup>k</sup>. That Jesus Christ, as a just judge, *will take vengeance on all those who obey not his gospel*; and that this irreversibile sentence will be passed by him, upon all the impenitent workers of iniquity; *depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire*<sup>l</sup>. And that this future condemnation will be heightened from this very consideration, that the *light of the gospel is come into the world, and they have loved and choosed the darkness of sin, rather than to walk by this light*, through an indissoluble attachment to their evil deeds<sup>m</sup>.

IF we would, therefore, ever hope for any saving advantage from our belief of the Christian religion, and attachment to it; nay, if we would ever hope to escape that aggravated condemnation, which, if the gospel is true, wicked and impenitent Christians will undoubtedly

<sup>z</sup> 2 Peter iii. 21.

<sup>h</sup> Luke xiii. 5. Heb. xii. 14.

<sup>i</sup> Romans i. 18.

<sup>k</sup> Romans ii. 8.

<sup>l</sup> Matt. xxv. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Theff. i. 7.

<sup>m</sup> John iiii. 19.

receive;



ceive; it behoves us to see well to it, that none of us should seem to come short of this grace of God, by indulging ourselves in the commission of any known sin, or in the neglect of any known duty, and so continuing in a state of impenitency. Let us see to it that we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling; that we cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God;—that, in obedience to that gospel which we believe to be divine, we make conscience of denying all ungodliness, &c. &c.—And that giving all diligence, we add to our faith, virtue, knowledge, &c.<sup>a</sup>. And let us lay down these as certain and unfailling maxims, that *faith without works, is dead, being alone.*—*That a holy and virtuous temper and disposition of mind, is, in the nature of things, an absolutely necessary preparative qualification for the happiness of heaven;*—and that *Jesus Christ will never be the author of eternal salvation to any, but to such as obey him*.<sup>o</sup>.

<sup>a</sup> 2 Peter i. 5—11.

<sup>o</sup> Hebrews v. 9.

END of the FIRST VOLUME,

VOL. I.

A





1. The first part of the document is a list of names and titles, including "The Hon. Mr. Justice" and "The Hon. Mr. Justice".



