

Library of the Theological Seminary,
Princeton

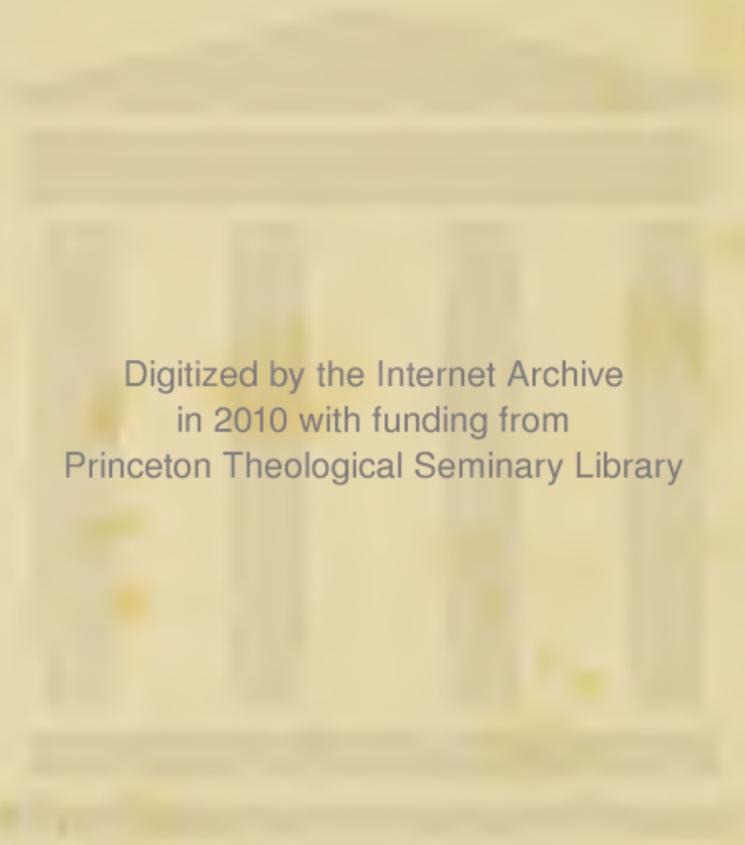
PRINCETON, N. J.

BT 1101 .N44 1854
Neill, William, 1778?-1860.
The divine origin and
authority of the Christian

Shelf.....







Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
Princeton Theological Seminary Library

THE

DIVINE ORIGIN AND AUTHORITY

OF THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION,

IN A CONNECTED SERIES OF FAMILIAR DISCOURSES, GIVING
A CONCISE VIEW OF THE HISTORICAL ARGUMENT
FOR THE TRUTH OF THE BIBLE.

BY
WILLIAM NEILL, D. D.

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

“We have not followed cunningly devised fables.”

PETER, THE APOSTLE.

PHILADELPHIA:

WILLIAM S. YOUNG, 50 N. SIXTH STREET.

SMITH & ENGLISH, 36 N. SIXTH ST.

1854.

Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1854,

BY WILLIAM S. YOUNG,

In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United
States, in and for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

TO THE
YOUNG MEN'S
CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION,
OF PHILADELPHIA,

This little volume is respectfully dedicated, as a token of the author's high appreciation of the benevolent design of that institution. Young men everywhere, particularly in cities, are exposed to temptations and dangers that prove, in many instances, disastrous to their best interests. A little friendly and seasonable attention, therefore, may, through a divine blessing, be the means of rescuing them from the unsuspected snares of death, and of securing to them success and happiness in this life, and glory, honour and immortality in the life to come. Honest efforts in the cause of truth and

humanity, are never in vain in the Lord. The social principles of our nature, under the sway and sanction of religion, are of prodigious potency. The redeeming influence of the gospel is divine and infinite:—Let none, therefore, be weary in well-doing; for the promise is sure and steadfast; IN DUE SEASON YE SHALL REAP, IF YE FAINT NOT.

Philadelphia, September 1st, 1854.

PROPERTY OF
PRINCETON
REC. JUN 1841
THEOLOGICAL
REMARKS, MINABY

Prefatory and Apologetic.

What! Another work on the Evidences of Christianity? Has not the subject been long, and largely, and lucidly discussed by men of note and acknowledged ability? Yes; but still there are skeptics, and doubting Christians. Let there be variety. There is some truth in the saying, that "The more writers, the more readers." We have a diversity of gifts, to suit our various tastes and circumstances. Besides, the subject is momentous,—it cannot be exhausted. Old arguments can be presented in new forms, without end; and be adapted to different capacities. The writer of this manual has had in view a numerous class of persons, that cannot command time to read extensively on any subject:—Young men in business, and

youth of both sexes in schools, academies, and Bible classes, where compends of this kind should have a prominent place. Colporteurs, and other distributors of religious tracts, it is hoped, will find this little book suitable for distribution, where books of a serious character are scarce. To all such co-workers in the Lord's vineyard it is respectfully commended. May divine favour attend it, and make it a blessing to many!



PROPERTY OF
PRINCETON
REC. JUN 1881
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

LECTURE I.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS ON THE NECESSITY AND
DESIRABLENESS OF DIVINE REVELATION.

WE propose to lay before our readers a condensed view of the grounds upon which the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are regarded as a revelation from God; or, in other words, to exhibit briefly, and in a connected form, the chief points of evidence in favour of the *divine origin and supreme authority* of the Christian religion.

The subject, as will be readily conceded, is of vast importance, not only to our own peace and happiness, but to the best interests of mankind. Let us, therefore, attend to it, divested as much as possible of prejudice—with minds open to conviction, and with a sincere desire to know the truth, and a firm determination to bow to its decisions, and carry out its principles at all hazards. In

treating of the evidences of revealed religion, we of course take for granted the *existence* and *perfections* of God; for when a supposed communication from him is the subject in question, his *being* and *essential attributes* are necessarily pre-supposed. Besides, the being, wisdom, and power of God are primary truths in religion, which are written as in letters of light on the face of the visible creation. The Creator and Lord of the universe has had, and now has, every where his silent but impressive witnesses: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handy-work: day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard."

We ought, perhaps, to remark here, that, although there are some very important religious truths common to the book of Nature, and the inspired volume; yet, in regard to many subjects of the deepest interest to us in our fallen, sinful state, we can get no adequate and satisfactory information from the former, but are wholly indebted (as we shall have occasion to show more at large in the progress of these Lectures) to the announce-

ments and assurances which we find in the Bible. Natural religion is good, so far as it goes. It perhaps might have been sufficient for man in his primitive, unfallen state; but to man as he *now is*, with his mind beclouded and his heart alienated from the source of bliss, the religion of Nature is insufficient to meet and relieve his necessities. It announces to him no remedy, no ransom, no forgiveness, no heaven. To ascertain, therefore, the authenticity, the credibility, and the divine authority of this latter book, which professes to bring us good tidings of great joy, from the very bosom of truth and love, and through the interposition of a Mediator, fitted by the constitution of his person to guard the rights of God, and at the same time provide for our necessities, will surely be regarded as a benevolent undertaking, even if it should not be accomplished to the satisfaction of all minds.

If any persons question the utility of such discussions as we are now entering upon, as if they were calculated to raise doubts where they did not before exist, or to diminish that reverence for the sacred scriptures in which we have been educated, and which ought to

be cherished, we would say, in reference to the suggestion, that *true religion—the religion of the Bible*—is founded in evidence; and the more fully that evidence is brought out and perceived, the stronger, the more intelligent, the more comfortable, and the more productive of good fruits, will be our faith in the doctrines of the gospel. We do not hold to the maxim that “Ignorance is the mother of devotion.” The truth has nothing to fear from discussion. She courts the investigation of her claims. Our blessed gospel has sustained unscathed and triumphant the scrutiny of ages. Besides, we learn from high authority that we should “be always ready to give a reason of the hope that is in us”—not indeed in the spirit of debate and boasting, but with meekness and fear, and from a benevolent desire that others may embrace the truth, and participate in its blessings.

As to *doubts*, they do and will spring up at times in every mind that thinks at all on the subject of religion. They come occasionally into pious minds, as “fiery darts from the wicked one.” Skeptical surmises and insinuations are afloat in a great variety of forms; so that you cannot escape them if you would.

You find them inwrought into the literature of every country—in newspapers, books, reviews, and public lectures. You hear them whispered or proclaimed in the fashionable assembly, on exchange, in the schools of science, in the halls of legislation—indeed, in all your ordinary intercourse with men. And how shall we best prepare to meet these annoying assaults upon our religious hope? Not by closing our eyes and ears against them, but by a pertinent reference to the cloud of witnesses—the numerous testimonies that concur in demonstrating that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and the Saviour—the only Saviour of the world. I know, indeed, that there is an *internal* evidence—the witness of the Spirit with our spirits, which, with a just sense of our guilt and weakness, and a clear perception of the exact adaptedness of the provisions of gospel grace to our wants and miseries, may be quite satisfactory to the experienced Christian; but to the great majority of non-professors, who have not felt the renewing power of the Holy Spirit, the *external* evidence, or *historical argument* for the truth of the Bible, is their best protection from the practical atheism of the world, and

the seductive influence of a false philosophy. At a time, too, when so much pains is taken to divorce religion from the primary education of the youth of our country, shall we not endeavour to show them the grounds upon which we wish them to be the disciples of Christ? Will it not be safer for them to meet the objections to religion in the presence of the answers to them, than to encounter the poison in the absence of the antidote?

We live in an inquiring and adventurous age. Every subject, in any way connected with human happiness, is freely and publicly discussed. No subject is deemed too sacred to be looked into, as to its facts, and results, and bearings upon the interests of mankind. The arts and sciences, history, and secular literature, have their professors and public lecturers; and why should not Christians institute and sustain lectures on the stupendous facts and distinguished personages that form so large a share of the subject-matter of the gospel narrative? If Jesus of Nazareth has indeed done for the world what his historians declare, and his followers believe; if he has come the accredited ambassador of Heaven;

if he has answered the great end of the types, and sacrifices, and prophecies of ancient times; if he has fulfilled all righteousness, and opened a fountain for the moral cleansing of our polluted race; if he has set up a kingdom which is to prevail in spite of all opposition; in a word, if, as his apostles affirm, he is our only Hope and final Judge, we are most exceedingly concerned to know it, and acknowledge his claims, without wavering or any attempt at compromise. But how can we know these things without looking at his credentials, examining his witnesses, marking his spirit, his acts, and the effects of his embassy? But, you say, We have ministers of the gospel to expound and apply its truths. True; and very "beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of them that bring good tidings and publish peace." But your ministers, as in duty bound, draw their messages from the Bible, as their book of instructions; and they would misapply their energies and pervert their office, were they to spend much of their time about the foundations and outworks of the Christian system. Their main object is, and should be, to win souls to Christ, by manifestation of his truth and grace. But why

are not the glad tidings, which they bring, more generally and joyfully embraced? May it not be owing, in some measure at least, to the fact that many of their hearers are in doubt in regard to the divine origin of our *book*—whether it be, indeed, from God, and by his inspiration and authority? There is room, then, for the evidences of revealed religion in Christian education. They are not only auxiliary to the ministry, but fundamental to its grand and godlike design. Convince men's understandings that God has spoken by his Son from heaven—that miracles have been wrought and prophecies fulfilled, in attestation of the truth of our gospel—and, so far as means are concerned, you prepare the way of the Lord to their hearts. Mere evidence has no power to convert sinners unto God; but it keeps conscience awake, and in many instances holds men back from embracing destructive error, inclines them to search the scriptures, and inquire for the way of life; and while the eye rests on the Saviour's assurance, "I am the way," how often is the same blissful truth, re-echoed in a still, small voice, from the excellent glory, "This is the way; walk ye in it"—made effectual to win the heart and save the soul!

Our next remark is, (for you see our introductory is to be composed of preliminaries to the main question,) that a revelation from God has been expected and *desired* in all ages of the world. Now this expectation is reasonable, and the desire natural. We are religious beings; i. e., we were made for religion, and religion was designed for us, as essential to the consummation of our happiness, and to secure the chief end of our creation. When we say that man is a religious creature, we mean that he was originally endued with the moral image of God, and favoured with divine communications, so that he would instinctively adore the Creator, and regard him as his chief good. This we can say in the light of reason, without going to the Bible for the information; for a holy Creator could not produce an unholy creature, and would not withhold what he knew to be necessary to its well-being. This is in accordance with the doctrine of scripture on the subject.— And in the mournful wreck of our nature, by our apostacy from God, we did not lose our religious susceptibility; we are still capable of being restored to divine favour and fellowship. We still feel disposed to adore and

confide in something above and beyond ourselves. We are conscious of weakness and exposure, and look about for something strong and enduring to lean upon. All men have some sense of religion and moral obligation, however much it needs to be instructed and strengthened. This is a distinctive characteristic of mankind—distinctive, we mean, in reference to the various orders of living creatures that inhabit our world. Other animals have sagacity, docility, and something like reason; but they have no conscience: they know no difference between right and wrong; they offer no homage or praise to the Creator except that which is passive and involuntary, by exhibiting specimens of his wisdom and munificence in making them what they are. And as to their capability of improvement, it is quite limited: you soon get to the end of all that you can teach them. They make no new discoveries—their habits are unchangeable. They wear the style of dress, build their nests, get their living, and defend themselves now just as the generations before them did; whereas, to man's capacity for invention and improvement, we can assign no limits. And, by the appropriate appliances,

he is improvable in his religious and moral qualities, as well as in his genius and intellect. Witness the superiority of the devout and intelligent Christian to the roaming, untutored savage. Now from these and the like considerations, we infer—and may we not infer, independent of what we learn from the sacred scriptures?—that God, the fountain of knowledge and goodness, will make such communications to our race, as are needful in our circumstances, to enable us to fulfil our duty to him and to one another, and thus attain to the high end and design of our being? It is reasonable, then, to believe that a revelation has been made.

But is it necessary? Would not man be able, by the efforts of his own reason and reflection, to find out enough of his duty to God and his fellow-men to answer all practical purposes? To this we have only to remark, at present, that the experiment has been made; and however we may conjecture about what man might do, if *he would*, there is no good sense in resisting the testimony of experience. The Baconian philosophy—the philosophy of induction from observation and facts—is better than all theory. Now let us see how it is

and how it has always been in the absence of the light of divine révelation. What is the history of religion in the pagan nations, from the earliest times, but the history of idolatry—idolatry multiform, stupid, debasing, and impure? Not only the heavenly bodies, as they showed forth the Creator's glory by their movements and splendour, were worshipped, but deceased men—heroes and warriors—thieves and strumpets—evil passions and evil spirits—yea, rivers and reptiles; and that, too, not only among the most rude and uncultivated tribes, but in Greece and Rome, and in the land of pyramids. All this was utterly aside from men's duty to the living God; and it clearly demonstrates one of two things—either that mankind had no right conceptions of the only proper object of worship, or that they did not like to retain him in their thoughts. In either case, who does not see how exceedingly they needed divine instruction? Of the principles of morality there was gross ignorance. Selfishness, revenge, fraud, and inhumanity prevailed to a shocking degree. A man might steal, if he could do it adroitly and elude detection. The marriage relation was scarcely recognized, and its du-

ties were generally neglected. Concubinage was common. Women were slaves, and children might be put to death whenever it was deemed inconvenient or unprofitable to raise them. There were no asylums for the poor, and the insane were treated as mad-dogs.—All government was despotism, and the only liberty licentiousness. Of man himself, in his origin and destiny, there was no satisfying knowledge. The immortality of the soul and a future state of retribution were regarded as fit subjects for speculation, but of no controlling influence or practical use. Of sin and its forgiveness, their notions were vague and visionary. Under a consciousness of ill-desert, they felt that sacrifices were necessary to appease the gods; and not only inferior animals, but human victims, in numerous instances, bled on their altars. These and the like facts impelled some of the wisest of the ancients to acknowledge that there were no human means of reforming the world, and constrained them to express an earnest desire and hope that the Supreme God would shed down light from heaven, to disperse the clouds in which they felt themselves enveloped on the most momentous subjects. We give you

a specimen or two from their well-authenticated sayings. Thus Cicero, the distinguished orator, and perhaps the wisest moralist of ancient Rome: "Utinam tam facile vera invenire possim, quàm falsa convincere!"—"Oh! that I could discover truth with the same ease that I can detect error!" And in another place, on the weakness of man, he says, "Nemo vir magnus, sine aliquo afflatu divino unquam fuit;" i. e., "No man was ever truly great without some divine influence." And Plato, the disciple of Socrates, and the wisest philosopher of Greece, concludes an essay on prayer in terms to this amount: "We cannot of ourselves know what petition will be pleasing to God, or what worship we should pay him: it is necessary, therefore, that a Lawgiver be sent from heaven to instruct us; and such a one," he adds, "I do expect; and Oh, how greatly I do desire to see that Teacher, and to know who he is!" He goes further, in another of his works, and affirms that the desired Lawgiver must be *more than man*; "for," says he, "as every nature is governed by some superior nature, as birds and beasts by man, so he who is to teach man what man could not know by his own nature, must be

of a nature superior to man; i. e., of a divine nature." Thus we have strong *presumption* in favour of Divine Revelation, and its reasonableness, necessity, and desirableness.

That God *can*, if he see fit, reveal himself, and make known his counsels to us in a way more effective, and more adapted to our wants, than he has done in the visible creation around us, is what cannot be denied, without impeaching his power, or virtually denying his existence. Now there are two modes in which this may be done. He may either address his communications to each individual of the race in succession; or he may select a few as his ministering agents, and furnish them with the requisite qualifications and credentials to make known his will to their fellow men; not only to the generation for the time being, but to all succeeding generations, with such evidence as shall be satisfactory to unbiassed and honestly inquiring minds. This latter is the method which has been adopted, according to the book which we are going to examine: for you will bear in mind that we have to do here with recorded facts and documentary evidence,—written testimony. We shall

have but little to say of opinion, theory, or hypothesis. *Here is a book*—a wonderful volume,—called THE BOOK, by way of eminence,—not large in size, though of vast scope and high pretensions,—not the production of one writer, but of some twenty-eight or thirty,—not of one country, or of one age, but of various countries, and extending through a period of at least fifteen hundred years. This book, we should also observe, is not in the form of a dissertation on the general subject of religion, but miscellaneous, composed of sixty-six distinct pieces, in diverse sorts of style, prose and poetry, doctrinal, historical and prophetic; relating to manners and customs, rites and ceremonies, laws and governments, wars and revolutions, types and symbols, providential dispensations and angelic visits and interferences, the most extraordinary that can be imagined. This volume, moreover, relates to matters and events coeval with the world; and all bearing directly or remotely on the redemption of mankind by Jesus Christ. And we may further remark concerning this volume, that it is strikingly analogous to the book of nature, where we find no digested system,

but a rich profusion of miscellaneous matter; with enough on its surface to attract the notice and call forth the admiration of the beholder, but in many of its facts and details sufficiently profound to exercise the ingenuity, and demand the diligent scrutiny and patient observation of the strongest and best cultivated minds. So here, the truths and beauties of our book of revelation are spread over its pages as with a bold and liberal hand, and as if the treasures of divine wisdom and goodness were herein disclosed to mankind, on purpose to make us wise, holy and happy. But we find no systematic arrangement of these riches; it is "*here* a little and *there* a little," in various forms, and suited to all capacities, plain lessons for plain people, and deep mines of knowledge for such as have the ability and inclination to work them. Now, from the strong resemblance which these books bear to one another in the particulars just named, we feel warranted in referring them to the same authorship. The God of nature is the God of the Bible. There is no collision, no discord between them; so far as they go *together*, their teachings are perfectly consistent. True, the manner of instruc-

tion is different, and the latter goes much further in its disclosures than the former, making us acquainted with things which we are deeply concerned to know, "which things the angels desire to look into." Now to whichever of these sources of knowledge we direct our attention for useful information, we may be assured that our proficiency will depend very much on the temper of mind with which we open the book and examine its contents. We must go to these teachers to *learn*, not to *cavil* at what we do not fully comprehend. We must take the lessons as they are dealt out to us, and not be in haste to reach conclusions before we have studied the premises. In brief, we must, in all our researches, cherish an humble, teachable spirit, acknowledge our ignorance, and pray for light and guidance to the Author of our being: for "no man becomes great or good without divine influence."

With such views and feelings we respectfully ask your candid and patient attention to a cursory examination of the reasons upon which the Bible claims to come from God, to furnish us with a perfect rule of duty, and point us to the way, the only way of salva-

tion provided for our fallen race. Our discussion must be brief, for the subject is exceedingly great; and topics for consideration, growing out of the general theme, crowd upon the thoughtful mind. Indeed, so extensive is the subject, and so numerous the trains of thought that lead to the same result, that our main difficulty will be, in selecting and condensing wisely, and so as not to impair the force of an argument, strong and conclusive in itself, when rightly apprehended, by presenting it in a partial and feeble manner. To keep within moderate limits, we shall, for the present, confine our remarks chiefly, though not exclusively, to the New Testament: not that we deem this part of the sacred volume any more authoritative or worthy of reverential regard than the Old Testament, but as a matter of convenience, and to preserve as much unity and distinctness in our observations as possible. Besides, Christ and his apostles give their unequivocal sanction to the writings of Moses and the prophets, so that if the judgment of the former be correct, it settles the question as to the authority of the latter. The connection between these two grand divisions of our sacred

book is intimate and indissoluble. Together, they constitute what we call the Bible, comprising the principles of revealed religion, imparting mutual light and support to one another. They stand or fall together. If you give up the one, you surrender more than half the testimonies in favour of the other. If you can substantiate the claims of one, you prove the divine origin and authority of both. We regard them as the joint, harmonious, undying witnesses for God, that he is the Creator, Lawgiver, Judge and Saviour of the world.

Restricting ourselves thus, we hope to get through with what we have to say in this series, in about eight lectures, of ordinary length; and, to save time, we shall indulge but little in quoting authorities, except what is indispensable, when we come to the early witnesses. Authorities we have, indeed, of the most trustworthy character, both ancient and modern; but they are so numerous, and each so excellent in his department, that it seems invidious to cite from our favourites, and pass by others of perhaps equal worth. If any should suspect us of speaking without book, they can go to the sources of in-

formation, and satisfy themselves at their leisure. Such epitomes as we offer in this little volume, are not designed to supersede more extended reading; but to rouse the mental energies, to mark out the most advantageous lines of thought, and give dense views of large subjects, as the result of careful research, for the benefit, particularly, of those whose circumstances and avocations allow them but little time for the perusal of books.

Another remark, we beg leave to submit. Our subject is a *trite* one. It has been thoroughly canvassed, in all its ramifications, and presented in all conceivable aspects. The New Testament is a volume of long standing and deep interest, with a large portion of civilized men. It is not only, in itself, a book of some antiquity and attraction from its singular features seen at first glance; but it professes to contain the elements of a religion,—the true religion, which is as old as creation. No book extant has been the text of so much comment and criticism. It has been assailed and vilified, expounded and defended, for nearly eighteen hundred years, by men of the first order of intellect: so that

nothing new is to be expected here, on either side of the question. The most that can be done, now-a-days, is to compile and compress, and exhibit old arguments in a modified form; to re-arrange and work into a new fabric, materials long since collected, and much of which lies stowed away in old store-houses, the food of moths. But *truth*, unlike many other things, suffers no deterioration by age. Like its Divine Author, it is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. To bring it out, therefore, from its retirement, and place it in contact with minds capable of appreciating and feeling its benefits is a laudable design, though not always popular. Novelties may be harmless and entertaining; they tickle the ear, and beguile the tediousness of a dull day: but truth, perceived and embraced, makes its votaries free and happy. The search for truth, on any subject, is a noble and ennobling employment; but the question about the truth of religion is transcendently momentous. When we set ourselves down to examine the pretensions of a book which professes to bring "good tidings of great joy to all people," we should observe every link in the chain of argument till we see its issue.

A sound judgment can hardly be formed without a patient hearing of the testimony in the case. You take the meaning of this paragraph. If you would receive the full benefit of a course of instruction such as we propose in these brief lectures, you must read the whole with care and candour. If we cannot give you new dishes, highly spiced, we shall endeavour to give you what is better for health, nutritious and plain fare.

Another remark may be made here, as illustrative of the importance of our subject. There is a strong tendency in human nature to extremes; and every extreme is error. Thus you find simple, well-meaning people, induced by the representations of ignorant or designing men, throwing their earthly goods into a common stock, living in a community by themselves, turning their backs upon many of the relative duties of life, embracing religious notions, and practising religious rites, *said, without evidence*, to have been received from *above*, in some mysterious way. Such projects, as time always demonstrates, are visionary and often disastrous. Others you see, just now and all around you, very decent, industrious, and many of them

quite serious people, possessed by the belief that the world is very soon coming to an end. Their leaders fix the day, time after time; their fears take the alarm, they throw up their worldly business, dispose of their property at an under-value, or give it away, cease to provide for their children, and betake themselves exclusively to watching and prayer. The consequences of these extravagant movements need not be portrayed here: they are notorious, and deeply to be lamented. But for these and the like evils, flowing from the same prolific source, what is the remedy? Not law, not physical force; you cannot, and perhaps you ought not to undertake to coerce fanaticism, except in so far as it violates the rights of others, or disturbs the public peace. What then would be the appropriate and effectual remedy or preventive? Some intelligible, divinely accredited, and authoritative standard of belief and practice. I know the teachers, in some of these sects, profess to take their texts from our Bible. But what interpreters they are! Our book says, in plain terms, that before the termination of the present dispensation, the gospel is to be preached to all nations,

—that war shall cease to be waged,—that peace, like a river, is to flow forth and bless the world,—that all kings and rulers shall do homage to the king of Zion. Surely the end is not yet, for these predictions are not yet accomplished. And again, our Teacher from heaven says, with emphasis, in reference to the end of the world,—“Of that day and hour knoweth no man; no, not the angels of heaven; but my Father only.” And a little onward in the same chapter, Matt. xxiv., it is asked, “Who, then, is a faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household, *to give them their meat in due season?* Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.” That is, to be ready for our Lord’s coming, is to be at our post, and engaged in the business which a wise Providence has assigned us. Now the Bible purports to be a sure word of prophecy,—a light to our feet and a lamp to our path,—to be of divine inspiration, to the end that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished with the true principles of religious faith, and right rules of conduct in all circumstances. And were this blessed book more generally known and re-

ceived as the sure basis of hope and the fixed law of duty, the ravages of fanatical wildfire would soon be stayed, and the fable of the golden age would be realized in the universal reign of the Prince of peace.

One thing more by way of bespeaking attention to this brief view of the evidences in favour of our common Christianity. How is it, and why is it, we ask in the name of common sense and reason, that men—rational and intelligent men—can consent to live, as many do, from youth to old age, in a state of indecision about the true religion, while they find it so painful to be undecided in matters of confessedly inferior moment? See how it is in a political contest: what rigid scrutiny into the claims of the candidates, their characters and policy; what frequent meetings, mass meetings; and how eager to hear; what thrilling appeals from the platform and from the press; what searching of documents and witnesses; what rapid running of expresses, to bear the news from state to state; what liberal contributions to meet the expense; what promptness and generosity in clearing the course for the bashful, and aged, and invalid voter! Now we are not condemning all this,

nor any of it. Our point is, the disproportion between the zeal manifested about matters which, after all, are temporary and transient, and that which is generally evinced on the great questions,—What is the true religion? What the published law of Heaven? Who is Lord of all? Who has the words of eternal life? Who is the Saviour? To whom may we with confidence commit our spirits when we die? These are questions of transcendent interest to every human being. And they are questions that cannot be settled without serious inquiry. Now, if you would be consistent and decided, and not expose yourselves to be driven about by every wind of doctrine, you will improve the opportunities which Providence affords to hear the witnesses for the truth; and benevolence will move you to use your influence with your families and neighbours to join you in your endeavours to find the truth, and the deep foundation of a hope that maketh not ashamed.

LECTURE II.

THE GENUINENESS, AUTHENTICITY AND INTEGRITY OF
THE NEW TESTAMENT.

As was stated in the introduction, we confine ourselves, in this series of lectures, mainly to the New Testament; not because it is deemed of higher authority, or more importance than the Old Testament, but for convenience, and to preserve as much unity as possible in our remarks; and, also, because Christ and his apostles have placed the seal of their sanction upon the writings of Moses and the prophets, so that the divine authority of the one involves that of the other. They are integral parts of the same book of revealed religion, and ought, we think, generally to be bound up in one volume, to prevent diversity of opinion, which will, otherwise, arise in the public mind respecting their comparative value.

This latter portion of our sacred book, called the New Testament, or New Covenant,

in the Greek language, in which it was written, Ἡ ΚΑΙΝΗ ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ, consists of twenty-seven pieces, composed on various occasions, and at different times, but all within the first century of the Christian era, and about sixty-five to seventy years after the Saviour's ascension. Of these pieces, five are, for the most part, historical; viz., the four gospels and the Acts of the apostles; twenty-one are doctrinal, and in the form of letters, addressed to churches and individuals; one, and the last in the volume, as we now have it, prophetic, called *the Revelation*, or *Apocalypse*, reaching, as we have reason to think, to the end of time, the close of the present dispensation.

These narratives were received by the churches, not simultaneously, but gradually, and after a careful investigation of their claims to divine authority; for spurious works were put in circulation, which roused the jealousy of the disciples, and rendered them exceedingly cautious in filling up the sacred canon. Nothing was admitted that did not bear on its face the strongest marks of genuineness and inspiration. And this accounts for the delay that took place in completing

the rule of faith—the statute book of the kingdom of Christ. It was, completed, however, with the exception of a few of the minor pieces, which were held under consideration and finally adopted, early in the second century; and as several sound critics believe, in regard to the greater part of the New Testament, under the eye, and with the sanction of the Apostle John, who lived to a great age.

The authorship of the several manuscripts which make up the matter of the volume in question, was determined with similar circumspection. To most of them the names of the writers were attached, and where these were withheld, for prudential reasons, the question was settled by circumstantial evidences, such as allusions to persons, places and usages, and certain characteristics in style, which betray an author to a discerning reader, in spite of all his efforts at concealment. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John penned the four gospel narratives and the Acts. Two of these were of the primitive twelve apostles; viz., Matthew and John; and the other two were among the first evangelists. Mark was a disciple of Peter, and wrote under his inspection; and Luke, who wrote the mission-

ary journal, called the Acts of the Apostles, as also the gospel which bears his name, was the companion of Paul, and acted as his amanuensis or clerk. Of the twenty-one epistles, Paul wrote fourteen, to churches and distinguished individuals, to each of which he annexed his name, except that to the Hebrews, from which he withheld it, no doubt, that their prejudices might not be immediately awakened against it, as coming from him, who was eminently the apostle of the gentiles, with whom they were not yet disposed to hold fellowship. The other seven epistles, called catholic, because not addressed to particular churches or persons, were, as is well known, by Peter, James, John and Jude. The Apocalypse was revealed to the Apostle John, while in a state of banishment, on the isle of Patmos. Now the obvious design of all these written documents is, to give a history of Jesus of Nazareth:—his person, his doctrines, his works, his sufferings and death, his resurrection and ascension,—the nature of his kingdom, and the effects of the ministry and institutions which he appointed before he left the world. And the writers all profess to have had personal

knowledge of the facts which they narrate. They were, most of them, among his early disciples and followers; became such at his call, which was, in no instance, attended by flattering prospects of a worldly nature. They straightway dropped their wonted occupations and engaged in his service, promptly, and at the expense of great sacrifices, under the frown of all the existing powers of church and state. They heard him preach,—put questions to him for solution,—expressed their doubts and fears about many of his movements and teachings. They witnessed his extraordinary works,—saw him, now, taking notice of little children and blessing them,—and then confounding and silencing the expounders of the law,—casting out devils,—raising the dead, and quelling the storm at sea. If, then, these men are the real authors of the narratives and letters to which their names were affixed,—if they were men of common sense and honesty,—no facts, one would suppose, could be more satisfactorily attested than those which are recorded in the New Testament. They were in the best position conceivable, to know the truth of the matter about which they undertake to

write; and the relation which they bore to Christ, enhances the value of their testimony; for it is the witness of constant, close observation, and, in the case of some of them, it is the unsolicited suffrage of persons who, from enemies, had become friends, through the power of evidence addressed to their senses, and a full persuasion of the validity of his claims.

But have we sufficient reason for believing that these writings are the genuine productions of the authors whose names they bear? We will endeavour to give to this question an affirmative and satisfactory answer. But suppose, for a moment, that this could not be done. Would you feel bound, in reason, to give up the documents as unworthy of credit? Does a fictitious or assumed name vitiate, or impair the intrinsic value of an essay, or any communication to which it is affixed? How many excellent pieces have been published under the names of Franklin, Penn, Knox, Calvin, &c. Are the letters of Junius any the less just and true, on account of the dispute which so long existed about their real authorship? Certainly not. It is the matter, the doctrine, the force of argument,

that give weight and worth to the book. If the "Life of Washington" by the late Chief Justice Marshall, had been published as the work of his son Thomas, would that circumstance have rendered the history less true, or less worthy of a place in your library? How, then, would the Epistle to the Hebrews be affected, either in its force of argument, or its authority as a part of divine revelation, if it should be discovered, in this age of research and discovery, that not Paul the apostle, but some other disciple of Christ, profoundly learned in the Jewish ritual, and familiar with the Christian plan of salvation, was the real author of that admirable letter? Would it be less worthy of the place which it now occupies in the sacred canon? Not at all.

But we freely acknowledge there is something rather unnatural and improbable in all this; and we return to the question about the genuineness or true authorship of our book. When asked why we believe Matthew Levi to be the writer of the first evangelical narrative in the New Testament; we answer:—for reasons such as to satisfy us that Thomas Jefferson penned our Declaration of Indepen-

dence, seventy-eight years ago; or that Milton wrote the "Paradise Lost;" or that the Emperor Justinian, of the sixth century, is the author of the famous Law Institutes which have come down to us, connected with his name; or that Eusebius, of the fourth century, wrote the Church History distinguished by his name. These works have been generally ascribed to the persons just named, as their authors. They have been quoted, commented on, translated, and referred to as the genuine productions of the men whose names are attached to them, severally. It is the prevalent opinion,—the testimony of history,—the judgment of those who lived when the works first made their appearance. And why should we hesitate to concur in the decision which has come down to us with the consent of so many competent judges? Now to apply this reasoning to the case in hand:—It is not at all likely that the early Christians would have admitted into their book of faith and rules of duty, any writings under wrong or fictitious names. We find, moreover, that the sacred writers themselves frequently refer one to another as the authors of their respective productions. Thus you will

find Peter referring to Paul as a beloved brother, who, in some of his epistles, had written things hard to be understood: and by looking at the marginal references, in your Bibles, you will see in Paul's letters to the Romans and Corinthians, the very things referred to. Read the speech of Stephen, the protomartyr, recorded in the seventh chapter of the Acts, in which he alludes to many facts and predictions of Moses and David, as you find them recorded, under their names, in the Old Testament. And if you will take the pains to look into the writers of the first three centuries of our era, you will be surprised at the frequent and full quotations which they make from the evangelists and apostles, by name, as we have them in our version. The same thing is done by several of the bitterest enemies of Christianity, such as Hierocles, of Bithynia, Porphyry, Celsus, and Julian the apostate. These adversaries of our religion quote freely from Matthew, Luke, John and Paul; and in the whole drift of their objections, go upon the concession that the Christian scriptures were the works of the authors to whom they were ascribed. What reasonable ground of doubt, then, can *we* have, in

regard to the genuineness or authorship of these books? But a more important question about these writings relates to their authenticity; that is, whether the writers relate matters of fact as they really happened, and are, therefore, worthy of confidence as historians. To answer this inquiry, we arrange our remarks under two heads, or two subordinate questions, viz. : 1. Were these writers, who are also witnesses, competent? 2. Were they honest, and disposed to tell the truth?

1. In regard to their *competency*, we observe, without assuming at present their inspiration, a point which shall receive attention in its proper place, that from all that we can learn of their characters, they appear to have been, with the exception of Luke and Paul, who were evidently men of learning, plain, uneducated men, but men of good common sense, and of a respectable share of practical wisdom. And they were placed in circumstances, as constant attendants on the ministry and movements of Christ, altogether favourable for knowing what *he* did and said, and what *others* did and said in his name, or in opposition to his designs. And, then, the occurrences which they relate were of such a

nature, as that they could hardly be deceived in relation to them. Every thing was done openly, and, for the most part, in the presence of opposers, as well as adherents. We forbear to mention the miraculous works in this connection, because they will be noticed in their proper place, when we come to the subject of miracles. And as to the Saviour's birth, and the events that transpired under the brief ministry of John the Baptist, which took place before our evangelists were called from their secular employments to serve in the Christian cause, these were *recent* events, and could easily be recollected, or obtained from the lips of living witnesses. The memorable occasion, the taxing, or registering, which drew Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem—the angelic announcements, and the report of the shepherds—must have been matters of public notoriety. In brief, from the character of the men, situated as they were, and from the nature of the things attested by them, it does seem that they were competent witnesses. But—

II. Were they honest, and disposed to tell the truth? We should always presume upon men's honesty until they are convicted, or

give strong indications of fraud or deceit. We have looked into all the best and most impartial memoirs of these men that have lain within our reach, and can find no charge of unfairness, in any respect, brought against them, except the general, sweeping allegation, of professed enemies to them and their religion, of their having clubbed together for the purpose of palming upon the world a cunningly devised fable as a communication from God. This we take to be gratuitous and unsupported; and we are not disposed to believe anything, without evidence of some sort; certainly we will not give credit to an evil report of any man, or any set of men, without good reasons. Sneers and *inuendoes* we let pass as the noxious breathings of envy or malice. Plain, labouring men, such as carpenters, tent-makers, and fishermen, are not apt to engage in wild schemes, especially complicated projects, open at many points to detection, on purpose to deceive the world, particularly where the prospect of advancing their own interests, by imposing on others, is dull and doubtful. Indeed, the gospel scheme is too complex in its machinery, and too vast in its design, to have originated in an untutored

mind; and, we will add, it is too good and godlike to have been conceived in a depraved heart. If we take our ideas of the character of these witnesses from their writings, we must think them unsophisticated and candid to a proverb. They do and say every thing above board; there seems to have been no caballing or concealment among them. They tell us of their own faults and foibles; of their mistakes, for they pretend not to inspiration or infallibility, except when employed *directly* as the messengers or amanuenses of the Holy Spirit. On ordinary occasions they were as liable to err, and as open to temptation, as other men in like circumstances. Let this be borne in mind, and it will enable you to solve many difficulties which you find in reconciling some parts of their conduct, as men, with their pretensions as the accredited ministers of God. Had they banded together to accomplish some sinister end, under the garb of religion, would they have told us of their ambition, intolerance, and, in some instances, treachery and falsehood? of their prejudices and faithlessness, which drew upon them the rebuke of their beloved and faithful Master? What an humbling tale they give us of Peter's beha-

viour in the hall of Pilate, under the power of temptation, when, for a little season, his fear got the better of his faith, and overcame his usual boldness and courage! Does not all this look like a scrupulous regard for truth? Does it not bespeak a frankness and an honest simplicity such as you rarely or never meet with in other writers? How can you account for these things without supposing that they were conscientiously rigid in declaring the whole truth, and that they wrote, not for any selfish purpose, but for the honour of their Lord, and the good of mankind? Are we not bound in justice, then, to regard them as faithful witnesses? and ought we not to receive their statements as a true account of facts and events as they really occurred?

Had they been in conspiracy for the accomplishment of some evil design, we think they could not have kept the secret so long. To sustain this opinion, take the case of Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve. Here was a case of defection among themselves, in which the collusion, had there been any, would most assuredly have been divulged. This miserable man had been with them from the beginning, and was undoubtedly acquainted with

their design. But, being actuated by wrong motives, his hypocrisy was, in due time, detected and disclosed by the heart-searching Saviour. How was he affected, and how did he behave, on occasion of his exposure and abandonment? Did he make any disclosure at all affecting the character and intentions of the body with which he had been so intimately connected? Not a syllable. Why? Because, as we have a right to infer from what we know of human nature, he had no tales to tell. How apt are men, when they withdraw in disgust, or are expelled from a society or club with which they have been associated, to reveal and proclaim, with an air of triumph, every thing within their knowledge, which will be likely to vindicate themselves, and blacken the character of the body they have left, or from which they have been excluded! This is a matter of very common experience. Now here is a man, in circumstances of strong temptation, leaving the apostolic college, instituted as some wise men after the flesh would persuade you, to deceive the world; and yet he utters not a word against it. On the contrary, he gives decisive though involuntary testimony in its favour. Stung

with conscious guilt, and overwhelmed with self-aborrence, he rushes out of the Christian brotherhood, dashes down, at the feet of those who had bought him, the price of his treachery, and commits a *felo-de-se* by hanging himself. Had there been fanaticism, rebellion, vanity, ambition, misanthropy, or *any other evil purpose*, in the counsels of these first ministers of the gospel, then the core and nucleus of the Christian system—that it did not *come out on this occasion*, we aver, was contrary to all experience and reasonable expectation—a mystery—a *miracle*, may we not say, as incomprehensible as any recorded in the evangelical narrative?

We pass to another consideration, showing the *authenticity* and *credibility* of these histories; for, in regard to matters of fact, not of doctrine, the distinction is not worth preserving, because a fact, which is authentic, is also credible. We refer to the harmony or substantial identity which the narrators maintain throughout, in all the leading and essential particulars of their history. Here are four writers and five narratives, two of them having been composed by Luke, who, though they differ in style and arrangement, and par-

ticularity, just as witnesses in the same case, examined separately, would differ, and just enough to show that they had not banded together for the purpose of carrying a point, yet agree in the main, so as to satisfy any impartial and intelligent judge that all their depositions are faithful, and founded in truth. This is worthy of special notice, inasmuch as they did not write in the same place or at the same time. Feigned accounts, even if there had been concert among writers thus situated, would with moral certainty have crossed each other, and been found in serious collision. Nothing of this kind, of any importance, is to be found in our historians. I know there is a *seeming* discrepancy between Matthew and Luke, in regard to the genealogy of Christ, which has been worked up into a frightful bugbear by certain skeptical critics, whom we forbear to name, but which is easily reconciled, by observing that the one takes the pedigree of Joseph, and the other that of Mary. Besides, these genealogies were manifestly taken from Jewish tables, acknowledged by the scribes as substantially correct, and therefore answering the purpose of the evangelists, which was, to prove that their

blessed Master was of the tribe of Judah, and of the family of David. And, after all, it is a matter which does not touch one essential doctrine of the gospel. An inspired writer may quote the sayings or statistics of others, without impairing his own veracity, or compromising the cause which he advocates in the least. The facts and events that constitute the materials of these historical pieces, were being developed, from time to time, during a period of more than three quarters of a century, including the Acts of the Apostles, and the writers made their notes at various points; yet how well they harmonize in all the main features of their narrations! What but an intimate knowledge of facts, with an inflexible love of the truth, could have produced this harmony? That they did not copy from one another, is evident from the fact that they do not all give the same particulars. To get a full history of Christ and his divinely-commissioned ambassadors, you must read the five narratives. And then, when you go on to the epistles, or, as you may call them, the doctrinal letters, you meet with numerous and seemingly incidental coincidences with, and allusions to, the histories, as written by the

evangelists, confirmatory of the statements, and evincing, not only the genuineness and authenticity of the several journals, but a complete and wonderful agreement between the facts and doctrines of our religion. Such harmony—such entire, yet unstudied concurrence and agreement in so many particulars, among so many writers, spread over so much time and space, tending to establish the truth of any system of religion or philosophy, we venture to affirm, cannot be found in the records of the world. Truth tends powerfully to union and consistency, while error and false pretensions are devious, multiform, and divisive.

Think, in the next place, of the extreme difficulty, nay, we might say, impossibility, of passing off as a true account, such a history, or journal rather, as that which we have in the New Testament, abounding, as it does, in thrilling and memorable incidents, among the very people, or their immediate successors, some of whom must have been living when the said events are alleged to have taken place, if it was all a sheer fiction. How could it be done by any set of men; especially, such plain, unlettered men as were our evangelists? Think what they

report as notorious matters of fact; the birth of Jesus, and its attendant circumstances, with a specification of the town where it took place, the visit of the distinguished strangers from the East, the date fixed, by naming the emperor and the governors then in power; the flight of the holy family into Egypt and the reason of it; and, subsequently, the baptism of Christ, by the famous baptizer John, at the river Jordan, amid a vast concourse of people, the voice from heaven, by which the Saviour was recognized as the Son of God, and the great Teacher who had peculiar claims to be heard; then the sermon on the mount, the greatest that ever was preached; his parables, so skilfully constructed, so pointed and cutting, some of them, to the Scribes and Pharisees; and his marvellous works, multitudes, thousands fed with a few loaves and fishes, when the fragments left far exceeded the original provision; so many cured of inveterate diseases; some deceased persons were raised to life, whose names and families are given; then, his persecution, arraignment and condemnation by Pilate, well known by his office; the crucifixion and burial of the Holy One in the tomb of Joseph, a

man of note about Jerusalem; the resurrection; and the ascension near Bethany, attested by witnesses in great numbers. Now, how could such stories obtain any credit or currency among the inhabitants of Palestine, if unfounded and untrue? It is impossible. But yet the skeptic takes refuge in the gratuitous assertion that these accounts of Christ and his religion, in the incipient stages of its progress, must have been prepared and published long after the date usually assigned them. To this supposititious theory we have several objections, one or two of which we will state very briefly. In the first place, we have not only the testimony of the earliest Christian fathers, Barnabas, Clement, Hermas, Ignatius and Polycarp, three of whom are named by the apostle Paul as his cotemporaries, but we have also the witness of heretical, and of Jewish and heathen writers, as Cerinthus, Marcion, Josephus, Porphyry and Celsus, &c., to the existence of the New Testament Scriptures. We have, in fact, an unbroken, close succession of writers of various creeds, and some of no creed, whose citations from our books, and comments upon them, and objections to parts of them, satisfy our minds, be-

yond all doubt, that our gospels and epistles were in being and repute, as standards of the facts and doctrines of Christianity, from the apostolic age down to the end of the fourth century, when it became the established religion of the Roman empire; after which time, spurious gospels could scarcely by any artifice of man be introduced to public favour, under the assumed names of our apostles and evangelists. The time would fail us to give the testimony of a tithe of the witnesses on this point. Let a brief notice of one of the bitterest and most acute enemies of our faith, suffice for the present. Celsus lived in the latter half of the second century, and early in the third. None of his entire works are known to be extant; but Eusebius, of the fourth century, has recorded, in his history, copious fragments of them, which you will find in Lardner, Michaelis, Horne, and other modern writers of well known repute. He mentions the names of most of the apostles and evangelists, and quotes from them pretty largely by name, so as to leave no doubt on any unbiassed mind, of their existence, in his time, as we have them now. He never questions the gospels as histories,—and speaks of the

persecutions of Christians on account of their religion. He charges them with altering the gospels, but obviously refers to the Marcionites, Valentinians and other heretics. He says he derives his arguments against them from their own acknowledged standards, and in no one instance from spurious writings. He speaks in flattering terms of Christ, which it is not easy to reconcile with his avowed hostility to his religion and followers; acknowledges the truth of his nativity, his flight into Egypt, his miracles; states, as we find it, substantially, in our gospels, that he was betrayed, scourged and crucified, that he drank vinegar, and that, after his death, he appeared among his friends, again, several times; mentions that he was regarded as divine and worthy of being worshipped. True, he does not profess to believe most of these things; but his concessions clearly establish our position, that the sacred writings were *then* what they are *now*, and that they were universally ascribed to the same authors. He never pretends to deny that our sacred books were written by the men whose names are attached to them, or that the facts which they narrate are unwor-

thy of credit; yet his opportunities were good, and his inclination to do so, if he could with any colour of reason, will not be doubted. His acuteness and learning are extolled by gentlemen of his way of thinking in modern times. They say he was a prodigy in literature, and a genuine, a profound philosopher. Where, then, is the evidence, or shadow of an argument, that our gospels and epistles were foisted in upon the world in after ages, to deceive men? Yield yourselves to such surmises and gratuitous assertions, and you inevitably sap the foundation of all historical belief.

Another thing going to prove the authenticity of these records is, the absence of any motive that could have induced the writers to falsify or invent a fictitious story. Men do, indeed, in some cases, act from impulse or whim for a little while; some will tell lies for sport, or for gain; but you will not find them sitting down and gravely writing a long, complex account of visions and impressions which nobody but themselves can know any thing about. You do not find men engaging in unpopular or unpromising projects without motives, and at the risk of fortune,

fame, and life itself. Now, assuming the existence of Jesus of Nazareth about the time specified, which we have authority to do, from the testimony of cotemporary and disinterested historians, what motivē could have actuated these first Christians, and great numbers of intelligent people that soon joined them, in magnifying their new Master, and identifying themselves with his cause? Was it gain? Why, according to their showing, he advertised them that his kingdom was not of this world, that he had neither wealth nor places of power to offer them. He states candidly that he has no home, not a place to lay his head when weary or aching; and he admonishes them that, if they would become his disciples and adherents, they must expect to be put out of the synagogues, and driven from their secular offices,—that they must count upon the loss of all their present worldly advantages; that they must deny themselves and take up their cross, as he was soon to bear his, and follow him to martyrdom. Was it fame? But what of this could they expect, either present or posthumous, from enlisting under the standard of an obscure individual, of humble parentage, with-

out friends, without power, and with no show of Jewish lore or Grecian polish? How could such men foresee the growth of the mustard seed, or the working of the leaven, destined of God to leaven the whole lump? How could fishermen, and tent-makers, and collectors of taxes, interpret and proceed upon the prophetic symbol of the little stone cut out of a mountain, and designed in due time to fill the world? It was quite beyond their mental vision, unless taught and inspired by the only wise God; and, if they were taught and influenced by him, they were neither knaves nor madmen; and their motives must have been as pure as their doctrines,—the love of truth, and of souls, and of God.

Again, look at the fearless way in which these authors write; how many snares they lay for themselves; how freely they give us the names of persons and places; how unguardedly they talk about manners, and customs, and institutions; how many things they assume, as well known to their readers; what wonderful events they narrate, without a note of exclamation, and with no effort to

meet objections. This looks like truth and honesty.

Observe, also, the style in which they write. It is not florid, or in any respect polished, but simple, and plain, in some instances almost to baldness: so little drapery do some of them use, that their bold statements may well be called the *naked* truth. Their language is figurative, as we would expect from their oriental habits and associations; but their figures and illustrations are taken from common scenes and occupations, mountains and valleys, rivers and pools, rocks and caves, the harvest field, and the vineyard, the garden and the fishing-boat, with the correspondent employments of keeping the flocks, using the net, ploughing, sowing and gathering the fruits. All this is in good keeping with the character of the writers, who were obviously more intent on things than words, and who were anxious to awaken and instruct men, rather than to please them, and catch their applause. This, also, looks like honesty of purpose, and challenges confidence in their communications.

The sort of Greek which they use, is another mark of the truth and authenticity of

their writings; for, except the gospel by Matthew, and the epistle to the Hebrews, which some critics think were originally written in a dialect of Hebrew, but soon translated into Greek, our authors wrote in the Greek language, that being more extensively known at the time than any other. But they use not pure, classical Greek, such as was spoken at Athens, but a dialect of it, which might be called Chaldaic-Greek, resembling the language of Judea, after the return from the Babylonian captivity. We are often told, what no scholar denies, that the New Testament is not pure Greek, and for this reason some exclude it from our classical schools. Be it so. We had rather have it so, than want the evidence it affords of the truth and honesty of the sacred writers. Their Greek abounds in Hebraisms; phraseology and allusions which prove that the writers were more familiar with the language and usages of Palestine than of Attica. This peculiarity in their language gives proof that they were, what they say they were, plain men, and raised among a plain, industrious people. Had it been otherwise, had our Testament been written in the beautiful style

of Plato or Aristotle, it would have thrown a shade of suspicion over it. We should then have been told, with triumph and taunting, that it must have been a compilation by some artful Grecian scholar, for that it could not be the production of such men as Matthew the publican, and John and James, the sons of Zebedee, the fishermen of Galilee.

Another question, and we will dismiss this branch of the subject, and conclude our present lecture: are these writings the *same now* as when they were first admitted into the sacred canon? Have they come down to us entire and unadulterated? Here a wide field opens upon us, had we time to survey it, but we have not at present. We may look into it on another occasion; but a brief remark or two will suffice, in this connection. We remark, in the first place, that as the autographs of these documents were in manuscript, for you know the art of printing was then unknown, copies could not be multiplied anything like so rapidly as they can now, by means of the press. To transcribe such a piece as the gospel by Matthew, for instance, was a work of considerable labour, and would hardly be undertaken on individual responsibility. It would

be under the eye and auspices of some church, and it would undoubtedly be subjected to strict scrutiny and comparison with the original, before it would be allowed to be read in the religious meetings. Adulteration, therefore, was not likely to take place. A copy of the *gospels*, to say nothing of the Acts and Epistles, was a matter of heavy expense. A cow or a horse could be procured at much less cost than a copy of the New Testament. It should be recollected that within twenty years after the Saviour's ascension, churches were formed in most of the chief towns in the Roman Empire. In these societies, each gospel or epistle that made its appearance under the seal of the inspired writer, was regarded as of the highest authority, and would, of course, be guarded and preserved from corruption with religious care. During the author's life, an imperfect copy could scarcely get into circulation, for every one would naturally be submitted to his inspection.

We remark, secondly, that the early Christians were deeply concerned to guard against any mutilation or change in the text of the sacred books. They clung to these writings as communications from God the Saviour;

they viewed them as the ground of their faith, and the charter of their most precious hopes; so that even after the death of the apostles their adulteration is scarcely conceivable. The primitive disciples were cast off, and every where spoken against by the world around them. Persecutors and gainsayers were on the alert for occasion against them and their new religion, as it was called. Had they permitted mutilated and conflicting copies of their sacred books to get abroad, it would have placed in the hands of their adversaries a weapon which would have been used with prodigious effect to impair their credit, and to arrest the progress of their principles. They must, therefore, have watched the purity of their inspired records with all imaginable jealousy and care, and to this effect, we have a mass of testimony which we have not room here to recite.

And, when, in process of time, heretics arose and began to take sacrilegious liberties with the sacred books, rejecting some, and interpolating their own glosses in others, the many correct copies in use in the churches, would furnish the ready means of staying the corruption. Tertullian, who was born about

sixty years after the death of the apostle John, tells us that some of the autograph manuscripts, i. e. the originals, were to be seen in his day. In his work* on heresy, he uses this spirited exhortation: "Come, thou who wouldst exercise thyself profitably about thy salvation, go through the apostolic churches, in which the very chairs of the apostles still preside, in which *their authentic letters* are recited, sounding forth the voice, and representing the countenance of each."

When we come to the middle of the fourth century, and find the churches divided into two great sects, the Eastern and Western, here we find a mutual preventive to the mutilation of the revealed word. The parties were a check upon one another. How wonderful is the providence of God! And from this time, downward to our own time, what a shield do we see held over, what a strong wall erected around, the holy writings, in the numerous sects into which Christendom has been riven by the pride and self-will of her ministers, chiefly. Let us, then, revere the Lord's hand in the preservation of his own

* Chap. 36.

truth. The preservation of our blessed book through the lapse of eighteen centuries is *itself* one of the many and decisive evidences of its divine origin. No human production on earth, of so remote an age, can produce a tenth part of the proof of its genuine authorship, that supports the claims of this *Book of books* to a divine source.

We have seen that its immediate writers were in a situation to judge of the truth of the facts and doctrines which it details—that they were honest and truthful men,—that they could have no rational inducement to falsify or veil the truth,—that they sacrificed all temporal advantages, and counted not their lives too high a price to pay for its maintenance. We have marked the harmony of its parts; we have seen the hand of God in its transmission to us, without material alteration, and with his seal and sanction upon it; we will, therefore, by God's help, receive it, and use it, and send it, if we can, to all mankind, not as the word of man, but, as it is indeed, the word of God, that liveth and abideth for ever. It is not the work of men, to deceive their fellow men. It is the word of sal-

vation from the God of truth and love; or, in the language of the poet:

“ Whence, indeed,
But from HEAVEN, should men unskill'd in arts,
In different ages born, in different parts,
Weave such *agreeing* truths? or how? or why
Should all conspire to cheat us with a lie?
Unask'd their pains, ungrateful their advice;
Starving, their gains, and martyrdom, their price.”
(DRYDEN.)

LECTURE III.

INSPIRATION.

HAVING seen, in the preceding lecture, that the sacred writings are the genuine productions of the authors whose names they bear, and that they are authentic and worthy of credit, we will now proceed to the consideration of their *authority* in all matters of faith and practice: for a book may be *genuine* and *authentic*, and entitled to *belief* as to its historical statements and the doctrines taught by public teachers whom it undertakes to celebrate, and yet have no just claim to control our judgment, regulate our conduct, or bind our conscience in questions of morality and religion. Honest and intelligent writers may err; they may form erroneous opinions respecting matters that have come under their observation; they may be influenced by prejudice unconsciously, and may misunderstand or misrepresent facts, or the characters of

persons of whom they have occasion to speak, through the weakness and fallibility of the human mind, without special divine guidance. It is *inspiration*, therefore, that gives to these writings their peculiar authority over the faith and practice and conscience of mankind. Of this we are now to speak; and our remarks apply to the Scriptures of the Old Testament as well as to those of the New Testament, although we shall confine ourselves mainly to the latter, for reasons heretofore stated.

By *inspiration*, we “mean such a communication, by the Spirit of God, to the minds of the sacred writers, of those things which could not have been otherwise known, and such superintendence in regard to particulars concerning which they might otherwise obtain information, as was sufficient to preserve them from error, in all things which could in the least affect any of the doctrines or precepts contained in their writings, or mislead any person who considered them as a divine and infallible standard of truth and duty.” It may be divided, for the sake of convenience, into the inspiration of *suggestion* and that of *supervision*: *suggestion*, in reference to what could not be otherwise known, and *supervision*

or *guidance*, in regard to what might, with some degree of certainty, be known by other means. This distinction, however, is not essential. What we want is, satisfactory evidence that God so enlightened, guided and guarded the writers, that we have in the Bible an infallible and sufficient rule of faith and practice, or, in other words, that its contents were dictated and secured to us by the Creator in his infinite wisdom and goodness, so that, in placing full confidence in its teachings and promises, we are in no danger of being deceived or disappointed.

Now that such a communication is possible, necessary, and desirable, was demonstrated in our introductory remarks; and, in our second lecture, we endeavoured to show that the writers of the New Testament are worthy of credit; that they were men of good sense and pure intentions, and that their statements respecting Christ and his doctrines may be relied on, as true and faithful. If, then, we believe them in other matters, we must, to be consistent, believe them in what they say about inspiration. Let us hear how they talk, and how they make their Master speak on this subject. But, before going directly to their

avowal of special divine influence, let us observe, that Christ and his apostles do unequivocally and repeatedly recognize and cite the writings of the Old Testament, as inspired and authoritative. We learn from Josephus and other reliable sources, that, the Jews, in the time of Christ, regarded the books of Moses and the prophets as the oracles of God. They did, indeed, misinterpret them, and place their oral traditions, practically, on a par with them; but they acknowledged them as the statutes, the testimonies, and laws of the Lord: calling them by the most honourable names, as the SCRIPTURES—HOLY SCRIPTURES, &c. Josephus says that they were universally believed to have been written by men who received them from God himself by inspiration, and were justly believed to be *divine*. “How firmly we have given credit to these books, he adds, is evident from what we do; for, during so many ages as have passed since they were given to our nation, no one has been so bold as to add any thing to them, or take any thing from them, or make any change in them; but it is natural to all Jews, even from their birth, to esteem those books to contain divine doc-

trines, and to persist in them, and, if occasion be, to die for them. "Now, while Christ fearlessly rebuked the Jews for making the word of God of none effect, through their traditions, neither he nor his apostles drop a hint that they were in error in esteeming the Old Testament Scriptures to be divinely inspired, or allowing them too much authority. On the contrary, the Saviour exhorts them to search their Scriptures, because they testified of him, and contained the words of eternal life. What Moses wrote in the Pentateuch, Christ says, was spoken by God. "Have ye never read that which was *spoken to you by God*, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?" So, what David wrote in the Psalms, and Isaiah, in his prophecies, are said to have been spoken by the Holy Ghost. And what says Peter respecting the Jewish prophets? Does he not assert, that, what they uttered was by the Spirit of Christ speaking in them? And that they wrote, not according to their own will, but as they were moved or inspired by the Holy Ghost, "Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ, which was in them, did signify, when it testified be-

forehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow." "The prophecy came not, in old time, by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." And the declaration of Paul is, if possible, more full and explicit. In one of his letters to Timothy, after reminding him, that, from a child, he had known the Scriptures which were able to make him wise unto salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus, he says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable," &c. These testimonies are surely sufficient and conclusive, as regards the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Pass we, then, to the consideration of the New Testament.

And, here, we might fairly infer the inspiration of the latter from that of the former, by reasoning from analogy. The two Testaments constitute the sacred canon. Is the one part inspired, and the other not? Can it be, that the communications made under the former dispensation, which was temporary, and in great measure shadowy and typical, were dictated by God, and that those of the present dispensation, which is to continue to the end of time, stand on mere human au-

thority? It is, to say the least, highly improbable. But we have more than analogy in support of the divine authority of the New Testament Scriptures.

I. We have large promises of Christ to his apostles, of ample qualifications for their ministerial work; and, especially, the promise of the Holy Spirit, as a Spirit of truth, by whose influence they should be able rightly to understand, and faithfully to publish the gospel message. Look at these promises, how full and comprehensive they are. Fear not, says the divine Master to the timid and feeble band of disciples, as they go forth to the rescue of a world lying in sin, "I will give you a mouth and wisdom which your adversaries can neither gainsay nor resist. The Spirit shall take of mine and show it unto you; shall bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you; he shall teach you all things, and show you things to come, and abide with you for ever." Thus, the Spirit is guaranteed to them, to enlighten, encourage, and sustain them in the mighty conflict; and he is to abide with them, to be at hand in all emergencies, and unfold to them the mysteries of the kingdom, as they could

bear it: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now; howbeit, when the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all the truth." Mark another promise, adapted to an occasion that often occurred: "When they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates and powers, take ye no thought how, or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say; for the Holy Ghost shall teach you, in the same hour, what ye ought to say: for it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." Here we have "the nature of inspiration incidentally disclosed; *it is the Spirit of God speaking in or by an apostle.*"

II. Let us notice the fulfilment of these ample promises, particularly on the day of Pentecost, at the opening of the evangelical dispensation; and, let us recollect what the apostles were before this memorable day of their endowment; how full of doubts and wrong notions about their Lord's kingdom; and mark the sudden change which they undergo, both as to their views of the gospel plan and qualifications for the arduous work to which they had been called. The twelve are assembled, waiting for the fulfilment of

the promise. The day arrives, the room, where they were holding a prayer-meeting, is suddenly shaken; the Spirit descends upon them, in his miraculous power, under the symbol of a lambent flame of fire; they instantly begin to speak in new tongues; unlettered as they were; they publish the glad tidings in the various dialects of the congregated multitude, with a freedom and boldness entirely superhuman. New and enlarged views of the stupendous scheme of redeeming love open upon their mental vision; the gifts of healing, and the power of discerning spirits attend their labours, as the credentials of their embassy. Here you see the apostles fully endowed for the work of the ministry; and can you suppose that, when they sat down to write their narratives and epistles for the instruction of mankind in all future time, they were left to their own erring judgment and unaided powers? It is not credible. The word preached, if unheeded, passes away; but, written, it abideth for the use and benefit of generations. If it behoved to be first preached by divine inspiration, surely it is reasonable as well as scriptural, to believe that it was recorded under the influence and by the dictation of the same infallible guide.

3. Take the case of Paul, who, you know, was soon added to the little band of primitive ministers of the word. According to his own account, he was arrested miraculously and in mercy, while on his way to Damascus a blasphemer of Christ, and a persecutor of his disciples. He saw the Lord Jesus, in a divine vision—heard his voice of rebuke, and felt his saving power—he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision—having received a full revelation of the Christian system, from the Saviour himself, without consulting flesh and blood, he bears it straightway to the Gentiles—goes, in due time, to Jerusalem—joins the church on examination—is soon called of God into Europe—visits Philippi of Macedonia, where he is arrested and imprisoned unjustly; but is soon released by an earthquake—goes forth in all directions, preaching the gospel and founding churches, the Lord attesting and sealing his ministry, by signs and wonders surpassing all the skill and power of man.

Now are we to believe that, when this man of God wrote his fourteen Epistles, which form so large and so important a portion of the sacred rule of Christian faith and duty,

the Spirit left him to lean upon his own resources, at the imminent hazard of mixing up human error with divine truth, designed for the edification of the church to the end of the world? It would be contrary to reasonable expectation, and in the face of all the known analogies of God's government of mankind. Divine assistance is usually adapted to man's necessities; and if, in any thing, special inspiration was needed, we would suppose it was in preparing a book according to which men are expected to believe, and live, and be finally judged.

4. But let us, in the next place, see what the apostles themselves claim for their written communications, whether narrative or epistolary. Take the decision of the council or synod at Jerusalem, on the question carried up from Antioch, respecting the obligation of certain Mosaic rites upon Christians. In the brief preamble of that decision, Acts xv. 28, you find these words: "*It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us,*" &c. This written decree, then, which is incorporated with their other writings in the New Testament, was enacted under the sanction and with the approbation of the Holy Spirit; that is, it is

inspired. Now turn to the close of Paul's epistle to the Romans: "Now to him that is of power to establish you, *according to my gospel,*" that is, my gospel *written in this letter,* for he goes on, "and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began; but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith; to God only wise, be glory, through Jesus Christ, for ever! Amen." This is plain enough; Paul's gospel in this epistle is on a par with the scriptures of the prophets, and in accordance with the commandment of the everlasting God, and, therefore, inspired.

Look at his epistle to the Galatians, i. 6—8, 11, 12. "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. But I certify you, brethren,

that the gospel which was preached by me is not after man; for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but *by the revelation of Jesus Christ.*" Here Paul asserts that he received his gospel directly from Christ,—that it is the *only true* gospel,—and denounces a curse on the man who would pervert it, or introduce any thing in its stead among the churches, and most emphatically declares that by means of *his gospel*, the Galatian Christians had been called into the grace of Christ. But where is his gospel, if not in his epistles? Surely he would not *preach* one doctrine and *write* another. Does not this show his persuasion that he wrote under the moving of the Holy Ghost, and that his letters, no less than his preaching, were inspired?

Read the epistles of John, and you will find similar claims to divine authority, for what *he wrote*. Read in his Apocalypse the short but powerful letters to the seven Asiatic churches, which you will observe he was commanded by Christ to *write*. "To the angel of the church in Ephesus, *write* these things," &c., and at the conclusion of each letter we have this solemn charge: "He that hath an

ear, let him hear what the *Spirit* saith unto the churches." The SPIRIT, then, dictated what the apostle *wrote* to these churches; but the dictation of the Spirit is inspiration, and these epistles are embodied in the New Testament. We may not protract this article by further references; you see the design: it is to show that the sacred writers deemed themselves inspired, and claimed for their productions the respect and reverence due to the infallible oracles of God.

This subject of inspiration is one on which we keep within the leaves of the Bible, in search of evidence. It is a *doctrine*, or rather a *matter of consciousness* to the subjects of it, about which no other person can give any testimony of much value. No man can be *absolutely* certain that another is inspired. We may, however, arrive at a high degree of *moral* certainty, by attending closely to the general character, the motives, the ends, the spirit, the truthfulness, the intelligence, &c., of the individual professing to be inspired. We have a right, too, to demand his credentials, if he come to us with an alleged message from God, and if these be submitted to our inspection, and appear to be full and authentic, we are obliged, by the laws of evi-

dence, to recognize him as an ambassador. Now all these favourable indications meet in the case of the men under consideration. We have not yet looked into their credentials; but we have found them, on examining their writings, and hearing the testimony of some of their cotemporaries concerning them, to be worthy of confidence in other matters, and there appears no good reason why we should not give them credit, when they tell us that they were employed and moved by the Holy Spirit to write a book which has come down to us through the hands of many generations, and all along been regarded by many competent judges as containing a revelation from God. And if upon examining the evidence of their mission, as we purpose doing in our next two lectures, it appears to be clear and unsuspecting, we shall certainly feel under moral obligation to receive their communications, as the oracles of divine truth.

Of the nature of inspiration, we know nothing but what the scriptures teach us. Of the mode, or process of operation, we know literally nothing, for we are taught nothing; and, in our present imperfect state we are, perhaps, incapable of being taught anything more than

the fact. This we can believe on testimony; and the belief of it seems essential to the idea of a perfect book, in which we may repose entire confidence. Without such a guide, we are out at sea, with neither pole-star nor compass, and must be in doubt and jeopardy every hour. "If," in the language of Dr. Knapp, "the apostles did not enjoy that high divine influence called inspiration, we might be easily disturbed by the doubt, whether they rightly understood, and taught this and the other doctrine of the Christian religion; whether, for example, their faithful attachment to Christ, their love to his person, and profound reverence for his character, did not betray them unintentionally and unconsciously into mistaken and exaggerated views concerning his person, his divinity, and his glory, in his state of exaltation. It would be easy, in this way, if no inspiration of the Bible were admitted, to render doubtful the most important doctrines of Christianity. This is what has been done, especially in modern times, by those who deny inspiration." Some things in the scriptures, it is plain, could not have been known, but by the direct teachings of the omniscient God. The work of creation, for

instance, its order, and the time occupied in that prodigious effect of creative power, could not, possibly, be known to Moses or any other writer, but by suggestion from the Creator himself; for there were then no living, human witnesses to attest the fact: and all monuments must have been swept away by the universal deluge. Neither could future, and far distant events—many of them quite beyond human calculation, and unlikely to occur in the ordinary course of nature, have been foretold, without the like divine teaching. In the former case, our confidence in the narrative rests entirely on the fact of the writer's inspiration, &c.; so also, in the latter, except in so far as the predictions have been fulfilled; and, then, we infer the inspiration of the prophets from the accomplishment of their announcements. So in regard to doctrines, beyond the reach of man's unaided powers of discovery; such as redemption by the incarnate Son of God, a future state, and a final judgment. In all these, and the like cases, where the ordinary means of information fail, the *ideas, certainly*, and the language, *probably*, must have been conveyed to the minds of men by the *suggestive inspiration* of God.

In regard to historical matters—facts and events, which come under the cognizance of our senses, but which may be misunderstood by erring mortals, even when their intentions are pure, the inspiration of *superintendence* seems indispensable, in order to secure a system of truth worthy of the faith and obedience of mankind. In such a mass of various matters as the Bible contains, how could we expect to find truth unmixed with the faults common to all human productions—just what we need—*enough*—and none *too much* to afford us the means of a right faith, and a proper regulation of our conduct in all the relations of life, without supposing the supervision and guidance of unerring wisdom and infinite goodness? Indeed, the doctrine of inspiration is so interlinked with all the arguments and evidences in favour of divine revelation—it is so *inwrought* into the entire web of revealed religion, that if you *erase* it, you will find the mutilated fabric that remains, will not shield you from the harassing doubts and tormenting fears, which must, at times, disturb your peace and mar your happiness, upon finding yourselves *here*, and *such as you are*, without knowing, *of a cer-*

tainty, whence you came, and how you became such creatures as you are—*whither* you are tending, and what will become of you when you go hence. Now in our sacred book we find a religion that suits us; that lets us know our origin; the reason of our sorrows, &c.; points out a way in which these sorrows may be cured; a religion which certainly bears some strong marks of truth; a religion which spreads light across the valley of death, and cheers us with a hope of life and glory beyond the precincts of time, through a mediator. The writers of this book claim for it divine authority; they assure us they were moved by the Holy One to pen this volume for our use and guidance: and, finding them competent and truth-telling witnesses in other respects, we believe them in this; and therefore receive their writings as the inspired word of God, till we see *good reason* to lay it aside, or find something better to put in its place. This is the sum and substance of all that we know and profess, on the subject of inspiration. Let us, next, attend to a few of the difficulties which, at first blush, seem to lie in the way of our reception of this book, as a communication from God, for the govern-

ment and salvation of our race. To some, these difficulties have appeared insurmountable, and been regarded as furnishing good reasons for turning away from the subject altogether, or for waging war against its pretensions, as futile and deceptive.

1. The first that usually meets the inquiring mind, is its *partial and limited bestowment*. The Almighty, they tell us, is no respecter of persons; if, therefore, he meant to give to his great family of mankind any instruction, or means of moral and religious improvement, beyond and above what he has given in the light of reason and the book of nature, he would have given it to *all and every one*; he would have written it on the face of the sky, using the stars, or some such brilliant lights, for letters; so that all, not only *might*, but *must* read his law and learn his grace. Now there is a plausibleness in this supposition, at first glance; but it is urged generally with more confidence and positiveness than either reason or observation will warrant. How is it, candid objector, in your book of nature, with which you profess to be so well satisfied? Is there nothing there that looks like divine sovereignty, on the part of the author? Are

the endowments of individuals and the allotments of nations alike rich and advantageous? All minds are not equally vigorous and capable; and, if they were so *natively*, they are not favoured with equal means and opportunities of culture. Some are weak, in various degrees, even down to idiocy. Some are born geniuses; and the hand of cultivation is about them from their cradle, onward and upward to the high places of science and literature, of statesmanship and professional distinction. Others of humble origin, are picked up as a pearl from the mire, and cherished by charity, or are obliged to work their own way into usefulness and comfort, by the sweat of their brow; yea, and in instances not a few, at the cost of health and life itself.

The allotments of tribes and nations are also very different. Some have a balmy atmosphere, and a fertile soil, with a profusion of the finest fruits; others occupy the frozen regions, or the burning sands. Some enjoy the conveniences of art, and the luxuries of refinement; others remain in a savage, or barbarous state from age to age. Some are blessed with a well balanced and free government; others writhe under the rod of des-

potism, the slaves of tyrants. Some have navies and armies, of force enough to keep the world in awe; others, as the tribes of Africa, are hunted down, captured, and sold into perpetual bondage, like the beasts of the forest. These inequalities we can bear without charging God foolishly, with injustice or partiality; because he teaches us, in the book which we regard as from him, that this world is but the vestibule of the world to come, where wisdom, and justice, and goodness will shine forth in united splendour; and every murmur against the King eternal will be hushed, by a full conviction, in view of the final result, to which he will conduct his dark and mysterious dispensations, that all his ways are right, and his judgments just. But how will the mortal Deist dispose of these appearances of partiality and injustice, which he cannot but read in his bible of nature? Let him think well, and ponder his path, lest he find himself, when too late to retrace his steps, pressing on the breaking margin of the deep, dark gulf of hopeless Atheism. But the objection is utterly unfounded, in our view, as regards special divine revelation. We hold that it *was* given to *all mankind*, in the

progenitors of our race; but that, being mutilated and corrupted by human depravity, it became necessary to renew and enlarge it, and present it in a more permanent form. Dim glimmerings of primitive revelation reached the nations around, and far beyond the limits of the Holy Land: else, how can you account for the origin of animal sacrifices, so extensively and profusely offered in pagan nations? Was this a dictate of nature? Could it have entered the mind of man, without a divine suggestion, that the blood of animals would be of any avail for the pardon of sin? To us it seems very unlikely. In our blessed book we are assured that no such offerings can possess any inherent efficacy; and here we learn the meaning and design of these inferior sacrifices. They shadowed forth, and held up to the view of mankind, in impressive and significant symbol, the shedding of that blood, without which there is no remission. In every lamb that bled on Jewish altars we see a type of the Lamb of God, virtually slain from the foundation of the world, whose blood cleanseth from all sin: and some dim traditional knowledge of this divine appointment must, we think, have

given rise to the use of bloody sacrifices among the gentile tribes. Again, we ask, how can you account for the hebdomadal or weekly division of time, so extensively observed by several of the ancient nations, without supposing them to have derived it from the divine institution of the weekly sabbath, immediately on the creation of the world? What right have we, then, to object to divine revelation that it has been but very partially bestowed? The fact is, as we verily believe, it has been *given*, and *renewedly* given, with increasing light and evidence to mankind; but it never has been, and never will be *forced* upon them. Religion is a voluntary thing, and man is a moral being. If a people reject the Bible, it will leave them. There were seven churches in Asia Minor of apostolic planting; but they degenerated, and heeded not the Lord's faithful counsels, and the gospel left them, and the hand of desolation has been upon that once beautiful land ever since. And, now, the sacred scripture is read in upwards of a hundred and seventy living languages; so that it is difficult to find a country, or any considerably peopled isle of the sea, where Christianity has not lighted up

the lamp of hope, and shed forth her peaceful, holy influence. The partial and limited bestowment of the precious boon, ought not, then, to be regarded as a formidable objection to its cordial reception by those to whom it is actually offered. But

2. The obscurity, the mystery, the great difficulty of understanding it, is alleged as another objection to the Bible, and to its acceptance as a heaven-inspired volume. Now we meet this with considerations very much resembling those which have just been presented in reference to the preceding objection. It lies against the book of nature as forcibly as it does against the Bible. There are many facts in the former as well as in the latter which we cannot comprehend, although we believe and act upon them every day, and without scruple. God manifests himself in his *works*, and in his *word*, in such way as is best adapted to call into exercise man's active powers, and improve his moral character. Nothing is made so plain as to supersede thought, and some degree of investigation; and we are so constituted, that a large proportion of our happiness arises from exertion and careful observation. The process of ve-

getation, the harmonious movements of the planetary system, the ebbing and flowing of the ocean, and a thousand things in nature, are mysteries to us. We see and enjoy their beneficial effects; but the causes or innate nature of these things we cannot fully comprehend: we, therefore, refer them to the unsearchable wisdom, power, and goodness of the Creator. But, in regard to the most important matters in revelation, they are easily understood, and may be readily and reasonably believed on testimony. What difficulty do you find, for instance, in getting at the meaning of the ten commandments,—the sermon on the mount,—the precept of doing as you would be done by,—of doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly before God? Is there any thing very mysterious in repentance, faith, and turning from our evil ways? These are certainly practical duties. And as to the great fundamental doctrines of our religion, the incarnation, the atonement and intercession of Christ, they are matters of belief, not of comprehension. They do not contradict reason, but transcend its grasp; and their blissful effects are known only by experience. Keep these precepts, and make

yourselves experimentally acquainted with these doctrines, and you can study the dark and deep things of the Bible at your leisure. If you should not get to the bottom of them here, you will have more light, and more time, and more mental vigour hereafter. "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."

But you find some things written and enjoined, of which you *can see no use*. Well, bear in mind that the Bible is a book *for the world*, in its successive ages and generations. What you may not find very useful to you, may have been, or may be, in future time, very useful to others. Still, there are bad things, and, often, a bad spirit manifested, by persons who hold a conspicuous place in the Bible. Be it so. But are these bad doings, and this wrong spirit commended to you by God for imitation? No, verily. They are detailed, for truth's sake, and to show you what human nature is. You should recollect, also, what was stated in a preceding lecture, that the subjects of inspiration were not always, or in their private character, under the infallible guidance of the Holy Spirit; but only when *directly* employed in making

known the will of God. If David, and Peter, and others, were left for a time to commit offences, for which they were, afterwards, humbled to the dust, it is a lesson to us and to all men: "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." But you will remind us, perhaps, that

3. The Bibles are not all exactly alike,—there are *various readings*, as they are called, in the old manuscripts, from which the numerous versions are made. It is true there are various readings; Mill, Wetstein, Griesbach, and others, have, by prodigious research, found and collated some thousands; but, after all, to what do they amount? They are seized with avidity by fault-finders; but really, and according to some of the soundest critics and best judges in such matters, that ever lived, they do not affect a single doctrine, or falsify any material fact in our sacred book. If they were all given up, you would still have the whole gospel, as well of the Old, as of the New Testament. They relate, chiefly, to grammar, the transposition of sentences and the collocation of words. Our view of inspiration is, that God so aided and guided the writers, that we have a volume under his sig-

nature, and by means of his special providence, comprising the facts, and doctrines, and institutions, which are able, by his blessing, to make us wise unto salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus, the only Mediator and Redeemer. You say you reject modern pretenders to inspiration, and demand why you should not reject the ancients of the same class? We answer in few words, because our ancients came with credentials, miracles, and prophecy, which we purpose examining in our next two lectures.

LECTURE IV.

THE EVIDENCE OF MIRACLES.

As we progress in the general argument for the truth and divine origin of our religion, it is important to bear along with us, and hold in remembrance the steps taken, or the points proved. If this be neglected, the result, or conclusion, at which we shall arrive in due time, will be less clear and convincing than it would have been by due attention to the progress of the reasoning. As in mathematical science, what has been proved is not expected to be proved over again; so it is in regard to any given point in morals or religion. It is true that moral arguments are not so closely connected, or so dependent on one another, as are the successive steps in the solution of a problem in mathematics; less or more proofs may be sufficient and satisfactory in the one case; whereas in the other, if a single link be broken or lost, the whole chain is sundered, and the demonstra-

tion fails. But yet, in moral reasoning, especially when the question to be settled is complicated and attended with seeming difficulties, the more arguments we can adduce tending to the same conclusion, the stronger it will be, and the deeper will be our conviction of its truth and soundness. Arguments may, indeed, be multiplied beyond what is necessary or useful;—some may be inappropriate and of doubtful bearing, and therefore injure a good cause. Our aim is to select a few of the most obvious and indisputable, arranged, according to our best judgment, so that their applicability may be perceived and their united impression be felt by the candid and inquiring mind: but the connection,—the links in the chain of reasoning, must not be overlooked or forgotten. We have a right to assume now and proceed upon what has been demonstrated; viz.: that the sacred Scriptures were penned by the writers whose names they bear, or to whom they have long been ascribed; that they narrate facts and events as they really occurred, and are therefore entitled to the credit due to all authentic history; we have seen that some things in these writings could not have been known to men,

but by divine teaching; such as the creation of the world, when there were no human witnesses, the radical doctrines of Christianity, which transcend the line of reason, and far distant events, plainly, beyond the ken of mortals; we have seen reason, also, to conclude that, in regard to matters that might be known, to some extent, without divine suggestion, a book such as the Bible is,—so far-reaching, so complex and various in its contents, and so stupendous in its design, could not have been composed by men without the special supervision and guidance of unerring wisdom. Accordingly, the writers profess to have been inspired,—they come to us as ambassadors from the high court of heaven,—they bring to us messages as from God, and claim for them the faith and obedience of mankind, as the infallible oracles of divine truth.

In the preceding lecture, we endeavoured to ascertain what they mean by inspiration; and have found, that, from the nature of the thing, and according to their own views of the matter, it consisted in two degrees; i. e. in God's suggesting to them the *ideas*, and probably the *words*, in which to convey those ideas to others, on subjects above human con-

ception; and in his supervision and guidance of them, in selecting and communicating to the world such matters of history and experience, as he deemed fit and proper to be embodied in his book of doctrine and precept, for the instruction, and government, and salvation of mankind.—We ask for their credentials, or the authenticated evidences of their divine mission; which are presented to us in the form of *miracles* and *prophecies*. These we now proceed to examine; and if they appear to be fair and above reasonable suspicion, we hold ourselves pledged and bound to regard them as the ministers of God, and will receive their communications, as of the highest authority, and worthy of all acceptance.

The *miracles* will be the subject of our present lecture, and the *prophecies* we shall consider in our next.

Christ and his apostles, certainly, according to all the accounts we have of them, and we have accounts, as well from their enemies as from themselves and their friends, did very wonderful works. They did those works, too, in attestation of their divine mission; and if they were indeed miraculous performances,

we see not how we can reasonably refuse to acknowledge their claims, and accept their teachings as divine and authoritative. But what is a miracle? Not every extraordinary performance or phenomenon, but something out of the usual course of events. A dangerous disease may be removed by a surgical operation, or by the use of medicine, and yet have nothing miraculous in it. But if an inveterate ailment, as the leprosy, be cured instantly by any one, just uttering the words, "I will; be thou cleansed;" this we would call a miracle. It is an effect for which we can assign no cause, other than the power of God.

Mr. Hume defines a miracle to be "a violation of the laws of nature." We object to the definition, for two reasons: first, because it conveys the idea of something wrong and disorderly: secondly, because of the inference deducible from it, against all miracles. No creature, it is manifest, can disturb an established law of nature. He may disregard it, and if he does he will suffer the penalty. And the presumption is, that God *would* not interfere for the violation of a law which he had enacted; for if he did, it would imply a change in him, and some defect in his

enactments; therefore, a miracle is not, in any instance, to be expected, and cannot be rendered credible by any possible amount of evidence. Now there is sophistry in this; and it has blinded and misled many honest inquirers. A better definition is, that a miracle is a *suspension* of some law, or ordinary operation of nature. But neither this, nor any that we have met with, is entirely satisfactory. The expression, "law of nature," as used in this connection, is obscure and deceptive. What is a law of nature? A law binding rational and accountable creatures, we can readily comprehend. But insensate matter, cannot, as we conceive, be bound by any law, either to remain inert, or to operate, or to move in any given way, uniformly and for ever, in the *absence* of that intelligent and efficient agency, which first brought it into being and has ever since used it, whether at rest or in action, for certain great and beneficent purposes, in reference to his rational and sensitive creatures. It is the providence of the Creator, touching, and controlling, and directing all things and all events, that secures that uniformity in nature's operations or *laws*, as we are accustomed to call them;

which is so convenient and beneficial to the world. The doctrine that the Creator, after imposing on the material universe certain indescribable laws, retired behind the curtain, and shut himself up in his own uncreated pavilion, is fraught with moral mischief. Its direct tendency is to give license to vice, to discourage virtue, and cover affliction with the mantle of despair. If God sustains and controls at pleasure, the ordinary operations of secondary causes, then we have good reason to rely upon him,—to look up to him in prayer, and submit to his providential decisions with filial confidence; and then may a miracle occur, without the violation of any law, upon a suitable occasion and for a great and good purpose. Such occasion there was in the days of Moses and the prophets; and again, under the ministry of Christ and his apostles. The obvious design in both cases, was to attest and verify a revelation for the temporal and eternal good of mankind. It is as easy and self-consistent for God to *suspend* as to *maintain* the usual course of events. But says the philosopher just named, “no evidence can render a miracle credible.” Then God can do what he cannot so authen-

ticate, that his intelligent creatures can reasonably believe it. This gross libel on God and human nature, were we to undertake its refutation, would throw us back upon the credibility of the sacred Scriptures. But we have disposed of that branch of our subject, and shall not resume it now. The skeptic's notion would limit the Almighty, and scandalize the intellectual constitution which he has given to man. The fact is, we are so constituted, and that, as might easily be shown, for wise purposes, that we almost *instinctively* rely on testimony, even before we examine whether it bear the marks of truth. Children believe every thing that is told them, until they learn, by degrees, that some things that are said, are not true and not to be credited. And we all believe a thousand things and some very extraordinary facts too, on the testimony of others, as *firmly* as we believe our own existence, or the existence of things that come in contact with our senses every day. But says our skeptical philosopher, "testimony is so often found by experience to be fallacious, that we can place little reliance on it; and a *miracle* is a thing so utterly contrary to uniform experience,

that we cannot believe it on any amount of testimony that can possibly be adduced in its support." Indeed! Let us see. On this principle, the people of Canton, or Ceylon, can never be made to believe that we have in this country, such a thing as *ice* on our lakes and rivers, strong enough to bear men and horses; for it is contrary to their uniform experience in that warm climate. But the forming of ice is not a miracle. Granted; but you see that *experience* is not uniform and invariable in all parts of the world: it is not, therefore, an infallible guide in reasoning about matters of fact. I have never experienced an earthquake;—my experience has been all my life *uniformly* against its occurrence; and yet I believe that these terrific convulsions of nature have taken place, as much as I believe any thing else, seen or not seen by me; and that, too, without demanding any extraordinary degree or kind of testimony in support of the fact. This sophism about the comparative value of experience and testimony, in regard to extraordinary past events, may be shown to be self-destructive, by carrying out its principles and looking at their effects. Suppose, for instance, that the

secret of compounding gunpowder had perished, by the death of its discoverer, immediately after its extraordinary effects had been exhibited before a hundred competent witnesses: the fact of its amazing powers must be rejected as a manifest falsehood; for, that a small, black powder should possess such powers, contradicts the universal experience of mankind. The depositions of the hundred witnesses, being in opposition to uniform experience, go for nothing. Is it not more probable that the witnesses should be liars, than that the experience of mankind should be contravened? Therefore, the said small, black powder, possesses no such powers as the hundred false witnesses ascribed to it.¹ This would be a *legitimate* inference from Mr. Hume's premises; but is it *just* and *true*?

But still, it is alleged, that whatever weight the testimony of the witnesses of Bible miracles might have had with those who lived near the date of their occurrence, it can be no fit ground of faith to *us*, who live in the nineteenth century. But why not? Does time gradually diminish and finally annih-

¹ Horne's Introduction, &c.

late the value and credibility of testimony? We have not so learned. However it may be in regard to *tradition*, now that human life is so much shorter than it was before Noah's flood, the case is certainly different with *written* testimony. We have the same documents that the people of the first two or three centuries had, together with the monumental institutions and usages, which took their rise at the time the miracles were wrought. For the last four centuries these writings have been in print and in many languages, as we had occasion to mention in a preceding lecture. We have seen, moreover, the progress and good effects of the religion taught in these documents: so that the testimony would seem to us to be corroborated, rather than weakened by time. We hear no complaint of the diminution of evidence in support of other ancient facts! Why then should we distrust the declarations of those who witnessed the gospel facts?

But there would be no end to answering objections. A miracle is possible with God. It is his act, either directly, or through an agent commissioned by him; and when he thus suspends the ordinary course of his pro-

vidence, and controls the operation of subordinate causes, we may rest assured, it is for a great and good end, and that each case, of such unusual procedure, will be strongly and distinctively marked. Let us proceed then to notice a few of the distinctive characteristics of the miracles narrated in the Bible, and which distinguish them from counterfeits; for miracles, like other good things, have been counterfeited: and,

1. The object or design. This was manifestly two-fold: first, to vindicate the Creator's claim to the exclusive homage and worship of his intelligent creatures: secondly, to attest his special revelations to mankind, for their instruction and salvation. Such was the obvious intention of the miracles wrought by the hands of Moses and the other prophets of the former dispensation. They rebuked idolatry, and taught men to look to Jehovah, as their only Lord and Saviour. The aim of the magicians of Egypt and the prophets of Baal was to flatter the king and uphold their craft. When they came in collision with the Lord's ministers, they were foiled and confounded,—their enchantments were shown to be tricks of jugglery, to wheedle and deceive

men : and thus the precept, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," and the invitation, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth," were enforced by a display of the supreme power and authority of the divine Lawgiver and only Redeemer.

So of the miracles of Christ and his apostles. The manifest design was, to maintain the rights of the eternal God, in opposition to the pretensions of false and powerless deities; and proclaim the true and only way of salvation, through a Mediator possessing all power in heaven and earth. "Think not," says Christ, "that I came to destroy the law; I came not to destroy, but to fulfil it." The first great commandment of the law is, "Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart;" and the second is like unto it—"Love thy neighbour as thyself." "Behold the Lamb of God," says the precursor of the Messiah, pointing to Jesus, "which taketh away the sin of the world;"—"His blood cleanseth from all sin"—"Neither is there salvation in any other," re-echo the apostles. "The works that I do," says the Redeemer, "they bear witness of me;"—"We know," says Nicodemus, "that thou art a teacher come from God; for no

man can do the miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." When the Master ascended to heaven and his servants went forth preaching his gospel, he attended their ministry by his Spirit, confirming the word by signs or miracles. Thus we see the connection between the word of Christ and his miracles. The miracles confirmed the doctrine, demonstrating its divine origin. The grand object of all Bible miracles was to promote the glory of God and the happiness of man; the greatest, the most beneficent, the most God-like design, that can be imagined;—an object worthy of infinite goodness, and in the circumstances of our fallen race, requiring and justifying an interruption of the ordinary course of nature. How else could a revelation of truth and grace be made, so as to command the faith, and rouse the attention of a world slumbering in sin?

Now if you test the reported doings of Apollonius, Vespasian and others, sometimes adduced to disparage the gospel miracles, by this mark of a genuine miracle, you will find they shrink from a comparison, and dwindle down to utter contempt. Their object is partial, local, selfish, and altogether unworthy of God, as their author and patron.

2. Another criterion of a genuine miracle is, that it be *instantaneous* in its effects and *without* the use of *means*, i. e., without the use of means having any natural connection with the effect produced. This characteristic marks the miracles of Moses and of Jesus. The plagues of Egypt came upon the oppressors suddenly. The waters of the Red Sea opened *instantly*, before the ransomed tribes, upon the waving of the rod of Moses, which he bore as the symbol of authority, but which, certainly, had no natural tendency to produce the effect. Jesus said, "Lazarus, come forth;" and he came forth, after being in the grave four days. To the deceased son of the widow of Nain, he said, "Young man, I say unto thee arise; and he that was dead sat up and began to speak; and he delivered him to his mother." Here are plain indications of the divine presence and power. Nature, or secondary causes, operate gradually; but with God, a volition is instantly obeyed. "He said, Let there be light; and light was." Bring fictitious miracles to this test, and you will see a wide difference between them and the miracles recorded in the Bible.

3. A third mark of a divine miracle, is, *publicity*, and that it be of *such a nature*, that a plain man of common sense can judge of the fact. The degree of publicity may be more or less, according to the circumstances of each case; but a thing done in a corner is always liable to suspicion. But if an opportunity be afforded for scrutiny, and if the fact be palpable and obvious to men's senses, the possibility of imposition, by addressing the imagination, or operating on the nerves of witnesses, seems to be precluded. Now that the scripture miracles bear this mark of genuineness, is undeniable. They were wrought in the face of day, for the most part, in the presence of great numbers of people, and were open for the inspection of all, both friends and foes. Take the turning of water into wine, at the marriage in Cana. On that occasion there was a lack of the customary beverage; which indicates that the number of guests was greater than had been expected; and there is no reason to suppose that all, or any considerable proportion of the persons present, were disciples of Christ, for it was one of the first, if not the very first miracle that he performed. Well, the waiters were

directed to fill the water-pots, and they were filled accordingly to the brim; the servants were then ordered to draw out of the contents, and bear it to the governor of the feast; and it proved to be wine, and wine of an excellent quality. The unlooked for supply became a subject of remark; the change was effected *on the spot* and *instantly*. The servants could testify that they filled the stone pots full of water, and that when drawn out, it was wine. The fact in this case was palpable to the senses. The servants witnessed all that was done; the master of ceremonies tasted the liquor,—pronounced it good wine, and called upon the bridegroom to know whence it had come. Here was publicity, and the thing done was of such a nature, that it could hardly be mistaken by the spectators. The like observations are applicable to the feeding of thousands by the multiplication of a few loaves and fishes; the raising of Lazarus, and the young man of Nain; and the cure of the man lame from his birth, at Jerusalem, by the apostles Peter and John. In all these cases, and others that might be named, there was no concealment,—no selecting of *ex parte* witnesses,—every thing was done

openly, in the presence of skeptics, as well as believers, and the facts were of such a character, that plain people could judge of them as readily and as correctly as the most learned. In some instances, it is true, that Christ in the early part of his ministry, to avoid public disturbance, by exciting the jealousy of the authorities, enjoined it upon those whom he cured to be quiet,—to return to their families, resuming their ordinary business, and let the effects, which were obvious and permanent, proclaim the cause. In some instances, as in the restoration to life of the daughter of Jairus, and the healing of the mother of Peter's wife, the circumstances being cases of family affliction, were such as did not admit at the time of the presence of many and various spectators; but the cures were lasting, and could be inquired into by any that chose. And inquiry was made, and satisfaction obtained from the subjects of miracles in several instances. The scribes interrogated one of the men that was relieved from blindness: "What *did* he unto thee that thy sight is restored?" "Why," said the man, "he made clay of spittle and anointed mine eyes, and told me to go to the pool of Siloam

and wash; and I went and washed, and came back, seeing." And certain Jews went to Bethany, we are told, "not for Jesus' sake only, but to see Lazarus, who had been raised from the dead." Try the heathen prodigies and other pious frauds of later times, by this criterion—the *openness* and *palpable character* of the gospel miracles, and you will see the difference. We have not time to institute a comparison.

4. Another characteristic of the miracles of the Bible is, the *complete* and *instant* success of every attempt. The miraculous works of Christ and his apostles, to say nothing of those of Moses and the prophets, were numerous and various both in kind and locality, extending through a period, counting from the beginning of Christ's ministry to the death of the apostle John, of upwards of half a century, and yet not a single instance of failure is noticed and recorded by friend or foe. The inability of the disciples to cast out a demon, on a certain occasion, is no exception; for the Master *did* what they could not do, through the weakness of their faith and the want of a proper sense of dependence on God. Now this is a remarkable, and a distinguishing

fact. The Emperor Vespasian is not reported to have attempted miraculous cures, except in Alexandria, just after his elevation to the imperial throne, and that, for the obvious purpose of raising him, in the estimation of the people. He laughed at the idea, when it was suggested to him, and really did not believe, with all his vanity, that he was endowed with such power. The courtiers coaxed and flattered him to make the attempt. And after all, as we learn from Tacitus, only two cures were effected, that looked like miracles! Two men, the one blind and the other lame. The physicians on being consulted, made report that, in the case of the blind man, the organ of vision was not destroyed,—and the limb of the other might be restored, if the proper remedy could be discovered. Yet these, Hume says, are as well authenticated miracles as any on record. It is humbling to observe how sadly a strong and cultivated mind may be warped, and subjected, and bigoted to a system of error. The tricks of a heathen prince, extorted and proclaimed by his flatterers, for no higher purpose than his official glory, as well authenticated, and as worthy of credit, as the miracles of the gos.

pel! Who, that can measure the force of evidence and is not given over to utter infatuation, can believe it?

Again, it is well known and confessed, that many of the miserable patients, that waited at the tomb of the Abbé Paris, died, or went away uncured; and those recoveries that were said to be effected, may be accounted for, on other grounds than the intercession of the canonized saint. But what hapless victim of disease, or of the devil, ever went away from Christ complaining of disappointment or neglect? No such case is reported; whence we may conclude, that none occurred, for there were enemies and opposers always and every where, ready to seize upon and use any thing and every thing plausible, to the disparagement of the Redeemer and his cause.

5. There are monumental witnesses, and religious observances still in use, to attest the truth of some of the principal miracles of Moses and Jesus Christ. Look at the *twelve* stones, set up at Gilgal by order of Joshua. What mean they, if not to perpetuate the remembrance of the miraculous passage of Jordan, under the auspices of Israel's God? What could have been the origin of the Jew-

ish Passover, but the miraculous exodus of the ransomed tribes from the bondage of Egypt? And the feast of weeks, called the feast of Pentecost—what does it mean, but to keep up the remembrance of the giving of the law at Mount Sinai, being fifty days after the exodus? The *change* of the *weekly* Sabbath, from the seventh to the first day of the week—what does this mean, and why was the change made, if not to celebrate the greatest of all miracles,—the resurrection of Christ, who is Lord of the Sabbath? And here are our two *great* and *peculiarly Christian* ordinances,—BAPTISM and the LORD'S SUPPER. We mean BAPTISM, in the name of the Holy Trinity; and the Sacramental Supper, pursuant to Christ's appointment, for the purpose of showing forth his death for the redemption of his people. These may be regarded as monuments of all the extraordinary facts connected with the rise and progress of the Christian religion. The existence and observance of these institutions cannot be accounted for, but by admitting the truthfulness of the gospel history, which includes the miracles. The former, in its present form, undoubtedly, originated in the commission

which Christ gave the apostles, after his resurrection:—"Go teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," &c. We say, in its present and Christian form; for there were various ceremonial ablutions in use before the Christian era; but they were not Christian baptism. Even John's baptism was not, strictly speaking, Christian; as is plain from the fact that Christ himself received it, not as a sign of regeneration and the remission of sin, for he was not a subject of either; but in the fulfilment of all righteousness, i. e. in compliance with divine rites, then obligatory and in conformity to ancient usage, of divine authority, in entering publicly, upon the office of prophet, priest and king of his church. Baptism, as now used, recognizes the supremacy of Christ, together and equally with that of the Father and the Spirit; and, as it originated in his command to the apostles, after he rose from the dead, according to his prediction, its administration indirectly commemorates his resurrection, *that miracle of miracles*, if we may so speak, and complete demonstration of the validity of his pretensions, as God's Messiah and man's Redeemer. The other mo-

numental institution, viz., the Eucharist, more properly styled, the Lord's Supper, as its object is to honour him, and keep his people in mind of his redeeming love, could not have originated but in the truth of the miracles. He would not have appointed, and that on the eve of his death, an ordinance which, if it should be observed at all, must, in the event of his not rising from the dead, commemorate his shame. He must have known with divine certainty, that he would rise and be held in everlasting and most grateful remembrance. Nor would the disciples, unless we suppose them to have been idiotic fanatics, observe and keep up an institution to perpetuate the remembrance of their own disappointment, as it must have done, if their Master had not risen as he said he would. So that the ordinance must have originated in the truth of the main fact and chief miracle of the gospel, and does commemorate the most precious doctrine of Christianity, viz., that "we have redemption through the blood of Christ."

6. One more consideration, and we shall sum up and conclude this lecture. Christ in his incarnation and sufferings was, *himself*, a *subject* as well as a *worker* of miracles.

He was conceived in a miraculous way, that his human nature might be immaculate; he was preserved in infancy, miraculously, by the interference of an angel, from the murderous designs of Herod. Three times, during his ministry, he was proclaimed, by a voice from heaven, to be God's beloved Son; and, at his death, nature departing for a time from her usual course, gave impressive signs of homage for her Lord. The earthquake, the rending rocks, the supernatural darkness, the sundered veil and the opening graves, bore unequivocal witness to his infinite love and matchless glory. Observe, also, that our blessed Lord was the subject of specific prophecy, which is a species of standing miracle, and will come more particularly under consideration in the next lecture. But we cannot forbear saying here, that Isaiah has pointed out the very miracles performed by Christ, that were to designate the Messiah, and commend him to the faith of the world. "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped; then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing." What a cloud of witnesses! what an accumulation

of evidence! what a converging of the rays of light to the central glory of God's moral system! Who would not join the convicted Centurion in his honest confession, "Truly this is the Son of God!" You see the close and intimate connection between the reality of the miracles, and the truth of the Bible.

Let us now sum up the argument, on this topic, and conclude. Spinoza, one of the shrewdest of unbelievers, is reported to have said:—"If I could believe one of the miracles of Christ, I would abandon my theory and become a Christian." And why could he not believe? Was it for the want of evidence? How can it be? Miracles are acts of the God of nature, suspending her regular operations for the best of purposes, the glory of the Creator and the good of man. Our miracles were wrought expressly to attest our religion; to demonstrate its divine origin and just claim to human credence. Their credibility, as matters of fact, rests on the common basis of all history, the successive testimony of living witnesses, corroborated by monuments and observances coeval with the facts which they commemorate. These miracles were wrought publicly in va-

rious places, on a variety of subjects, and during a long period of time, and without failure in a single instance; the effects followed the acts instantly, and in the absence of natural means; they were of a kind that could be easily judged of by plain observers, and the results were beneficent and enduring; they gave rise to monuments and religious observances which are still to be seen. The great efficient worker of these miracles was, himself, a subject of miracles and prophecy. Nature obeyed his word, and yielded homage to her living Lord; and, when, as Mediator, he died, "the just for the unjust," she veiled her face, and bowed her head at the cross with reverential awe. What more is wanting? What more, from the nature of the case, could have been given in the way of proof? Here are signs from earth, and signs from heaven; and even the spirits of darkness render their reluctant witness, "crying out and confessing, 'Thou art Christ, the Son of God;' and he, rebuking them, suffered them not to speak; for they knew that he was the Christ." Miracles, thus avouched, have a strong claim to our unwavering faith in Christ and his gospel; for they demon-

strate the validity of his pretensions. Why, if we reject the gospel, we will have to encounter miracles of another sort, quite as hard to believe, and as contrary to our experience as any recorded in the sacred volume. "Seeing, then, that we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us; and let us run, with patience, the race that is set before us, *looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.*"

LECTURE V.

EVIDENCE OF PROPHECY.

IT was said in our last lecture, that miracles and prophecy constitute the credentials of the inspired penmen, *i. e.*, the evidence of their mission from God, with his messages of truth and grace to mankind. The miracles we have examined, and have found that they were deviations from the ordinary course of events, or suspensions of the laws of nature, by divine power, to attest and authenticate the doctrines of the Bible, taught, as well by Moses and the prophets, as by Christ and his apostles. The other part of these credentials, *viz.*, prophecy, which is a kind of standing miracle, we will now proceed to consider, very briefly: for it is far from our purpose to give a dissertation on prophecy, or to undertake the solution of all the questions that have been raised on the subject. Our sole object here, is to bring out the argument de-

ducible from this branch of the evidences, for the truth and authority of our religion, and present it in a dense, but intelligible form, so that its force may be perceived and felt. Let us, then, endeavour, first, to ascertain what genuine prophecy is, and how it is distinguished from heathen oracles and other false pretensions. Secondly, the scope, or general scheme of scripture prophecy. Thirdly, notice some specimens of its actual fulfilment. And, fourthly, its bearing on the truth of Christianity. And,

I. The nature of genuine prophecy: It is the predicting or foretelling of such future events as can be known only to the omniscient God. Man's knowledge is limited to the past and the present. The knowledge of past events he derives from testimony; and that of the present he gathers from observation and experience. Of the future, he knows nothing. We know not what a day will bring forth; except what we expect from the regular course of nature, or the action of certain physical or moral causes, of which we have had some experience in time past. Thus we count upon the sun's rising in the morning; and the return of spring at the usual period

of the year; upon the ebbing and flowing of the tides; and the matured fruits of the earth, in due season. Thus the astronomer can foretell eclipses and other celestial phenomena, by certain calculations based on the general uniformity of the rules by which the Creator governs and sustains, in order, the planetary system. But this is not positive knowledge. It is only rational expectation, which, possibly, may not be realized. No law of nature has inherent power to operate uniformly, independent of that infinite intelligence which gave it its first impulse, and whose abiding influence sustains it in action. So the poverty of an idler—the ruin of a drunkard—the ill effects of bad policy in church or state may be foretold, hypothetically, with *moral certainty* or strong probability; but a reformation, or a change of measures, may prevent the predicted results. The utmost that we can arrive at, in regard to future events, is moral probability, or reasonable expectation. To know with absolute and infallible certainty, what a day or an hour will bring forth, is one of the prerogatives of Him, who sees the end from the beginning; and with whom a thousand years

are as one day, and one day as a thousand years. The prediction of future events, therefore, especially if they be remote and unlikely, in human view, to take place, *which are subsequently fulfilled*, is prophecy; and is fairly attributable to God, whether the announcement be by him immediately or indirectly, through a chosen and commissioned minister. And whoever utters a prediction, *so fulfilled*, in the name of the Lord, and professedly in confirmation of the doctrine which he teaches, is entitled to be received as a teacher from God, and his teachings are to be regarded as divine and authoritative. To God belongs the power of prophecy; and he would not delegate that power to any one, for the establishment and propagation of falsehood. The force of the argument, it should be observed, lies in the *fulfilment* of the prediction. The mere utterance may be nothing more than guessing: and the apparent accomplishment, in one, or a few instances, out of many predictions, may be accidental; but, if the prophecies be numerous, and various, as to the subjects, the time, and place, and means of fulfilment; and particularly if there be some great object, or personage to-

wards which they all converge, as rays of light to a focus; and if the terms in which the predictions are conveyed, be definite and unequivocal, and yet the accomplishment take place, according to the main features of the description, the evidence of the inspiration of the prophet becomes strong and impressive. These characteristics are all found in the scripture prophecies, and distinguish them from the pagan oracles and all other dishonest pretensions. The time would fail us to go into the comparison, except to adduce one or two well known instances of oracular answers, so artfully worded, as to maintain the honour of the god, in any event. Cræsus, meditating war upon the Persians, consulted the oracle at Delphi, the most celebrated in the heathen world, and received for answer, that, if he engaged in the contemplated war, "he would destroy a great empire." This he interpreted, very naturally, in his own favour. But the response was capable of another meaning. The doomed empire might either be his own or that of Persia. He made the attack, but was defeated, and ruined his own kingdom; and yet the oracle continued in credit. Pyrrhus, king of Epirus, long after-

wards, inquired of the same oracle, to know the issue of a war upon the Romans, and received an answer in the Latin language, in these words:—

‘“Aio te Æacida, Romanos vincere posse.

‘Ibis, redibis, nunquam in bello peribis.’”

Equally capable, as every Latin scholar knows, of two directly opposite meanings. It may be translated into English,—“I say that thou, son of Æacus, canst conquer the Romans; thou shalt go, thou shalt return, never shalt thou perish in war;” or thus:—“I say that the Romans can conquer thee, son of Æacus; thou shalt go, thou shalt never return, thou shalt perish in war.” Pyrrhus, on the faith of this equivocal answer, interpreting it, of course, according to his own wishes, rushed to the onset, and was beaten; and yet the oracle saved its character by the artful structure of its response. Shame on the skeptic, who, for sake of disparagement, would bring such juggling into competition with the plain and intelligible announcements of the Lord’s prophets!

We have said that prophecy is a kind of standing miracle, and forms a part of the credentials of God’s ambassadors. Its de-

sign is the same as that of miraculous works, to attest the truth and authority of divine revelation. It is a miracle of *knowledge*, as supernatural works are miracles of *power*. They both bespeak the respect and confidence of mankind, for the ministerial acts, and official character of Christ and his prophets and apostles. *Divine works* make their appeal directly to men's senses, and are adapted to produce instant and vivid conviction of the truth of the messages which they ratify. Prophecy is equally convincing, but the conviction comes more slowly, is more calm, gentle, and permanent. The miraculous act was as satisfactory as any thing that can be imagined, to those who witnessed it, or who lived near the date of its performance; but, to remote generations, it necessarily loses something of its vividness, though its rational strength remains for ever. Prophecy, on the other hand, waits for the fulfilment, wherein lies its power of conviction; and, as this (the fulfilment) takes place before the eyes of mankind, the evidence gains strength in the lapse of ages, until, in its full maturity, it must be overwhelming. The prediction is on imperishable record; and,

when the development of the prophetic scheme comes before the world, a thousand disinterested pens register the fact, so that he who runs may read GOD'S testimony to his own revelations. This peculiarity in the prophetic evidence for the truth of our religion must not be lightly passed over, by those who would know the strong ground of the Christian's faith. It is an argument of amazing, we had almost said, irresistible force. It has been gaining strength for ages, and it will not probably attain its full maturity till the end of time. The prophecies are numerous; some have been fulfilled; others are, now, in a course of fulfilment; for, as Lord Bacon remarks, "Some prophecies are not fulfilled suddenly and at once, but have a springing and germinant accomplishment, throughout many ages, though the height and fulness of them belong to some one age." Every step in the process adds fresh vigour to the argument, so that we have, in this respect, the advantage of the apostles themselves. We hear a voice, which they heard not—a voice from the desolations of Babylon, Nineveh and Tyre—from Egypt and the Holy Land—from the ruins of Jeru-

salem and its once glorious temple—from the mournful relics of the seven churches,—from the sad story of Israel's dispersion, and the broken fragments of the enormous empire of Rome, proclaiming, in thrilling tones:—It is done; the Lord's word, by the mouth of his servants, is fulfilled; we are monuments of the truth of prophecy; let all the earth look upon us and fear God: oh, had we known, in the day of our visitation, the things that belonged to our peace! but now they are hidden from our eyes! Many prophets and wise men, of ancient days, desired to see the things which we see, but saw them not. Their light was as that of the early dawn; ours, that of the risen sun, advancing to his meridian. We have marked the progress of the Apocalyptic angel, with the everlasting gospel to preach to them that dwell on the earth. He has been round the globe, and has lit up the lamp of hope in India and China, in Africa and the Pacific isles. Who can resist such a flood of light as holy Providence is pouring down upon the prophetic page? But,

2. We pass on, to consider the general scope and scheme of prophecy. This is most

comprehensive, including the strongest features and most interesting events in the history of the world, and the magnificent scheme contemplates the ultimate subserviency of all the prominent occurrences, the rise and fall of empires, the revolutions of states, and the progress of art, science and literature, to the glory of God and the redemption of mankind by Jesus Christ. How wide the range,—how stupendous the plan! Where shall we begin, and where end, in attempting to sketch its outline? No sooner had man sinned, and incurred the penalty of a broken covenant, than the Spirit of prophecy let down upon his dark path a ray of hope, in the first prophetic promise respecting “the seed of the woman.” This cheering announcement illustrated and enforced, as it was, by various typical rites and offerings, sustained the faith of the antediluvian church. And, when the enormity of men’s wickedness made it necessary, in the judgment of the only wise God, to arrest rebellion against his rightful authority, and cleanse his footstool by the waters of a deluge, his fearful purpose was announced, and the wicked were warned of coming retribution, a hun-

dred and twenty years before the dread catastrophe came upon them, so that truth and justice, forbearance and mercy might be seen together, in the completion of the awful prediction, that it might be known and remembered, in all future time, that God will keep his word, whether it be a word of threatening or of promise. When the deluge had subsided, and the bow in the cloud guaranteed security from a similar calamity, Noah, the father of the new world, predicted the fortunes of his three sons and their descendants, with a precision which nothing short of divine omniscience could have dictated, as is clearly demonstrated in the subsequent history of the three families that re-peopled the world. Shem is blessed and honoured, as the progenitor of Christ, according to the flesh; Japhet is enlarged, and dwells in the tents of Shem, by the admission of the Gentiles into the visible church; and Ham has been, for ages, the servant of both, in the subjugation and expulsion of the Canaanites, and the bondage of the Africans. Abraham, in due time, was called, not as a favourite, but as a depositary of truth, for the benefit of the world; and to him was made the prophetic

promise of Canaan, as the earthly inheritance of his natural posterity, and the type of a better home; and the *seed*, the *peculiar seed* was announced, in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed. Then, Jacob, the father of the twelve tribes, on his death-bed, described their characters and destinies, and the continuance of a lawgiver in Judah, till the coming of Shiloh, with a prophetic clearness, that indicated the presence and prescience of the Holy Spirit. After a lapse of years, to use the language of Bishop Wilson of Calcutta, "Prophecy rekindled her torch, and pointed to the prophet 'like unto Moses,' while Job and Balaam, about the same time, came forward to testify of the future Redeemer, and 'the *star* that should arise out of Jacob.' After Moses, some four hundred years, Samuel arose amidst the decay of religion and the extreme corruption of the priesthood, the first of a new series of divine messengers. The age of prophecy, emphatically so termed, now began. David came first, and tuned his harp. Jonah followed, then Hosea, Amos, and Micah, who led on the choir of the greater prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. The last

named of these accompanied the Jewish people to Babylon, where Daniel arose and spake of the seventy weeks, reaching unto Messiah the Prince. Haggai and Zechariah roused the languid nation, on their return, and Malachi announced the herald of the Saviour."

About four hundred years after Malachi, appeared Christ, the Lord, the desire of nations, and the grand object of the sublimest prophetic visions, and most significant types of the patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations. And he, to whom all the preceding prophets had borne witness, announced the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, the dissolution of the Jewish polity, and the introduction of that *consummate* economy of light and love, which bears his honoured name, and is adapted to all climes and countries. And, finally, to close the long succession of inspired seers, and complete the sacred CANON, he commissioned his beloved disciple and apostle, John, when exiled in Patmos, to receive and record the last of the prophetic visions of the Almighty, bearing on the progress and conflicts, and ultimate triumph of the kingdom of grace, in all future time.

What a stupendous scheme! How holy, how wise, how beneficent! Could it have originated in the mind of man? Such grandeur of purpose, such union and harmony, with such various instrumentalities, continued in action through so long a period, is surely above and beyond the range of mortal conception. "It is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous." "Let all the earth fear before him!"

3. We proceed, thirdly, to notice some specimens of the fulfilment of prophecy. The scripture prophecies may be arranged in four classes, viz.:—Those that relate particularly to the Jewish nation;—those that relate to the surrounding kingdoms;—those that directly announce the Messiah and portray his character and work;—and those that were uttered by Christ and his apostles. We cannot, for want of time, do more than offer a single specimen from each class. First, of the Jewish nation, it was foretold by Moses, their own lawgiver, Deut. xxviii.—That they should, for their sins, be removed into other nations, "that they should be scattered among all people, from one end of the earth even unto the other—find no ease or rest—be op-

pressed and crushed always—be left few in number among the heathen—pine away in their iniquity, in their enemies' land, and become an astonishment, a proverb and a by-word, unto all nations." These predictions were exactly fulfilled in their subjugation, first, to the Chaldeans, and then to the Romans; and, in later times, wherever they sojourn among the nations; for they have no settled home. No man, who reads at all, doubts, or can doubt, the literal accomplishment of this terrible threatening. The people themselves acknowledge it; the present generation feel it, and have not yet reached the "height and fulness of it." They are living and mournful witnesses of its fearful truth. And that it was pronounced some three thousand years ago, is just as certain as any other past event can be made to us, by testimony human or divine.

2. As a sample of the prophecies of the second class, take what is foretold of Babylon, so well known in ancient history, and so often visited and described as it, or rather its site now is, for, as it once was, it is now no more. It was, in early times, an exceedingly great city, with walls and gates, and

towers, and hanging gardens, and other works of art, and proofs of wealth almost incredible. But its inhabitants were idolatrous and incorrigible in their evil ways, and a holy God doomed it to desolation. For the burden of Heaven's decision concerning it, see Isaiah xiii., xiv. and xliv., and Jeremiah l. and li., and several places of other prophets. It was to be attacked by the Medes and Persians; the river Euphrates, which passed through it, and was one of its chief luxuries, was to be dried up; the city was to be taken by surprise, and during a feast, when her guardians were indulging in their revels. All this was exactly accomplished under Cyrus, who, as Herodotus and others inform us, changed the course of the river, by digging a new channel for it, and introducing his army by the old one. In consequence of this diversion of the stream from its natural course, pools of water were to be seen amidst the magnificent ruins of the city, and the surrounding country became marshy and unfit for human habitation. Now the correspondence of the event with the prediction, *in so many particulars*, could not have happened by chance; and should any one suggest that

the prediction might have been written after the event, and artfully fitted to it, we would ask him, what impostor would have ventured upon the following description of perpetual desolation, verified by credible modern travellers? "Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, shall be as Sodom and Gomorrah; it shall never be inhabited from generation to generation; but wild beasts of the forest shall lie there, and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures: the owls shall dwell there, and dragons in their pleasant places." This is by far, too minute and unlikely, in human view, to be realized, for the conception of a fraudulent adventurer. But it was all foreseen by divine omniscience, announced by inspiration, and is attested by many witnesses, to be the literal truth at the present day.

3. Of the prophecies that announce the Messiah, and describe his character and office, we may remark, in passing, that they are numerous, and, some of them, very minute and peculiar; so that they cannot be applied, without violence, to any personage known in the history of the world, except Jesus of Nazareth. All the prophets refer to him, directly or indirectly: "To him," it

is expressly declared, "they all give witness." "Beginning at Moses and all the prophets," we are told by an evangelist, "he expounded to his disciples the things concerning himself." Indeed, the Messiah was the great object of interest and expectation through the whole of the Old Testament. We find his miraculous conception, the place and time of his birth, the tribe and family from which he was to descend, his meekness and patience, his manner of teaching, his acts of beneficence, his death and burial, his resurrection, and the progress of his kingdom, delineated, with a graphic exactness, which makes it easy to identify him in the person of our Saviour, and impossible, as we honestly believe, to find the original in any other.

But, as a specimen for more particular remark, take the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. We prefer this, because it is more comprehensive and obvious in its application than most others. It is so appropriate and peculiar, that it looks like history. Indeed, it is given, partly, in the past tense! "He *hath borne* our griefs," &c.: of which circumstance, the skeptic has availed himself, to sustain the bold allegation, that it was written after

the death of Christ, and applied to him, as prophecy, by way of pious, well-meant fraud. Surely, the man must feel himself in pressing want of arguments, who would seize upon such a flimsy fetch as this. The fact is, that the prophecy was penned seven hundred years before Christ was born, and, with the other prophecies, was, from that time forth, in the keeping of the Jews; and is to be found in the Greek translation of the Bible, called the Septuagint, made some three hundred years before the birth of Christ. We account for the use of the present and past tenses here, and in some other instances, on the ground of the vividness and distinctness of the prophet's views. So intimate was his communion with the God of prophecy, and so clear was his vision of the coming Saviour, that that which was *to be* seemed to have *already taken place*. And so it had, *virtually*, and in the divine purpose. The Lamb of God is said to have been slain from the foundation of the world. The efficacy of his sacrifice looks *backward* as well as *forward*, from eternity to eternity, and round the entire globe; for "he is the propitiation for our sins, and, not for ours only, but for the sins

of the whole world." But let us look at this remarkable prophecy for a few moments. It depicts a personage, at first, of humble aspect, without comeliness, or any thing to attract respectful regard,—despised and rejected of men,—all faces were averted from him,—a man of sorrows, and familiar with grief. Yet he *surely bore our griefs* and carried *our sorrows*,—was wounded for *our transgressions*, and bruised for *our iniquities*,—the chastisement of *our peace* was upon *him*, and by *his stripes we are healed*. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, and the Lord hath laid on *him* the iniquity of us all. Yet, under this fearful load of imputed guilt, he is meek and uncomplaining; is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and, as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment; and who shall declare his generation? that is, as we understand the passage, He was taken into custody, and hurried to execution unjustly, and without process of law; and, although his *generation*, that is, the beginning of his days, and the end of his life and reign, cannot be declared, being from everlasting to everlasting, yet

was he cut off out of the land of the living, for the transgression of the people for whom he was stricken. He made his grave with the wicked, and was with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth; and, after his life shall have been made an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail, or agony of his soul, and shall be satisfied. By the knowledge of himself, as God's righteous mediatorial servant, he shall justify many, *because he shall bear their iniquities*; therefore, will I (Jehovah) divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, *because he hath poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors, and bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*" What a picture! What conceptions of lowliness and moral grandeur are here combined! What created, uninspired mind could have originated, and given utterance to such thoughts? Where, on earth or in heaven, shall we find the personage that *sat for the picture*? In Jesus of

Nazareth, the son of man and the Son of God, we recognize the original; and we might challenge men and angels to show us a plausible competitor in the wide universe. In *him* these extremes of meekness and majesty meet and harmonize. Yes, and, if every lineament in the likeness does not meet a correspondent trait in his singular character and history, as drawn by the evangelists in their simple, unvarnished narratives, we have erred exceedingly in our honest, and laborious efforts to ascertain the truth, and should be very thankful to be set right. But, if the foregoing description was sketched, by inspiration of God, and, if Jesus Christ *alone* answers to it, and that completely and minutely, how can we escape from the conclusion that his pretensions to the Messiahship are valid, and that his religion is divine?

4. But his own and his apostles' predictions form a fourth class of the prophecies, to which we will now direct attention for a few moments. These are also numerous, relating to various matters, and delivered on sundry occasions. We must content ourselves, at present, with a brief notice of one or two of his *own*, omitting entirely those of the apostles, for want of time.

1. He predicted his resurrection from the dead, specifying the very day on which it should take place. See, at your leisure, Matt. xvi. 21; Mark viii. 31, and other parallel passages. "Destroy this temple," said he, meaning his body, "and, in *three days*, I will raise it up." He is to rise then by his own underrived power. "*I will raise it up.*" Here he stakes all his claims, not only to divine honours, but to common truth and honesty, upon the fulfilment of the prediction or engagement, "*I will raise it up.*" Here is a pledge given, and given publicly in the hearing of enemies as well as friends. And the time is so near at hand that it will not, it cannot be forgotten. Well, the temple was destroyed—he was crucified—always a certain, though a lingering death: he was on the cross at least three hours; but to make certainty more sure, if possible, a soldier pierced him to the heart, and there flowed forth blood and water, the latter being an acknowledged indication of the extinction of animal life. We have, moreover, the testimony of the executioners, who, according to a barbarous usage, proceeded to break the legs of the victims; but, after performing this function on the

two thieves that were crucified with him, they state that they brake not his legs, because they found "*that he was already dead.*" The death, then, was real; and he who was thus, indubitably, put to death, must have been a living person, not a personation, or figure of speech, as some affect to think Jesus Christ must have been,—his character is so *amiable*, and so much *out of the common way*. Whoever can believe such a romantic dream, *might*, if he *would*, believe any mystery revealed in the Bible. But to return to our train of remark about the redemption of the pledge given, "I will raise it up." The men of power took good care that no door should be left open for fraud, on the part of his disciples. These deluded creatures might come by night and steal away the body, and report a fictitious resurrection. Poor souls! what could they expect from a *dead body*, if they should steal it? They must have known that measures would be taken to oblige them to produce it. But they had no opportunity to attempt such a foolish thing. The body was laid in a tomb hewn out of a rock, the entrance to which was covered with a massy stone and sealed; nor was this all; a band of armed

soldiers was stationed around it. Yet, when the set time arrived, early in the morning of the third day, the body was missing: diligent search was made for it;—what had become of it? The soldiers were inquired of. They said the disciples took it away while they were asleep; thus exposing themselves to the penalty of death, by their own confession, for sleeping on guard, and testifying to what took place, while, by their own showing, *they were asleep*. The story is clumsy enough—believe it, who can. It would never have been reported, but for money, and a promise of security from the penalty of the law; for what could the testimony of sleeping witnesses be worth? We shall be told, perhaps, that this whole statement is ex-parte, that it was got up and propagated by the friends of Christ. Granted; but is there any counter statement? There were enemies, shrewd and powerful, that knew all that took place. Why did they not contradict the supposed false account? Is there any thing, now known to be on record, to contravene this account? If so, let it be produced. We should like to see it. We know of none; and the strong and fair presumption is, that there never was any. We

believe the fact of Christ's resurrection, upon a mass of evidence which we really cannot, consistently, resist. If we did, we should, to be consistent, give up the truth of all history. He escaped from the tomb of Joseph, notwithstanding all the precautions referred to, in order to prevent imposition. He was seen, after his resurrection, not once or twice merely, but many times, in various places, and by numerous witnesses, for the space of forty days; satisfying the doubts of the incredulous, and giving full proof to friends and foes, that he had redeemed his pledge. And we find that many of his warmest friends were slow to believe. Thomas, one of the twelve, would not be satisfied with the evidence of one sense only, that of *seeing*, but must feel the print of the nails in his hands, and the opening of the spear in his side. Thus convinced by the testimony of two of his senses, in connection with other proofs of the fact, no marvel that he exclaimed with adoring admiration, "My Lord and my God!" But surely there are other grounds of a rational faith, besides the evidence of a sense. "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed!" As it stands in the gos-

pel narrative, we hold it to be one of the clearest moral demonstrations on record. Here is a prophecy of what was very unlikely, in human view, to take place, uttered by the founder of our religion in proof of his divine mission, literally fulfilled, in despite of the efforts of his enemies to prevent its fulfilment. Had it failed,—had the pledge not been redeemed, all would have agreed that his pretensions were unfounded; then, as the event turned out in exact correspondence to the prediction—as the pledge was actually redeemed, according to the showing of many witnesses, why, in the name of sense and reason, should we not concede his claims, and hail him as the long expected Messiah, the great teacher from heaven, whose doctrine is divine, and whose right and power to save is no longer questionable?

We intended to have brought to your notice, his prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, but our time is gone; and, indeed, if we had time, it seems needless to urge further considerations. The argument from prophecy is strong enough, in all reason, as it now stands. The mind may be saturated and oppressed with evi-

dence. The case just named, however, we counsel you, respectfully, to re-examine at your convenience. It is another demonstration of the truth and divine origin of your religion. The prophecy is minutely recorded by three of the evangelists, and the fulfilment is narrated by Josephus and other foreign writers, no way concerned to sustain the Christian cause. As full justice cannot be done to this subject; in a single lecture, we take the liberty, without intending disparagement to other valuable works, with which you are, probably, more familiar, to recommend to your attentive and candid perusal, a sterling little work, by Keith, on the fulfilment of prophecy. It is a matter-of-fact volume, and gives you the argument in a dense and lucid form.

4. And now, in conclusion, what shall we say, in regard to the bearing of scripture prophecy on the truth of Christianity? Is it not powerful and convincing? God *alone* can foretell future events which are not the result of the laws of nature; and when such events are foretold, and afterwards come to pass, in exact correspondence with the prediction, and, professedly, for the confirmation

of the doctrine taught, it is, clearly, the divine attestation to the truth of the doctrine; for the Divine Being would not, could not, without denying himself, bear witness to a falsehood. When he is said to send false prophets, with deceitful messages, to a wicked people, who would have it so,* the meaning obviously is, that he would not restrain them, or supersede their personal responsibility. And, when his chosen prophets allege as, in a few instances, they do, that he had deceived them, he is in no way responsible for their rash conclusion. He never inspired them to say so. It ought not to be forgotten, that prophetic inspiration is not personal sanctification. The men that are made use of, by God, for certain purposes of mercy or judgment, are not made perfect and faultless. His infallible guidance does not attend *them*, more than other men, into their private walks, or in the transaction of ordinary business with mankind. It is in the announcement of messages which he dictates, and in the recording of what he would have recorded, for his own glory and the good of the world,

* 1 Kings xxii.

that he moves and guards them from error. If, therefore, you find Moses and David and Peter, and others doing or saying wrong things, in their private and uncommissioned capacity, don't charge God blasphemously with being the author of their sin. If God gave Joshua a commission to destroy, or dispossess the Canaanites, and you know one people are often employed to punish another, that gave him no right to molest a nation to whom he was not sent. God employed Balaam to utter a prophecy concerning Christ, but, for all that, we know, he did not make him a good man: nay, he used the most stupid of animals to rebuke him for his madness. God inspired Peter to carry the gospel to Cornelius and others, but he surely did not inspire him to deny his Lord. The man's personal character is not to be confounded with his prophetic instrumentality. Keep this common-sense distinction in view, and it will save you from a world of difficulties, and preserve the strong argument from prophecy, in all its vigour; and, an argument it is, which you cannot ponder too seriously; the more you examine it, in the light of unbiassed reason, and with earnest prayer to the Father of lights, the more you will feel its weight.

LECTURE VI.

THE RISE AND PROGRESS OF CHRISTIANITY.

THE rapid *propagation, continuance, and present state* of the Christian religion cannot be satisfactorily accounted for, but by supposing that a special divine favour *was, and is still* exercised in its support. To establish and illustrate this general proposition, is the design of the present lecture. To make good our position, we invite attention to a grave and dispassionate consideration of the general character of the religion itself; the obstacles in the way of its reception and progress; the means employed in its introduction and advancement; and the internal difficulties it *has had, and now has* to contend with, arising out of the bad policy and misconduct of its professed friends: and, (if time permit,) we will add, the partial accomplishment, in its prevalence hitherto, of its own stupendous scheme of prophecy.

I. The religion itself is singular, in many respects. It ought not to be called new; for it is, in fact, the oldest in the world: that is—it is the *old, primitive religion, in a new style*—divested of its types and shadows, and presented in a more luminous and simplified form, adapted to universal use and diffusion among mankind. Yet it is singular in its origin, having been, substantially and virtually, in existence and operation, long before its founder made his visible advent among men; singular, in the *person* of its author and finisher, Emmanuel, God with us—Deity and humanity in union; singular, in the fulness of its communications—informing us that there is a God—one living and eternal intelligence, that made, and that governs all things, by a providence so minute as to reach the smallest bird, and the loftiest angel—the atom that floats in the sunbeam, and the comet in its eccentric flight; a providence that regards and orders our domestic affairs, while it regulates the springs and holds the lever that moves the nations;—thus differing from the prating philosophy that *imagines* a creator and calls it chance, or fate. This religion teaches us, how we became the guilty, help-

less creatures that we are, and is *very singular* in the *amplitude* of its *provisions* to meet our necessities, by its mediatorial system—its spiritual influence—its atonement and perfect righteousness, to be received and enjoyed by faith; thus, rising above natural religion, and differing from Deism, which proposes to work its own way and secure its own peace, without foreign aid. It is *singular*, in that it opposes and denounces, without compromise, the predominant passions and inclinations of men, whom it comes, professedly, to bless and to save; and, so differs from Mohammedism and other pliant devices of that sort. It is singular, in its high claims and bold pretensions, coming with a “THUS SAITH THE LORD,” and demanding acceptance and obedience, on pain of utter ruin, refusing to share the homage of mankind, in common with other religions; thus, differing from paganism, which had its thirty thousand gods in Greece alone, all willing, it is said, to live and let live; and in this way evincing, what has been called an unsocial and illiberal spirit. But, if it be true and divine, this exclusiveness is benevolent and right; for, then, no system opposed to it, or essentially differ-

ing from it, can be true: and what fellowship hath truth with error, or light with darkness? How can two walk together except they be agreed? Finally, this religion is distinguished from all others, in its direct claim upon the whole heart, insisting on repentance and the renunciation of idols, followed up by a life of holiness; and in its explicit disclosure of a future state of eternal rewards and punishments, the all-powerful motive to holiness, and the sure anchor-ground of hope. In few words, this religion, in its leading doctrines and requirements, is very unacceptable, nay, repulsive to the native pride and haughtiness of the human heart. See a summary of its graces, or the dispositions of mind which it inspires and commends, in the sermon on the mount, beginning with the fifth chapter of Matt., viz.: penitence, humility, meekness, gentleness, purity of heart, the love of holiness, peacemaking, quiet submission to slander and persecution for righteousness' sake, forgiveness of injuries, the love of enemies, unobtrusiveness in prayer and almsgiving, self-denial, spiritual-mindedness, purity of motive, and unreserved devotion to every good word and work. How unlike

are these qualities to what is generally exhibited and admired in the world! How could such a religion gain admission and prevail among a people addicted to forms and external rites, as was the case with both Jews and Gentiles, and which had little to do with the heart, and almost no influence on private character and public morals? It was diametrically opposed to the theories of philosophers, and the long-established habits of the common people. It must have been regarded as an intruder, and unworthy of a hearing: and one of the greatest wonders in its history is, that it was not instantly silenced and smothered in its cradle. This would, undoubtedly, have been its fate, had it not been of God and under his almighty patronage; for look, secondly, at the obstacles which lay in the way of its introduction and prevalence. The first, and that which must ever prove insurmountable, without divine influence, is the repugnance of the human heart to proffered assistance, of which it feels no need. The rich will not accept a gratuity, unless it be as a token of esteem. A man in health, or who fancies himself so, will not follow the prescriptions of a physician. The

gospel comes to men with provisions of grace, predicated on their guilt and helplessness. Its first demand is repentance and the acceptance of this grace. But where there is no proper sense of sin, the offer, instead of being thankfully received, will rather be regarded as an insult. Repentance is deemed a very easy matter, when one sees occasion for it; and the Divine Being is supposed to be incapable of refusing forgiveness to the penitent. This is the reason why the gospel is so unceremoniously rejected now; and it was so in the apostolic age. How, then, could it have gained admittance into so many hearts as were opened to receive it, on the day of Pentecost, under the preaching of Peter, had not the Holy Spirit attended it, by his convincing power?

Another obstinate hinderance to the reception and progress of the gospel was, the death of Christ by crucifixion. "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, *whom ye have crucified*, both Lord and Christ." This declaration was made by Peter in a large assembly composed, chiefly, of Jews. How incredible such an announcement must have seemed to

a people whose confident expectation was, that when the Christ came, he would set up an earthly kingdom, of unrivalled splendour, and make them the first participants of its honours and emoluments! According to the principles that ordinarily govern men, their emotions must have been those of rage and contempt. For the cross, and all who suffered upon it, they entertained the utmost abhorrence. "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree," was one of their proverbs. So far from feeling compunction under the Apostle's charge of their having crucified the Lord's anointed, they gloried in what they had done, fully persuaded that, in delivering Jesus over to the secular authorities to be crucified, they had given a death-blow to the pretensions of an impostor, and blasted the hopes of his disciples. "Come down from the cross, if thou be the Son of God," said they. "He saved others, himself he cannot save."

And as the doctrine of a crucified Saviour was, to the Jews, a stumbling-block, so was it foolishness to the Greeks. That an obscure individual, who had been, by his countrymen, subjected to so ignominious a death, as that

of crucifixion, should be proclaimed as the Redeemer of the world, and that all men should be called upon to believe and obey him on pain of endless perdition, was, in itself, revolting and repulsive to all their natural feelings and habits of thought. Yet this was the grand theme of the gospel. It was the doctrine of Christ, and the motto inscribed on every banner that was unfurled in his name. The apostles preached it wherever they went; and that not with caution and softening paraphrase, but explicitly and with glorying. "I determined," said Paul to the people of Corinth, "not to know any thing among you, save Christ and *him crucified*." "God forbid," said he to the Galatians of Asia Minor, "that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Now, looking at the matter in the light of nature, merely, what ground of hope was there that such preaching could make converts? Yet it did; and that, too, in vast numbers, among as licentious and skeptical a generation as ever existed. But how? Not by enticing words of man's wisdom—not by the arts of elocution and moral suasion; but

by the ministration of the Spirit, making it "the power of God, and the wisdom of God unto salvation." Here is a palpable and undeniable effect, for which no other adequate cause can be assigned.

The *time* and *place*, at which the propagation was commenced, would seem, in the eye of reason, to present an obstacle to its reception and progress. It was an age of high attainments in literature and science;—the Augustan age, when the chief places in the empire were filled with philosophers, orators, historians and poets. It was a time of literary light and learned leisure. The temple of Janus was shut, and men were keenly disposed to watch and criticise pretensions of science and religion. It was not an age of credulity, but of unwonted skepticism. The Epicurean philosophy, falsely called philosophy, had swallowed up most other notions and theories on the subject of religion. It repudiated the distinction of right and wrong in moral conduct, made animal pleasure the chief good, and scouted the doctrine of a future state. The disciples of Epicurus denied the being of a God, or, at least, represented him as reclining in a sort of torpor,

disdaining to take any notice of what is going on in this little world. It was, in fact, a period of the world very inauspicious to the introduction of a false religion. The philosophers of all sects laughed in their sleeves at the popular gods, and expected nothing from them. Religion was generally looked upon as a matter of form, and useful, only as a political engine. Any thing new in the religious way was eyed with jealousy, and met with jeers and sarcasm. There were gods enough in the calendar; and their worship was viewed rather as pastime than devotion of soul. The fine arts and elegant literature were cultivated to the highest pitch: so that Christianity cannot be said to have been introduced in an age of ignorance and superstition. It was confessedly an age of reading and incredulity. The *place*, too, seems to have been against the success of the enterprise. Jerusalem and the country around it, where many were still living who had witnessed the life and death of Christ, were the most likely places to meet with opposition and discomfiture, that could have been chosen. Those who had delivered him to be crucified were deeply interested to blacken his character, and resist the labours of his ministers.

Mohammed was much more politic, both as to time and place, for the introduction of his religion, than were the apostles, in regard to that of their Master. He chose the seventh century,—a time of gross darkness,—and Arabia, the most ignorant country then known, as the scene of his first efforts. Indeed, it is plain the apostles did not select their fields of labour with a view to personal convenience, or to success in their preaching. They felt that they were under divine guidance, and went, straightway, whithersoever God called them. When they left Judea, they did not content themselves with preaching to country people and villages, but pressed into the chief cities, often at the risk of their lives, and without waiting to know whether the citizens would be disposed to hear them or not. We find them at Rome, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Antioch, in all places of concourse. Their object was to get a hearing, trusting that if they could get access to the ear, the Spirit that attended their ministry would open a way for their messages to the heart. “Faith cometh by hearing.” “It pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.” Accordingly,

the first sermon that was delivered under the new dispensation, was the means of making three thousand converts, and that at Jerusalem, in sight of the mount on which the Redeemer was crucified. How can we account for this fact, without supposing a divine influence? These considerations are of weight. Here is a religion rising into notice on the very spot where the facts connected with it had taken place and were well known. It then goes forth into the heart of a polished, but profligate world, and lays its holy obligations on a reckless atheism, and the worst passions of the human mind. "By its meek spirit and pure doctrine, it triumphs over the influence of education, the force of habit, the weight of authority, the craft of a corrupt priesthood, the policy of legislators, the genius of poets and philosophers, the fascination of oracles and prodigies, the shafts of scorn and ridicule, and the rites of an idolatry supported by remote antiquity, universal diffusion, and inseparable conjunction with the laws and usages, and fancied prosperity of each state."* Who can see all this, and not

* Bishop Wilson.

recognize in it the hand and patronage of heaven? The visible agency will not account for the fact.

We have anticipated, in some measure, observations, which belong, more properly, to the last and most formidable obstacle which we shall notice, viz.:

The unrelenting spirit of persecution which came out against the gospel and its adherents. This spirit was evinced and acted out by Jew and Gentile. The pretext was that the religion of Christ assumed too much authority; it was too exclusive, and unbending in its claims,—it must be every thing or nothing. It was *unsocial* and *uncompromising*. It would not be associated, even with the ritual of Moses. It rebuked those who sat in Moses' seat, charging them with having made the law of God of no effect, by their traditions. The Jewish sacraments were to be superseded by Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The great festivals were to be discontinued. A holy life was to be preferred to ostentatious prayers, and expensive offerings. A sacrifice had now been made once for all. The types had answered their purpose, and must give place to the substance. The priesthood was changed,

—or, rather, there were to be no priests under the new dispensation, but only ministers of the word and ordinances of Christianity. Simplicity and godly sincerity were to take the place of rites and forms, not involving the vitality of religion. Men were, henceforth, to rely wholly on the merits of Christ, and renounce their own works, as of no avail in the matter of justification. God was to be worshipped, in spirit and in truth, not at the temple in Jerusalem, for that was to be demolished, but wherever two or three should meet for the purpose, in the name of Christ; and all nations were to be placed on an equal footing, in regard to the blessings and immunities of the kingdom of heaven. All this was intolerable. Such an entire revolution was not to be submitted to by a people who had long been distinguished by divine goodness, and had come to a fixed belief that they were a privileged nation. The Jew, therefore, though not possessing the power of life and death, threw his whole influence into the hand of the pagan authorities, and there was, for the first time, a union of purpose between them, and that purpose was for the extermination of Christianity. The gentile powers,

thus encouraged by Jewish bigotry, opened their batteries and set their engines of death in operation, against the unarmed and non-resistant Christians, with a ferocity and unrelenting fury quite unparalleled and indescribable. All who professed the new and despised religion were deprived of property, country, liberty, and life, if they persisted in their adhesion. For more than three hundred years the blood of martyrs flowed in torrents. Christians were called atheists because they refused to worship false gods;—misanthropists, because they would not join the world in its idolatry and vice. The only crimes alleged against them, according to Tacitus the historian, and Pliny, the governor of Bithynia, who both lived within the first century, was a rigid adherence to Christ, and a refusal to offer incense to the popular gods, which the former calls “a pestilent superstition, which ought to be severely punished;” and the latter, in his letter to Trajan, the Emperor, says, that “from the best account he could obtain of their religion, (whether it should be called a crime or error, he was doubtful,) it consisted in their meeting on a certain day, before daylight, to sing a hymn to Christ as to a god,

and to bind themselves by an oath, not to commit any wickedness, but to abstain from thefts, robberies, and adulteries; not to violate their promise or deny a pledge; after which it was their custom to separate, and meet again at a promiscuous, harmless meal." Such was the amount of their offending; and for this "pestilent superstition," and strict adherence to their principles, they were to be punished, without distinction of age or sex. The most barbarous tortures were inflicted on them that ingenious malice could invent; such as the rack, the wheel, throwing to wild beasts, tearing the body asunder, while yet alive, burning in pitched coats, boiling in oil or melted lead, crucifixion with the head downward, &c. The persecutions followed one another in rapid succession. We will give you a list of them, from Dr. Gregory's letters, a work of great merit. "The first formal state assault began under Nero, A. D. 65; the second, under Domitian, A. D. 90; the third, under Trajan, A. D. 100; the fourth, under Adrian, A. D. 126, and continued under Antoninus Pius to A. D. 140; the fifth, under Marcus Aurelius, A. D. 162; the sixth, under Severus, A. D. 203; the seventh, under Maxi-

minus, A.D. 236; the eighth, under Decius, A.D. 251; the ninth, under Valerian, A.D. 258; and the tenth, under Dioclesian, A.D. 303." And what, you will ask, was the nature of these persecutions? In reply, we will briefly describe the last. In the edict issued by Dioclesian, in 303, he commanded all the churches to be demolished, and the Christians to be deprived of their sacred writings, and of all their civil privileges and immunities. This occasioned the death of very many who refused to surrender their sacred books to the magistrates. Tertullian says 20,000 Christians were burned by Dioclesian's orders on *one Christmas day*; of whom many were consumed in a church where they were assembled for worship. The second edict ordered the imprisonment of all bishops and ministers of the gospel. A third commanded that the most exquisite tortures should be employed to compel these captives to lead the way in open apostasy. In a fourth, promulgated in A.D. 304, magistrates were enjoined to inflict tortures upon all Christians without distinction of rank or sex, for the purpose of forcing them to renounce their religion. These edicts, which extended over the whole Roman Em-

pire, with the exception of Gaul, were executed with such active, brutal, and successful zeal, that pillars were erected in Spain, in honour of Dioclesian, for having, every where abolished the superstition of Christ, and a medal of this emperor was struck, with the inscription, "Nomine Christianorum deleto;" "the name of Christians being blotted out." Let this imperfect picture serve as a specimen of the bloody doings of three centuries, under the reign of imperial paganism.

Yet, strange to tell, the religion of Christ, even amidst such fiery trials, and in the face of such furious opposition, continued to spread and flourish. "The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church." "The more you mow us down," said one of the apologists to the persecutors, "the thicker we rise: the Christian blood you spill is like the seed you sow; it springs from the earth again, and fructifies the more." Tertullian. The *long continuance* of this violent opposition to Christianity, is worthy of special notice, in connection with its advancement, and the unyielding firmness and zeal of its disciples. Almost any scheme of religion, however absurd, will gather proselytes for a time.

There are always to be found persons hanging loosely on the skirts of organized religious societies, and multitudes attached to no denomination, who can be induced, by a little cunning and a good deal of boldness, on the part of the leaders, to join in an enterprise of doubtful issue. But when they find that they must make heavy sacrifices and encounter serious difficulties, and perils of property and life, they are very apt to drop off. In this way, many a wild project, with religion for its watchword, but no truth at bottom, has failed so soon and so completely, as not to find a place in history. A religion, to gain any considerable standing in the world, must either be founded in truth and sustained by evidence, or be so pliant and accommodating to the selfish passions of men, as not only to require no self-denial of its votaries, but open before them the pathway to wealth, or fame, or places of power. Now here is a religion of self-denial, throughout; a religion of strict laws, giving no quarters to pride, revenge, evil-concupiscence, or even worldly-mindedness; a religion of *the heart*, that pronounces a malicious desire, virtual murder; a lustful look,

adultery, and covetousness, idolatry; a religion so unpopular as to be every where spoken against; assailed at every step by slander and ridicule, fire and sword, for more than three hundred years, yet gaining upon the world, in its influence, with a rapidity *unexampled* and *unaccountable*, unless we suppose an unseen power bearing it onward, and securing its victories by light and love. For look, in the next place, at

3. The visible means and agencies employed in its propagation. Twelve men, from the humblest walks of life, with little education, no wealth, no power, no influence, and no influential connections; nothing but honesty, simplicity, perseverance, and fearlessness, in declaring what they believe to be the truth. They profess, indeed, to work miracles and deliver prophecies, as proofs of their divine mission; but, if we deny these, and charge the men with fanaticism or imposture, then we have agencies quite disproportioned to the undeniable results of their action.

The method, or means adopted to give currency to their doctrine, seems also unequal to the effects produced. It was not by en-

ticing words of man's wisdom, nor profound reasoning or moving eloquence; but unpolished statements made as if true and authoritative, without anticipating objections, or any pains-taking to meet and answer them. The utmost simplicity and distinctness marked the style of the first preachers. Their doctrines were exemplified in their own lives, and urged by motives of the tenderest and most awakening kind. It was uniformly declared or implied, in their discourses, that a cordial belief and practical use of their doctrines, were essential to salvation. All this seemed calculated to rouse opposition, as it implied censure of the established and prevalent religions. "Except ye repent," says Christ, "ye shall all likewise perish. He that hath the Son, hath life; he that hath not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him. He that receiveth you, receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me. God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son; neither is there salvation in any other." Such language must have been provoking and repulsive to Jewish bigotry and Gentile pride. True, the first

Christians evinced great meekness and patience under insult and suffering, and, in ordinary circumstances, these qualities would not be without some effect; but of what avail could the passive virtues be, in overcoming religious prejudice and secular authorities, all powerful, and arrayed against those who were regarded as innovators and "setters-forth of strange gods," as the men of Athens said of Paul, when he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection? Is it not perfectly manifest that the attempt to propagate *such* a religion, in such circumstances, and by such men and means, must have proved abortive, had there not been an invisible power abetting and urging it forward? Yet this religion did prevail and triumph to an extent unparalleled. We may not enlarge on this point, but it claims some notice. "I believe," says Dr. Gregory, "it is an undeniable fact, that, before the end of the second century, Christianity had been more widely disseminated over the face of the earth than any one religion, true or false. Heathenism in all its variety of dismal shades, had been thickening for thousands of years, until darkness covered the

earth and gross darkness the people. But as the natural sun chases away darkness from whole regions, so, with analogous rapidity, did the Sun of righteousness dispel the moral gloom which every where prevailed." And the following is the reluctant testimony of Gibbon, in his Roman history,—“The progress of Christianity was 120 at the ascension; soon after, 3000; then, 5000; and in little less than two years after the ascension, it reached great multitudes at Jerusalem only. Mohammed was three years silently occupied in making fourteen converts, and they of his own family, and proceeded so slowly at Mecca, that in the seventh year, only 83 men and 18 women retired to Ethiopia; and he had no established religion at Mecca to contend with.” Upon admitting the fact of the wonderful spread of the gospel, this bitter enemy of the cross undertakes to account for it, by natural or second causes. He assigns five, viz.:—“The inflexible and intolerant zeal of the first Christians—the doctrine of a future state, improved by every circumstance that could give weight to that important truth—the miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive

church—the pure and austere morals of the Christians—the union and discipline of the Christian republic, (as he calls it,) which gradually formed an independent and increasing state, in the heart of the Roman empire.” We have not time, now, to analyze these causes; but any man who will take the trouble to examine them, will see their impotency and irrelevancy, in the circumstances of the case. To talk about the *intolerance* of the primitive Christians, is absurd enough. How could they *be* intolerant, in any other sense than that of a strict adherence to their own principles? And to call that intolerance is an abuse of terms. The power of coercion was in other hands; theirs was a *moral* power, the power of truth, of meekness, of love, and of enduring all sorts of inflictions, with a patience and joyfulness, that did, indeed, surprise their persecutors; but it did not convince them. They misnamed it, calling it *obstinacy*, and determined that it should be subdued. The disciples evinced zeal and perseverance; but these were the effects of their religion, not the cause of its progress. The doctrine of a future state, clearly revealed as it was, in

the gospel, probably, had some effect; though the leading sects in philosophy ridiculed it, and the vicious hated it, because of the future punishment for the wicked, which it involved. Something may also be conceded to the miraculous powers, not only "ascribed to the primitive church," but actually exercised by the founder of Christianity and his apostles, yet these, when admitted, as they were by Porphyry, Celsus, Julian, and others, were ascribed to magic, and, thus, their power neutralized, in a great measure. In regard to the *pure morals* of the Christians, which Gibbon concedes, and (we thank him for the concession,) these, we have to remark again, were the fruits of their faith, and could not have been *at first*, the cause of its advancement. This effect, we acknowledge, did become, in process of time, one of the concurrent and secondary causes of the furtherance of the gospel, on the obvious principle, that, "the tree is known by its fruit." But the tree must have root, and some degree of maturity, before the fruit can appear. The historian's fifth cause of the rapid spread of our religion, viz., "the union and discipline of the church or Christian republic," as he calls

it, brings us up to our fourth class of hinderances to its progress, viz.:—

4. The internal difficulties, which arose early, and which are *still felt*, springing out of the bad policy and misconduct of some of its own members and professed friends. Our remarks on this topic must be few. The best of Heaven's institutions are liable to abuse and corruption in human hands. Christ did design union and discipline in his church. He did state, explicitly, that his kingdom was not of this world, and that its affairs were to be administered, not after the model of worldly policy, but on principles of righteousness, harmony and love. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another." "Be of one heart, and of one mind," say the apostles; "mark them that cause divisions among you, and avoid them." "See that ye love one another, with a pure heart, fervently." But, some of the disciples, falling off a little from their first love, and yielding to the spirit of sect, began to say,—“I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ.” They differed about preachers and preaching. The ministers, too, that came into office,

pretty soon after the apostles, compassed with infirmity, like other men, began to aspire. Not relishing or misinterpreting the injunction,—“Be not called rabbi; for one is your master, and all ye are brethren,” they set about some supposed improvements, on the original plan. Diotrephes wanted the pre-eminence. There ought, it was alleged, to be some distinction of rank and standing; as there was a diversity of gifts and attainments. Some did not exactly like so much simplicity in worship, and thought it would be good policy to have a selection of showy and exciting ceremonies borrowed from their neighbours. It could do no harm, even if not provided for in the book of primitive institutes. And, thus, matters went on, till, in the fourth century, the state took the church under its patronage, and the emperor relieved her, in a great measure, of the trouble of exercising her own discipline. He built her fine houses, and adorned her in purple robes. Here was a strange mixing up of heterogeneous elements. The Christian republic lost, by the unnatural junction, much of her original and distinctive character. Outwardly, she seemed prosperous, her

borders were extended, her coffers were replenished, and her accession of numbers was quite flattering; but there was a sad backsliding of heart. The changes, desired long by some of her ambitious members, were encouraged. Certain cities were made metropolitan; grades in the ministry were introduced, together, with vestments and robes of office; the mode of worship was rendered more liberal and popular, by the accumulation of rites and ceremonies, till the line of demarcation between the church and the world could scarcely be perceived. Hypocrisy grew apace, bickerings and strifes increased; heresies were organized, headed by ambitious and godless ministers; Constantinople began to compete with Rome, which resulted in a division of the churches into the eastern and western; a breach not healed to this day. Then, instead of outward pressure, internal war broke out—a war of controversy and non-intercourse. The darkness increased, schisms multiplied; the pious witnesses for God and his truth gradually withdrew to the valleys, that they might worship their Maker in peace, and preserve his ordinances from utter desecration. The

dark ages ensued, and the progress from bad to worse was such, that Zion's light would have been extinguished, had not her God remembered his promise, that "the gates of hell should not prevail against her," and, by his Providence and Spirit, brought about the glorious Reformation of the sixteenth century. This formed a memorable epoch, as well in learning as religion. But even this blissful and Heaven-directed work was marred, and defrauded of its full effect, by contentions and conflicting views among its leaders, who though good men, upon the whole, were fallible and subject, except in so far as they were guided by the wisdom that is from above, to the action of bad influences. Some reformed too much, perhaps, in *one direction*; while others stopped short, through mistaken notions of policy and expediency. Thus, you find among Protestants, a good deal of difference, particularly in modes and forms, although there is, really, more *substantial agreement* among them, than a cold-hearted unfriendly bystander is apt to think. But we are, we confess it with shame, filed off into little bands, occupied, too much, each with its own con-

cerns, while it would seem as if we ought to be united, in one unbroken phalanx, to convey the glad tidings to the multitudes yet sitting in darkness and the shadow of death. We are not inveighing against this state of things, or presuming against holy Providence; perhaps it will issue in good that we cannot see: we are stating facts. And, now, in view of these internal difficulties, added to the outward obstacles, in the way of the gospel's progress, already referred to, we ask whether it be not more than wonderful, that genuine Christianity has not been, before this time, banished from the world? Could it have attained the standing and the influence among mankind, which it now holds, had there not been a divine power sustaining it, and urging it on towards its destined triumph? You have seen that the religion itself is repulsive to fallen nature; the obstacles to its progress, complicated and prodigious, made up of Jewish prejudice and Gentile pride and polytheism; you have been shown the inadequacy of the visible agencies and means used in its furtherance; and last, though not least, you have marked the hinderances resulting from the wrong

policy, and bad conduct of its own professed friends. The proposition, with which we set out in this lecture, we here repeat. The rapid propagation, continuance and present state of the Christian religion cannot be satisfactorily accounted for, without supposing that a special divine patronage was and is still exercised in its support; and, if the demonstration has failed, you will impute the failure to the lecturer, not to the weakness of the cause.

If any one should remind us of Moham-medism, as a parallel case, we deny that it is a parallel case; and we feel that our holy religion is dishonoured by the comparison. Mohammed's was a very different system, made up of selections from Judaism, Christianity and Paganism, an unseemly mixture adapted to men's depraved taste; it was got up in a dark age, and among an ignorant people; it was propagated after the first few years by the sword; its founder was of a distinguished family and of great wealth; its rewards were the rewards of valour; its very heaven was sensual. Mohammed exhibited no credentials of a divine mission. His Koran was enough; its style and sub-

limity were superhuman. He talked about his intimacy and interviews with angels, and long and rapid journeys through unbounded space, which no one witnessed but himself. "There is one God, and Mohammed is his prophet," was the substance of his creed; and, then, the numerous prayers, penances and abstinences to merit divine favour. Nothing new or important for man to know was revealed by him. It was, first and last, a warlike, politico-ecclesiastical, self-righteous and despotic contrivance of a worldly-wise and artful man. It is a religion which cannot subsist on the soil of civil and religious freedom, where Christianity is at home, in company with science and literature, freedom and the arts of civilization. The religion of Christ bespeaks its holy origin by its benign effects—it stands alone by the help of God, and is as imperishable and immutable as *truth*. Its aim is as pure as benevolence—its scope, wide as the world—its victories are those of love and free grace—its ultimate triumph certain; for its author and finisher is the Lord of hosts.

LECTURE VII.

APPENDIX TO THE PRECEDING LECTURE:—PREACHING,
THE DIVINELY ORDAINED METHOD OF CARRYING OUT
THE PRINCIPLES OF THE GOSPEL, AND OF ACCOMPLISH-
ING ITS GLORIOUS DESIGN.

IN our last lecture, which, it will be recollected, was on the *propagation* of Christianity, we had occasion, frequently, to notice the *preaching* of Christ and his apostles, as a means of introducing and spreading the gospel among mankind. But as our remarks upon the subject then were necessarily very brief and rather incidental, and as it is a matter of great practical importance in the Christian system, we will now direct your attention to it a little more particularly.

For the origin of preaching, as a *divine institution*, we must look far back of the commencement of the Christian dispensation. Noah was a preacher; and Enoch, the seventh from Adam, the apostle Jude informs us, prophesied, and of course preached, for every

prophet was a preacher, to some extent. Moses and all the prophets of the Old Testament, with John the precursor of Jesus, were likewise preachers. They were divinely commissioned to publish God's messages of truth to mankind, and call sinners to repentance and obedience; which is the main object and aim of evangelical preaching. In the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah, we have a prophetic, and most graphic description of the character of the Redeemer, as a preacher of righteousness and grace: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to *preach* good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted; to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound: to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified." In the fourth chapter of the Evangelist Luke, we find that the Saviour took this passage as the text of a ser-

mon which he delivered in the synagogue at Nazareth, and commenced his discourse, by remarking, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

Indeed, preaching, in one form or another, seems to have been the chosen and principal means of instructing mankind, and of bringing them to a saving knowledge of religious truth ever since the apostacy of our race; and that it will continue to be so, till the designs of redeeming love shall be fully accomplished, we cannot doubt. We will arrange our remarks on the subject, under the following heads, viz.

I. The *wisdom* of the institution; or, its adaptedness to the character and circumstances of man.

II. The nature of a *call* to the work, and the mode of induction into office.

III. The *matter* and the *manner* of preaching, its *utility* and *economy* as a mode of public instruction.

IV. The obligations of Christians to maintain the preaching of the gospel, at home and abroad, as extensively as possible.

I. The wisdom of the institution appears in its adaptedness to the nature, necessities

and circumstances of man; just as the same divine attribute is displayed in creation and providence. This material world was evidently fitted up and furnished, mainly, for such a being as man. Every thing in it is adapted to our physical character and wants. Inferior animals are not forgotten, indeed; but they are subjected to our control; and we may use them for our benefit, within certain obvious limits of reason and humanity. The objects with which we are surrounded, all bear some relation to us, and are calculated, if rightly used, to promote our comfort. Thus light is adapted to the eye, music to the ear, the fragrance of the rose to the sense of smell, the products of the field and the ocean are suited to our appetites and wants, and the healing virtues of the *materia medica* are fitted to remove the diseases that assail our bodies. So in providence, there is an admirable adjustment of the divine dispensations to our ultimate good, rather than to our immediate gratification. Unbroken prosperity would foster our pride, and make us unmindful of our dependence; unmixed and long-continued adversity would break down our spirits and discourage our efforts, and thus

render us alike wretched and useless. A mingled cup is therefore put into our hands, with enough of the bitter to keep us humble and prayerful, and a sufficiency of the sweet to sustain hope and stimulate to action. So, also, it is in the communications which God has made to us in the Bible. Here our moral wants are consulted and amply supplied. Our origin and destiny, our fall and recovery, the fountain of bliss and the way to reach it; sin with its wages, and holiness with its immortal rewards, are clearly revealed. Every want is met, and every reasonable desire is gratified. Weakness, unworthiness, ignorance, and guilt, poverty and wretchedness, are all regarded in the provisions of grace. The word of invitation is applicable to all, without restriction to time, place or nation: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."—"Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."

Analogous to all this, is the appointment of the sacred ministry, or the divine ordinance of preaching. The grand design of this institution is, to carry home revealed

truth to the bosom and business of mankind; to reach the heart through the ear. It is happily adapted to our moral constitution and religious susceptibilities. The word of promise, in reference to it, is, "Hear, and your soul shall live." In keeping with this promise, is an old adage, ascribed to one of the sages of antiquity, "That wisdom takes hold of a young man by the ears." There is good sense in the maxim; and in its spirit, it may be applied to persons at all periods of life. We get most of our ideas through the eye and the ear. And though we cannot say that more people can hear than can see, yet we know, that many who *can* see, cannot read. This has always been the case; and it will be so, for a long time to come, notwithstanding our modern and increasing facilities, for obtaining a common education. Besides, people are, generally, more disposed to *hear* than to *read*. The great majority of mankind are obliged to earn their bread by active manual labour, and cannot bear the expense of many books; and if they could, the style in which books are, for the most part written, makes it difficult for plain people, unused to close thinking, to comprehend the meaning, and

feel the impression of the truths so taught. Active laborious employments bring on fatigue, and dispose men to drowsiness and repose, when they sit down to read. Even pious persons, with good sense and serious intentions, find it no easy matter to keep their minds sufficiently awake to read even the *Bible*, the most interesting book in the world, with interest and profit, when alone and away from social influences and exciting causes. Prayer and awakening considerations of the momentous import of its truths, of its divine authority and high claims, are necessary to a profitable, private perusal of this blessed volume. The duty of searching the Scriptures, every one for himself, is plain, and positively enjoined upon us; yet it is attended with certain difficulties, arising out of our dulness, and ordinary habits of life, which we do not have to encounter, at least not in an equal degree, in the solemn assembly where we meet, with our families and neighbours, to hear the word of God read and preached. Here the whole scene is lively and awakening. Our social feelings and sympathies are stirred up. Mind acts upon mind. We see our teachers, and *hear* from living lips the

lively oracles. The public reading of the word with due solemnity, vivacity, and emphasis, serves as a comment upon it. The aim of the preacher in his sermon is, or ought to be, to bring some *one* truth of the gospel in each discourse, fairly into contact with the minds and consciences of his audience. His text is from the Bible; and his own learning, experience and observation are taxed, for illustration and argument to enforce its doctrine upon the understanding and the heart. The earnestness and affection, that usually attend these exercises, impart an interest to truth, which has a powerful tendency to awaken attention, and dispose the heart to receive the divine message in love. It is true, and must not be forgotten, that no saving result is to be expected, without the Spirit's influence. This is expressed, or implied in the prayers and praises, that are offered in connection with preaching, and which contribute to its effect, by quieting the mind, and rendering it docile and submissive to the declared will of God. You see, then, the wisdom and condescension of the Most High, in adapting his institutions to the moral constitution and ordinary circumstances of our race.

The revealed truths of the gospel are admirably suited to meet our wants, and the method of bringing these truths home to our bosoms, by the ministry of reconciliation, is equally well adapted to our social nature, and our capability of useful impressions, from various combined influences. All our powers of attention are roused, our affections interested, and our perceptions aided by the truthful statements and earnest, urgent appeals of the living preacher. It suits our frail nature vastly better to receive the divine messages through lips of clay, than by the voice of an angel from heaven. In this way the great God comes down to our weakness, making known to us, in our own language, and by one of our fellows and equals by nature, the most august truths, and cheering assurances of grace and acceptance through the Mediator. Multitudes of mankind can hear that cannot read; and many that can read prefer to hear, on account of the social attractions connected with public teaching. It suits the capacity and habits of the great mass of the people better than solitary study. They can learn more in a given time in this way, than in any other. Hence, God in conformity

with one of the great principles of his government, that of adapting the *means* to the *end*, has selected and distinguished this mode of religious instruction, by his special blessing. Judging from what we read in Scripture and church history, we would say that more souls have been brought to repentance and a saving knowledge of the gospel by preaching, than by all other means together; not by any inherent efficacy which it possesses, but by divine appointment and favour. As a general rule, "Faith cometh by *hearing*, and hearing by the word of God." We proceed now to consider briefly,—

II. The nature of a call to the prophetic or preaching work; and the mode of induction into the office. On this article, which comprises two ideas, we shall not detain you long, for we have no relish for controversy. We begin by remarking that God is a sovereign, and chooses the instruments and means of accomplishing his purposes, according to the counsel of his own will. Thus he called Cyrus, a heathen prince, to the deliverance of his people, Israel, from the Babylonish captivity. And in calling men to the work of the ministry, the same awful attribute appears.

He does not seem to have regarded the possession of genuine personal piety in all cases, as an indispensable pre-requisite. Some men have been employed by him in building up his kingdom in the world, who do not appear to have been the subjects of his saving grace. We have in view the cases of Balaam and Judas, both of whom, so far as we can judge, were bad men, and were actuated by unholy motives, first and last. Jonah is a doubtful case; and Jeremiah, when called very explicitly, came up to the work reluctantly, alleging his youth and unfitness; and conscious, probably, of the want of that personal courage, which seemed to him necessary, in so bold and perilous an undertaking, in a degenerate age he would have declined the call. The reasons of the divine conduct in such cases, are not made known to us, and it were idle, if not presumptuous, in us, to attempt to guess them out. To our limited vision, God's way is often in the dark; but it is always right, and leads to a wise and good end. The *call* was not, in all instances, the same in form, though doubtless the same in substance. It was made clear to the person called. Ablution with water, as a sign of purity, and anointing with

oil, as a token of consecration, with a commission and miraculous powers, were usually connected with the call under the old economy. Under the gospel dispensation the washing and anointing were laid aside, and imposition of hands by the proper authority, substituted as a symbol of official designation. Of what constitutes a call to the ministry of the word, since the cessation of miracles, we cannot speak definitely, because the Scripture is not explicit on the subject. We believe there is a *providential call*, but whether there be anything special and peculiar in it, we are not prepared to say. We suppose it is to be determined, like other questions of duty, by a careful reference to the indications of the divine will,—our natural, acquired, and gracious qualifications, and strict scrutiny of the motives that lead us to seek the office, with earnest prayer for the divine direction. A desire to do good is not decisive; for *that* is the common feeling of all good men; and yet it is obviously not the will of God that every good man should be set apart to the work of the ministry. Some probably mistake their calling, in assuming the office; and others, perhaps, (not many we trust) rush into it

from motives of ambition, comfort, or convenience. Those who do so, cannot expect to be either useful or happy. The duty of the church plainly is to guard, with all fidelity and vigilance, against the intrusion into her ministry, of men destitute of the proper qualifications. She may not admit to her sacred ministrations, ignorant men or novices, whatever may be their pious pretensions; nor godless or immoral men, or those who are unsound in the faith of the gospel, whatever may be their attainments in literature, or their standing in general society. She knows that those who love the Saviour and his truth will be most likely to edify her members, promote her union, and extend her borders; self-preservation and fidelity to her Lord therefore, require her to guard her sanctuaries, and look well to those who are to guide her counsels and minister in her holy ordinances. She cannot, indeed, judge the heart, or detect hypocrisy; but she can judge of the fruits of righteousness, the evidences of a regenerate heart; and she has a right to insist on reputable membership, and a good report from them that are without, and prudence, and aptness to teach, and such training in litera-

ture, science, and theology, as the Scriptures warrant, together with the unqualified adoption of her creed, before she gives her sanction to the ordination of any man. When she has attended faithfully to these things, she has done about all that is expected of her, save to sustain the true-hearted labourers in the Lord's vineyard, and expel from her communion and service, such as subsequently act unworthy of their high vocation.

In regard to the mode of setting apart, or inducting ministers into office, the subject is frequently noticed in the New Testament; and the safest way is, to take it just as we find it there: for as to any changes, or modifications which may have been introduced after the apostles ceased to direct the affairs of the church, although they might not affect the substance of the institution, yet we must not regard them as of any authority, but only as matters of taste or expediency. Some eight or ten instances of ordination are given in the New Testament. Thus, Mark iii. 14, it is said that, "Christ ordained the twelve, that they should be with him;" i. e., as learners under his eye and special tuition, preparatory to their receiving the general commission,

under which all gospel ministers profess to act. On the defection of Judas, as we read, Acts i. 21, 22, the other apostles ordained, or nominated Matthias to take his place; we say *nominated*, for the choice between him and Joseph Barsabas, was made by lot, with a solemn appeal to God. In Acts xiv. 23, &c., we find that Paul and Barnabas ordained elders in certain cities which they visited in one of their missionary tours. 1st Timothy ii. 7, Paul tells us, that he was *ordained* or *appointed* or *made* an apostle; i. e., evidently by Christ. Timothy and Titus are instructed in their duty, in regard to ordination. The former is said to have been set apart, by a Presbytery in one place, with the laying on of hands, and in another place, with the imposition of Paul's hand; which are reconcilable, by supposing that Paul took part in the service, or acted as Moderator or President of the Presbytery, or council of elders, on the occasion. The latter, (Titus) is directed to ordain elders in the churches of Crete; or, as the passage may be interpreted, to see that the duty was attended to while he remained in that island as an evangelist. Timothy is charged not to lay hands *suddenly* on any man. From all

these instances, together, for we have not time to remark upon them separately; we may safely conclude, that the apostles appointed, or ordained men to the work of the ministry, with serious reference to their fitness for the office, commending them to God for his blessing, and using the symbolical act of imposing hands upon them as a sign or public testimony, that they were invested with ministerial authority, and held responsible for the faithful discharge of its duties.

The precise *form* of ordination is not essential to its validity; if it were, we should find it definitely prescribed in the sacred Scripture, our only rule of faith and practice. Ministers, it should be remembered, are *given, constituted and trained* for the service of the church,—not the church for her ministers' convenience, which would be absurd and aside from the analogy of all other social arrangements. It is the church, under her glorious Head and King, that virtually selects and commissions her servants, whether it be by the agency of one authorized minister, or of several acting conjointly, and in her behalf. She is richly endowed by her gracious Lord and Saviour. All things are hers; whether

Paul or Apollos, or Cephas. When the Redeemer "ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men; some apostles, some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Eph. iv. 11—13. These ascension gifts, you learn from this Scripture, are to be continued, till the work of redemption shall be completed: so that if by any catastrophe, not likely indeed to occur, every minister on earth should be cut off, others would be furnished from the same source; and the church would undoubtedly have an important agency in providing them. The apostolic succession does not, therefore, appear to be a matter of so great moment as some seem to think. For ourselves, we attach very little importance to it. It is a long chain, extending through ages of horrible corruption; and nothing short of a perpetual miracle could preserve it unbroken and pure. We have no mind to hold on to it. Our de-

pendence is on the fulness of Christ, and the word of assurance, that no weapon formed against Zion shall prosper. Let us now attend a little to the next head:

III. *Matter*, and the *manner* of preaching—its *utility* and *economy*, as a method of public instruction. It is proper to remark here, that according to the Scriptures, *preaching* is assigned the first place in the scale of ministerial duties. All other departments of administration are subordinate and subsidiary to this. The training and *ordination* of ministers are preparatory, and in *order* to preaching: and the exercise of discipline and government, and the dispensing of the sacraments become duties, in consequence of the results of preaching. Baptism is administered but once to the same individual; and the Lord's Supper, at suitable intervals; whereas, preaching, or preparing to preach, is the minister's daily business. This, indeed, is the grand instrumentality, chosen and sanctified of God, for bringing men to repentance and the faith of the gospel. The voice that cried as a herald, in the wilderness of Jordan, prepared the way of the Lord, first by *preaching*, and then by administering the baptism of repentance, and

telling the multitudes of *Him* who was soon coming to baptize with the Holy Ghost, and with fire. The Saviour commenced his public ministry by proclaiming that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. The seventy disciples that he sent out in pairs, went forth preaching the same doctrine, wherever they could obtain a hearing. The first words in the great commission are, "Go, *preach* the gospel to every creature." Paul preached in the synagogue at Damascus, immediately after his conversion; and so of the rest. Preaching was their main employment; while other duties were attended to as occasion offered. And as preaching is the chief business of God's ministers, so he has furnished them with materials for the work, in his blessed Bible. The injunction is, "Preach the word," that is, the gospel, comprising all the facts, doctrines, precepts, and promises of revealed religion; Christ Jesus in his Mediatorship, and atoning sacrifice being the central glory of the whole. "We preach Christ crucified," says Paul, "to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks, foolishness; but to them that are called, the power of God, and the wisdom of God." "I am not ashamed of the gospel

of Christ," says he to the Romans; "for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth." In his farewell address to the elders of Ephesus, he says: "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you; but have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ:—neither count I my life dear, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." "If any man speak," says Peter, "let him speak *as the oracles of God*, that God, in all things, may be glorified." And, for himself, in view of his final account, he adds, 2 Pet. i. 12, &c., "I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth: yea, I think it meet as long as I am in this tabernacle to stir you up, by putting you in remembrance; knowing that, shortly, I must put off this my tabernacle. Moreover, I will endeavour that ye may be able, after my decease, to have these things always in remembrance; for we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known

unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." "That which we have seen and heard," says John, "declare we unto you:" 1 John i. 3. But why should we argue this point? Nothing is plainer, or more easily deducible from scripture and apostolic example, than that the sacred volume contains the whole subject-matter of evangelical preaching. It is rich, pure, and various in its contents and bearings. It is our storehouse from which, as stewards in the house of God, we are to bring forth things new and old: *new*, in the arrangement and form of presentation; but *old*, as the divine purpose to save sinners, in essence and import. It is our text-book—our *only* text-book, from which all our themes, arguments and motives are to be drawn. No other work, however excellent its matter, or distinguished its author, is to be, even by implication, brought on the same platform with God's book. Whether it be Calvin or Luther, Cranmer or Knox, Wesley or Bunyan, it matters not: the writings are uninspired; and, therefore, fallible, and without authority to bind the conscience. Such writings may be used as helps and illustrations, but not as the ground-

work of our public preaching. No: nor are the creeds, or confessions of the churches, to be allowed to compete with the Bible, in furnishing the matter of preaching. They ought, indeed, to be explained, and used as exponents of the sense in which scripture is understood, by the several denominations that have adopted them. But this may be done without putting them, even *in appearance* and *temporarily*, in the place of the inspired oracles. It would not do to say, that these books teach the doctrines of the Bible, for the same may be said of many other books. It is for the *pre-eminence*—the *supremacy* of the sacred scriptures that we contend. If the Bible be what it purports to be, the word of God—the only infallible rule of religious faith and practice, let not its prerogative be invaded. It acknowledges no compeers; but stands alone, bearing the distinguished impress of its divine origin and authority. And why should it be degraded by being bound up in close contact with apocryphal writings? All such associations make against its rightful claims, in public estimation. Nor do we need such associates with it on the *score of variety*. The Bible is, *in itself*, a

world of truth—a mine, deep, and wide, and inexhaustible; nor can any preacher exhaust one of its smallest veins in the longest lifetime. It is ample and complete, containing the matter—and *all* the matter that is to be preached. We are not to give our own speculations for gospel truth; nor is it safe to make sermons out of our inferences from its doctrines. These will be more or less legitimate, according as the truth is clearly, or dimly discerned; and they are very apt to be used for supporting a preconceived system. Long texts and short sermons are better, other things being equal, than short texts and long sermons. In the former case, we are sure of having a good amount of truth; in the latter, we sometimes get more of the *preacher* than of Christ; whereas, Christ should be “*all* and in all.” “We preach not ourselves,” says Paul, “but Christ Jesus, the Lord; and ourselves, your servants, for Jesus’ sake.” The truth—gospel truth, is the instrument of sanctification:—“Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth.”

As to the *manner* of preaching—it should be plain, fearless, affectionate, and solemn. Plain, because the majority of hearers, every-

where, are unused to elaborate or highly embellished language. The professed object is to give instruction, which cannot be done in a style that is above the comprehension of the hearer; and the souls of the illiterate are as precious as those of the learned. "I would rather," says Paul, "speak five words with my understanding," that is, that can be easily understood, "that, with my voice, I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue."—1 Cor. xiv. 19. The *manner* should be *fearless*.—Not harsh and vindictive, which always disgusts, or provokes, or grieves; and thus mars the effect of the truth declared: but without "the fear of man which bringeth a snare;" and without any effort to smooth and soften down the word of the Lord to suit an un-sanctified taste. Words of awful import used by the Holy Ghost, may be safely uttered by the preacher, on suitable occasions, if, in the manner of utterance, he evince a just sense of their fearful meaning. There are a few denunciatory terms, occasionally found in scripture, which should be but seldom published from the pulpit, and then with profound reverence and awe. Yet courage

and fearlessness are necessary to a faithful discharge of ministerial duty. Paul asked the prayers of Christians that he might speak *boldly* as he *ought* to speak. He preached righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come, before Felix, and that profligate governor trembled. Peter and John, when ordered by the Jewish sanhedrim, to desist from preaching, refused to obey the injunction, at the risk of their lives. "Fear not them that kill the body," said Christ, "but after that, have nothing more that they can do; but rather fear him, who hath power to destroy both soul and body in hell."

Affectionate.—This is a quality of preaching which cannot be acquired by art, though it is sometimes affected; and then it is hypocritical and worse than useless. To preach the gospel affectionately, we must speak under the influence of the Redeemer's love. We must feel, in a measure, as he felt, when he mingled his tears with those of Martha and Mary at the grave of their brother; when he had compassion on the multitude, and wept over Jerusalem. A heart steeped in the love of God, and agonizing for the

salvation of souls, is the only source of genuine religious affection. It does not consist in the free use of tender terms, and strong professions, but rather in labours of love—faithful, untiring efforts to save men from sin and ruin. When evinced in this way, it is seldom without effect, by a divine blessing. It allays prejudice, moves the heart, and draws the sympathies into the channels of truth. In a word, next to the truth itself, impressed on the conscience by the Holy Spirit, it is the chief agent in winning souls to Christ; for it is but the reaction of his love, which is stronger than death. And, here, if time permitted, we might inquire a little about the *reading* of sermons, whether it be the most affectionate and effective manner. It has its obvious advantages; but, then, whether these are sufficient to overcome the equally obvious disadvantages, connected with it, is doubtful. On some subjects, and on certain occasions, no doubt, reading is preferable; but in the ordinary preaching of the word to a promiscuous audience, a free, earnest, animated delivery seems most likely to produce effect. The pleader, at the bar, does not, ordinarily,

read his plea to the court and jury, though he may have both studied and written: why? Because he deems this method less convincing, and less likely to secure success, than the other. Apostolic and primitive example is, also, as it seems to us, against the practice of reading. It is true, the first preachers of the gospel were inspired, and had but little opportunity for study and writing. Upon a full view of the subject, therefore, it will, probably, be found that no general rule can be laid down, on this point, which it would be wise to follow, in all circumstances. Study, writing and prayer are indispensable; but the mode of delivery may be left to the discretion of the preacher, in view of his own talents and the character of his hearers. There is a diversity of gifts; let every man try to *know himself*, and take the method by which he can do the most good. But let it never be forgotten, that the design of the ministry is, to *convince* men that the gospel is true, and to *persuade* them to embrace it. *Solemnity* of manner is another quality of preaching well worthy of consideration. It is a serious business to undertake to show unto sinful men the way of salvation; rightly

to divide or distribute the word of truth, so that every hearer may receive a portion, in due season. To be a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death, to those who hear us, is a fearful alternative. "Who is sufficient for these things?" The responsibilities and results of the office are solemn and momentous, beyond expression. All levity of mind, matter, or manner, is *unseemly*, and sadly out of place here. And to this great evil, some preachers are peculiarly liable from constitution, temperament, or habit. It is, to some, a besetting sin, against which they have need to watch unto prayer. To say of a preacher, that he is *witty*, is no praise, but a censure; to say that he is ingenious, or elegant, is not much to his credit; but to say that he is grave and solemn, is in good keeping with his appropriate work. Cowper, one of Zion's favourite poets, has expressed our ideas, on this point, very forcibly.

"He that negotiates between God and man,
As God's ambassador, the grand concerns
Of judgment and of mercy, should beware
Of lightness in his speech. 'Tis pitiful
To court a grin, when you should woo a soul;
To break a jest, when pity would inspire

Pathetic exhortation; and t' address
 The skittish fancy with facetious tales,
 When sent with God's commission to the heart."

Of the *usefulness* of this institution, we need say but little. Its *appointment*, by the only wise God, as the principal means of saving souls, is indubitable evidence of its utility and fitness. But in addition to this, see its benign effects, on individuals, families and states; effects blissful, holy and permanent as Heaven. "The pulpit," as our poet again sings:

"Must stand acknowledged, while the world shall stand,
 The most important and effectual guard,
 Support, and ornament of virtue's cause."

But that the preaching of the gospel may have its full effect, it must be made accessible to people, in all circumstances. It is characteristic of the true Messiah, that his religion is *preached to the poor*. This was the case originally, and designed so to be, always and every where. But in modern times, particularly in large wealthy cities, there is a lamentable departure from this distinctive principle in the divine plan. We erect fine houses for worship, and decorate them in a style so costly, as virtually to ex-

clude the poor.. Some provision is usually made for them, it is true; but, for the most part, it is regarded by them as invidious or degrading and, therefore, not generally accepted. Christians should look well to this evil, and spare no pains to have it corrected. It is not for us to suggest the ways and means; but one of two things seems desirable: either that the seats in God's house be placed, in point of expense, within the reach of the poorest; or that free houses be erected, and furnished with pastors, and be governed on the received principles of the several denominations with which they are connected. Street or field preaching, though well-meant and useful at times, will not last long in civilized society; it gives too much occasion to scoffing and riotous doings. It is painful to the Christian heart, to think how great a proportion of the population of large cities are unconnected with any place of public worship; mainly from the cause just alluded to. The consequence is, that the holy Sabbath is lost, and worse than lost to them; they go in the way of temptation; some disturb the public peace, and, as a consequence, the courts of

police are more crowded with business, on *Monday* than on any other day of the week. A hundred thousand people, in Philadelphia and its liberties, hear no gospel on the Lord's day. How can its full benefits be experienced in such a state of things? "We speak, as unto wise men; judge ye what we say."

The *economy* or *cheapness* of preaching, as a mode of public instruction, is well worthy of more consideration than we can give it, at present. It is said, there are "twenty thousand preachers of the gospel in the United States;" we have not the means, at hand, of ascertaining the number accurately. But take it at that; and suppose their support to be five hundred dollars apiece, per annum, (and it will scarcely average so much;) then you have ten million a year for their maintenance. Now compare this sum, at your leisure, with the expense of our public and private schools, our academies and colleges, and you will be surprised at the difference. And yet the gospel is the cement of society; and the faithful preaching of it does more for the intelligence, the good order and happiness of the community than

all other means of popular instruction together, to say nothing of its influence on the salvation of the soul. To have any just conception of the worth of preaching, we must view it in connection with the Sabbath, the Sabbath-School, public morals, and all missionary, and other benevolent efforts. It is the conservator, the counsellor and advocate of these, and of all humane and philanthropic institutions and designs. It operates benignly through so many channels, and by so many subordinate agencies, that its value cannot be duly estimated; and yet it costs less than the dressing of our feet. It quickens and educates conscience, and conscience restrains vice and prompts to good morals, and good morals, *Christian* morals, keep the peopled world from turning into a hell. Yes, it is *cheap* and *efficacious*, incomparably beyond any scheme of public instruction that has ever been devised. Education, without religion, is no blessing to any community. The experiment has been tried; and the result is before the world, in letters of blood. France abolished her Sabbaths, closed her churches, and silenced her religious teachers, but was soon glad to re-open and recall them; for she

found that Atheism is a miserable substitute for Christianity, even when mixed up with a good deal of mummery and superstition. But we must pass to the last division of our present topic, viz.:

IV. The obligations of Christians to sustain the preaching of the gospel, at home and abroad, as extensively as possible. This opens before us a wide field; but we must survey it very cursorily. Indeed, argument is scarcely necessary here. Christians know the law of their Lord's kingdom, so oft repeated, and in various forms. "The labourer is worthy of his hire; the ox that treadeth out the corn must not be muzzled; who goeth a warfare at his own charges? They that preach the gospel, must live of the gospel." "If we," says Paul, "have ministered to you in spiritual things, is it a great matter that you should minister to us of your carnal things?" Our object, therefore, is to stir up your pure minds, by way of remembrance. Christians, your obligations, in this behalf, are plain and pressing. Your pastors, who serve you in holy things, expect but a moderate support—a decent living; this you guaranty to them, by covenant, when you call

them into your service: let them have it, without stint or grudging, and without delay, when due. Let them have it, as a matter of right, not of favour. Generally speaking, no men serve your interests better, or at a more reasonable rate; and, if any should prove faithless and recreant, you know how to get rid of them. Your missionaries, too, are dependent on your patronage. You call upon *them* to bear the messages of truth to your brethren of mankind, who are suffering for the bread of life. They respond, Here we are; send us, but give us the bread that perisheth. They make sacrifices, and encounter hardships, that cannot be described; and they are doing more good than can be measured, in time. Forget them not, in your family devotions, and when you meet, in your commodious sanctuaries, to worship God. They are following in the footsteps, and continuing the labours of *him* who came to seek and to save the lost. They are preparing the way of the Lord, who is coming by appointment, to baptize the nations with the Holy Ghost. They are laying the foundation of Zion's future glory. They are *working* men; and their work is *rough* and ; you will not leave them without encouragement

and support: you will keep your children in mind of them, too, by countenancing their little contributions and teaching them to read the missionary journals. Your fellow sinners, who are sitting in darkness and the shadow of death, have, also, strong claims to your remembrance. Who maketh you to differ? and what have you, that you have not received? You have the gospel; but not to keep as a monopoly. You are expected to hold forth the word of life, to sound forth the glad tidings, so that all may hear and believe and be saved. To whom is the command addressed, "Go preach the gospel to every creature?" To the church, indubitably. Now, when God commands, it is not for us to pause and inquire whether the time is come, or whether the gospel will be received and take root on heathen ground. Just *sow the seed*, and the Spirit of the Lord will see to the increase. You hear him saying, "My word shall not return unto me void; it shall accomplish that whereunto I send it." Oh no! your "labour will not be in vain in the Lord." "Lo! I am with you always." But your agency, Christians, is embraced in the divine plan. Withhold it not. Your

missions, whether at home or abroad, cannot live and prosper without your aid. Come up to the work, then, with faith in God. Remember there is but one true gospel, and one only Saviour. This gospel is the power of God, and must prevail. By and by, it will find support wherever you send it. It is adapted for universal diffusion. To your Saviour are given, by solemn covenant, the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied. All flesh shall see the salvation of our God, and all nations shall praise him. He shall come down as dew on the tender herb: even so—come, Lord Jesus!

LECTURE VIII.

RECAPITULATION AND INFERENCES.

THE design of this lecture, which will complete the series on the *external evidences*, is two-fold; First, to give a summary view of what has been attempted, in the course; and secondly, to conclude with such practical remarks as are suggested by the general argument.

The *summary* must consist of little more than a reference to the several topics that have been discussed, for our power of condensation has been already taxed, nearly to the utmost. The object has been, you will recollect, to prove that the Christian religion, or the Bible, is a revelation from God, containing every thing essential to a sound religious faith, and correct moral conduct; and that it is accompanied by evidence, sufficient to convince us of its divine origin and authority. In entering upon the subject, the being and natural perfections of the Creator were

assumed, as exhibited, to some extent, in the visible universe, and its wise and beneficent arrangements; and from the striking analogy between the works of nature, (as they are called,) and the revelations of the Bible, we asserted, upon various considerations suggested, that the God of nature is the author of the Bible; that the book of nature and that of revelation are perfectly harmonious and consistent, so far as they keep company; but that the latter goes much farther than the former,—making known things of intense interest to us, in our present imperfect and sinful state. Hence appears the *necessity* of revelation, as well for the honour of God as for the happiness of man. The first parents of our race were religious beings; and were, undoubtedly, favoured with such knowledge of divine truth as was necessary to the fulfilment of their obligations to God, to themselves, and to their posterity. But this primitive revelation being handed down, probably, by tradition, became, in process of time, adulterated, and ineffectual as a rule of duty. Men became idolatrous, ignorant, and profligate in the extreme. God's honour and glory were trodden under foot—humanity

was outraged, and thick darkness covered the earth. Yet, man, even in his fallen and degraded condition, had not lost his religious susceptibility;—he felt his weakness, and would lean on something without himself;—he longed for an efficacious atonement, and an authorized teacher from heaven. Thus, there arises a *presumption* in favour of divine revelation, anterior to its bestowment, and before the sacred oracles are submitted to our inspection and acceptance. God is good; and it is presumable, that he would renew and enlarge his communications of truth and mercy to our fallen and bewildered race, in such measure as would meet and relieve our necessities. That the Almighty Creator could, if so disposed, provide for the relief of our helpless misery, none will deny. And, as the case was extraordinary, we might, reasonably, expect that extraordinary means would be used to commend the provisions of divine love to the reason and conscience of mankind. A revelation was necessary, desirable, and possible; felt to be so by many of the wisest and best men of pagan antiquity. These presumptive indications that a special revelation would be made, and that a qualified

Saviour would be sent into the world, in due time, gave occasion to spurious oracles and false Christs; which, however, furnish no solid objection to the sacred scriptures and the true Messiah, inasmuch as the best things are liable to be counterfeited; and we pointed out several criteria, or tests, by which the precious may be easily distinguished from the vile, but which our limited time will not allow us, here, to enumerate.

We, then, took up the Bible, with the view of examining its claims, and found that it consisted of two parts, called the Old and the New Testaments, mutually sustaining and illustrating one another; the whole volume being composed of sixty-six distinct pieces, written by various authors, who lived in several countries, and at different periods of the world, through the space of at least fifteen hundred years; yet all harmonizing, wonderfully, in their doctrines, general tendency, and apparent design,—the glory of God as connected with the salvation of man. This harmony and unity of purpose we cannot account for, without supposing a divine interference. We looked carefully at the character of the writers, and found them to be, for the most

part, plain, uneducated men, but men of good sense, and of uncommon simplicity and candour, revealing their own personal faults and foibles, when there seemed to be no occasion for such disclosures; thus proving that they had no sinister, selfish end in view. This fact is remarkable in these writers. It stands alone; there is nothing like it in the world. It marks their rigid regard for truth and honesty, and seems to demonstrate that the hand of the Lord was upon them and his Spirit within them. We examined into the authenticity, and integrity, or unadulterated preservation of these writings, as we now have them; and found no reason to doubt either. The credibility of the facts narrated, we have also found to rest on the same kind of evidence that supports the truth of other historical acts, viz: the testimony of eye-witnesses, handed down, uncontradicted by evidence of equal force, and with the sanction of successive ages. As to the integrity, or unadulterated character of the sacred writings, we have every reason that the nature of the case admits of, to be perfectly satisfied. They were transmitted to us with great care and at prodigious cost, from the apostolic age.

The ancient manuscripts are to be found in many of the principal libraries of Christendom. We have numerous codices, and various versions, collated with immense labour, and found to be substantially identical, from the second century to the age of printing; and, since then, they have been translated, from the originals, into scores of languages, and are in the hands of all sects and denominations of Christians, acting as checks upon each other, should any attempt be made to alter or corrupt the sacred text. And, it is a fact, worthy of special notice, and put beyond dispute, by sound, critical comparison, that the *various readings*, or differences of the early manuscripts, are merely verbal, relating to minor questions of grammar, and do not affect one of the important doctrines of the gospel.

The inspiration of the Scriptures, which gives them their peculiar authority and sacredness, has been attended to, in the preceding lectures, and we have found it to be well sustained. It consists in two degrees of the divine influences, viz: *suggestion* and *superintendence*; the former, in matters beyond the reach of the human mind,—as the Mosaic account of creation, when there were no living

witnesses to attest the fact; the plan of redemption by the Son of God; a future state of retribution; the resurrection of the body, &c. The latter, (superintendence,) in the selection and recording of such matters of fact and history, as were deemed proper, by divine wisdom, to form a portion of the sacred book. In this gradation of divine influence, we have had occasion to admire, as in many other instances, the wisdom of God, in adapting his measure of interference to the exigencies of each case,—never working a miracle without good reason for it. The writers of Scripture claimed to be under special divine guidance; we, therefore, inspected their credentials, and found them to consist in a power to *work miracles, and foretell future events*, quite above the ability and sagacity of man. This miraculous power, put forth in support of the doctrines and facts taught in the sacred records, gives them a fair title to our unwavering faith; for it is God's seal and signet upon their truth and importance. The bad things said or done, occasionally, by the writers of scripture, are no solid objection to their claims; for it is not pretended, that they were inspired and rendered infallible, in their private and per-

sonal behaviour, but only when employed as God's amanuenses, to write what *he dictated*.

Nor are the wicked speeches and doings of bad men and evil spirits recorded in the Bible, of any weight against its inspiration; for such things are obviously registered as matters of fact, for the admonition of mankind, that they may see the fruits of sin, and shun the way of transgressors. One design of revelation is, to show us the depravity of our nature, and make us feel our need of redeeming grace.

The miracles and prophecies we have, also, examined; (we place them together, here, for prophecy is a miracle of knowledge,) and have found the former so various and numerous, wrought on so many subjects, and in so open and public a manner; and, that they were of such a nature, and followed by such permanent effects, as to render deception or collusion next to impossible; and, the latter, we have seen, are of such character—so numerous—and, many of them fulfilled, and being fulfilled, according to the testimony of historians and travellers, as to make *unbelief*, one would think, almost a miracle. In few words, we have *seen*—we have *proved*, may

we not say? that *miraculous power*, *i. e.*, the power to suspend or control the laws of nature, and prophetic fore-knowledge, *are of God*; and are never imparted, but for the maintenance of truth, and the accomplishment of some great and good end, worthy the Divine Being. Now, that these extraordinary powers were exercised by Christ and his apostles, and by Moses and the prophets, in proof of the divine origin and authority of what they wrote and taught, seems, to our minds, as clear and indubitable as any thing can be made, by the joint and concurrent testimony of well authenticated history, and monumental witnesses, as we have them in the Christian sacraments, in the Jewish Passover, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jewish people. How the intelligent and honest unbeliever makes out to escape the force of such testimony, without setting aside the received laws of evidence, and outraging his own moral constitution, it is not for us to say.

We, next, proceeded to consider the propagation of Christianity; which, as is well known, was rapid and wide, beyond a parallel. Immediately, on the opening of the gospel

dispensation, three thousand souls were converted; in a few days the number increased to five thousand. Within thirty years, the gospel had spread through Judea, Galilee, Samaria, the greater part of Asia Minor, Greece, Italy, and the northern coast of Africa, as we learn from the Acts of the Apostles; which account is abundantly confirmed by foreign and uninterested writers, such as Tacitus, Juvenal, Pliny, Martial, &c. Tertullian and Origen, in the latter part of the second, and early in the third century, speak of the Christians, as filling the cities, towns, boroughs, islands, the camp, the forum and the senate: and in the year 312, the empire of Rome became nominally Christian. This rapid progress, as has been shown at some length, is very wonderful, considering the nature of the religion—so uncompromising to the sins and prejudices of men; the formidable and combined opposition made to it; the weakness of the instrumentalities used in its advancement; the fearful, legalized persecutions, which it suffered, (ten in number,) reaching from the middle of the first to the beginning of the fourth century; in the last of which, under Dioclesian, twenty thousand Christians were

put to death, on *one Christmas day*, by order of the emperor. Yet the religion triumphed and prevailed, in despite of all hinderances. How will you account for this fact? Gibbon's five natural causes, we have seen, are wholly inadequate. Our weapons, in this warfare, were not carnal, but spiritual and persuasive—truth, meekness, love and martyrdom were mighty, *through God*. Here is the cause, the only efficient and adequate cause of the prevalence, and continuance of a religion, which is too holy in its nature, and heavenly in its aim, to find favour from a world lying in sin. How could Christianity have survived the assaults of her outward foes, seconded by the treachery and worldly policy of her professed friends, till this date, had not the hand of the Lord been with her, bringing good out of evil, and making the wrath of man subserve the purposes of his mercy?

Finally, we have seen the Christian ministry, instituted to carry out the principles of *the Gospel*, and sustained by divine favour, and doing more for the reformation and good order, the peace and intelligence of mankind, than all other modes of popular instruction, that have ever been devised; thus, demon-

strating its heavenly origin by its wholesome fruits; unfolding the riches of free grace to the poor of all climes; pouring the light of life into the dark places of the earth; and, gradually, bringing a revolted world back to God, under the dominion of Messiah, the Prince of peace, and only Saviour of lost men. The preaching of the word, we have seen, is a method of instruction wisely adapted to our character and circumstances, and eminently calculated to make us wise unto salvation, and meet for that life and immortality which the gospel reveals, and which the Redeemer exemplified by his resurrection from the dead. This ministry is a monument of the truth, and divine authority of the doctrines, which it is intended to promote and perpetuate. The monument stands upon the facts; and facts are things more solid and enduring than the rocks of the Alps or the Andes. Or, to use another figure, the preaching of the gospel, is an original and abiding witness, testifying to the peopled world repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, as the way—the only way to eternal life. The ministry of reconciliation is part and parcel of the gospel system; it is co-eval

with it; gives utterance to its good tidings; expounds its meaning; opens its treasures; urges its claims; publishes its promises, as yea and amen in Christ Jesus, the chief corner stone and sure foundation of a sinner's hope. In few words, the existence of the Christian ministry cannot be accounted for but upon the truth of the gospel narrative, and, wherever it is exercised in its primitive purity and simplicity, it bears along with it unequivocal marks of a divine origin, in its benevolent, peaceful and holy effects.

Now, to what conclusion do all these considerations bring us, but that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world? Here are seven distinct arguments for the truth of the Christian religion, not one of which has as yet been fairly refuted; seven streams of light meeting in the Sun of righteousness, and yet we have not touched, except incidentally, upon the *internal* evidences; an important branch of the subject, belonging more properly, however, to the pulpit than to the press, and which addresses itself to you every Sabbath day, and as often as you read your Bibles. And why this accumulation of evidence in presenting the histo-

rical argument? A tithe of it would be deemed satisfactory in ordinary matters. We answer, because religion is founded in evidence; and also because of the transcendent importance of the inquiry. When the question is, Who is the Saviour of the soul? and who has the words of eternal life? the anxious mind is not easily satisfied. It demands, and has reason to expect, more evidence than would be satisfactory in temporal concerns. Accordingly, the Redeemer claims our faith amidst a cloud of witnesses; and he has decided, that if we hear not these, or are not convinced by their joint and harmonious testimony, *neither would we be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*

We trust enough has been said and *proved*, in the foregoing series of lectures, to satisfy the Christian that his faith is well founded, and that he has good reasons for the hope that is in him. If so, our labour will not be in vain in the Lord. As to skeptics and gainsayers, we have had them in view also, and with deep solicitude and prayer; but we are by no means sanguine that any thing that has been said, or that can be said, will be of much use to them. We do not, indeed, despair of their

conviction; for the grace revealed in the gospel is free;—the Author and Finisher of our faith is able to save to the uttermost. But their feet are in a snare of their own net-work, from which nothing short of an extraordinary exertion of redeeming power can rescue them. That this gracious power may be exercised in their favour, *is* and *will be* our sincere and fervent prayer:—"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do!"

We are sensible, after all, that the argument has not been presented on this occasion, in its full strength and impressiveness. Others in the same blessed cause, have done much more and to better purpose. But we have done what we could, in a given time. We have cast in our two mites for the furtherance of God's truth and man's salvation. Whatever of good may result from our feeble efforts, will be through divine favour; and to the Author of all good be the praise ascribed.

There is an aspect of this question, not yet prominently presented, which we beg leave to submit, in closing our summary, just as it lies in our own mind. It may be taken as a *sub-summary*. Here is a religion, so holy in its principles, and so benign in its influences

that it could not have been got up by bad men, for an evil purpose; so stupendous in its scope and pretensions, that it is extremely difficult to conceive of its having originated in a finite mind. It has come down to us, moreover, through such formidable obstacles, that we cannot see how it could have reached us without divine patronage; and then it comprises natural religion, and all that is good in all other religions known to the world, besides its own peculiar provisions; so that if its distinctive features should fail, there would be safety in embracing it; whereas, if it turn out to be *true*, and true in all its *peculiarities*; if it is, as it purports to be, the only religion that comprises the elements of salvation, for our apostate world, there must be *exceeding peril* in rejecting it. So it strikes us upon mature consideration; and in this form, we leave the question with you, for your decision, each one for himself, and on his personal responsibility. For ourselves, we have deposited our immortal interests in the *safety-chest* of the gospel, which contains the written covenant of man's redemption, believing it to be the only thing of the kind that will survive the fires of that day of the Lord,—coming as a thief in the

night,—when the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat,—the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burnt up!

But we promised some practical remarks, before we conclude. Several have been suggested in the course of the argument. And,

First. We have not met the objections to our religion, except incidentally, as they have fallen in our way. The reason is, they are too numerous to be noticed, formally, in so limited a course. Many of them, moreover, are too puerile and trifling to deserve any serious notice. All that have any weight, or even plausibility, have been answered and refuted triumphantly, more than once. Those who wish to see the answers in print, will find them in several works, well known, and of easy access. As specimens, we recommend, Leland's Review of the Deistical Writers of Great Britain, Campbell on Miracles, in answer to Hume's objections, Keith on the Fulfilment of Prophecy, and Watson's Apology, in answer to Paine's ribaldry. But it ought to be known and remembered, that not one of the chief works on the evidences of Christianity has ever been answered. Who, as

Bishop Wilson asks, (who is himself one of the ablest among them,) has answered Lardner, Michaelis, Paley, Porteus, Thomas H. Horne, or even the brief and select arguments of Lord Lyttleton, and Leslie's Short Method with Deists? Scores of other able defences, and some of them by living writers, lie in book-stores, and on the shelves of libraries unanswered, little known, and read by very few. It will be time enough to deal with objections, raised out of the antiquities and mysteries of our faith, when its grand historical proofs are fairly met, and candidly considered by its adversaries. We respect sound *argument* and *sober discussion*, and will always treat them with courtesy and candour; but we despise cavilling and ridicule: they are the squibs and pop-guns of mischievous boys, and the light missiles of depraved old men. *Fault-finding* is an *easy*, and therefore a very common business; and ridicule may be played off by any fool on the gravest subjects imaginable. It is *not the test of truth*—his lordship of Shaftesbury, to the contrary notwithstanding.

2. Our second remark respects the unaccountable apathy of Christians, in regard to

the defence of the great fundamental principles of their religion. The country is deluged with two-penny books, and penny newspapers, designed to sap the foundation of our best hopes. Paine's *Age of Reason* is distributed through the land, with a zeal worthy of a better cause. Lecturers, under the plausible pretext of reforming society, are going to and fro, preaching *radicalism*, assailing our courts of law, our domestic economy, and religious institutions. One of these wandering stars has recently mustered courage to ask the use of our legislative hall at Washington, that he may get at the heart of the nation with his uprooting and pestiferous notions; and, what is yet more alarming is, that an aged and respectable member of our house of representatives has moved to grant the petition. Here is a man of gray hairs, and of some influence in his neighbourhood, who has just issued from the press a furious attack upon the Christian Sabbath, that will be in the hands, and at the hearts of our reading youth, ere long, for its author and origin are close at hand. Full three-fourths of our young men are practical infidels. You may find them at the play-house, but not often in

the house of God. Our baptized children are *attracted* by their easy manners, and genteel gait: (for every thing goes by attraction now-a-days,) and, what will be the consequences of these licentious measures? Judge ye. But what are we doing to counteract these poisonous influences? Why have we not lectures in all our cities and populous towns on the foundations of our Christian hope, *made attractive* by the best talents that the church can furnish? Where are the houses that can be had for such services on the appropriate day? How is it that none of our wealthy Christians, who give and bequeath large sums of money for other benevolent institutions, never think of endowing lectureships for the maintenance and defence of the great doctrines and facts of our common Christianity? Much has been done, and is now being done in Great Britain and elsewhere in this way; and should we not attempt something of the kind? The man that would now take the lead in procuring and opening, for the purpose just named such rooms as "The Musical Fund Hall," "The Chinese Saloon," or "Concert Hall," of Philadelphia, would *certainly succeed*, and, thus, render a service

to the cause of gospel truth, for which coming generations would rise up and call him blessed. Something of this kind is due to ourselves, to our children, and to our unbelieving fellow-citizens, that they may *know*, without attaching themselves to any particular denomination before they are prepared for it, the reasons and grounds upon which we wish them to be Christians. We beg that this hint may not be lost sight of. It is practicable.

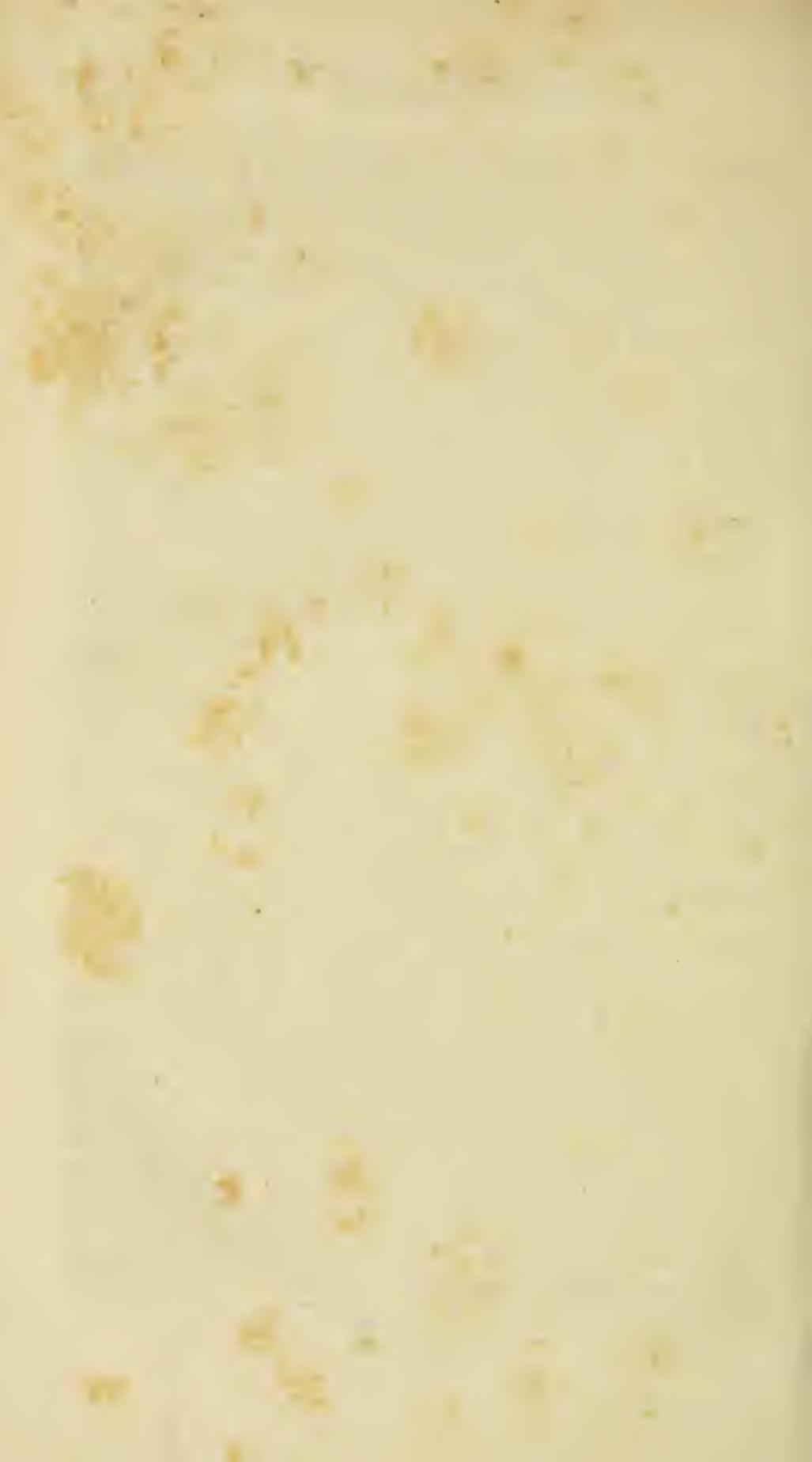
3. As a third remark, we wish it to be distinctly understood, that *we do not believe in the power of external evidence to convert the soul to God*, or inspire it with the love of revealed religion. This is the work of the Holy Spirit,—the Spirit of truth and holiness. But the outward evidences are useful, and to be used to prepare the way of the Lord. Religion is founded in evidence, as we have often had occasion to remark. The heart is ordinarily reached through the understanding; else its impression of truth will not be deep and abiding. Religion is the most reasonable thing in the world. To say, as some have said and written, that it cannot bear the test of reason, is a libel upon its Divine Author, for which a man deserves to be *ecclesiastically be-*

headed. We would, therefore, demonstrate the deep and strong foundations of the hope set before us, in the gospel, and, then, send the sinner, laden with a sense of his obligations, to God on his throne of grace, for a new heart and a right spirit. Such, in few words, is our view of the proper *place* and *use* of the outward evidences of our holy religion. And this leads to our last remark, viz:

4. That whoever would be a Christian, in deed and in truth, must go to God to be made one. To believe the gospel intelligently, and to feel the peace and bliss of believing, we want, not only evidence which addresses itself to the intellect, but a disposition to receive the truth in love, and abide by its decisions. "If any man," says Christ, "will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." The great hinderance to our coming to the Saviour, or acquiescence in the terms of the gospel salvation, is an evil heart of unbelief, departing from the living God. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Faith is the gift of God, *i. e.*, he disposes or inclines our

hearts to embrace the truth, as it is in Jesus; not that any coercive influence is brought to bear upon us; but we are *made willing* in a day of his gracious power. What we want is to feel this renovating power. Historical faith the devils have, and yet hate God, and say of his only begotten, "What have we to do with thee, thou holy one of God?" How, then, is this heart to believe, to be obtained? By prayer. Ask, and ye shall receive. "How much more (*i. e.*, than parents give good things to their children) will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." Yes, hearer, you must have help of God, or you are undone. If, for your contempt of his truth and grace, he be provoked to say of you, as was said of Ephraim, "he is joined to his idols, let him alone," you are lost for ever. We, therefore, urge you, in the bowels of mercy, to the throne of grace. And, as Christ is the way, and the truth, and the life; and you have no merit of your own, we beseech you to go to God, in his name—his is "the only name, under heaven, through which you can be saved." But his blood cleanseth from all sin: and "in him, it hath pleased the Father, that all fulness should dwell."

THE END.





Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 01012 5484