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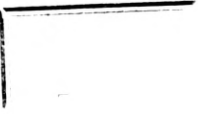
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AN  
**EXPOSITION**  
OF THE  
HISTORICAL WRITINGS  
OF THE  
**NEW TESTAMENT,**

WITH REFLECTIONS SUBJOINED TO EACH SECTION,

BY THE LATE  
REV. TIMOTHY KENRICK.

WITH A  
MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR.

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FROM THE SECOND LONDON OCTAVO EDITION.

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

**VOL. III.**

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, AND CHRONOLOGICAL TABLES, &c.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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THE book of Scripture on which we are about to enter, is called 'The Acts of the Apostles;' a title, however, which was not, probably, given to it by the author; for it does not exactly correspond with the design of the work, which appears to have been, not to write a history of the transactions of every one of the apostles, but to give a general account of the first planting of the Christian religion in the world, and to enter no further into the miracles, discourses, and travels of any of the apostles than was necessary for this purpose. They are the transactions of Peter and Paul, principally, which he has selected with this design. Very little is said about any of the other apostles, although, no doubt, they were all alike active in this great work.

This book is professedly written as a continuation of the gospel of Luke, as is manifest from the introduction, and, there is every reason to suppose, by the same author; being composed in the Greek language, in the same elegant style as that gospel, and having been universally attributed to that evangelist. Luke, it is generally allowed, was a physician, and may therefore be supposed to have had the benefit of some education. In this respect he had an advantage over the other evangelists, who were men of ordinary occupations, and wrote in language which corresponded with their situation in life. It has the same internal marks of being an authentic history which are to be found in the gospels. We observe in it the same simple and artless relation of facts, without any comments from the author to recommend them; the same minute detail of particulars in regard to time and place; the same unreserved disclosure of errors and failings in Christians and Christian teachers. Events of a public nature, recorded or referred to in this work, are found to correspond with the accounts left us of those times by Jewish and heathen historians: a circumstance that must give them credibility in the estimation of those who

may doubt the character of the author, and which greatly confirms the faith of the believer. But the strongest evidence of the truth and genuineness of this history is derived from the regard that was paid to it by the first Christians, who were themselves witnesses of the transactions which it relates, and therefore proper judges of the degree of credit to which it was entitled. Their opinion upon this subject must decide ours. By them it is referred to as an authentic record, in those few remains of their writings which are come down to our time; nor do they give us the smallest intimation that its authority was ever questioned or disputed. Quotations are made from it on this ground in Clement of Rome, in Ignatius, and Polycarp; men who were contemporary with the apostles, and have been, therefore, called Apostolic Fathers. It is found in all the early catalogues of sacred books, and it was publicly read in the churches of Christians, along with the gospels. Stronger evidence than this of the authenticity of a book of the New Testament it is not possible to give.

Composers of books did not formerly annex dates to their writings, as it has been usual to do in modern times. We cannot, therefore, exactly ascertain at what time this book was written. But it could not be before the close of Paul's first imprisonment at Rome, which happened in the year sixty-three; for to that event the history is brought down; it is not, however, probable that it was much later than that period. Mill and Lardner conclude, after the most careful consideration of the subject, that it was written and published, together with Luke's gospel, in the year sixty-four of the Christian æra, which is reckoned from the birth of Christ, or a little more than thirty years after his ascension; that is, at a time when great numbers were living who had been witnesses of the transactions here related, and while they were fresh in their memories, and when, therefore, a false account could not fail to be detected and exposed.

“This history contains an account of the choice of Matthias to be apostle in the room of the traitor, of the wonderful and plentiful pouring out of the gift of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and other disciples of Jesus at Jerusalem, at the Pentecost next succeeding his crucifixion, and of the testimony borne by the apostles to his resurrection and ascension, in their discourses, and by many miracles, and various sufferings; their preaching first at Jerusalem, and in Judæa, and afterwards, by themselves or their assistants, in

Samaria: and then to Gentiles in Judæa, and afterwards out of it, as well as to Jews: and of the conversion of Paul, and his preaching, miracles, labours, sufferings, in many cities and countries, parts of the Roman empire, and the polite world, and at length in Rome itself." \*

In the first nine chapters we have an account of the preaching of the gospel to the Jews, and of the reception which it met with from that people. In the remaining part of the book we have the history of the publication of it to Gentiles, first in Judæa and afterwards beyond the limits of that country. In the sixteenth chapter the writer joins his name with that of Paul, saying, "immediately after he had seen the vision, *we* endeavoured to go into Macedonia." So that it appears that of all the subsequent transactions he was himself an eye-witness. The former part of the volume he had partly from his own knowledge, and partly from the information of others, who had the best opportunities of making themselves acquainted with what he relates.

The first thirty years after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, was a very active period, in which much work was done in propagating the Christian religion, the bare recital of which would probably fill many volumes, and which only a few men of leisure would be able to read. Luke, therefore, writing for the instruction of men in every situation in life, has very wisely confined himself to a brief account of some of the principal transactions, which might be read by all. In consequence of pursuing this design, he has omitted many things about which we are very desirous to be informed.

It is the natural remark of an ancient Christian writer and orator, (Chrysostom,) that Luke leaves us thirsting for more; but he very properly adds, had he written more it could only be a repetition of the same difficulties and dangers which he had recounted before, of imprisonments, tortures, tumults, and deaths. On account of this studied brevity, and the abrupt manner in which he breaks off the history of individuals in several instances, it has been concluded by some that the author meant to write another volume, in which he might continue and complete the history which he had left defective in this. But however desirable such a continuation may seem to us, it does not appear that he had any such design. The truth is, that his object being not to aggrandize

\* Lardner, Vol. VI. p. 146.

individuals, by entering into a minute account of their actions, whether Peter, Barnabus, or Paul,\* but to give us an idea of the first planting of the Christian religion, as soon as he had said as much as was necessary for this purpose, he breaks off his history. Thus he drops Paul himself, upon his confinement at Rome, although it appears that he was with him long afterwards, and might have continued his history much further, had he been so pleased, or had he conceived that such a work would be useful. There is no reason, therefore, to conclude, from such circumstances, that the present is an imperfect or incomplete work.

Of the importance and value of this history it would not be easy to say too much. For it contains an account of the doctrine which was taught by the apostles and first preachers of Christianity, the reasonings and arguments employed to recommend it, the evidence with which it was attended, their sufferings in support of the truth, and the success which attended their labours; particulars, concerning all of which Christians must desire to be well informed; as they must, likewise, of the reasonings and objections of unbelievers, of which it contains a like faithful account.

This history is the best introduction to the epistles, and the surer proof of their authenticity. From the correspondence between the facts mentioned in it with those which are mentioned or alluded to in the epistles of Paul, a learned clergyman of the church of England, (Dr. Paley,) has deduced a clear and satisfactory argument to prove the authenticity of these epistles, and the truth of the history, and, by consequence, the truth of Christianity itself.

For the principal events in the life of Christ we have the evidence of three independent witnesses, or witnesses who wrote without any communication with each other; in which case their united testimony is of much more weight than that of any single individual. By this means, however, the value of a particular history is lessened; for were it mutilated or lost, its place would be supplied by the others. But the present history is rendered peculiarly interesting, by being the only one of its kind: for no other person has given us an authentic account of the same period; so that if any misfortune had befallen this, the loss would have been irreparable. On all these accounts it claims from us the most careful attention.

\* Lardner, Vol. VI. p. 117.

AN

# EXPOSITION,

8.c. 8.c.

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## SECTION I.

*The ascension of Jesus.*

ACTS i. 1—14.

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1. The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, “*of all that he both did and taught.*”

This introduction shows that this book is only a continuation of a former work, and that they ought both to be read together; for the writer completes his design in the one, which he had left unfinished in the other. Who Theophilus was, to whom this book, as well as the gospel, is addressed, is not certainly known. Some have supposed the name to be fictitious, and to stand for any Christian. If it stand for a real personage he was some one of rank, a governor, a senator, or a person in similar situation; for the same terms of respect are applied to him in the gospel as Paul applies to Festus, the Roman governor.\* If these two books were first published in Greece, as has been supposed by some, he was probably a resident in that country.

2. Until the day in which he was taken up, after he had given his commands unto the apostles whom he had chosen by the Holy Spirit;

In this order the words may be translated by a slight change of punctuation,† and in this form they appear most natural; according to it Jesus is said to have chosen his apostles by the direction of the Holy Spirit, a thing probable in itself, and corresponding with what was done in another instance, Acts xiii. 2, where we are told that the Spirit said, “Separate me Paul and Barnabas to the

\* See Michaëlis's Introduction, Vol. III. p. 236. &c. † See Griesbach.

work to which I have called them." The commands here referred to are those which he gave his apostles at his departure, directing them to stay at Jerusalem till they received the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and afterwards to preach the gospel to the whole world.

3. To whom also he showed himself alive, after his passion, "*after he had suffered death,*" by many infallible proofs; being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

The many proofs which he gave to his disciples of his being alive, have been already noticed; such as their seeing him again, eating and conversing with him, and handling his person. These proofs he continued to afford them, at different times, for forty days, during which time they would recover from the surprise into which they might be thrown by an unexpected event, and might ask him for such further satisfaction as would remove all their doubts. What he said to them about the kingdom of God, or the gospel dispensation, we are not informed in the short accounts given by the evangelists, and it would be of no use to conjecture. It appears, from what is said below, that their opinions upon this subject were still very gross and low.

4. And, being assembled together with them, "*having assembled them together,*" he commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, (saith he,) ye have heard of me.

Jerusalem being the place where their Master was crucified, and where his principal enemies resided, the disciples would naturally be disposed to take the first opportunity of quitting it, in order to avoid danger. But he directs them to remain there until they should receive the gift of the Holy Spirit; it being thought right that in the place where he was crucified, and most dishonoured, he should also receive this high mark of the divine favour. It was the place, likewise, in which there would be the greatest number of witnesses to the miracle, and which was the most proper for the exhibition of it on that account. This is called the promise of the Father, because made by him to Christ; and although many others had been delivered, this was more important than the rest. It had often been repeated by Christ to his disciples, as we have already seen.\*

5. For John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence.

The communication of miraculous gifts under the gospel dispensation is promised by the prophet Joel ii. 24, under the figure of water. "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh." This image is used because it was to be bestowed plentifully, or without re-

\* Luke xxiv. 49., and John xiv. 16, 26. ; xv. 26. ; xvi. 7.

serve, as water is poured out ; whereas in former times it was given more sparingly, and, as it were, by measure. In allusion to this language, John tells his disciples that he baptized them with water, but that there was one coming who would baptize them with the Holy Spirit and with fire. To these words of John he now refers his disciples, only leaving out the baptism with fire, as having relation to the punishment of the impenitent, and declares that the prophecy shall be fulfilled in a few days.

6. When they, therefore, were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel ?

By this question it appears that the apostles were still possessed with the notion universally prevalent among the Jews respecting the Messiah, that he was to rescue them from the Roman yoke, and to restore the independence of their country. They seem to have concluded that he was raised from the dead for this purpose, and only wished to be informed whether it was to be accomplished immediately, or after some time. To their inquiry he returns no direct answer ; but his reply intimates that his kingdom would be of a different nature from what they imagined.

7. And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power.

The words seem to imply that at some time or other the kingdom was to be restored to Israel : but that the particular period at which it was to be done was known only to God, and not to be communicated to them. They, however, would have no share in accomplishing it, but be employed in a very different manner.

8. But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you, "*ye shall receive the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon you,*" and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

He had before informed them that they should be baptized with the Holy Spirit : he now tells them for what purpose it was to be bestowed, namely, in order to give credibility to the testimony which they were to bear, both in Judæa and out of it, to his miracles, doctrine, and resurrection. This was the general design of their mission.

9. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up ; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

All we learn from this passage is, that Jesus, after ascending

into the air, disappeared from the view of his disciples. On this occasion it is natural to inquire whither he went, and what he is now doing. But on these subjects the history is silent. The common opinion, indeed, is that he ascended to some place above the clouds, where God has his peculiar residence, where he holds his court, sits upon a throne, and is surrounded by angels and other beings. But of the existence of such a place, as a separate portion of the universe, we may reasonably doubt. Modern discoveries in philosophy have shown us nothing in the space with which we are surrounded but planets, like the earth on which we live, moons, comets, and stars. The sacred writers do indeed seem to suppose the existence of such a place as that which has been just described; but it is rather done to help our conceptions than to represent what is strictly true, and ought no more to be understood literally, than when they speak of the Deity as having hands, and eyes, and other organs of a man, or as moving from place to place. In regard to the place which is designed to be the residence of good men after the resurrection, it is probably this earth, after it has undergone certain important revolutions which may be necessary to prepare it for this purpose.\*

If then there be no local heaven above the clouds, Christ, in ascending, could only go into the air, and never proceed beyond the limits of this planet. Accordingly, some have supposed that he is still on or near the earth, although invisible to us, and that he is employed, together with Enoch and Elijah, in a way which we cannot comprehend, in promoting the designs of Providence respecting the Christian church. In confirmation of this opinion, they have observed that he appeared several times in person to the apostle Paul.† But it must be remembered that on this subject, the present residence of Christ, we have nothing but conjecture to guide us; the Scriptures having been silent, or, at most, having only furnished obscure hints.

10. And while they looked steadfastly towards heaven, as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel,

11. Which also said; Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come, in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

\* To those who may be alarmed with such speculations respecting the future heaven of Christians, I would recommend the words of Mr. Hallett. "It cannot be thought of any great consequence in itself," says he, "to determine in what place good men shall dwell after the resurrection. It is enough for them to know that they shall be completely happy, both in body and in soul, in that place, be it where it will. Their God and Father will take care that they shall be in a most convenient and glorious place; and they may contentedly go on towards it, (as Abraham did towards Canaan,) not knowing whither they go. For where the king is, there is the court, and where God is, there is happiness, peace, and joy. Upon which account no one will be surprised to find me supposing that good men shall dwell on the new earth for ever. God can make them completely happy there to all eternity."

*Notes on Texts of Scripture, vol. I. p. 191.*

† Priestley's Discourses, Vol. II. Disc. IV. Part 2.



The apostles might possibly look for the descent of their Master to the earth again ; or feel some uneasy apprehensions about his future existence and happiness. These messengers were, therefore, sent to inform them that, although he disappeared for the present, he would still live, and that they should see him again ; for that he would descend in the same visible and glorious manner in which he had now ascended. By heaven, in these two verses, nothing more seems to be intended than the sky ; a sense which the word frequently bears in Scripture ; for we are told that the disciples looked steadfastly after Jesus towards heaven, that is, towards the sky ; for there was nothing else to behold.

12. Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, "*the mount of Olives,*" which is from Jerusalem a sabbath-day's journey, *or, about two miles.*

13. And when they were come in, *that is, into Jerusalem,* they went up into an upper room, *to escape observation,* where abode, "*where usually abode,*" both Peter and James, and John and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James, the son of Alpheus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James.

14. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus and with his brethren.

The principal object of these prayers, no doubt, was the gift of the Holy Spirit, which Christ had encouraged them to pray for by the parable of the man who went to his friend at midnight, to beg three loaves of bread, and succeeded by his importunity, of which you have an account, Luke xi. 1—13.

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## REFLECTIONS.

1. THE rebuke which Christ gave to his disciples, when they inquired whether he would now restore the kingdom to Israel, should teach us to restrain our curiosity respecting future events. We may feel ourselves much interested in them, and be very desirous to know when they will take place. But if God has reserved them in his power, and not thought proper to give us any information respecting them, we should learn to be contented with our ignorance, and quietly acquiesce in his will. To be eager and impatient in our inquiries after what God has concealed, is to be dissatisfied with his dispensations, and will probably involve us in many errors and in much anxiety.

Where predictions, however, have been delivered, and the time of their accomplishment has been marked out by the hand of God, although in obscure characters, we are not laid under the same restraint. To inquire diligently here is our duty; it is a proof of our faith in the divine promise, and may tend yet more to confirm it.

2. The miracle here related bears the clearest marks of truth, and lays a just foundation for hope and joy.

It is not said to have been performed in the night, or while the parties were all involved in a cloud, as in some fabulous accounts, but in the open day; not in tumult and confusion, during a storm of thunder and lightning, when the attention would be strongly attracted to another object, or wholly confounded; but while Jesus was speaking, while every eye was fixed upon him and attentive to him. In these circumstances the disciples saw him taken up into the air, gradually and leisurely ascending, until he was entirely withdrawn from their sight. And, lastly, he was seen not by one person only, but by many. What can be fairer and more unexceptionable!

Although we know not with certainty the place of his residence, yet we are assured that he is at the right hand of God, in a post of the highest dignity and honour, and head over all things to his church; that he is glorified and happy, and will continue to be so to the end of the world, the consummation of all things, when he will come again, with the same splendour, to raise the dead, and to judge the world. Of this last event, his miraculous departure from among men was intended to afford us a security and pledge; it is naturally calculated to produce that effect; and the design is rendered clear beyond all doubt by the testimony of two angels.

3. Let the conduct of these disciples, in betaking themselves to prayer on the present occasion, teach us what we ought to do, when we expect important blessings. Christ had often promised the gift of the Spirit to his disciples, during the course of his ministry; he had renewed the same promise after his resurrection, and just before his departure, so as to leave no room for doubt in their minds, that they would be bestowed. Yet they think it right to ask them of God by fervent and continued prayer, and to express their faith in the divine promise, to affect their minds with a proper sense of the value of the favour, and of their dependence upon the Divine Being for bestowing it upon them. In like manner let us act, in regard to the many valuable blessings which we expect for ourselves or for the church of Christ. Let us not deem them less proper objects of prayer, because we think they will be bestowed, independently of our requests; for although we can produce no change in the divine mind, although we cannot increase the number or value of our blessings hereby, yet we shall not fail to benefit ourselves.

## SECTION II.

*Matthias chosen by lot as an apostle.*

ACTS i. 15—26.

15. And in those days, *in the interval between the ascension, and the day of Pentecost*, Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names, “*of persons*,” together were about a hundred and twenty,)

We are not to suppose that these were the whole or even the greater part of the disciples; for we learn, that more than five hundred were assembled, on one occasion, after Christ’s resurrection,\* but these were all that met at Jerusalem, for the purpose of daily supplicating the promised gifts of the Spirit. The rest were dispersed in different parts of the country. Names are, in this verse, put for persons, by a common figure of speech, of which we have several examples in heathen authors, as well as in the Scriptures.†

16. Men and brethren, “*brethren*,” this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy spirit, by the mouth of David, spake before, concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.

The passage, to which Peter here refers, will be considered hereafter. But there has been no small difficulty in accounting for the apostle’s appearing to say, that the words in question were a prophecy of Judas, and fulfilled in the events of his life, when it is evident to those that read the Psalms, that they refer to the enemies of David, and to them only. Some have attempted to solve this difficulty, by supposing, that although the words were originally intended for the enemies of the king of Israel, which is too plain to be denied, yet the Spirit of God, by whom they were dictated, had a reference to the enemies of Christ, and particularly to Judas the traitor and apostate.‡ But I think it much better to acknowledge at once, that the words were never intended for him, and were only applied to him by the apostles by way of accommodation, than to have recourse to a sense so contrary to their obvious meaning. The words are attributed to the Holy Spirit, because all the Psalms were supposed by the Jews of our Lord’s time, as they are by the generality of Christians of the present day, to be inspired.

17. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.

\* 1 Cor. xv. 6.

† Wetstein and Pearce.

‡ Doddridge.

These words are intended to show, that he deserved the evils which befel him, which are mentioned in the twentieth verse. Forasmuch as he was as regularly chosen to the office of an apostle, as the rest, his guilt in betraying his Master and deserting his post, was the more aggravated.

18. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity, and, falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.

19. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem, insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, "*in their own dialect,*" *Aceldama*, that is to say, the field of blood.

It is evident that what these verses contain, could not be the words of Peter, although they are introduced into his discourse. For Peter could have no inducement to mention the circumstances which attended the death of Judas to the apostles and other disciples, who were as well acquainted with them as himself; the transactions having taken place but a few days before, and in the city of Jerusalem where they now were. Much less can it be supposed, that Peter would inform his countrymen, that in their proper dialect, the field in which Judas died was called *Aceldama*, that is to say, the field of blood. Such an explanation is evidently the language of a man who is instructing foreigners in the meaning of an unknown term, and not that of a native, addressing the inhabitants of a country in which he lives.

If these two verses, therefore, are a genuine part of the text, they must be regarded as the words of Luke the writer of the Acts. But there is strong reason to suspect, that they come neither from Luke nor Peter, and that they are an interpolation, or an addition to the text, which, by some means has been introduced into it; for this account is very different from, if not absolutely inconsistent with, that given by Matthew. I will read the words of the evangelist, and leave you to judge, whether they can be reconciled. He says, that Judas, having repented of what he had done, cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself; and the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood; and they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in; wherefore that field was called the field of blood unto this day. Matt. xxvii. 3, &c.

Hence, you perceive, that the two accounts differ from each other in several material circumstances. According to Matthew, Judas died by his own hands, by hanging himself. According to this account, he fell headlong, and burst asunder. According to Matthew, the chief priests bought the field; here we are told, that Judas purchased it himself. One says, that it was called the field of blood, because bought with the price of blood; whereas it is intimated by the other, that it was so called, because Judas died there. I cannot conceive that two such contra-

dictory accounts could come from the pens of persons so well informed as Matthew and Luke were, respecting every thing which related to so remarkable a personage as the traitor. If the account of Matthew, therefore, be genuine, which there is every reason to suppose, that given us in the Acts cannot have been written by Luke, but by some other person, who contrived to insert it in the early copies, whence it has been transmitted down to us. It seems to confirm this supposition, that if the story be entirely removed, no chasm is made in the history. This story is not necessary to account for any thing which precedes or follows; and the want of it is not perceived: for the seventeenth verse connects very well with the twentieth.

The supposition now made does not, I acknowledge, correspond with the opinion of the majority of the commentators upon the passage; but I am glad to find it supported by so sagacious a commentator as Bishop Pearce, who says, “these seem not to be the words of Peter, and perhaps they were not the words of Luke, the writer of the Acts of the Apostles.” I know, indeed, that attempts have been made by other ingenious men to reconcile the differences; but they are such as would enable us to reconcile the most contradictory narratives. Where a real difficulty occurs it is much better to admit it in its full force, than, by evading it, to incur the charge of disingenuousness.

20. For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein; and his bishoprick, “*his office,*” let another take.

In this verse there is a reference to two Psalms of David; the former is Psalm lxxix. 25. Let their habitation be desolate, and let none dwell in their tents; where you see that David speaks of his enemies in the plural number; whereas Peter applies his words to an individual; but the change is a matter of little consequence, as the apostle uses the words of the Psalmist only in the way of accommodation, and not as a real prophecy. The latter is Psalm cix. 8. Let his days be few, and let another take his office; where David imprecates the divine vengeance upon an individual, some one of his own enemies, or those of Israel, which the apostle Peter applies to Judas, in the same way of accommodation as he does the preceding passage.

21. Wherefore, of these men which have accompanied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us;

22. Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained, to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

Besides the twelve apostles, there were other disciples of Jesus who constantly attended him from the beginning of his ministry;

namely, from his baptism by John, at which time he received the Holy Spirit, to the time when it closed, when he was taken up from them. How many they were in number, we are not told; but Luke mentions seventy who were sent out to preach. The whole number was probably much greater. Of these persons Peter proposed, that one should be chosen, to supply the place of Judas, in order that he might, with them, communicate to the world the knowledge of all that Christ had said or done during his ministry, and likewise of his resurrection.

We see hence, what the apostle Peter thought requisite to constitute a man a disciple of Jesus: it was the belief of those things concerning Christ which took place from the commencement of his ministry to the close of it. Respecting those transactions which took place prior to his public appearance, the apostle is silent, they were either unknown, or to communicate the knowledge of them was no part of the business of an apostle. In correspondence with this language, two of the evangelists, Mark and John, begin their history of Jesus with the time of his baptism: and although the two others appear to commence their account at an early period, and relate many wonderful things respecting his birth and infancy, many persons have seen reason to doubt whether this part of the history were really written by Matthew and Luke.

23. And they appointed two, Joseph, called Barsabas, whose surname was Justus, and Matthias:

24. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whither of these two thou hast chosen.

In Jeremiah xvii. 10, the prophet represents God as saying, "I, the Lord, search the heart." It is to this, probably, that the apostles allude, when they intreat God to choose him whom he knew to be the best qualified for the office for which they designed him.

25. That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas, by transgression fell, "*which he left,*" or, "*from which he departed,*" that he might go to his own place.

By his own place, some understand his original occupation, to which he returned after being an apostle. Others suppose, that the phrase means the place of the damned, or punished. But it seems most probable, that by his own place is meant the grave, the place which he now occupied.

26. And they gave forth their lots, and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

## REFLECTIONS.

1. THE passage of Scripture which we have been reading, shows us the strength of the ground on which our faith in the Christian religion is built. It is erected on the testimony of men who were eye and ear-witnesses of the facts which they relate; who accompanied their Master during the whole of his ministry, had access to his person at all times, conversed with him in the most familiar manner, were well assured of his death, and saw him after his resurrection from the dead. That so many persons, who had such opportunities of being well informed, should all be mistaken or deceived, is impossible; and it is also impossible, that they should all unite in propagating a known falsehood. Their testimony is so far from being destroyed by the apostacy of a solitary individual, that it is greatly strengthened and confirmed thereby. For that individual has no frauds to discover, no impostures to disclose, in order to justify his desertion; on the contrary, the voluntary death which he inflicted upon himself for having betrayed his Master, is a striking confirmation of the testimony given by the rest to the innocence and excellence of his character. On evidence of this nature, founded on the testimony of friends, and confirmed by the conduct of enemies, we may rely with the utmost confidence. It stands upon a rock, which nothing will be able to shake.

2. The apostles and first disciples justly regarded every event, however little decided by human agency, even the issue of a lot, as under the direction of Divine Providence, and prayed to God for a favourable issue. In the same light let us learn to regard those occurrences of life in which we cannot readily discern the hand of intelligence: the joy or sorrow which they bring with them is not the effect of chance, but of design. They are no less a part of the plan of infinite wisdom respecting the world than the regular and uniform operations of nature, and demand, no less, our grateful acknowledgments and humble submission.

## SECTION III.

*Effusion of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost.*

ACTS ii. 1—17.

1. AND when the day\* of Pentecost was fully come, “*was arrived,*” they were all, *i. e. the apostles,* with one accord in one place.

\* Pearce prefers ἡμερας, days, which is the reading of most of the ancient versions. Griesbach, 2nd edit.

*Pentecost* is a Greek name for a Jewish festival, which was observed fifty days after the passover. It is sometimes called the feast of weeks, because it was seven weeks, or a week of weeks, from the feast of unleavened bread ;\* sometimes, the feast of harvest, because the first fruits of wheat-harvest were offered to God on that day.† This day seems to have been fixed upon for the miracle, because Jerusalem being then crowded with people who came to observe the festival, there would be the more witnesses of the event.

2. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind ; and it filled all the house, “ *the whole room,*”‡ where they were sitting.

This sound, which resembled that of a great wind, seemed at first to be external, and to come from the sky, but afterwards it was internal, and heard in every part of the room where they were sitting. The design of it seems to have been no more than to announce the presence of the Deity, and to direct the attention to the cause of what was about to take place. Similar examples are to be found in the Old Testament, of the approach of the Deity to produce some miraculous effect, being preceded by a great noise.§

3. And they saw like tongues of fire, distributing themselves, and settling upon each of them.

I adopt this translation, which is Mr. Wakefield’s,|| because it appears to me to correspond better with the meaning of the original than the old translation. Flames of fire, which Luke compares to tongues, supposing, probably, that they had an allusion to the gift of tongues, appeared in the room, and were distributed upon the heads of the apostles, over whom they continued to hover. Fire, as well as wind, is well known to have been employed under the Old Testament dispensation, to announce the presence of the Deity. Thus we find, that fire appeared to Moses in the bush ; to the children of Israel in the cloud, and to the giver of the law upon Mount Sinai. And it is generally supposed, that a light appeared over Christ at his baptism. In like manner, the fire in the present instance was intended, as well as the mighty wind, to announce the presence of the Deity about to produce a miraculous effect. What the miracle was we are informed in the next verse.

4. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, “ *languages,*” as the Spirit gave them utterance.

By their being filled with the Holy Spirit no more can be meant than that they abounded with miraculous powers, which manifested themselves in various ways, as if the persons from whom they came

\* Exodus xxiv. 22. † Exodus xxiii. 16.

‡ Pearce, who refers to Matthew v. 15.

§ Ezekiel xliii. 2. † 1 Kings xix. 11.

|| See Bos, likewise, as quoted by Doddridge.



had been filled with them. One proof of this appeared immediately, in their speaking various foreign languages, which they had never learnt; a thing in itself impossible, except to those who are aided by divine power. This power over foreign languages was given to them instantaneously; and they were incited to exercise it immediately, in relating the miracles and unfolding the doctrine of Jesus. They are said to speak with other languages as the Spirit gave them utterance; by which we are to understand that they spoke that foreign language which the power of God enabled them to speak. It is probable that no one individual spoke all languages, although they might have different powers in this respect.

5. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.

As these Jews are called devout men, it is probable that they were brought here by their devotional spirit, and were not constant but occasional residents at Jerusalem, come up to this city to celebrate some of the public festivals, and intending afterwards to return to the countries whence they came. The words "out of every nation under heaven," are not to be taken in their full extent, as if there were Jews from every nation of the earth, but as signifying that there were some of this people from most parts of the known world.

6. Now when this was noised abroad, *literally*, "when this sound was," the sound mentioned ver. 2, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

The sound, which first appeared to come from heaven, and afterwards from the room in which the apostles were assembled, was so remarkable as to attract the attention of the whole neighbourhood, and to bring together a great crowd of people, consisting partly of inhabitants of Judæa, and partly of foreigners, the latter of whom were astonished to find their own language spoken by some one of the company. The occasion of their speaking foreign languages was the presence of these strangers.

Because it is here said, every man heard them speak in his own language, it has been supposed by some that the apostles spoke only one language, but that every one heard them in his own, and that the miracle, therefore, was wrought, not on the speakers, but the hearers. This supposition, however, is inconsistent with the language of the historian, who says, that the speakers were filled with the Holy Spirit, and is contradicted by a circumstance mentioned below, that some of the company mocked, which could only arise from their not understanding what they heard. It is plainly inconsistent likewise with what Paul says to the Corinthians, whom he blames for the too free use of this gift, on the ground of their being unintelligible to their hearers.

7. And they were all amazed, and marvelled, say-

ing one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak, Galileans ?

8. And how hear we every man in our own tongue wherein we were born ?

The persons speaking foreign languages upon the present occasion, with so much correctness and propriety, as to be intelligible to those to whom they were vernacular, they observed, were Galileans, in an ordinary station of life, who could have no opportunity of acquiring the knowledge which they appeared to possess ; the more especially, as the same person spoke several languages, some of which had no affinity to each other. This excited their amazement, as well it might.

9. Parthians, *i. e.* “ *We Parthians,*” and Medes, and Elamites, *or,* “ *Persians,*” and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judæa, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia,

10. Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Lybia about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes,

11. Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

In this list of countries, in which foreign languages were spoken, it is observable that Judæa is mentioned, although the apostles were Jews, which some account for by supposing that the dialect spoken in Galilee was so different from that spoken in Judæa, as to be esteemed a distinct language ; others, by supposing that we ought to read Mesopotamian Judæa, the Jews in that country being so numerous as to be called by Josephus a nation, and to induce Luke to call it another Judæa. The strangers of Rome are said to include both Jews and proselytes ; and it is well known that there were many Jews at Rome, and that they made many proselytes.

The wonderful works of God, about which the apostles are said to discourse, were probably the divine mission, the miracles, and particularly, the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

12. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying, one to another, What meaneth this ?

13. Others, mocking, said, These men are full of new wine.

These were persons who did not understand their language, and supposed that the strange sounds which they heard were the effect of intoxication. Those who understood them also, and who might suppose the power with which they appeared to be endued to be miraculous, could not understand for what purpose it was bestowed ; not knowing that it was designed to qualify the apostles for preaching the gospel in foreign countries.

## REFLECTIONS.

THE miracle of which we have here an account, is one of the most remarkable that occur in the whole history of revelation ; and it affords an illustrious proof of the power of God, and a satisfactory confirmation of the truth of the Christian religion. To understand a foreign language, so far as to enter with ease into the sentiments of a speaker or writer, is well known to be extremely difficult, and to require the patient exertion of several years : but to acquire so complete a knowledge as to speak it fluently, requires long labour and much patient exertion. But here we find that knowledge acquired in an instant, without any previous study or application, and not the knowledge of one language only, but of several.

Yet, great and astonishing as this effect is, it is not too great for the power of God to accomplish. He who made man's mouth, and gave him the faculty of speech, he who taught the first man to speak without any human instructor, can, no doubt, if he so please, inspire him at once with the knowledge of all languages, without learning any. No one can say that this is more than God can perform, where there is an evident propriety and necessity for it, as there was in the present instance.

Had the disciples of Jesus been impostors, as some would insinuate, had they now been carrying on a system of fraud, which their Master had begun, we should have found them, at first at least, copying his example, and imitating some of the miracles which they had seen him perform, because such miracles would have been most easily believed, and might have passed without examination. But here is a miracle which bears no resemblance to any thing that has been performed before, of which no parallel can be found in the history of the country, and which, therefore, could never have occurred to Jews. Had it been an imposture, nothing would have been more easy of detection : for here are persons present from every country under heaven, who would quickly discern the falsehood of pretensions which were not well supported.

Let us then acknowledge, with gratitude and joy, the evident hand of God in this event. Let us rejoice that the same divine power which so eminently distinguished Jesus of Nazareth, continues to be conferred upon his successors, hereby qualifying them for preaching the gospel to all nations, and sealing the truth of their testimony. To suppose that God could countenance men who were engaged in propagating a falsehood, by enabling them to speak various languages which they had never learned, and to perform other miracles, is to suppose that he could act contrary to his attributes of justice and mercy, and contradict his character ; which is impossible.

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14. BUT Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, “*raised his voice,*” and said unto them, Ye men of Judæa, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words :

Those who did not understand the languages spoken by the apostles, supposed that they were intoxicated. This charge Peter now refutes, by explaining the nature of the miracle, and showing that nothing had taken place but what had been foretold. By its being said that Peter stood up with the eleven, it seems probable that they are the only persons whom he means to vindicate from the aspersion in verse the thirteenth ; and that consequently, they are the only persons who on this occasion spoke in foreign tongues. Peter addresses himself more particularly to Jews, and inhabitants of Jerusalem, because it was among them principally that this mistake prevailed ; native Jews being the most likely to regard a foreign language as a jargon.

15. For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day, *nine o'clock in the morning.*

16. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel ;\*

17. And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh : and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams :

18. And on my servants and on my hand-maidens, “*on my men-servants and my maid-servants,*” I will pour out in those days of my spirit, and they shall prophesy.

“In the last days.” These words do not exactly correspond with the language of the prophecy, where we have, instead of them, the word “afterward.” Peter, however, interpreted that word to mean the last days, which is a phrase which occurs in other prophecies, and is understood to signify the days of the Messiah ;† although some suppose that it refers to a much later period, when the Jews are to be restored to their own land.‡ Prophetic and miraculous powers had now been discontinued for the space of four hundred years, from the time of Malachi to the appearance of Christ. It is highly probable, therefore, that so remarkable a display of those powers as was exhibited on this occasion, would be the subject of prophecy. But those who imagine that this proph-

\* Joel ii. 28.

† Isa. ii. 2.

‡ Theological Repository, Vol. V. p. 119.

ecy refers to the last period of the Jewish state, must suppose that the gift of the Spirit was entirely overlooked, which is very unlikely.

“I will pour out of my Spirit.” The Spirit of God, or the Holy Spirit, signifies, as before explained, not a person, but the divine power, exerted in miraculous gifts: these were to be bestowed in such variety and abundance in the present instance, that they are compared to the pouring out of water, which is expended without strict regard to quantity.

“Upon all flesh.” This may signify all mankind, Gentiles as well as Jews, or all classes of persons, people of every age, sex, and condition. It is to the latter sense that the words which follow seem to restrict its meaning; for the prophet proceeds immediately to enumerate the persons included under that general term.\*

“And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.” To prophesy, signifies sometimes to communicate religious instruction, as well as to foretel future events. Both senses may be included here, as several of the first Christians of both sexes were qualified to predict as well as to teach.

“And your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.” Dreams and visions were methods by which God, in ancient times, communicated notices of his will to prophets and patriarchs. In visions, objects were presented to the imagination, while the prophet was awake, but in dreams, the same thing was done while he was asleep. It is here foretold, that the same mode of divine revelation would be observed under the new dispensation; and accordingly, we have examples of both in the book of Acts. When it is said that the young men should see visions, and the old men dream dreams, we are not to suppose that only visions were to be communicated to the young, and only dreams to the old; but that visions and dreams were to be communicated to persons of all ages, to young and old.

The next thing which God promises in this prophesy, is, that this Spirit should be poured out upon men-servants and maid-servants. The words in the original denote men-servants and maid-servants of the lowest condition, such as were bought or taken in war, that is, slaves. Persons in this condition were to partake of the Spirit, or of miraculous powers. It is added, “and they shall prophesy,” but these words are not found in Joel, neither in the Hebrew, nor in the Greek version. The want of them is, however, of little consequence; for prophesying is plainly implied in the promise of the Spirit.

19. And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke.

20. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come.

\* Chandler's Dissertation, annexed to his Commentary on Joel, p. 123.

It is the observation of Sir Isaac Newton, in explaining the prophetic language, that the sun's being darkened, the moon's being turned into blood, and the falling of stars, are put for the ceasing of a kingdom or dissolution thereof. Agreeably to this observation, we find, that when the destruction of Babylon is threatened, it is thus expressed; 'The stars of the heaven, and the constellations thereof, shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. I will shake the heavens, &c.\*' In terms very similar to these has Jesus, in the gospel of Matthew, foretold the destruction of the Jewish state, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days," say he, "shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken." After two such examples, I conceive there will be found little difficulty in supposing, that this language of the prophet Joel was intended to express the total overthrow of the civil and ecclesiastical polity of the Jews. If we examine the several parts of this prophecy separately, and suppose that one phrase was intended to express one thing, and another phrase another, we shall be misled. The whole is to be taken together, and regarded as a highly figurative prediction of a great approaching national calamity.

21. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

They shall be delivered from those calamities, to which the rest of the Jews shall be exposed. To call upon the name of the Lord, is a phrase describing a religious person, and the meaning is, that the worshipper of God, according to the gospel of his Son, shall escape. Accordingly we find from Eusebius, that the Christians, in consequence of a particular revelation, or, more probably, of the warnings already given them by Christ, escaped from Jerusalem, when they saw it about to be besieged, and hereby saved themselves from the calamities which fell upon that devoted city. Peter, having shown that a plentiful effusion of miraculous gifts had been foretold, proceeds to show how they came to be bestowed upon them in particular.

22. Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, "*Jesus of Nazareth proved unto you to be a man from God,*" by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did by him, in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:

In these words you may observe, that he speaks of Nazareth as the native place of Jesus, and gives him no higher title than that of a man from God, or one who had a divine mission, and was proved to be so authorized by the miracles which he wrought.

\* Isaiah xiii. 10, 13.

23. Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified\* and slain ;

It was an aggravation of the sufferings of Christ, that he was put to death by those enemies of the nation and of true religion, the Romans, who, in the language of the Jews, were called sinners or ungodly men. God however was justified in permitting such an event ; for it was foreseen by him, and allowed to take place for wise and important ends.

24. Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death, “ *the bonds of the grave :*”

This is a quotation from the Psalms, in the Greek version, which was commonly in use in Judæa at this time ; but the Hebrew word signifies either bonds or pains, and the authors of that version preferred the latter.†

Because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

There was no natural impossibility in the case, but it was impossible, because God had foretold that he should be raised from the dead, as Peter proceeds to show in the next verse.

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### REFLECTIONS.

1. THE prophecy of Joel, as fulfilled under the Christian dispensation, affords an illustrious proof of the liberal and impartial goodness of the great Father of mankind. For he not only bestows miraculous powers in a great variety of forms, in gifts of tongues, by enabling persons who had never learnt foreign languages, to speak them fluently, in powers of healing, in foretelling future events, in the communication of knowledge of persons or things, by dreams, by visions, and in a variety of other ways, which it is impossible for us at the present day, perhaps, exactly to ascertain, yet such as appeared to his wisdom best adapted to the purposes of divine revelation ; but also confers them on all classes of persons, on the young as well as the old ; the poor as well as the rich ; not excepting men-servants, and women-servants, who were, at that time much more degraded than at present, being slaves, the absolute property of their masters. How great is the condescension of the Almighty, in noticing these outcasts of human society : how highly are they exalted by these testimonies of his regard ! Slaves are raised to the dignity of prophets, and of inspired messengers of the divine will to mankind.

\* Mr. Wakefield translates, “ when ye had mocked,” reading *πεοταλιζεντες*.

† Pearce.

Let Christians, then, of the meanest condition rejoice. The disgrace of that condition is removed; for God has honoured persons in it with the gift of miraculous powers; hereby assuring them, that they are as much the objects of his regard, as the rich and great; and that, if they take the same pains to serve and please him, according to the advantages which they possess, they shall have the same share in his favour, both now and for ever.

Let those who are distinguished by wealth or honours, learn hence, not to despise their poorer brethren, but draw from this important event the inference suggested by the apostle Paul, that in Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither bond nor free, male nor female; that these distinctions are overlooked, that all are upon a footing of equality, and the meanest and weakest treated with the same degree of respect and affection as the greatest.

2. We see that the faith of those who believe Jesus to be a human being is established on a scriptural foundation: for it corresponds with the language of an apostle, who calls him a man from God, after his resurrection and ascension, and after that apostle had received the Holy Spirit, and would have learnt to correct any mistakes respecting the person of Christ into which he might be supposed to have fallen. The crime which he imputes to the Jews, is not, that they had put to death an angel or super-angelic being in human shape, much less the Creator of the world; but a man from God, or a divine messenger, proved to be so by a great variety of miracles. Had their guilt been attended with that higher aggravation, no doubt Peter would have mentioned it at this time, when he was endeavouring to impress them with the heinousness of their crime, as a ground for apprehending the approach of divine vengeance, and a motive for immediate repentance. Let no one, therefore, be ashamed of this faith, or afraid to avow it in the most public manner; nor let any one presume to reproach him who does so, with degrading his Master. He follows the example of inspired teachers, and the best friends of Jesus, who, when they speak in plain terms, devoid of metaphor, always represent him as a man.

3. We learn hence, what strong evidence we have for the resurrection of Jesus. Not more than six weeks after the event, in the very place where he had been put to death, in the presence of many persons who had been witnesses of the fact, (if their hands had not actually been stained with his blood,) Peter boldly asserts his resurrection, and declares that he and eleven other persons were witnesses to it, without any one venturing to contradict or oppose him. What better foundation can we have for our faith, than the testimony of friends and the silence of enemies?

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PETER proceeds to show that other prophecies were likewise fulfilled in the history of Jesus of Nazareth, besides that of Joel, and particularly in his resurrection from the dead.

25. For David speaketh concerning him; I fore-



saw, “*I saw,*”\* the Lord always before my face ; for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved :

If these words be regarded as the language of David, applied to himself, they may mean that, although banished to a foreign land by Saul, his inveterate enemy and persecutor, and in great trouble, yet having always made it his object to please God, he should still maintain his confidence in him, and hope to be rescued from danger, and to be preserved for the great object of his wishes, the succession to the throne. But considering David as personating Christ, as the apostle does, they may signify that, seeing the presence and favour of God would be with him at all times, he would have no reason to despair of the divine aid in the most unpromising circumstances, even when reduced to the grave.

26. Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad : moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope :

27. Besause thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, “*my life in the grave,*” neither wilt thou suffer thy Holy One to see corruption.

“Thou wilt not leave my life in the grave.” The word we translate soul, signifies life also. Thus in the injunction prohibiting murder, it is said, at every man’s brother will I require the life of man ; in the original, it is the *soul* of man. And the ransom of life is the ransom of the soul.† Also the word which we translate hell, signifies more proprly the mansions of the dead, or any place under the surface of the globe, whether that surface be land or water, and consequently the grave.‡ Indeed, I believe this was the original signification of the English word, hell, *a covered place*, although it be now used universally to express the place of punishment for the wicked. It ought not, therefore, to have been used on the present occasion, where it gives countenance to the gross mistake which some have fallen into, that the soul of Christ at death descended into the place of the damned.

“Neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see corruption.” In the Hebrew it is holy ones, the plural number being used instead of the singular. In many copies, however, the Hebrew corresponds with the Greek ; and Dr. Kennicot thinks they all did so originally, but were afterwards intentionally corrupted, in order to destroy the force of the prophecy.§ However this may be, the phrase, holy one, is of the same import as saint, which frequently has no reference to moral character, but merely to being in a covenant or privileged state. So all Israelites are called saints or holy ones. If this phrase was intended for Christ, it denotes the purity and excellence of his character. To see corruption, is the same thing as being corrupted or perishing, as to see death, is to die.

“My flesh shall rest in hope.” Flesh does not seem here to be

\* Pearce.

† Taylor’s Concordance.

‡ Ibid.

§ Diss. i. p. 496.

put for the body, in opposition to the mind; but for the life, as it is afterwards explained, or for the whole man. Thus, all flesh signifies not all human bodies, but all mankind, or beings consisting of both principles. If these words, then, are capable of any application to David, they express his strong confidence in God, that, notwithstanding the dangers which now surround him from his enemies, he should not be suffered to die, nor left to perish in the grave: but should still live, to experience the goodness of God in general, and particularly in bestowing upon him the crown of Israel. Considered as the words of Christ, they express his persuasion that, although brought to the grave, he should be raised thence to life, without remaining there long enough to be corrupted, and the joy and gratitude which he felt in the prospect of such an event.

28. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life: thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.

“Thou hast made known to me the ways of life.” This, if applied to David, must mean that God had instructed him how to preserve his life, and to avoid the snares of death. Considered as the words of Christ, they mean, Thou hast made me acquainted with the way of returning to life, by raising me from the dead.

“Thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.” In the sixteenth Psalm the words are, “In thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” The words of Peter, however, express nearly the same meaning, the joy to be derived from the countenance or presence of God.

In the case of David, this joy must be the pleasure to be derived from approaching God in the tabernacle, in which the king of Israel seems to have placed the chief delight of his life. In regard to Christ, it is the pleasure arising from a sense of the divine presence and favour, after he disappeared from the world.

There are other variations from the original in this quotation, besides those above-mentioned, which I have not noticed, because they appear to be immaterial.

29. Brethren, I may freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.

30. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, to set up of the fruit of his loins upon his throne;

31. He, seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his life was not left in the grave, neither his flesh did see corruption.

32. This Jesus God hath raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.

I have left out the words, “according to the flesh he would raise up Christ,” which are found in our translation of the thirtieth verse, because they are evidently spurious, being omitted in the best manuscripts and versions.

“I may freely speak unto you of the patriarch David.” This kind of apology was necessary in addressing Jews on the subject of this patriarch, by whom he was held in high estimation, and who might be offended at any thing which seemed derogatory from his honour, as this application of his language to another person, and not to himself, might appear to some.

“That God had sworn with an oath.” This oath is mentioned in Ps. cxxxii. 11, and is referred to in several passages of the historical books. “To set up the fruit of his loins upon his throne.” This expression plainly implies that Christ was to be a natural descendant of David, by the male or direct line. It was in that line that all genealogies were reckoned among the Jews.

“He, seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ.” It is plain hence, and indeed from the whole of Peter’s comment upon the language of this Psalm, that he considered the words of David as a direct prophecy of the resurrection of Christ, and not in any degree applicable to himself. Paul likewise refers to them with the same view, in his address to the Jews at Antioch in Pisidia, recorded in chapter the thirteenth of this book. And this interpretation seems to have been admitted as just in both cases by the Jews; for in consequence of the apostle’s reasoning upon this subject, many of them embraced Christianity. Yet it has been observed by some, of no small reputation for sagacity, that in reading the Psalms, without any knowledge of this interpretation, all persons at the present day would have concluded that David was speaking of himself only, and intending to say, that God would not suffer him to perish by the hands of his enemies, or at most, that if he should die, God would raise him from the dead, and admit him to a state of greater happiness in a future life. It has likewise been said, that in the whole Psalm there is not a single expression which David may not well be supposed to have used concerning himself, and that no second person is mentioned or alluded to. What weight these circumstances ought to have, in opposition to the authorities before mentioned, I shall leave to the reader to determine.\*

33. Therefore being by, “at,” the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear.

“Being at the right hand of God exalted.” These words are not to be interpreted literally, as if the Supreme Being were seated upon a visible throne in the sky, and had a right hand and left, where beings are stationed according to the degree of favour which they enjoy; but, to be exalted at the right hand of God, is to be understood metaphorically, for enjoying the first place in his favour

and confidence. The language is evidently borrowed from the practice of the courts of earthly princes, where men are placed at the right hand or left, according as they possess more or less of the prince's favour. That it is a metaphorical exaltation which is here referred to, is evident hence, that the proof, which is adduced of his possessing it, is not his being seen lifted up on high, but his shedding forth these extraordinary powers.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are called the promise of the Father, because they had been promised to Jesus by him; and they are said to be shed or poured out by Christ, because given at his request, and through his agency.

34. For David is not ascended into the heavens; but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand,

35. Until I make thy foes thy footstool.

Peter now produces a fresh proof of Christ's exaltation, which is borrowed from Ps. cx. 1, where David seems to be favoured with a prospect of the future Messiah, in the same manner as Abraham saw Christ's day, and to hear the language which God, the great Lord of all, addresses to him, desiring him to sit at his right hand, in the place of chief honour until he should bring all his enemies to his feet, or make them his footstool; that is, bring them to a state of the lowest subjection. This, Peter observes, David could only have said by the gift of prophecy; for he was not in heaven to hear the language, but was now lying in the grave.

36. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

Not Lord of the whole creation, a title which belongs to Jehovah alone, but the Lord just spoken of in the prophecy of David; his Lord or superior, or the head of the Christian church.

## REFLECTIONS.

1. LET Christians rejoice in the exaltation of their Master. He who was treated with contempt and scorn by the world, who was condemned and crucified as a malefactor, is raised to a post of the highest dignity and honour, the honour of bestowing upon men those miraculous powers by which superstition, idolatry and vice, were to be overthrown; and by which virtue, truth and righteousness were to be established in the world. A glorious prince, more honourable than any who occupied the throne of his father David! A happy triumph, not obtained by blood and slaughter and the many evils of war, but by the sacred energy of truth; the willing subjection of the mind to laws which it approves! It is the emancipation of slaves from the tyranny of vice. Such a triumph is as

honourable for the vanquished as for the victor. Let us rejoice that our Master has obtained the joy set before him, the glory which he desired, the only object worthy of the ambition of a truly virtuous and benevolent mind, that of conferring upon mankind the most extensive blessings. He has now a name given him above every name; he stands first in the list of virtuous characters and of the benefactors of the human race. And well does he deserve this distinction; for although in the form of God, although possessed of a power of working miracles at pleasure like God, he restrained the exercise of this power, and took upon himself the form of a servant, and became obedient to death, the death of the cross.

2. After beholding the exaltation of Jesus, let none of his followers be discouraged from persevering in the path of virtue. Whatever difficulties you have to contend with, you will one day surmount; whatever afflictions it may seem fit to Divine Providence that you should now endure, they shall at length be exchanged for joy. Never can your condition be more unpromising than that of your Master was. In his reward and triumph you may see a pledge of your own. It is a faithful saying, "If we be dead with Christ we shall live with him; if we suffer we shall also reign with him;" but "if we deny him he will deny us."

3. If Jesus is made lord in his church, let us be careful to render him due obedience in that character. Let us take our rule of faith from his gospel, without adding thereto or taking from it. In matters of religion let us submit to his authority alone. To follow the imaginations of our minds, or to receive the dictates of fellow-creatures, whether one or a greater number, is to renounce the allegiance which we owe to Christ, and to choose another master. Such conduct cannot fail to be highly offensive to him, as well as injurious to his religion.

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THE historian now proceeds to give an account of the impression made upon the multitude by the miracle of the effusion of the Holy Spirit, and the reasoning of Peter upon the subject.

37. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, "*to the heart,*" and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, "*brethren,*" what shall we do?

How shall we escape the calamities which are coming upon the Jewish nation, and repair the error which we have committed in rejecting and crucifying the Messiah? By the quotations which Peter made from Joel, in which the prophet speaks of the sun being turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, and of blood and fire, and vapour of smoke preceding the terrible day of the Lord, which the apostle applied to the present occasion, they understand that great and uncommon evils were about to befall their country, and they are anxious to be informed in what manner they

themselves might be delivered from them. This Peter tells them in the next verse.

38. Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins : and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The repentance to which Peter here exhorts his hearers, is not a general reformation of character and conduct, although the word sometimes undoubtedly has that meaning, but a change of principles upon a particular subject, namely, the divine mission of Jesus. Nor does the remission of sins, here promised as the consequence of repentance and baptism, signify the removal of moral guilt in general, but merely a recovery from that sinful state to which all men, whether Jew or Gentiles, are represented as being reduced, so long as they are out of the Christian covenant. This sense of the word repentance occurs in other parts of the book of Acts, as xvii. 20. "But the times of this ignorance God winked at," where heathen idolatry is spoken of, "but now commandeth all men every where *to repent*;" that is, to abandon their idolatrous errors, and to embrace the Christian religion. And in the same manner, xxvi. 20, when Paul says of himself to Agrippa, that he showed first to them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance, he means that they should forsake their errors as Jews or heathens, receive the Christian religion which God now offered to them, and walk in a manner becoming their new profession. The remission of sins is here connected with baptism, in the same manner as, in other passages, with the blood of Christ; not because the one, any more than the other, removed the guilt arising from the commission of crimes, but because men who were before reckoned sinners, ceased to be esteemed so, upon their profession of the Christian religion, or upon their entering into the Christian covenant. It may be further observed on this passage, that men are exhorted to be baptized into the name of Christ only; which affords a strong presumption that this was the original form of baptism; and that the Holy Spirit is called a gift, which implies that it was a power and not a person. The gift was usually bestowed upon believers in early times, and was regarded as a proof of their being the covenant-people of God.

39. For the promise, *i. e. of the Holy Spirit*, is unto you and to your children, "*to your offspring*," and to all that are afar off, *to the Jews in foreign countries*, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

By "afar off," some suppose Peter to refer to the Gentiles, who are so described by the apostle Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians, where, speaking of Gentiles and Jews, he calls them those who were afar off, and those who were nigh. But Peter

could have no idea of the communication of miraculous powers to the Gentiles at this time; for it required an express revelation from God to instruct him in that part of the Christian dispensation, His design was evidently to encourage the Jews to expect miraculous powers upon the profession of Christianity, because the promise of the Spirit had been made to them and to their offspring, in whatever part of the world dispersed, to whom the gospel was offered. This was part, but by no means the whole, of what Peter said to them on the present occasion; for he instructed them further in the Christian religion, and exhorted them, by embracing it, to save themselves from impending calamities.

40. And with many other words did he testify, *i. e. bear testimony to the truth of Christianity*, and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

It appeared, from the above prophecies of Joel, that dreadful calamities were threatened to the Jews, and that the time for inflicting them was now arrived, because the miraculous powers which were foretold as preceding the event appeared to be bestowed. The apostle, therefore, exhorts his hearers to separate themselves from their countrymen, by embracing Christianity, and to save themselves from the calamities which were coming upon unbelievers. Christians, it seems, were promised exemption from the sufferings of the Jews, and actually escaped them.

41. Then they that received his word were baptized, *not upon the spot, but in some other place*, and the same day there were added about three thousand souls.

That is, so many persons were added to the number of one hundred and twenty before mentioned. The word "gladly," which appears in our translation, is omitted in some of the best manuscripts and versions, and is, therefore probably an interpolation.\*

42. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, "*constantly attended to the apostles' doctrine*," and to fellowship, and to breaking of bread, and to prayers.

The word we render fellowship has two senses, and may either signify friendly intercourse, or the distribution of property, a virtue for which the first Christians were remarkable, and which is noticed below. There is a like ambiguity in the phrase, breaking of bread, which may either signify eating their common meals, or celebrating the Lord's supper, but, as it accompanies prayers, it is most probable that it refers to the Lord's supper,

\* See Griesbach, 2nd edition.

which the first Christians celebrated every Sunday, if not more frequently.

43. And fear came upon every one, and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

The fear mentioned in the first clause of the verse, is to be regarded as the consequence of what is mentioned in the last. Many extraordinary miracles were performed by the apostles, and therefore all men were impressed with awe of the divine power.

44. And all that believed were together, *not in one place, but united in different societies*, and had all things common ;

45. And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

This was a remarkable effect of their faith in Christ, and showed the little value which they placed upon temporal possessions, when compared with the eternal inheritance promised to them in the gospel. Their joy in the clear evidence of a future state of happiness for good men, given them by this new doctrine, was so great, that their worldly property seemed of no value, any further than as it afforded them an opportunity of dividing it with their brethren, and of administering to the wants of those who were in distress. This community of goods could not be the work of a day, but must have required some time to accomplish it.\*

46. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, "*at home,*" did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, "*with purity of heart.*"

That is, with hearts free from all ambitions, impure, or selfish designs. The writer is describing their public and private conduct. In regard to the former, they frequented the temple, to praise God for his invaluable blessings, and at home, they ate their meat with joy, and spent an irreproachable life.

47. Praising God, and having favour with all the people ; *or, "praising God with thankfulness before all the people,"*

This seems better adapted to the connexion than the common translation. This was their employment at home, in the presence of their acquaintance, as well as in the temple.

\* Mosheim, in a dissertation on this subject, has endeavoured to show that the expressions used by the historian are not to be interpreted literally of a community of goods, but relate to the liberality of the first Christians to teach other, in giving a large share of their substance for the support of their necessitous brethren. See Simpson on Internal Evidence, p. 223.



And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved, "*such as were saved.*"

The language of the writer in the original, expresses what had already taken place. All men were saved who believed in the gospel of Christ; for they were thereby delivered from their former errors, which exposed them to the judgments of God and to many evils. And all that the writer means is, God daily added new converts to the number of the disciples. This is an instance, among many others which occur in the New Testament, of the term "saved" being applied not to deliverance from future misery, about the probability of which it was impossible for any one to decide at present; but to deliverance from present and temporal evil. In this sense is the word continually used in Paul's epistles.

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### REFLECTIONS.

1. WE may observe that the reception of the gospel by three thousand persons, in one day, is a glorious evidence of its truth and divine origin. For the apostle appeals to the character of Jesus, as a prophet working miracles to prove his divine mission, and to his resurrection from the dead, as facts well known among them; and the appeal is made very soon after his crucifixion and death, and in the very city where they were said to have taken place. When persons embrace Christianity upon being reminded of these things, it is a clear admission of the facts; it is an acknowledgment on their part that they believed them to be true; and when this is done by so many, and in so short a time, it shows that a proof was plain and clear, level to every understanding; whence this unavoidable inference follows, that what produced conviction in this manner, among persons who had the best opportunity for examining and every motive for inquiry, must be true. No instance can be produced from the beginning of the world of facts, received in these circumstances, proving false. Let every man carefully consider these points, and fairly resist the inference to which they lead, if he can.

2. The liberality of these early Christians is a just specimen of the temper which the gospel produces, and deserves our imitation. They distributed their substance to all that had need, and retained no more for themselves than was requisite for procuring the necessaries of life. This was the natural consequence of a high degree of joy in the prospect of a blessing far more valuable than any earthly comfort, and of gratitude to that Being who had promised to bestow it. Let us manifest the same temper; not, indeed, by establishing a community of goods, which the experience of mankind has shown to be an encouragement to the idle and dissolute, and to furnish opportunities to the fraudulent for carrying on their devices, and therefore calculated to increase, rather than diminish, the miseries of life; but by showing a be-

coming indifference to temporal good things, by regarding them as of comparatively little value, and employing them freely in doing good, especially in promoting the great design of the gospel. Eternal life is of the same value to us as to the first Christians, and the goodness of God is equally great in bestowing it. Therefore, having the same motives for gratitude and joy, we ought to manifest the like exertions. This is the most substantial and acceptable way of showing our esteem for the gospel of Christ. We ought not, however, to omit,

3. To express our gratitude to God in words, by praising him continually for his goodness. Riches are bestowed only upon a few, and they only can express their gratitude by acts of charity and beneficence, but praise is an easy tribute, which may be offered by every one who has a heart to feel, and a tongue to speak. It belongs not exclusively to any class of men, but is incumbent upon all men of every condition; for they are all under equal obligations.

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#### SECTION IV.

##### *Cure of the lame man at the Beautiful gate of the temple.*

ACTS iii. 1—26.

1. Now Peter and John went up together into the temple, at that hour of prayer which is the ninth hour.

There were three hours of prayer in a day, nine o'clock, twelve, and three in the afternoon, or the ninth hour. This was the last of them.

2. And a certain man, lame from his mother's womb, was carried, whom they placed daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;

3. Who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked an alms.

4. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him, with John, said, Look on us.

He intended hereby to awaken his attention, and, by leading him to consider who they were, to prepare his mind for the exercise of that faith in the divine power which was necessary for receiving the favour of a miraculous cure.

5. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

He misunderstood their meaning, imagining that they intended to prepare him for receiving alms.

6. Then said Peter, Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.

As a disciple and follower of Jesus, who is the Christ, I say unto thee, Arise. It has already been shown that to pray in the name of Christ, is to pray as his disciples; and to perform a miracle in his name, signifies the same thing. In each case, the authority of Christ for what is done must be understood. The name of Christ is mentioned on this occasion, not as a charm for effecting a cure, but to awaken the faith of the lame man, who had probably heard of the fame of Jesus, and to point out the design of the miracle, which was to confirm his divine mission.

7. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

8. And he, leaping up, stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking and leaping, and praising God.

It was perfectly natural for a man who had just recovered the use of his limbs, to try them in every way, in order to be assured that they were restored to perfect soundness; and it was no less natural for a devout mind to offer public thanks to God for so great a favour. We learn from this last action, by whose power, according to the man's idea, the miracle was performed.

9. And all the people saw him walking, and praising God;

10. And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.

This miracle was well adapted to make a strong impression upon the minds of spectators; for the subject of it was so completely a cripple, as to be unable to move, and to make it necessary for him to be carried to his station; and on this account he was particularly calculated to excite the pity of beholders. He was well known to all those that frequented the temple, having been placed there daily, many years, being forty years old at this time. Yet in an instant his limbs are restored to perfect soundness, without the application of any natural remedy. If such a miracle had not excited amazement, human nature could not have been then what it is now.

11. And as the lame man who was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them,

in the porch, *or*, “*portico*,” that is called Solomon’s, greatly wondering.

Solomon’s portico was a part of Solomon’s temple, left standing when the rest of the temple was rebuilt by Herod. The man upon whom the miracle had been performed, was probably induced to lay hold on Peter and John, to prevent his benefactors from leaving him, when they showed an inclination to depart. This afforded the multitude an opportunity of gratifying their curiosity, by assembling round them. Peter takes occasion hence to explain the cause and design of the miracle.

12. And when Peter saw it, he answered, “*he said*,” unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though, by our own power or holiness, we had made this man to walk?

By the eagerness with which the multitude gazed upon him and his companion, Peter concluded that they must suppose, that the man was healed, either by some extraordinary medical virtue, existing in themselves, or by the power of God, as a testimony to the excellence of their characters; he takes care, therefore, to undeceive them, by declaring that the miracle was intended principally to do honour to Christ, whom they had lately crucified, being performed by power which God had conferred upon him for that purpose.

13. The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son, “*his servant*,” Jesus, whom ye delivered up, and denied him, “*rejected him*,” in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go.

The word which is here rendered “*Son*,” in its primitive sense, signifies a boy, and as boys were generally employed as servants, it came in course of time, to signify a servant. In this sense it frequently occurs in the New Testament. Thus we read in Luke, “if that servant say, My Lord delayeth his coming, and shall begin to beat the men-servants:” in the original, the same word which is used here. But our translators, who believed Jesus to be God, equal with the Father, were shocked at the idea of calling Christ a servant of God, and therefore called him his Son; a name which he undoubtedly sometimes bears, but which Peter had no intention of giving him in this place. A similar observation may be made on the translation of the next verse.

14. But ye denied, “*ye rejected*,” the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you;

The proper translation of the first clause of the verse is undoubtedly the holy man and the just man, in opposition to the murderer;

but the translators were not prepared to follow Peter in calling Christ a man, and therefore have adopted a phrase which may imply that Christ was something more than human.

15. And killed the prince of life, "*the leader of life,*" whom God hath raised from the dead, whereof we are witnesses.

When Christ is called the leader of life, there is an allusion to the situation of an officer of an army, who goes before, or leads his men. In like manner, Jesus is the leader of Christians to eternal life, being the first of the human race who rose from the dead to that condition. It was to remove the imputation cast upon the character of Jesus by the Jews, who preferred a robber, and crucified the Messiah, that God conferred upon him the honour of bestowing miraculous powers upon his disciples, and particularly, that of enabling one of them to produce the present cure. And this is what Peter refers to, when he says, (verse thirteenth,) that the God of their fathers had glorified his servant Jesus. It was to Christ, principally, and not to the two apostles, that God meant to do honour by this event. He next explains how so great a favour came to be conferred upon the man who was cured of his lameness: he derived this benefit from his faith in Christ.

16. And by faith in his name hath he given strength to this man, whom ye see and know: that name, I say, and that faith therein hath given him this perfect soundness in the sight of you all.

In this manner may this verse be translated, by only a small alteration in the punctuation, which renders its meaning clear and obvious; whereas it is very perplexed and confused, according to the common method of reading. The apostle asserts, that the name of Christ, or rather, faith in Christ, which the mention of his name excited, produced this extraordinary cure. This declaration corresponds very well with the language of Christ upon similar occasions, who often said to those whom he cured, Thy faith hath made thee whole. It was only upon such as had some degree of faith in the divine power, that God thought fit to confer these favours.

17. And now, brethren, I wot, "*I know,*" that through ignorance ye did it, *without any intention of fulfilling the divine purpose,* as did also your rulers.

18. But those things which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.

The apostle is not here offering an apology for the Jewish people and rulers, in their preceding conduct in rejecting and crucifying the Messiah, by saying, that it was the effect of ignorance,

and therefore, in some degree excusable. But he asserts that in ignorance, or contrary to their intentions, they had fulfilled the purpose of Divine Providence, which had been foretold by all the prophets which spake of Christ, that he should suffer death. In that event, therefore, there was nothing which ought to give them offence.

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## REFLECTIONS.

1. THE wretched condition of this cripple, who could neither walk nor move, should teach us to be thankful to God for the use of our limbs. In his case we see and acknowledge the propriety of his praising God for restoring the use of them, and should have charged him with the grossest insensibility and ingratitude, if he had neglected to testify a sense of his obligations in this manner. Yet to a like charge we are ourselves liable, if, after having enjoyed, for thirty or forty years, the favour now first conferred upon him, we have not perceived its value, and acknowledged it in grateful praise. Whatever our past conduct has been, let us be careful that we do not incur the same reproach in future. Let us admire the skill which framed the curious limb, which endued it with its various movements, and which preserves it in a sound state and fit for use, notwithstanding the many accidents to which it is liable, and the constant exercise in which it is employed. To awaken our gratitude, we need only consider how unhappy our condition must be, if, instead of conveying ourselves from place to place, we must be conveyed by others; if we could not walk when we pleased, to execute the business of life, to visit our friends, or to attend the house of God: we need only look at those unfortunate men among our brethren who have lost a limb, or cannot use it without pain.

2. This story furnishes us with a striking example of the unassuming, disinterested conduct of the apostles. The first converts had already divided their substance, and all things were common; and the apostles of Christ, no doubt, by their superior authority, might have secured a large portion of it to themselves. But we have no reason to suspect them of any selfish, interested views: we still find them poor fishermen, without silver or gold to give away. When a miracle is performed, and the astonished multitude are disposed to regard them with extraordinary veneration, as the authors, they ascribe all the honour to their Master, and assume nothing to themselves. Thus we discover, that their attachment to the gospel, and their zeal for propagating it in the world, was a pure, disinterested regard; for they sought not to enrich or to aggrandize themselves; and, therefore, in the highest degree honourable to them, and to the cause which they espoused.

3. Let Peter's resolution respecting this man, be ours, respecting all those who may be in like circumstances: such as I have, give I unto thee. Ability to confer alms is confined to a few, and may not be within our reach. But there is a variety of other ways

in which we may do good to the distressed. If we cannot relieve them by charitable donations, we may afford them assistance or comfort by personal services, by our advice, or by our company. If we cannot give assistance ourselves, we may recommend them to others, who are better able to afford it.

In whichever of these ways we can give pleasure, or remove pain, that let us adopt ; remembering, that offerings of this nature will be well received ; since every man is accepted according to what he hath, and not according to what he hath not.

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THE apostle Peter, having explained to the multitude the design of the miracle performed upon the lame man, namely, that it was intended to confirm the divine mission of Jesus, exhorts the Jews to submit to his authority, and to repent of their guilt in rejecting him.

19. Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times, “*that the times,*” of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord :

20. And that he may send Jesus Christ appointed for you ;

21. Whom the heaven must receive, until the times of the completion of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets [from the beginning\*.]

The repentance, to which Peter here exhorts the Jews, did not relate to their ill conduct in general, but only in one particular instance, the rejection of the Messiah. In respect to this subject, he exhorts them to change their mind, in consequence of what he had said of the miracle just performed, and to embrace the Christian faith. As an encouragement to do so, he assures them, that their sins would be blotted out ; that is, that they would be taken from that unholy and dangerous state in which they lay, as unbelievers, into one that was safe and holy. The consequence would likewise be, that the times of refreshing would come from the presence of the Lord. These times of refreshing are supposed to refer to the ease and prosperity which the Jewish converts to Christianity would enjoy, when the persecution of their countrymen ceased, upon the destruction of the Jewish state and government. Another advantage to be derived from their conversion was, that Christ, who was fore-ordained for this purpose, would be sent. The coming of Christ is frequently used in the New Testament, to express, not a personal appearance, but any remarkable display of divine power in his favour, by the accomplishment

\* The words  $\alpha\tau\prime\ \epsilon\lambda\theta\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$  are marked by Griesbach as probably spurious.

of his predictions, or the success of his gospel. Thus the destruction of Jerusalem is called the coming of the Son of man : and in the same, or a like sense, the apostle might intend to speak, when he says, that he would be sent. He says, further, that the heaven must receive him ; by which we are to understand not any local situation, in which he is to continue, the sky, or the presence of God, but a state of dignity and power, which, in metaphorical language, is being in heaven. In this state he will continue until the times of the restitution, or rather to the times of the completion, of all things which have been predicted concerning him by any of the prophets ; or until he has subdued all the enemies of his gospel. This corresponds with the language of Paul, who, speaking of Christ, 1 Cor. xv. 25, says, that he must reign, till he has put all enemies under his feet. See also Heb. x. 12, 13.\*

22. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise unto you of your brethren, like unto me, “*as he raised me;*” him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.

23. And it shall come to pass, that every soul which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.

Peter having in the preceding verses mentioned the testimony borne to the character of Jesus, as a divine teacher, by the miracle just performed, and called upon them to receive him as the Messiah, reminds his countrymen of the prophecy delivered of old by Moses, in which he foretold a succession of prophets, which God would raise up among the children of Israel, and at the same time, of the severe punishment threatened to those who should disregard their messages, which he applies to the present occasion. The words of Moses may seem to refer to one prophet in particular ; and it may be thought, from what follows here, that they were so understood by Peter, and applied by him solely to the Messiah ; but the connexion in which they first occur in the book of Deuteronomy, plainly shows that a succession of prophets was intended, and that a prophet is spoken of as a representative of a series of prophets. The apostle’s argument, however, is by no means injured by this supposition ; for the regard due to all the prophets is equally requisite to every individual. When Peter says that those who refused to listen to the prophet which God should raise up, should be cut off from among the people, he delivers the sense, rather than the words of the prophecy ; for his language does not correspond with either the Hebrew or Greek copies of the Old Testament.

24. Yea, and all the prophets, from Samuel, and

\* Le Clerc, and Ernesti’s Dissert. quoted by Rosenmüller.



as many as follow after as have spoken, have foretold of these days.

Samuel is the only prophet after Moses, of whom any writings, bearing his name, are come down to us, and in them there is a prophecy of the Messiah, 2 Sam. vii. 12, &c. This was delivered by Nathan to David; yet being in the books which bear the name of Samuel, it is attributed to him. When it is said that all succeeding prophets foretel the days of Christ, we are not to expect to find it true of every individual of them; it is enough to justify Peter's expression if the majority of them did so.

25. Ye are the children of the prophets, *or, as some conjecture, by a slight alteration, "of these prophecies."*\* and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

He calls them the children of these prophecies, if we take this reading, and of this covenant, because they are the descendants of those to whom they were delivered, and therefore, entitled to the privileges which they granted, which he now calls upon them to accept.

The meaning of the promise made to Abraham, In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed, is, that all men would pray for a blessing for those to whom they wished well, by saying, May God make thee as numerous, prosperous, and distinguished by divine favours, as the seed of Abraham; and the language is well illustrated by what Jacob says to the two sons of Joseph, In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh. The principal of these favours to the seed of Abraham was, causing the Messiah to be born from among them, and sending him to instruct them, in preference to other nations, as is explained in the words that follow.†

26. Unto you first, God, having raised up his servant, Jesus, *raised him up as a prophet*, sent him to bless you,‡ in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

This was the benevolent design of the Divine Being in the mission of Jesus; but the folly and perverseness of the Jews defeated, in a great measure, his purpose.

\* Wakefield, Bowyer.

† Le Clerc, and Theological Repository, Vol. IV, p. 361.

‡ Peter uses the word *εωλογων* in the sense of communicating benefits, and not praying for them.

## REFLECTIONS.

1. THE faith of so many Jews in a miraculous cure, is a decisive testimony in favour of the divine authority of those by whom it was performed. That so many thousand persons, of all ages and descriptions, in full possession of their senses, should have been deceived in a case so plain, where they had been eye-witnesses of the past and present condition of the man who was said to be relieved, and when many of them must have seen the change actually take place, is impossible. And it is also impossible that the person who performed such a miracle, as a proof of a commission to be a divine teacher, should not be what he professes that he is. For miracles are the works of God alone; it is he only who can change the course of nature, which himself has established; and we may be assured that he will never suspend his operations in support of a falsehood. Whoever, therefore, receives the sanction of miracles to his testimony, is supported by the authority of the Deity. In that light let us regard these men, and bow to their decisions on all subjects to which their commission extended.

2. Let us rejoice to hear, from such authority, that Christ shall be in heaven, that is, his religion in a state of power, until the completion of all things which have been foretold. For a time it may lie buried under a mass of superstitious practices and corrupt doctrines; but it shall spring again, with fresh vigour, from the root which is left alive, and again become a great tree, so that the birds of the air may lodge in the branches thereof. Amongst all the revolutions in the world, the name of Jesus shall be held in estimation, and his religion prevail, and the time at length come, when, the corruptions unhappily incorporated with it being removed, the princes and powers of this world who supported them being overthrown, it shall triumph over all opposition, and accomplish all the predicted purposes of divine goodness. In the most gloomy periods, when many reject and many corrupt the Christian doctrine, let Christians support their minds with these prospects. There is no cause for despondency, while we have such promises.

3. Let the subject of the apostles' preaching, a resurrection from the dead, be the leading topic of discourse amongst all Christian instructors. No doctrine is better calculated to awaken the fears of the guilty, or to encourage the endeavours, and to promote the comfort of the virtuous. It is the distinguishing doctrine and principal glory of the Christian system, it is what the ignorant heathen knew nothing of; what the Jews, although they believed it, could derive from no just authority, and what can never be proved from the light of reason.

## SECTION V.

*The apostles are imprisoned and brought before the Sanhedrim, and dismissed with an injunction of silence.*

ACTS iv. 1—22.

1. AND as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them ;

The priests, who attended in great numbers, to perform the service of the temple, were arranged into different divisions, according to the object for which they were designed, over which a president or officer was appointed, who was called the captain of the temple.\*

The pretext for the interference of this officer and the other persons here mentioned, was, no doubt, that the apostles created a disturbance, by assembling such a multitude ; but they were secretly influenced by another motive.

2. Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

The Sadducees disbelieved this doctrine ; and although it might be an article of faith with the rest, yet they were displeased to find that it was supposed to receive fresh sanction and authority from the resurrection and instructions of Jesus, a man whom they had lately crucified as a malefactor. We learn from this passage what it was that the apostles regarded as the primary and distinguishing doctrine of the Christian system ; it was a resurrection from the dead ; for it was this which they first preached to the people.

3. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day ; for it was now even-tide.

4. Howbeit, "*Nevertheless,*" many of them which heard the word, *Peter's discourse just recited*, believed ; and the number of the men was about five thousand.

This number of converts was added on this occasion to those before mentioned, making in all the number of eight thousand. So rapid was the success of the gospel !

5. And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes,

6. And Annas the highpriest, and Caiaphas, and

\* Lardner, Vol. I. p. 106. Harwood (Liberal Translation) thinks that he was captain of a band of soldiers that guarded the temple.

John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high-priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.

This is a description of the highest court of Justice among the Jews, usually called the Sanhedrim, consisting of seventy or seventy-two members, who were probably chosen from among the priests, the magistrates of inferior courts, here called rulers, the elders of the tribes, and also from among the scribes, or those persons whose profession it was to transcribe or correct copies of the law. This council sat in the form of a circle, the president being on the side, and the prisoner placed in the middle.

There has been difficulty in accounting for Annas being here called high-priest, when the evangelists Matthew and John inform us that Caiaphas possessed that office at this time, and Luke himself, the writer of this history, tells us that Annas and Caiaphas were both high-priests in the year when the word of God came to John the Baptist. To reconcile these seemingly discordant accounts, it has been supposed that Annas, having once been high-priest, although at present deposed from his office by the Romans, still retained the name, and was probably thought by many of the Jews to be still entitled to the office.\* The reason why he alone is called high-priest on this occasion may be, that he was the president of the Sanhedrim.

7. And when they had set them, *the two apostles and the man*, in the midst, they asked, By what power, or in what name, have ye done this ?

By what powers of medicine have ye performed this cure, if it be a natural one; or in whose name, if it be miraculous? By these questions, they hoped either to cast discredit on the miracle, or to discover some ground of accusation against them.

3. Then Peter filled with the Holy Spirit, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people and elders of Israel,

9. If we this day be examined of the good state of the infirm man, by what means he is healed,

10. Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand before you healed.

“Filled with the Holy Spirit.” By this phrase we are to understand, not that Peter was aided by any extraordinary inspiration upon the present occasion; for there is nothing in his speech

\* Pearce and Lardner.

which might not naturally be suggested by the circumstances of the case, and for which, therefore, divine aid could be wanted; but that, being conscious to himself of possessing extraordinary miraculous powers, manifested by the late event, and especially by the gift of tongues, he acquired thence an extraordinary degree of courage, to assert in the presence of the council what he then declared; namely, that Jesus Christ, whom they had crucified, was the author of the miracle about which they were inquiring; that God had raised him from the dead, and that, therefore, they were guilty of a great crime in putting him to death. Nothing but the fullest persuasion that he was countenanced by divine authority could have enabled him to hold this language, in such a situation.

Jesus is here and elsewhere called Jesus of Nazareth; a strong presumption that that town was the place of his nativity, and not Bethlehem, as some accounts would lead us to suppose. For as it appears, from John vii. 42, that the Jews expected their Christ to come from Bethlehem, had he really been born there, no doubt can be entertained that his disciples would have named him after that place, Jesus of Bethlehem, in order to remove the objections of the Jews, and to give greater credibility to his claims.

11. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

A stone at the head of the corner connects and binds together the whole building, and, therefore, occupies the most important and conspicuous place in it. To such an exalted situation does Peter say that Jesus is now raised, in the structure which God is erecting; being the head of the Christian church, and superior to all former prophets and messengers. The evidence of this exaltation is his being raised from the dead; an honour conferred on no preceding prophet, and his enabling his followers to perform such extraordinary miracles as the present. This language is taken from Ps. cxviii. 22, and is used by David respecting himself, whose exaltation to the throne of Israel had been opposed by the rulers of that nation; but is applied, by way of accommodation, both by Jesus and his apostles, to the Messiah.

12. Neither is there restoration to soundness in any other; for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we may be saved.

To be saved, in the New Testament, frequently signifies the same thing as to be cured. Thus Christ says more than once to persons upon whom he had performed miraculous cures, Thy faith hath saved thee. When Peter, therefore, says here that there is salvation in no other name than that of Jesus, he means that miraculous cures, or deliverance from bodily maladies, can be accomplished by no authority but his. This sense of the passage connects extremely well with the preceding circumstances, which cannot be said of the common interpretation, which supposes an eternal and not a temporal deliverance to be here spoken of; for Peter, being asked

in what name the cure had been performed, replies, In the name of Jesus; and adds, that such cures can be performed in no other name.

13. Now when they saw the freedom of speech of Peter and John, and discovered that they were unlearned and common men, they wondered; and they recollected that they had been with Jesus.

The common translation of this verse is particularly unhappy, because it represents the apostles as ignorant men, a character which they did not deserve, and which the council did not mean to give them; for they probably had as much, if not more, knowledge of religion and the Scriptures than most other men of their station in life. That they had some pretensions to knowledge, appears from their works, one of them having written a history of Christ, and the other, two epistles, preserved to the present day. All that the words of the original imply is, that they were unlearned and common persons, in opposition to the council, which was composed of men of learning and high rank. The behaviour of such persons, when brought before their superiors, especially in a court of justice, is commonly timid and embarrassed; but the two apostles, conscious of being supported by divine power, spoke with a freedom which could not be expected from their station, and excited the astonishment of their hearers, who knew not whence it proceeded. That some of the members of the Sanhedrim should recollect having seen them with Jesus, is what might be expected: since they themselves used occasionally to attend upon his ministry, and we are expressly told that John was known to the high-priest, at the time when he followed Jesus to his trial.

14. And beholding the man which was cured standing with them, they could say nothing against it, "*against them.*"

It was in vain to deny the reality of the miracle; for the man himself, upon whom it was performed, appeared before them, and was probably well known to them all.

15. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves,

16. Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable, "*an undoubted,*" miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell at Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it:

17. But that it, *i. e. this matter*, spread no further among the people, let us strictly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name, "*about this name,*" *i. e. about Jesus.*

They imagined that a prohibition from so respectable a body of men as the Jewish Sanhedrim, accompanied with a threatening of severe punishment, in case of disobedience, would effectually deter the apostles from saying any thing respecting Jesus and his resurrection. But they found that they had to do with men who considered themselves as under the direction of higher authority, and who would not encourage them, for so much as a moment, to hope that they would submit to their injunctions.

18. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all, nor teach about the name of Jesus.

They required them henceforth to be totally silent, both in public and private, respecting the character and doctrine of Jesus.

19. But Peter and John answered, and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

We appeal to your own judgment, whether it be consistent with piety towards God to obey man rather than God. If not, you deliver to us injunctions which you yourselves must acknowledge that we cannot, as faithful servants of the Divine Being, comply with. This language strongly implies that they had the authority and command of God, for teaching the people about the name of Jesus; and the same thing is as strongly implied in the next verse.

20. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

Your own judgment, we conceive, will acquit us of doing wrong in disobeying your orders; but, whether it do so or not, we cannot decline to publish what we have seen and heard on this subject, when enjoined by such high authority. This reply contained a very plain intimation that they were resolved not to comply with the prohibition which had been given them; but the council were afraid to punish their disobedience, and contented themselves with renewing their threatenings, and dismissing them.

21. So, when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing, or, "*not finding*," how they might punish them, because of the people:

They could devise no method of punishing them, which would not give offence to the people, who saw no fault in their conduct, but, on the contrary, were highly pleased with it, considering them as having performed a great and beneficent miracle.

For all men glorified God for that which was done.

Although the apostles, who appeared to perform the miracle, had attributed it to Christ, yet the people rightly judged that the power for this purpose, must have been originally derived from God, and that to him the praise was due.

22. For the man was above forty years old on whom this miracle of healing was showed.

His age rendered his lameness notorious, and the reality of the miracle unquestionable.

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### REFLECTIONS.

1. THIS story may teach us what advantage the truth derives from inquiry and discussion. The authenticity of the account rested at first upon the testimony of friends alone, upon the evidence of persons, who, having seen the man before and after his cure, were satisfied that a miracle had been performed, and were thereby induced to embrace the Christian religion: but, in consequence of the officious zeal of some who were desirous of discrediting the account, we have now the testimony of enemies as well as of friends in its favour. The whole Jewish Sanhedrim, composed of the ablest and most learned men in the nation, are obliged, after the strictest examination, to acknowledge the fact, and dismiss the apostles with a command to suppress it. To evidence thus supported, nothing can be opposed: when persons of such different interests and views acknowledge the same thing, it must be true. Let no one, then, be alarmed at any severe investigation which the evidences and doctrines of Christianity are likely to undergo, either from friends or foes. For the inquiries of its friends can do it no harm, and the attacks of its foes will only serve to establish it on firmer ground.

2. The courage of the apostles in defence of the gospel of Christ, is highly commendable, and worthy of imitation. They hesitate not to attribute a miracle, about which they are questioned, to one who had been crucified as a malefactor; they scruple not to speak of him as a divine prophet, and the great Messiah, before the highest court of justice in the kingdom, and to accuse that court of the foulest crime in putting to death this divine messenger. When prohibited from speaking of him in private or public any more, they declare that piety to God forbids their compliance with the injunction. How manly and noble is this conduct! How becoming the disciples of Jesus, and the messengers of the Most High; and how happily calculated to inspire others with the like resolution! Surely it must shake the confidence of their opponents, and awaken their inquiries to discover what could give ordinary persons so much courage, and lead many of them to the acknowledgment of the truth. It is to men, who like them profess or defend the truth, undaunted by authority, unterrified by danger, at the hazard of their liberty and lives, that we are indebted for that degree of light and knowledge which we now possess, and without their services we must have remained, like our ancestors, in the darkness of popish superstition or pagan idolatry. Ye noble army of apostles, confessors, and martyrs, ye are the benefactors and saviours of mankind! We will revere



your memories, and hold your actions in everlasting remembrance, and pray to God to inspire us with a portion of your spirit.

3. The courage of Peter, in particular, on this occasion, affords a strong presumptive argument in favour of the truth of the gospel-history. Peter, who was once terrified at the voice of a servant-maid calling him a disciple of Jesus, and disowned any relation to him three times in the space of an hour, confirming his declarations with oaths and curses; this same Peter, a few weeks afterwards, has acquired courage to make a voluntary confession of his relation to his Master before the Jewish Sanhedrim, and can listen undismayed to their threats of punishment. What can have produced so wonderful a change? If he once manifested more than ordinary timidity, what has now given him a degree of courage above his station? Allow the truth of the facts mentioned in the preceding part of the history, that his Master, having been crucified, rose from the dead, and that he himself received extraordinary miraculous powers in his name, and his conduct will appear consistent and natural: the change has an adequate cause; but without such a cause, it is inexplicable.

4. Let us ever keep in remembrance that Jesus Christ is raised to the head of the corner. All the angels of God, that is, all the messengers and prophets of God sent to the human race, are commanded to worship him, that is, to pay him homage, as possessing superior rank and authority to themselves. The like respect let us also show him, by admitting no rites or ceremonies into Christian worship, which he has not commanded or authorized, whether of Jewish or pagan origin, of earlier or later date. What he has enjoined let us observe, though kings and magistrates, councils, synods, and parliaments may condemn it; knowing that Christ alone is head of the Christian church, and that the allegiance which we owe to him requires us to oppose all rival claims.

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#### SECTION VI.

*The apostles returning from the council, pray for support in preaching the gospel, and are answered by an effusion of the Holy Spirit.*

ACTS iv. 23—37.

23. AND being let go, they went to their own company, “*to their own friends,*” and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.

Under these terms the Jewish Sanhedrim is described, because it consisted principally of such persons.

24. And when they heard that they lifted up their

voice to God with one accord, and said Lord, *or*, "*Sovereign Lord*," thou art God, which hast made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is ;

This verse, which is descriptive of the divine power, is a very proper introduction to a petition for the extension of miraculous gifts, which shortly succeeds, and should be connected in our minds with the thirtieth verse, in which the disciples pray that God would stretch forth his hand to heal, and that signs and wonders might be done in the name of his holy servant Jesus. For there can be no doubt that the Being who created the heavens and the earth, that is, who established the course of nature, can change it for these purposes whenever he pleases.

25. Who, by the mouth of thy servant David, has said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things ?

26. The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Christ, "*against his anointed*."

These words are taken exactly from the Septuagint translation of the second Psalm, which some persons consider as applicable to David, by whom it was composed, since he was God's anointed, having been designed for the throne of Israel, by Samuel, by pouring out oil in a solemn manner upon his head ; and several of the neighbouring nations, the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, and others, attempted to disturb the peace of his kingdom, and to destroy his authority, although without success. This language they therefore regard as a poetical remonstrance with them on the weakness and folly of their attempt. By the apostles and first Christians, however, the Psalm seems to have been regarded as a prophecy of the Messiah ; and these verses in particular are considered as referring to the opposition which he would meet with from the Jews and Roman people, and especially from their governors.

27. For, of a truth, against thy holy child, "*thy holy servant*," Jesus whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together in this city :\*

28. For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

The Jewish kings were appointed to their office by having oil poured out upon their heads, and were from this circumstance called the anointed, and the Lord's anointed. As Jesus of Nazareth was designed in the divine counsels, to be a most distinguished prince, although only in a spiritual kingdom, he was called

the Messiah, or the anointed, by way of eminence, although he never underwent the ceremony before-mentioned. This appellation, *Messiah*, is translated by the word Christ into Greek. Against this prince appointed by God to his office, Herod and Pilate, and the Jews, we are here told, conspired to deprive him of his dignity; but their conspiracy proved ineffectual, as had been foretold; for they only inflicted upon him those calamities and sufferings which God had before determined to permit, for the purpose of more effectually exalting him to the high office for which he was designed.

29. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings, and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness, "*with all freedom of speech,*" they may speak thy word;

30. By stretching forth thy hand to heal: and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy servant Jesus.

It seems as if some of the disciples had been alarmed at the threats of the Jewish council, and feeling some doubts about their own courage to preach the gospel in the face of such danger, had prayed to God to have it strengthened, by being enabled to perform such cures as that which had been just wrought upon the lame man, and to work other wonders. Hence, it appears probable, that although all the disciples had the gift of tongues, and the apostles, John and Peter, the power of healing diseases, the rest were not assured, that the same power would be communicated to them. Without this assistance, they were apprehensive that their resolution would fail; but so aided, they were convinced that they should be able to face all their adversaries. To confirm their expectations, and remove their fears, God was pleased to favour them with a sign, which is mentioned in the following verse. In the twenty-seventh and thirtieth verses, Christ is called, by our translators, God's holy child; but the proper translation is, undoubtedly, that which has been given, thy holy servant, as appears from the twenty-fifth verse, where they themselves have so rendered the word, calling David God's servant, although the same term be used in the original in that, as in other places.

31. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together.

This supernatural earthquake seems to have been intended as a signal, to announce the approach of the Deity, for the communication of miraculous powers, just as the noise of the mighty rushing wind, and the cloven tongues of fire, preceded the gift of tongues, on the day of Pentecost. In the present instance, however, there was no visible appearance; nor does it seem that any other miraculous effect immediately followed. What we are told about their being all filled with the Holy Spirit, I regard as referring rather to powers which afterwards appeared, than to any sensible change which took place immediately. They might,

indeed, be naturally supposed to be communicated at this moment. What the disciples prayed for was a miraculous power to heal and to perform other wonders as the means of establishing their faith in the gospel. When they found themselves possessed of these powers, by exercising them, and not before, they acquired the confidence which they wished for. Their boldness was not itself supernatural but founded upon reflection, and sprang from a consciousness of possessing extraordinary faculties, which were plain marks of the approbation and patronage of Heaven.

And they were all filled the Holy Spirit, and delivered the word of God with freedom of speech.

32. And the multitude of them that believed, *that is, the five thousand*, were of one heart and one soul, *were of one and the same spirit, and loved each other as themselves*, neither regarded any of them the things which he possessed as his own, but they had all things common.

This strong, mutual affection was the natural result of entertaining the same sentiments, of a common feeling of gratitude to God for this high favour, and perhaps, most of all, of observing that all were partakers of the same miraculous gifts, and therefore alike the objects of divine regard. The voluntary division of property arose from this affection, and in part, probably, from that new plan of life which now opened upon them, and to which they intended to devote themselves in future; that of preaching the gospel. This was henceforth to become their great object, and not the accumulation of wealth. In these instances they acted like the former converts, of whom we have an account in the second chapter.

33. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

They gave testimony to his resurrection, not only by words, but likewise by miracles performed in his name, and by powers derived professedly from him, and which were therefore a proof that he was alive; for God cannot give evidence in support of a falsehood.

And great grace was upon them all, *or, "great favour was towards them all."*

The extraordinary powers which they appeared to possess, the beneficent cures which they wrought, and their liberality to each other, raised the disciples very high in the estimation of many, who had not yet embraced their sentiments.

34. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or

houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

35. And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

The choice which Jesus had made of these twelve persons to be the companions of his life, and the witnesses of his resurrection, pointed them out as fit for having this trust committed to them; and they showed themselves worthy of the trust, by distributing to every one as he had need. This implies, that not a few of the first proselytes were poor; otherwise there would have been no occasion for this kind of assistance. But it shows, at the same time, that they were not all of that description, there being many persons of property among them.

36. And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas (which is, being interpreted, the son of consolation) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,

37. Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

It is not easy to say why Barnabas is more particularly noticed in this place, than another disciple: whether it is because he was the first who set the example, because he was a Levite, and such an act of liberality was not to be expected from him, or because his estate was larger than any other disposed of in this way, or for all these reasons united. From the name which the apostles gave him, "Son of Consolation," it seems evident that he bore a distinguished part in this charity. The Levites, although they had no land allotted them as a tribe in the division of Canaan, yet might purchase individually in any part of the country. His having land to dispose of, therefore, is not at all inconsistent with his character as a Levite.

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#### REFLECTIONS.

1. THE pleasing description here given us of the temper and conduct of the first professors of the gospel, is well calculated to strengthen our faith in its divine origin. They appear to be men of unfeigned piety; for when threatened with danger, instead of fleeing from it, they address themselves to God in a prayer, which was the spontaneous effusion of a devout mind. Their piety too, is not enthusiastic and rapturous, like that of some modern devotees; but it is perfectly calm and rational. From the character of the Deity, as the creator and governor of the universe, they

justly infer his ability to alter or suspend the course of nature. When they ask for aid to their courage, they look not for an answer to their petitions by an unaccountable and irresistible impulse upon their minds, but for a confirmation of their faith by natural and adequate means, by being enabled to work miracles. They are not men of interested characters, who had worldly emoluments in view in the profession which they assumed; for their first acquaintance with Christianity is accompanied with the sale of their lands and houses, and with a division of their property among the poor. Judge now, whether such men are likely to deceive the world; whether those who have the justest apprehensions of the power and supremacy of the Deity would knowingly assert a falsehood in his name, and hereby expose themselves to his displeasure; whether men of pure and rational devotion are likely to be filled with imaginary notions of inspiration; whether men of the most disinterested and the warmest benevolence could be disposed to propagate a pernicious lie, for the sake of gain; or whether the belief of such men in the events of the gospel history, and their declaring them with boldness in the midst of the strongest opposition and the greatest danger, does not furnish irresistible evidence of their truth?

3. Let us endeavour to imitate the temper of these first Christians, in esteeming the good things of this life of little value, when compared with spiritual benefits. No sooner are they acquainted with the hopes of the gospel, and enjoy the honour of miraculous powers, than they learn to regard what they most esteemed before, and made the great object of their pursuit, as perfectly worthless, and are ready to distribute it among such of their Christian friends as had need of it. Such also was the temper of Paul, who esteemed all things but loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his lord; and such will be the temper of all who have imbibed the genuine spirit of Christianity. Let us, my brethren, examine ourselves by this test.

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#### SECTION VII.

##### *The punishment of Ananias and Sapphira.*

ACTS v. 1—16.

1. BUT a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,

2. And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

By appearing to dispose of his property, and to put the price into the hands of the apostles, for the benefit of the disciples,

Ananias probably expected to obtain the same popularity as Barnabas had acquired by the same means; and, as those who had parted with all they had, must still have something for their subsistence, he intended to claim a share of the common fund. This share joined to what he retained, might make his circumstances as good, if not better, than they were before. But as he intended to impose upon the apostles, men who possessed miraculous powers, it was a high affront to the Being by whom they were inspired; and as the fraud, when discovered, would bring great reproach upon the Christian name, and prove an essential detriment to an infant cause, it was punished with great severity.

3. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie to, "*to deceive,*"\* the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land?

4. While it remained, was it not thy own? and after it was sold, was it not in thy own power?

Why hast thou been guilty of a falsehood to which there was so little temptation? For thy profession of the Christian religion did not oblige thee to sell thy land, nor, when sold, to lay the produce, or any part of it at our feet! Here he remonstrates with him on the folly of his conduct; in the next words, on the heinous impiety of it.

Why hast thou conceived, "*determined,*" this thing in thy heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.

That is, not to men only, but to God also; for he had lied to both: to men, because he had brought but a part of his property to the apostles, when he professed by his words, or his actions, or both, to bring the whole; and to God, because he was guilty of this falsehood before men, who had given proofs of their being assisted by divine powers, and might therefore be well supposed, like the ancient prophets, to be acquainted with the hearts of men. By the devil and Satan, the writers of the New Testament sometimes mean the persecuting power, as when it is said, The devil goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour; at other times, the supposed author of all moral evil; as when it is said, the devil put it into the heart of Judas to betray his Master. In this sense Satan seems to be used in the present instance, where he is said to have filled the heart of Ananias with the design of deceiving the Holy Spirit. Not that they supposed that he had any real agency, by which he could instigate to this or other crimes; but it was the common language of the Jews, borrowed, perhaps from some of their Eastern neighbours; for what is said to be the work of Satan, in one verse, is said to be conceived in his own heart in the next.

\* Pearce.

5. And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and gave up the ghost, “*expired*,” and great fear came upon all them that heard these things.

His death was not the effect of sudden surprise or violent remorse, in consequence of having his guilt thus detected and exposed; but was produced by divine power, as a punishment for his crime, and a warning to others of what they might expect, if they should be guilty of a like offence. Such an event was well calculated to strike all who heard of it with an awe of the divine power. But that part of this verse which speaks of the impression produced, seems to be out of its place, and to be inserted here by mistake from the eleventh verse, where it very properly closes the account of the whole transaction.

6. And the young men arose, *i. e. the young disciples*, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.

It is usual with the inhabitants of Eastern countries, in order to prevent the infection which might be produced in a hot climate, to bury the dead within twenty-four hours after death; but this man was not kept the usual time; for he had every appearance of death, and there was less hope of a recovery in this than in other cases of sudden death.

7. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in,

8. And Peter said unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? *i. e. that for so much and no more.* And she said, Yea, for so much.

9. Then Peter said unto her, How is that ye have agreed together to tempt, “*to try*,” the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.

To tempt the Spirit of God, or, which is the same thing, God himself, is to make an improper trial of his power or knowledge, from presumption or distrust,\* which is no small offence in his creatures. Of this offence both Ananias and Sapphira were guilty, when they imagined that they could impose upon men who had given such unquestionable proofs of being aided by the power and knowledge of the Supreme Being.

10. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and expired. And the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.

\* Farmer on Christ's Temptation, p. 118.



11. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

12. Moreover, they were all, with one accord, in Solomon's porch.

13. And after this, no one desired to meddle with them;\* but the people greatly magnified them.

14. And believers in the Lord were continually added, multitudes both of men and women. And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people;

15. So that in every street they brought forth the sick, and laid them on couches and beds, that the shadow of Peter, as he passed by, might fall upon some of them.†

16. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about, unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits; and they were healed, every one.

It is evident to every one that reads this passage with attention, that there is a considerable degree of confusion in the history, owing, probably, to a very ancient corruption of the original text by the transposition of sentences, through the carelessness of transcribers. I have read them in the order in which they appear to me best connected, and in which I conceive that they must have been written originally by Luke. In taking this liberty, I have done no more than what respect to the author seemed to require.

The persons here said to be vexed with unclean spirits, are the same whom we find so often mentioned in the evangelists as possessed with dæmons, namely, either insane persons or epileptics.

Solomon's porch or portico, so called because built by him, and left standing when the rest of the temple was taken down, was on the eastern side of that building. Here the disciples assembled for public worship and instruction, when shut out of the temple; no one daring to prohibit them.

\* So this passage is found in an ancient version, and it connects very well with what follows; being more intelligible than what we have in our translation, "And of the rest durst no man join himself to them." See Wakefield.

† Wakefield.

## REFLECTIONS.

1. THIS story affords a striking picture of the odious nature and the dreadful consequences of the vice of lying. It is a high offence both against God and man. In respect to the latter, indeed, it possesses different degrees of malignity, according to the object which men propose to themselves by uttering wilful falsehood: whether it be merely to conceal guilt, to acquire honour or riches, or for the more criminal purpose of depriving others of their property, of injuring their reputation, or taking away their lives. In the most favourable instances, it is a mean, selfish and pernicious vice, destroying the mutual confidence so necessary to the well-being of society, and introducing universal distrust and confusion. In some cases it becomes the foulest crime to be found in the calendar of human vices, and deserves to be ranked with theft, robbery, and murder, because employed to effect these enormities. In every case it is an offence against God, as well as man, because those who are guilty of it show that they suppose that he is ignorant of their behaviour, or indifferent about their moral character; that he knows not their guilt, or is unable or unwilling to punish it; a presumption highly derogatory from the essential attributes of his nature, and the purity of his moral administration; a presumption which partakes of the malignity of perjury, and which the righteous Governor of the world cannot fail highly to resent.

Let those who indulge themselves in this odious practice assuredly know that an omniscient Being is perfectly acquainted with all their secret falsehoods, however artfully disguised; and that, although he may not, from motives of wisdom and forbearance, inflict immediate death upon the offender as in the present instance; yet he beholds his conduct with displeasure, and will one day visit it with severe punishment. All liars shall have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.

To men of every age this narrative furnishes useful instruction; but more particularly to those who are in the early part of life. The temptations to falsehood are many and powerful; but, whenever tempted, let the young recollect this story, and they cannot fail to find in it strong motives for maintaining a sacred regard to truth in all circumstances.

2. We are here furnished with fresh presumptive evidence of the truth of the gospel history. Those who were so forward to punish falsehood and deceit, must surely be men without guile. How could Peter have had the effrontery to reprove Ananias for uttering a lie, if he himself had been at the same time publishing a more flagrant lie, in reporting the resurrection of his Master, and in asserting his own claim to a divine commission? How could God, the impartial Judge of all the earth, punish the less offender with so much severity, and let the greater go free?

Or how could men, with such dreadful examples before their eyes, persist in a notorious fraud? To such questions as these, let the enemies of our faith, if they are able, reply.

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SECTION VIII.

*The apostles being imprisoned, are miraculously delivered. They defend themselves before the council, and are dismissed with scourging.*

ACTS v. 17--42.

17. THEN the high-priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation;

18. And laid hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.

By saying that the high-priest and those who were with him, that is, the persons in public offices, were the sect of the Sadducees, the writer implies that such persons generally adopted the tenets of this sect. It is not likely, therefore, that the opinion commonly entertained of them can be true, namely, that they rejected all the books of Scripture, except the Pentateuch, or five books of Moses; for it is not to be supposed that persons denying the authority of so great a proportion of the Scriptures, would be placed in such situations. It is certain, however, that they denied the resurrection of the dead, and this, probably made them so violent in opposing the Christians, who maintained that doctrine. They were not satisfied now with apprehending one or two of the apostles, but seized the whole number, finding that they were all alike active in preaching.

19. But the angel of the Lord, by night, opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said,

20. Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life, or, "*all this doctrine of life,*"\* *i. e. the doctrine of eternal life.*

It was the opinion of the Sadducees, but not necessarily untrue because patronized by them, that the angels mentioned in Scripture as intelligent agents, had no permanent existence, but were men or phantoms created by God for the particular occasion on which they appeared. Of this nature, may have been the being who performed the present miracle, which was intended to give courage to the apostles in preaching the gospel.

\* See the authorities for ταυτα τη; ζων; in Wakefield, and Griesbach, second edition

21. And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning and taught: but the high-priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate, "*all the elders,*" of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

This was not an ordinary assembly of the Sanhedrim; for all the members were summoned to meet, as if to deliberate upon a matter of the highest moment. The high-priest and his companions have nothing less in view than putting to death the whole company of the apostles, as the only means left for stopping the progress of the new doctrine.

22. But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned and told,

23. Saying, 'The prison, truly, found we shut with all safety, and the keepers, "*the guard,*" standing before the doors;\* but when we had opened we found no man within.

As the guards could give no account of the prisoners, it is probable that they were all thrown into a deep sleep, at the time when the angel opened the doors and let them forth. In a similar instance, when Peter was liberated, the soldiers were put to death which was the Roman punishment for sleeping upon guard.

24. Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow, "*they doubted how this could be.*"†

They doubted how they had been able to escape, whether it was by corrupting the guards, by their falling asleep, or by some other means. The captain of the temple, as before explained, was the priest who presided over all the different classes of priests, employed in the temple service.

25. Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison, are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.

26. Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence, *that is, without their being bound*; for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned.

27. And when they had brought them, they set

\* Griesbach rejects 12.

† Doddridge, Wakefield, and Harwood.

them before the council, and the high-priest asked them,

28. Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? "*about this name,*" and behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring, "*and wish to bring,*" this man's blood upon us.

Here we see the ground of the alarm of the Jewish rulers, and the cause of their animosity against the apostles. They taught the people respecting Jesus, that he was a great prophet, and that the Jewish rulers, in putting him to death by crucifixion, had been guilty of a heinous crime; and they did this so industriously and indefatigably, that Jerusalem was already filled with their doctrine, and the common people in no small degree inflamed against their rulers, as appeared from their disposition to commit violence on those who came to apprehend the apostles.

29. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, (*he spoke in the name of the rest,*) We ought to obey God rather than men.

30. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree, "*by hanging on a tree;*"

31. Him hath God exalted with his right hand, "*at his right hand,*" to be a prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness, "*remission,*" of sins.

32. And we are his witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Spirit, which God hath given to them that obey him.

"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus. By the phrase, "raised up," we are not here to understand raised from the dead, but honoured with a divine commission. The words are to be understood in the same sense as when they occur in the celebrated prophecy of Moses, who says, "A prophet will the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, as he raised me."

"Whom ye slew by hanging on a tree." It is observable that Peter, although by no means disposed to spare the Jewish rulers, or afraid of offending them, never mentioned any aggravation of their crime, arising from putting to death a great pre-existent spirit, the Maker of the world, or another God, which is a plain proof that no such aggravation existed. "Him hath God exalted at his right hand." These words do not refer to any local elevation, but are merely metaphorical, and intended to signify a state of high favour and honour, such as those usually possessed,

who, in the courts of princes, were placed on the right hand of the throne. The honour conferred in the present instance was that of being a prince and a Saviour, that is, the first or principal Saviour, to the children of Israel; the apostles and other followers of Jesus only holding a secondary place in this great work of deliverance.

“To give repentance and remission of sins.” In this he was to discharge the office of a Saviour. The word which we render *repentance* signifies a change of mind, and is here used for that change of principles which would take place in giving up Jewish prejudices, and embracing the gospel. The consequence of this change would be remission of sins; for converts to Christianity among the Jews, as well as among the heathen, were taken from an impure into a holy and privileged state, which, in the language of the New Testament, is expressed by the remission of sins, or the removal of ceremonial uncleanness.

“Of which things,” i. e. his exaltation, “we are witnesses, as is also the Holy Spirit.” The apostles had witnessed the honour conferred by raising him from the dead, and the gift of miraculous powers, which came from the hands of Christ. These events were a proof that he stood high in the favour of the divine Being. Hence it is evident that the exaltation of Christ here spoken of was not local; for of no such exaltation could the miraculous powers conferred upon the first Christians be regarded as witnesses; although they may be considered as a very proper testimony to his standing high in the divine favour.

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## REFLECTIONS.

I. WE have here a fresh testimony to the notoriety of the facts on which our faith is built, and therefore to their certainty. They were not reported in a foreign country, remote from the scene of action, where those who heard them had no opportunity of ascertaining the truth or falsehood of the relation; but in Judæa, where Jesus was said to have lived and suffered death, and in Jerusalem, which had been the grand theatre of the principal events. They were not entrusted to a few at first, and, at the distance of many years, divulged to a greater number; but they are published immediately, while the pretended witnesses are living and present, and propagated with so much industry, and with so little reserve, that all Jerusalem is filled with them, and they reach the ears of the high-priest and the principal persons in the nation. They are facts, too, of such a nature, that all are induced to inquire into their truth, whether believers or unbelievers; the former, to satisfy themselves that they are not suffering persecution for a fable, and that the high expectations which they are taught to entertain are well-founded; the latter, to vindicate themselves from the imputation of a foul murder, with which they must stand charged, if what the Christians say be true. Yet in these circumstances,

which must have been abundantly sufficient to have detected and exposed the most artful imposture, the story gains increasing credit; a plain proof of its reality.

2. We have fresh reason to admire the courage and intrepidity of the apostles. Although imprisoned at night, for teaching the people in the name of Jesus, yet in the morning, as soon as they are set at liberty, they renew their labours, in the most public place, where they could not fail to be noticed. When apprehended a second time, and censured for their conduct by the whole Jewish Sanhedrim, the highest court of justice in the nation, they boldly declare that they had acted under the authority of God, and that it was necessary that his instructions should be obeyed, in opposition to all human prohibitions. They assert the divine mission and high exaltation of their Master, before the very assembly by which he was condemned to death as a malefactor; hereby virtually accusing them of the grossest injustice. Such was the conduct of the apostles, and it discovered the highest degree of piety and integrity. Let us learn to copy so noble an example of courage in a good cause. When conscience is to be obeyed; when religious truth is to be professed or communicated; when men are to be rescued from pernicious and dangerous errors, let the conduct of the apostles be ours. Let us not be deterred by the injunctions of the civil magistrate, by the laws of our country, or by any other authority; remembering that in regard to religion, God is to be obeyed rather than men.

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33. WHEN they heard that, *i. e.* the declaration of Peter, they were cut to the heart, and took council to slay them.

They consulted together how they might get them condemned by the governor, and so put to death; for the Jews had not at this time the power of inflicting capital punishment, as appears from their conduct in regard to Jesus.

34. Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, "*a teacher of the law,*" had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth\* a little space.

Those of the Jews who had devoted themselves to the study of the law, and made considerable proficiency in it, were allowed to teach in public, and to resolve the doubts of the people respecting difficult matters. These were sometimes called scribes, and sometimes lawyers and teachers of the law. This was the employment of Gamaliel, and it seems that he had attained the greatest eminence in his profession. He was a zealous opposer of Christianity,

\* "Who bade the apostles to stay without." Wakefield, who quotes James iv. 13.

as may be inferred from the character of Paul, who was his disciple, and who had imbibed all the prejudices of his master; but the advice which he gave upon the present occasion, was full of good sense and prudence.

35. And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do, "*what ye are about to do,*" touching these men.

36. For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody, "*some great person,*" to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves, who was slain, and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered and came to nothing.

As Josephus, the Jewish historian, mentions a Theudas, who, pretending to be a prophet, drew after him many followers, and perished miserably with them, but places him later by ten years than the time at which Gamaliel delivered this speech, those who consider him as the same person who is here mentioned, must suppose there is some mistake in Josephus or the sacred historian; but, as this was a very turbulent period of the Jewish history, and Theudas a very common name among the Jews, it is very possible that there might be two impostors of the same name, who experienced a like fate. Dr. Lardner\* has mentioned several instances. There were two Judas's, who caused disturbances in Judæa, besides the man taken notice of in the next verse. In this way both accounts may be perfectly consistent.

37. After this man, rose up Judas of Galilee, in the days of the taxing, "*of the enrolment,*" and drew away much people after him: he also perished, and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.

This Judas is sometimes called by Josephus, Judas the Gaulanite, and sometimes, as he is here, Judas of Galilee, so that there can be no doubt of their being the same person. The account which he gives of him is that he excited the people to rebellion, at the time of the general enrolment of persons and property, for the purposes of taxation, under Cyrenius governor of Syria: telling them that they had a mean spirit, if they could endure to pay tribute to the Romans, and acknowledge mortal men for their lords, after God had been their king. These sentiments, the historian tells us, were imbibed with avidity by great numbers of the people, and many were induced by his persuasion to refuse to pay tribute. But in what manner the matter ended, Josephus has no where related. There can be no doubt, however, that his enterprise was defeated, as Gamaliel informs us, since the tribute was levied, and the Roman government continued to subsist. His

\* Lardner's Works, Vol. I. pp. 105—113. Doddridge and Benson follow him. Pearce follows Archbishop Usher, in supposing that Theudas is only another name for Judas.



doctrines, however, were by no means removed from the minds of the people, but continued to ferment there, until, as we learn by the same writer, they produced the insurrection which terminated in the destruction of the city and temple. It is generally allowed that the taxing or enrolment mentioned in this passage is not the same which is noticed in the second chapter of Luke's gospel, as it now stands: the circumstance, however, of its not being distinguished from a prior one by being called the second taxing or enrolment, affords a strong presumption against the existence of any other, and is a fresh objection to that part of the history, in addition to the many others to which it is liable. From Gamaliel's language, we should suppose that he knew but of one enrolment; and probably there was no other.

38. And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nothing;

Something will arise to defeat this scheme, as in the two preceding instances, although at one time they promised fair for success.

39. But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it:

The next words are to be connected with the advice which he had given in the preceding verse; Refrain from these men and let them alone,

Lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

This is the reason on which his advice is founded. Gamaliel probably thought that the Roman governors would become jealous of the followers of Jesus, as they had of those impostors, and that by their means the Christian doctrine would be suppressed, without the interference of the Jewish rulers.

40. And to him they agreed; and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, *either with rods or by scourging*, they commanded that they should not speak concerning the name of Jesus, and let them go.

41. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

They rejoiced to find that they had discovered so much attachment to the cause of Christ, which, they believed, deserved all the zeal which they could manifest, as to attract the notice of his adversaries, and incur punishment from them. From the punishment being called suffering shame, it is probable that it was of a light nature, and intended rather for the purpose of degrading than that of inflicting bodily pain.

42. And daily in the temple, and in every house, "at home," they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ, "that Jesus is the Christ."

## REFLECTIONS.

1. THE arguments employed by Gamaliel to dissuade the Jews from persecution, are well worthy of the serious consideration of Christians. If the opinions which you seek to suppress by force are false, they will fall to the ground of themselves, and violence is unnecessary and improper; for it will delay, not hasten their fall. If they should be true, your attempt is, at the same time, fruitless and impious. The contest is always unequal between truth and error: if both should be defended with equal skill and zeal, it is easy to decide, which will have the victory. The progress of reason is slow, but certain, and mankind cannot fail to be enlightened, if unremitting pains be taken for the purpose. Let no one, therefore, stain his hands with persecution in opposing error, when his wishes may be so easily accomplished in another way. But your conduct, in having recourse to persecution, deserves to be stigmatized with a harsher name than that of folly. For it is possible, that the opinions of those whom you oppose may be right, and your own erroneous; and then, outrage and violence are employed against the friends and benefactors of the human race, against the worthiest men, and the servants of God; against those whom you cannot oppose successfully, or over whom, if you could, it would be no honour to triumph. This implies no small degree of guilt.

Happy would it have been for the Jews, happy would it have been for Christians, if they had always been attentive to the maxims of this wise teacher! How much innocent blood would have been spared! How much human misery prevented! But, alas, it seems as if the bulk of mankind had yet to learn, what history and observation have always taught the enlightened, the folly and wickedness of persecution.

2. Let those who suffer for Christ, or for the cause of Christ, derive consolation to themselves from the same source as the apostles. Be assured, that your zeal is of no ordinary kind: it has already engaged the attention and awakened the fears of your opponents; and they think, that the cause which you espouse, can suffer no greater loss, than by the want of your exertions; bearing hereby an unwilling testimony to their value. If you had any doubts of the sincerity and warmth of your attachment to the interest of religion before, those doubts must now be removed; for they are acknowledged by the conduct of its enemies. Rejoice, then, in the honourable distinction which you have attained: you will henceforth be classed among the zealous followers of Jesus, among the apostles and martyrs whose names are handed down with reverence from one generation to another. Blessed are you; for you are persecuted for righteousness' sake, and yours is the kingdom of heaven; rejoice and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven.

3. The indefatigable industry of the apostles in the cause in

which they were engaged, notwithstanding so much opposition, deserves our admiration and our praise. They are willing to preach, wherever men are disposed to hear, and the truth is likely to be communicated, in public, or private, in their own houses, or in the temple. To them, while engaged in this important work, every day is a sabbath, every house a chapel, and every spot of ground consecrated. Let the professed ministers of the gospel, in this respect, imitate their example. Let them manifest the like unremitting industry, in correcting the errors and in reforming the morals of mankind. If they should experience opposition from the patrons of error and vice, let it only serve to quicken their exertions, in as much as this alarm is a proof, that their past labours have been in some degree successful; in as much as the present opposition may only be a prelude to much severer measures, which may deprive them of further opportunities of doing good. While God is therefore pleased to give them leisure, let them not fail to employ it, in the best manner, for this purpose.

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SECTION IX.

*Appointment of deacons to superintend the daily ministration.*

ACTS vi. 1—7.

1. AND in those days when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.

These Grecians, who complained of neglect, were probably proselytes to the Jewish religion\* from among the Greeks, or the descendants of such persons, who had now embraced Christianity. They were become Jews by conforming to all the ceremonies of the Mosaic law; but they were not allowed the same civil privileges as the native Israelites, who, by way of distinction, were called Hebrews; nor were they, by any means, held in the same estimation. A proof of this they experienced on the present occasion, even after their conversion to Christianity, by having their widows overlooked in the daily provision that was made for those of the Hebrews from the public fund. Of this partiality they complained, as they well might; and the apostles were disposed to grant them redress.

2. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, it is not reason, "*It is not reasonable,*" that we should leave the word of

\* Lardner (Remarks on Dr. Ward's Diss. Vol. IX. p. 292) suspects, that the original reading was ἑλλήνων.

God and serve tables, *i. e.* employ ourselves to furnish provisions.

3. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you, seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, “*testified to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom,*” whom ye may appoint over this business.

4. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

The money which had been raised for charitable purposes by the new converts, was at first committed to the disposal of the apostles; but as they had more important work to engage their attention, they were obliged to entrust it to others, who, it seems, had not made an equitable distribution, but suffered themselves to be influenced by national prejudices. To provide for this and other cases, and to free themselves from every interruption in the great business of instruction, they desire the disciples to recommend seven persons for the office of distributing their charity, who might be respectable for their wisdom, and for a more than ordinary portion of miraculous powers.

5. And the saying, “*the address,*” pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch;

These names are all, or most of them, Greek; but we cannot certainly infer thence, that the persons were so. For some of the apostles, who were undoubtedly Hebrews, had Greek names. One of the deacons, Stephen, was certainly a Hebrew, as appears from his speech in the next chapter, and so were probably the rest except Nicolas, who is expressly called a proselyte. But this circumstance tends to confirm the opinion which has just been given, that the persons who complained upon the present occasion were proselytes to the Jewish religion. Hence appears the propriety of choosing a proselyte to superintend the concerns of those who were in the same situation with himself, and with whom he could not fail to have a fellow-feeling.

6. Whom they set before the apostles, and, when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.

The action of laying on of hands probably accompanied the prayers of the apostles, and did not follow them, as the words may seem to imply, and was intended to render their prayers more impressive, and mark out the persons who were the objects of them.

7. And the word of God increased, “*thived,*”

and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

That many priests, the inveterate enemies and persecutors of Jesus should profess their faith in him, and hereby expose themselves to the peculiar hatred of their brethren, and especially, that a large company, or, as the words properly signify, a great multitude should do so, is highly improbable. So remarkable a fact would have been noticed again: but this is the only instance in which it is mentioned. One ancient version, the Syriac,\* instead of priests, has Jews in this place; and I am inclined to think, that this must have been the original reading. According to this supposition, Luke, after saying, that the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, adds, that a great multitude of other Jews, that is, of the inhabitants of the neighbouring country, became obedient to the faith; a thing highly probable in itself, and what it was very natural that he should mention.

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### REFLECTIONS.

1. THE conduct of the apostles in preferring one employment to another, may afford a rule for directing others who may be in like circumstances.

When two employments interfere, they choose to follow that in which they are likely to be the more useful. They decline the office of distributing the charities of the first converts, although a post of great honour and influence, because it interrupted them too much in the great work of preaching the Christian doctrine; hereby showing, that to provide for the wants of the mind was, in their estimation, a more important service than providing for those of the body, and that instructing men in the means of attaining a virtuous life now, and an eternal well-being hereafter, is of more utility than furnishing them with temporal accommodations. For the one office they are peculiarly well qualified, by being the companions of their Master from the beginning, and by the extraordinary powers with which they are endowed. For the other, men of inferior endowments might be found among the disciples, equally well qualified with themselves, and who would not be interrupted by it in any other more important work. To such persons, therefore, they refer it. The apostles are, in this instance, an example to those who came after them, who possess from nature, or have acquired by industry, peculiar talents for instructing mankind; teaching them not to entangle themselves so far with other employments, as may interfere with the main design of their profession, and obstruct the exercise of their abilities.

\* To the authority of the Syriac may be now added, that of five manuscripts, not however of high antiquity, and the quotation of Theophylact. See Griesbach, 2nd. edition.—*Editor.*

The ministry of the word is indeed, with those who undertake it in the present day, a voluntary employment, nor can any claim a commission from above, for exercising it; but if, by any means, they are better qualified for this office than many others, it is the part of prudence and benevolence to confine themselves to it, as they have hereby a prospect of doing more good, and as persons may easily be found to discharge inferior offices.

2. Christian teachers may learn hence, how necessary it is to join prayer with the preaching of the word. The apostles were aware of this necessity; for they desire to be set free from the office of deacons, in order that they might give themselves up to prayer, as well as the ministry of the word. What they prayed for was, no doubt, the success of their labours in preaching, the continuance of miraculous powers, and resolution and fortitude to support the opposition and the evils which they had to encounter in the exercise of their apostolic office. The ministers of religion in the present day, who meet with like obstacles, will find the same means equally necessary. Without the continual aid of this exercise, they are in danger of forgetting the importance of their work; of being discouraged by difficulties, or of growing remiss in their exertions. Let them, therefore, often present themselves and their labours before God, and thus seek the animating influence of those motives which they cannot fail to feel, when viewing them in his presence.

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#### SECTION X.

*Stephen is brought before the council. His defence and martyrdom.*

ACTS vi. 8—15. vii. 1—60.

8. AND Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

This serves to explain what is said of him in the fifth verse, that he was full of the Holy Spirit. By this, it appears, no more was intended than that he was possessed of supernatural powers, and wrought many miracles.

9. Then there arose certain of the Synagogue which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia, and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.

It has been generally supposed, that the Libertines were Jews, who, having been slaves to Roman masters, had received their liberty, and took their name from that circumstance. But as there was a city or district in Africa, called *Libertina*,\* it is most probable,

\* Pearce.

that the Libertines were thus denominated from that name; the more especially, as the Cyrenians and Alexandrians, mentioned in connexion with them, were inhabitants of that quarter of the globe. As the Jews who resided in foreign countries had frequent occasion to resort to Jerusalem, to bring offerings to the temple, and for other purposes, they found it convenient to have synagogues of their own, in which the law might be read to them in a language which was familiar to them, namely, the Greek. These were the persons whom Stephen met, and with whom he disputed on the present occasion.

10. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit. *i. e.* *the wise spirit*, with which he spake.

11. Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.

12. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him into the council.

13. And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law :

14. For we have heard him say, That this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

They had probably heard Stephen recount some of the prophecies of Jesus, respecting the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, in which case some of the customs of the place must undoubtedly cease; such as the rites of sacrifice, and other things.

15. And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face, as it had been the face of an angel.

To see his face like the face of angel, is only a Jewish form of speech, to express the gracefulness or majesty, or both, which appeared in the countenance of Stephen, when about to speak, and when illuminated with the sentiments that he was going to deliver, which we have in the next chapter.

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We see from this history what base expedients those men have recourse to, whose minds are prejudiced against the truth. The opposers of Stephen, because they cannot answer his arguments, resolve to take away his life; and that by the most dishonourable

means; by suborning men to bear false witness against him. What complicated guilt and folly! Let us, my brethren, cultivate a sincere love of truth, as one of the best and noblest qualities of the mind. It will save us from a thousand dishonourable and criminal artifices, to which the advocates of error must have recourse, in order to support a bad cause.

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1. Then said the high-priest, Are these things so?

Is the charge of having spoken blasphemous or wicked words against Moses and against God, true? offering Stephen an opportunity of defending himself.

2. And he said, Brethren and Fathers, (*some of the council were much his seniors,*) hearken!

Stephen makes an indirect reply to the charge of blasphemy, by reciting briefly a considerable portion of the Old Testament history, hereby showing, that he believed in the same God and the same revelations with themselves, and could not, therefore, be guilty of the crime of which he was accused. He reminds them, also, of several instances in which they had rejected or ill treated divine messengers, intending hereby to warn them of the danger which they were in of being guilty of the same crime, in the present instance, by rejecting the Messiah.

The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran.

This place is called Haran in the book of Genesis, and lay in the country between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, which was, on that account, called Mesopotamia.

3. And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee.

The object of this extraordinary command was to preserve him from idolatry, with which all his kindred were infected, and which it would have been impossible for the patriarch to resist, if he had remained among them. It is probable that the Canaanites, at this time, were not so much corrupted in this respect as the Chaldeans; for we read of Melchizedek, king of Salem, who was priest of the most high God, and who blessed Abraham; and likewise of some other persons who seemed to have retained the knowledge of the true God. In this country it was foreseen that Abraham would meet with fewer temptations to idolatry, and be better able to preserve his integrity.

4. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when



his father was dead, he, *i. e.* God, removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell.

5. And he gave him no inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on; yet he promised that he would give it him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.

These circumstances are mentioned to illustrate the strength of the patriarch's faith. He believed that God would bestow the land of Canaan upon his posterity, although he had not ground enough to set his foot upon, and although he had no child, nor, according to the common course of nature, had the prospect of any. Abraham had, indeed, one small portion of land, the field of Macphelah, which he bought for a burying-place; yet, as it was purchased by himself, and not given him by God, it is not noticed here.

6. And God spake on this wise, "*in this manner,*" that his seed should sojourn in a strange land, and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years.

The children of Israel were not four hundred years in bondage; for the whole period of their residence in Egypt was not more than two hundred and fifteen years. But that period must be applied to the first part of the paragraph, as well as the last, that is, to the whole time of their sojourning in a strange land, in Canaan as well as in Egypt, and then it will include the whole period from the birth of Isaac to the time of their deliverance, which makes four hundred years. Paul, Galatians iii. 17, reckons four hundred and thirty years from the covenant made with Abraham to the time of the giving the law; but his reckoning includes the time which elapsed before the birth of Isaac, which was between twenty and thirty years.

7. And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, "*will I punish,*" said God; and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place, *in Canaan, or Palestine.*

8. And he gave him the covenant of circumcision, *or, circumcision as the ratifying act of the covenant.* And so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day: and Isaac begat Jacob, and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.

9. And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him,

10. And delivered him out of all his afflictions,

and gave him favour and wisdom, *i. e.* *first wisdom and then favour*, in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

11. And there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction; and our fathers found no sustenance:

12. But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first;

13. And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren, and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh.

14. Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls.

This number does not correspond with that which is mentioned in Gen. xlv. 27, where seventy only are enumerated; and commentators have been much perplexed to reconcile the two places. But the truth is, that Stephen has followed the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which has added Manasseh and Ephraim, and their children to the list, who were indeed descendants of Jacob, but did not go with him into Egypt, being already in that country. Which of these numbers is the right, it is of little consequence to determine, except to those who maintain the inspiration of Stephen, and, at the same time, the inspiration of the history of Genesis. The reason of mentioning the number that came down with Jacob into Egypt, was to show the great increase of the children of Israel, who, in little more than two hundred years, grew from seventy persons into a great nation.

15. So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he and our fathers;

16. And were carried over into Sychem, "*Shechem*," and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money, of the sons of Emmor, the father of Sychem.

This purchase was made by Jacob, and not by Abraham, Gen. xxxiii. 19. One name has, therefore, been substituted for another; but whether this mistake arose from a slight failure of the memory in Stephen, or in Luke, or, which is as likely, from the error of a transcriber, it is of little consequence to determine.

## REFLECTIONS.

THE portion of Scripture which we have been reading, although it requires little explanation, is not without instruction.

1. The conduct of Abraham, in believing the divine declarations, affords an excellent example for the imitation of Christians. Although the blessing promised, was of the most extraordinary nature; although the event was distant; although there was no apparent probability of its ever being fulfilled; this patriarch relies with implicit confidence upon the power and faithfulness of God. In doing so, he was not actuated by a spirit of extravagant presumption, but followed the soundest principles of reason and piety; and the event fully justified his conduct. If we act in the same manner, in regard to other promises which yet remain to be fulfilled, we shall do honour to ourselves, and to the great Being in whom we believe. We are assured of an inheritance in a better country, and are now required to live and act in expectation of that event. The object of our hope is unseen and distant, and we must shortly be laid in a place, from which, according to present appearances, it is not likely that we shall ever return. But let us not on this account abandon our hopes. Other persons have believed promises of God equally improbable, which have been fully accomplished, and there is nothing which can prevent the execution of this, by a Being of almighty power and infinite wisdom.

2. Nothing could be more base and criminal than the conduct of the patriarchs towards Joseph. Such a want of common humanity, to say nothing of brotherly affection, we could hardly have expected in any believers in the God of Israel; much less in such a family as that of Jacob. But the conduct of Joseph, in forgiving entirely this great injury, when it was fully in his power to retaliate; in acknowledging as his brethren those who had forfeited all title to the privileges of that relation, when he himself was so highly exalted above them; in preserving them and their children alive, in a time of famine, is an instance of virtue and greatness of mind which demands our highest admiration and praise. This circumstance alone, had we known nothing more of his history, would have been sufficient to immortalize his memory. How tender and affecting his language to them, when they come, full of fear and apprehension, to implore his forgiveness! "But as for you," says he, "ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day; to save much people alive. Now, therefore, fear ye not, I will nourish you and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them!" You see that he views the hand of God as well as the enmity of his brethren, in his sufferings, and offers them consolation which they could not offer themselves. How truly noble is this conduct! Joseph enjoyed far greater pleasure and satisfaction of mind in

this behaviour, than the amplest revenge could have afforded; and so will every one who imitates his example.

3. The history of this patriarch may teach us that exalted virtue is not universally prosperous. The excellent character of Joseph could not secure him from the envy and ill treatment of his brethren. Indeed the virtue which he possessed seems to have been one principal ground of the dislike which they entertained against him. Let not good men, therefore, of the present day, be surprised or discouraged if they experience treatment to which their predecessors and superiors were exposed, and from which one, who was greater than Joseph was not exempted: especially when they recollect, what indeed they may learn at the same time, that virtue, however oppressed and injured for a season, will triumph in the end, and that it is generally the surest, if not the easiest, path to human favour and prosperity. With the prospect of such a termination to their journey, they may well endure a few hardships by the way.

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17. But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, *the promise of release from Egypt*, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt,

18. Till another king arose which knew not Joseph.

19. The same dealt subtly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end that they might not live.

20. In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months.

21. And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son.

22. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.

That Egypt was anciently the seat of learning, and that the Egyptians were the inventors of several branches of science, is generally allowed by historians; and particularly that they first discovered the principles of that system of the universe which afterward rendered the name of Copernicus illustrious. What degree of knowledge they possessed in the time of Moses, we do not certainly know; but whatever it might be, it is probable, independently of the authority of Stephen, that the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter was acquainted with it. To what particular facts Stephen refers, when he says that Moses became mighty in

words and deeds, it is impossible to say. He probably spoke from tradition : for the Old Testament history is silent upon the subject. That Moses was no orator, is sufficiently evident ; for Aaron, his brother, was employed to speak for him on all public occasions, and that he was not skilled in military affairs, is equally clear ; for military expeditions were entrusted to the care of Joshua, and never commanded by Moses in person. It is highly improbable, therefore, that the story which Josephus tells us of his commanding the Egyptians in a successful expedition against the Ethiopians should be true. That Moses was skilled in writing or composition, appears from the history which bears his name, and also from the book of Job, if that really be, as some suppose, his work. In regard to the laws and institutions of Moses, they had a higher origin than his own wisdom.

23. And when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel.

24. And, seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, "*that was overpowered,*" and smote the Egyptian :

25. For he supposed his brethren would have understood, how, that God, by his hand, would deliver them : but they understood not.

The design of delivering the Israelites from bondage and from Egypt, in the manner in which it was accomplished, originated with God, and it was with much difficulty, and not till after he had made many objections, that Moses could be prevailed upon to engage in the undertaking. It is not likely, therefore, that he should offer his services for that purpose. Yet his visit to his countrymen, and his interference in their behalf, were intended to show that he was willing to exert himself for their benefit, although he might thereby incur personal danger. He probably thought that his influence at court would have enabled him to remove, or at least to alleviate, their sufferings. But the Israelites were too much oppressed with their sufferings to attend to any hint of this kind.

26. And the next day he showed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, "*would have reconciled them,*" saying, Sirs, ye are brethren, why do ye wrong one to another ?

27. But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us ?

28. Wilt thou kill me, as thou didst the Egyptian yesterday ?

29. Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Midian, where he begat two sons.

30. And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina, an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush.

This passage, as well as many in the Old Testament, affords a proof that by "an angel of the Lord," nothing more is to be understood than some instrument of the Divine Being, for communicating his will to mankind, or for executing his purposes. For we here find that a flame of fire, or rather, perhaps, the voice that came out of it, is so called. That there was no intelligent being present on this occasion, besides God himself, is evident from the words that follow, in which the Divine Being speaks in his own person. In like manner, a dream, a vision, a voice from heaven, a plague, a burning wind, are called angels of God. And whatever God is pleased to do by them is said to be done by an angel of the Lord.\*

31. When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight ;

What excited his surprise, as we learn from the history, was that the bush should not be consumed by what appeared to be a burning flame.

And as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him,

32. Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold.

He was approaching the bush, curious to examine the appearance ; but hearing the voice of God from it, he durst no longer look towards it. From the strong manner in which Moses was affected, it is probable, that this was the first appearance which the Divine Being ever made to him.

33. Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet : for the place where thou standest is holy ground.

The ground was rendered holy by the presence of God ; and Moses was required to uncover his feet, as a testimony of respect usually paid to a superior, as uncovering the head is in modern times. In the history of this transaction in the book of Exodus, this order precedes the declaration in the foregoing verse ; a change which is of little impotrance in itself, but which shows that Stephen was guided by his memory, and not by any superior assistance.

\* Lowman's Three Tracts, p. 25.

34. I have seen, I have seen, *or, as it is in Exodus, "I have surely seen,"* the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt.

As God is every where present, and knows what takes place at all times, when he here speaks of himself as now hearing of the afflictions of the children of Israel for the first time, and coming down from heaven to deliver them, he only accommodates his language to the gross conception of men.

35. This Moses, whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer, by the hands of the angel which appeared to him in the bush.

By reminding the Jews of the folly of their ancestors, in despising the services of a man whom God honoured, by employing him as the fittest instrument of their deliverance, Stephen plainly insinuates, that his countrymen might have been guilty of the like folly a second time, in rejecting Jesus of Nazareth.

36. He brought them out, after that he had showed wonders and signs, in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness, forty years.

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### REFLECTIONS.

1. WE may observe how truly honourable and noble was the conduct of Moses in regard to his brethren. He forsakes the honours and pleasures of a court, to visit a despised, oppressed, and enslaved people; he concerns himself in their affairs, and endeavours, at the hazard of his own life, to redress their wrongs; and this he does entirely from a principle of faith, before God had appeared to him, and before he had made any of those gracious communications with which the patriarchs had been favoured; relying upon the promise of God to their fathers, that he would be their protector and deliverer. Justly has his conduct, upon this occasion, been celebrated by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "By faith," says he, "Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;" that is, the pleasure of sinners or idolators, which are only temporary. For that Moses partook of sinful pleasures does not appear. "Esteeming the reproach of Christ," or, as it would be better rendered, "the reproach of the anointed," that is, of God's chosen people, the Israelites, "greater

riches than the treasures of Egypt." This conduct was truly generous and disinterested; and justly was he afterwards honoured by God with being made the deliverer and law-giver of the people to whom he had shown such regard. How well does his character illustrate the happy effects of a virtuous and religious education; for to the pious instructions of his parents he was no doubt indebted for his firm belief in the divine promises.

How different the part which Moses acted, from that of many of those who have been in the like circumstances; who, when once raised from a mean condition to affluence and power, entirely forget the afflicted condition of their brethren, and are often zealous to countenance the measures of their oppressors, in order to convince their new friends, that they have entirely discarded their former acquaintance, and that they are sincere in their present professions.

2. Happy would it be for mankind, did they but attend to the motive which Moses is represented as suggesting for abating the violence of his contending countrymen. Why do ye injure one another? Ye are brethren, descended from the same ancestor, children of one family, members of one community, professors of one religion. Violent contests, bitter animosities, and barbarous treatment among persons so nearly related, are peculiarly unnatural and reproachful. Let private families, when torn with internal dissensions; let Christian societies, when differing in religious opinions, remember this important truth; and it cannot fail to soften their animosities against each other, and to moderate the violence of their contests. Nor let it be forgotten by contending nations. However different from each other in situation, in language, and in imagined interests, they have all one common nature, and one Father in heaven. Let this consideration soften the ferocities of war, and teach them humanity towards each other. Let it teach them to pity and pray for their misguided brethren, and not to anathematize them.

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37. THIS is that Moses which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, as he has raised me; him shall ye hear.

This declaration of Moses referred, originally, to a succession of prophets or teachers among the children of Israel, and not to any one individual. Yet it is properly applied to the Messiah, because he must be included in the number.

38. This is he that was in the church, "*in the congregation,*" in the wilderness, with the angel that spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles, "*the doctrines of life,*" to give unto us.



It was God who delivered the law from mount Sinai : the angel, therefore, to whom it is attributed, must be understood, as before explained, to mean either the fire which appeared on the top of the mountain, or the voice which proceeded from it. The laws of Moses are here called the doctrines of life, because they prolonged the lives of those who observed them, in the land of Canaan.

39. To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt ;

They wished to return thither, though they did not actually do so.

40. Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us : for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not, "*we know not,*" what is become of him.

41. And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

If they regarded the image of a calf as really a god, nothing could expose the folly of idolatry more than saying that they rejoiced in, or worshipped, the work of their own hands.

42. Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered unto me slain beasts and sacrifices, by the space of forty years in the wilderness ?

43. But ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, *supposed to mean the sun*, and the star of your god Remphan, or, "*Rephan,*" as some copies read it, *supposed to be the planet Saturn*, figures which ye made to worship them : and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.

This is a quotation from the prophet Amos, in which he replies to a boast of the children of Israel, that they had served God faithfully for forty years in the wilderness, by telling them that, at that time, as some imagine, or afterwards, as others with more probability suppose, they had carried the image of Moloch in a tent, and a star to represent Rephan, another of their gods, and that for these offences they were to be carried captive to, or beyond, Babylon. This last circumstance shows that the idolatry here referred to, was not any thing practised in the wilderness, but must have taken place in some succeeding period. For the captivity of Israel and Judah was a punishment inflicted for offences committed in the land of Canaan. This quotation does not correspond with

the original Hebrew, where we have the word Chiun instead of Rephan; nor yet exactly with the Greek translation, although evidently borrowed thence, in which we have Damascus instead of Babylon, but these variations are of little importance, where the inspiration of the speaker is not maintained, and may be easily accounted for by a failure of memory in Stephen.

44. Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen;

The tent or tabernacle of testimony was so called, because it contained the two tables of stone on which God had written, with his own hand, the ten commandments delivered in an audible voice from Mount Sinai, and which were to be kept as a memorial of that event to all future generations. A model of this tabernacle was shown to Moses on the mount, and he was directed to make it exactly after that pattern. Stephen seems to have introduced the mention of the tabernacle and temple, in order to show that he considered them as of divine appointment, and that the charge brought against him, so far as it respected these places, was without foundation.

45. Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus, "*Joshua*," into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David;

46. Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.

David was favoured with great success in the wars against the Canaanites, and wished to erect a temple for the ark of God from the spoils which he had taken from his enemies. But he was not permitted to accomplish his wishes, because he had been engaged in war, and his hands were stained with blood: the Divine Being choosing to express his dislike of war in this manner. This honour was reserved for the more peaceful reign of his successors.

47. But Solomon built him a house.

48. Howbeit, "*though indeed*," the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands, as saith the prophet,\*

49. Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: What house will ye build me, saith the Lord? Or what is the place of my rest?

50. Hath not my hands made all these things?

\* Isaiah lxi. 1.

In this sublime language the Deity, by the prophet Isaiah, expresses his universal presence, and declares that the manifestation of his perfections cannot be limited to any place. This quotation was very properly made by Stephen, in order to convey to the Jews this useful admonition, that they set too high a value upon their temple, when they supposed that God could be worshipped in no other place.

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### REFLECTIONS.

1. THE strong tendency which the children of Israel discovered to forsake the laws and institutions under which they lived, affords a strong presumption that they were not at first chosen by themselves, but that they had a superior origin. Had they been devised by the people, they would have contrived something more agreeable to their wishes and inclinations; and if they had been the contrivance of Moses, he would have taken care to give them what was more acceptable, and not have imposed a yoke which they were never able to bear. The truth is, that the institutions of Moses proceeded from the Divine Being himself, who, in giving them, consulted the benefit of the Israelites and the future good of mankind, rather than the wishes of the Jews. Hence it was that he required many things which they bore with great impatience, and which nothing could have induced them to submit to at all, but unquestionable evidence of divine interposition.

2. Let us ever keep in mind the representation here given of the universal presence of the Deity. He cannot be confined to any place, much less to such places as men erect for addressing him. He resides at the same time in every part of the universe, and may be worshipped every where. To him every place is alike, nor are prayers or praises offered to him in one place, more acceptable than those which are offered in another. If in former times he manifested himself in particular places only, it was not because his perfections were limited to them, but to accommodate himself to the weak conceptions of mortals. How venerable and awful is the Being who possesses this attribute of omnipresence! How infinitely exalted above human conceptions! Consider the works of God, and conceive, if you can, how great their number, how vast their extent; in them the Deity constantly resides, and manifests every where his vital energy. Stretch your thoughts beyond the visible creation, into boundless space, he follows you wherever you go, and exists beyond where your thoughts can penetrate. Who will presume to think that he can please such a Being by erecting a spacious temple for his worship, when the universe itself cannot contain him? Let us never approach him but with reverence, nor address him, wherever it may be, but with the profoundest awe.

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HAVING given a brief account of the dispensations of God to his countrymen, and shown how ill they behaved under them, Stephen

proceeds to reproach the Sanhedrim, in very severe but just terms, with imitating the conduct of their ancestors.

51. Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit : as your fathers did, so do ye.

These are figurative or metaphorical terms, borrowed by Stephen from the Old Testament, to express the perverse and wicked spirit of the Jews. To be uncircumcised, was a reproach among that people, and therefore this term, like other terms of that nature, came, in course of time, to be applied to the disposition as well as the person. To be uncircumcised in heart and ears, is to refuse to hear the divine commands, or, when heard, to obey them. With this crime the Jews were justly chargeable, for rejecting Jesus of Nazareth, who came to them with a divine commission ; and in doing this they copied but too closely the wicked example of their ancestors.

52. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted ? and have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One, “ *of the just man,*” of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers ;

Jesus was put to death by Pilate the Roman governor ; nevertheless, as it was done at the instigation of the Jews, and in opposition to his own judgment, repeatedly expressed, they might justly be called his betrayers and murderers. He is foretold by the prophet Isaiah, liii. 11, under the character of the righteous servant of God, and it is to him, probably, that Stephen refers, when he says that they slew those who foretold the coming of the Just One.

53. Who have received the law by the dispensation, “ *by the ministrations,*” of angels, and have not kept it.

I have already had occasion to observe to you, in the course of this chapter, that the Jews called any instrument employed to execute the divine purposes, or to communicate the divine will, an angel ; and that Stephen uses the term in this sense, when he calls the voice that spake to Moses from the bush, and from Sinai, an angel of God. In the same sense, the law may be said to be received by the ministration of angels, because it was communicated to the children of Israel, or to Moses, by these miraculous voices. To violate a law delivered to them in this extraordinary manner, was a great aggravation of their offence.

54. When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart ; and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

55. But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked

up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,

56. And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

What Stephen saw was no real appearance, but merely a visionary representation, existing wholly within his own mind, intended to express the divine approbation of his present conduct, and to furnish him with fortitude for his approaching trial. He was now standing before the Jewish Sanhedrim, in a covered room, where the sky, probably, was not visible. We are told, indeed, that he looked towards heaven; but no more was meant by this, than that he directed his eyes upwards. That it was a divine vision, is sufficiently intimated by its being said that he was full of the Holy Spirit, that is, abounded in miraculous communications; the very same phrase that is applied by Luke to Christ before the vision of the temptation in the wilderness. In this vision Stephen seemed to see some glorious symbol of the divine presence, and Jesus standing on, or at, the right-hand of God. That one who had reprov'd them with so much severity for their vice should pretend to divine visions, was more than they could bear.

57. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,

38. And cast him out of the city, and stoned him :

This was an act of popular fury, without any legal conviction, and therefore, in the highest degree, disgraceful to a court of justice.

And the witnesses, *i. e. the false witnesses, upon whose accusation Stephen was brought to the council,* laid their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

This is the first time that the name of this illustrious person occurs in this history, and on this occasion not much to his honour. He took care of the clothes of those, who, with savage fury, put Stephen to death.

59. And they stoned Stephen, crying out, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit, "*receive my life.*"

The word God has been very improperly inserted in this verse in our translation, as it is not found in the original. Stephen, having just been favoured with a vision in which he saw Jesus, and retaining the impression of it still strong upon his mind, perhaps, still seeing him at the moment when he was dying, is naturally led to address him, requesting him to accept of his life, which he sur-

rendered in his house. But no argument can be adduced, from the extraordinary circumstances in which Stephen was at this time, for addressing prayers to Christ in general.

60. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge ; and when he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul was consenting unto his death.

This was sufficiently evident from what was before said of his taking care of the clothes of the witnesses. This sentence, which begins the next chapter, ought to have closed the seventh.

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### REFLECTIONS.

1. THE courage and intrepidity of Stephen deserves particular notice. We hear him charging the whole Jewish council with being the betrayers and murderers of the Just One, a righteous man and eminent prophet. What could induce a private individual, standing alone and unprotected, to accuse his judges, who had his life in their hands, of so base a crime, when their conduct towards his Master had afforded such evidence of their disposition ? Surely nothing but a full conviction of the divine mission of Jesus, and of his being himself countenanced by divine authority, could induce him to make so bold and dangerous a declaration. And his faith in the truth of the gospel is the best foundation for ours. For men will not expose their lives to destruction for facts about the truth of which they have never inquired ; much less will they do this for a known falsehood. Here then we see what benefit the world derives from the blood of the martyrs, and how the providence of God is justified in permitting their death. Their testimony in favour of Christianity confirms the faith of many of their brethren, who were before wavering, and inspires them with courage to act the same part. The violent death of an excellent man cannot fail to attract the attention of unbelievers, and to lead them to inquire into the cause of so extraordinary an event ; and inquiry must end in conviction. In this manner the martyr makes more proselytes, and does more good by his death than he could have effected by his instructions, if he had lived many years. Such are the benefits arising from martyrdom to persons living in the same age ; but the advantages resulting from it to posterity are incalculable. It affords better proof of the truth of the Christian religion than any other evidence. Men may pretend to divine revelations who have no authority for their pretensions ; they may swear falsely in a court of justice, where there is no opportunity of detecting and punishing their falsehood ; but they will not deliberately throw away their lives for an imposture, in any circumstances.

2. We see what a noble spirit is communicated to those who feel the influence of the gospel. It teaches them to overlook and forgive the greatest personal injuries ; to regard with sentiments

of benevolence, those who inflict them, and even to pray for their forgiveness, at the moment when they are felt. Such was the conduct of Jesus, when nailed to the cross ; such was the conduct of his disciple Stephen, whose last words were a prayer for his murderers ; “ Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”

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SECTION XI.

*Persecution of the disciples. Simon Magus attempts to purchase the gifts of the Spirit.*

ACTS viii. 1--25.

1. AND at that time, “ *on that day,*” there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem, and they were all scattered abroad, throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria, except the apostles.

The populace, having found that they could murder a Christian with impunity, proceed to acts of outrage against others. But the objects of their fury, instructed by their Master, “ When they persecute you in one city to flee to another,” disperse themselves over the neighbouring countries in all directions, in order to shelter themselves from the storm. The apostles were either persons of too much eminence to be attacked, or their presence at Jerusalem was too much wanted in the infant state of the church, to allow them to desert their post.

2. And devout men prepared Stephen for his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

These were probably some of the proselytes to the Jewish religion, whose concerns Stephen and the other deacons were chosen to superintend. They were called devout men, because they worshipped the true God.

3. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house ; and, haling men and women, committed them to prison.

He did not content himself with apprehending those who had assembled for public worship and instruction, which the Sanhedrim had prohibited, but entered also private houses, where any Christians were supposed to reside, and dragged them to prison. In this, however, he acted under the authority of the high-priest.

4. Therefore they that were scattered abroad

went every where, preaching the doctrine of the gospel.

In the original it is preaching the word ; but as this is only a short form of expression for the word of God, the word of life, and the word of salvation, by which the gospel is denominated in other parts of the New Testament, I think it better to translate the word by this phrase.

5. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, “*to a city of Samaria,*” *the city of that name had been destroyed* ; and preached Christ unto them.

This Philip was not the apostle of that name, but one of the seven deacons, who was chosen with Stephen, as appears from his not being able to communicate miraculous gifts to the Samaritans ; a power which belonged only to the apostles.

6. And the people, with one accord, gave heed to those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did :

7. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them, and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.

Some of the Samaritans, being cured of madness on the present occasion, are said to be dispossessed of dæmons, or of unclean spirits, and the spirits are said to leave them, crying out. This may refer to the apprehensions of the madmen, who, fancying themselves possessed by dæmons, might fear that Philip was about to inflict upon them some signal punishment, and cry out on that account, like one of the dæmoniacs mentioned in the gospel, who cried out to Jesus, “*Art thou come to torment us before the time ?*”\*

If it should be said here that the language of the writer is founded upon the prevailing opinion, and implies a belief of the reality of possessions, it is readily admitted ; and I conceive that it is not at all derogatory from the authority of the apostles and first teachers of Christianity, to suppose them ignorant of the nature of the diseases which they cured ; but on the contrary, that it tends to establish the reality of their miracles ; inasmuch as it appears that they were not the effects of superior knowledge in themselves, and must, therefore, proceed from divine power.

8. And there was great joy in that city.

9. But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched, “*used magic and astonished,*” the peo-



ple, “*the nation,*” of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one :

The art of magic was supposed to consist in predicting future events, and in performing other extraordinary things by superior knowledge of the secret powers of nature, of the virtue of plants and minerals, and of the motions and influences of the stars, assisted, at the same time, by the power of the gods, to whom, therefore, prayers and invocations were addressed by those who practised this art. With these performances Simon had for some time astonished the people of Samaria ; I say astonished, and not bewitched, because that is the proper translation of the original. The supposed powers of witchcraft, therefore, receive no countenance from this, nor indeed from any other passage of Scripture. On the contrary, they are universally branded with the character of impostures.\*

10. To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.

What was meant by this expression, Luke has furnished us with no means of ascertaining ; but some things which are told us by ecclesiastical historians respecting this man, will throw light upon the subject. According to these historians, Simon was by birth a Samaritan, but had travelled into Egypt, where he acquired a knowledge of the oriental philosophy, one of the leading articles of which was, that there existed certain superior intelligences, which were emanations from the divine nature, and that these occasionally took possession of human bodies, and manifested in them the extraordinary powers of their divine origin. One of these intelligences Simon feigned himself to be, on which account, Luke says that he gave himself out to be some great one, and that the people called him the great power of God. Such was the philosophy of the East, upon which this impostor artfully founded his pretensions ; and it has been supposed by many that the opinions which afterwards prevailed among Christians, respecting the pre-existence of Christ, and the mode of his derivation from the Father, had the same origin.†

11. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had astonished them with his magic.

12. But when they believed Philip, preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

Highly as they thought of Simon and his performances, both quickly sunk into contempt, when they heard the doctrine and

\* Farmer on Miracles, p. 254, & c.

† Priestley's History of Early Opinions, Vol. I. ch. 2.—Enfield's Brucker.

saw the miracles of Philip. For the one were real miracles, the other, only pretended.

13. Then Simon himself believed also; and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

Whatever his professions might be, all that Simon seems to have believed, as appears by his subsequent conduct, was no more than that Philip was a greater magician than himself; and that, by associating with him, he might have an opportunity of acquiring the knowledge of his superior art.

14. Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria, *i. e. a city of that country*, had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:

15. Who, when they were come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

16. For as yet he was fallen upon none of them; only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

17. Then laid they, *i. e. the two apostles*, their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

From this passage it has been justly inferred that none but the apostles could confer miraculous powers, or a power of working miracles: otherwise there would have been no occasion to send down two apostles to Samaria, when Philip was there already, and employed continually in working other miracles. But this, though highly necessary for confirming the faith of the Samaritans in the Christian doctrine, was not within his ability to perform. The case of Paul can hardly be deemed an exception to this rule; for he had seen Jesus, and received the knowledge of the gospel from his mouth, and had, therefore, all the characteristics of an apostle. We may observe, also, that these Samaritans were baptized in the name of Jesus only, and that, therefore, this method of baptizing is to be regarded as legitimate and proper. The communication of miraculous powers followed the laying on of the hands of the apostles, in order to show that the gifts proceeded from them, or rather, that they were the effects of their prayers; in the same manner as a miraculous cure followed the touch, or the laying on of the hand, of Christ.

18. And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money.

19. Saying, Give me also this power, that on

whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit.

By this proposal, it appears that Simon regarded the power of bestowing miraculous gifts as an art which the apostles had learnt by their own skill, or the instructions of others, and which they would be ready to communicate, if well paid for the discovery. He could not, therefore, believe that they came from God, or, at least, did not properly consider the important purpose for which they were now employed. He imagined, no doubt, that if he could purchase this power, it would prove an extremely profitable acquisition, and soon repay the sum which he might expend. Peter received the proposal with indignation and horror.

20. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money,

These terms are not to be interpreted literally, as if Peter really wished for the destruction of Simon, as well as of his money; but he uses strong and familiar terms of indignation, which, like other terms of that nature, often express more than is intended. It is as if he had said, Away with thee and thy money.

21. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, "*in this doctrine*," for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.

Though thou hast professed Christianity, thou art entitled to none of its rewards; for these are promised to the virtuous only; whereas thou hast now betrayed the depravity of thy heart.

22. Repent, therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee.

If Simon considered miraculous gifts as the effects of divine power, nothing could be a higher affront to the Divine Being, than his offer to buy them with money, as if he could be tempted with gold or silver: or if he considered them as the effects of human skill or knowledge, to wish to purchase them for the purposes of fraud and imposture, was little less criminal. In either case the offence was great, and nothing but contrition could afford hope of forgiveness.

23. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

Thou art in the most wretched condition, a slave to thy vices. He was still pursuing the same wicked designs in which he had been engaged before. This severe, but just reproof, awakened the apprehensions of Simon, and made him afraid that he should be punished with some signal judgment.

24. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to

the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.

It might be supposed, from this language, that he was become duly sensible of his guilt, as well as aware of his danger. Yet it is the general opinion of ecclesiastical writers, that he remained to his death an unbeliever, and a violent opposer of Christianity.

25. And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

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### REFLECTIONS.

1. IN the last section I had occasion to notice the benefit which Christianity derives from the martyrdom of Stephen and other first believers; since their testimony in its favour, with the prospect of immediate death before them, affords the strongest proof that could be given of their persuasion of its truth and divine origin, and, therefore, lays a good foundation for the like persuasion in others, in the most distant places and most remote generations. We are now called to observe the good effects of an inferior degree of persecution, which spares men's lives, but harasses their persons and confiscates their property. By dispersing them in various directions, it proves the means of diffusing the knowledge of the truth through a wide extent of country; for they go every where, preaching the word. Thus do the storms of persecution in the moral world resemble the effects of the winds in the natural, which disperse the clouds, and make them descend in showers in distant regions. Here, then, we see the wisdom of God counteracting the designs of man, and rendering those means which were employed to suppress and destroy the truth, subservient to its further diffusion and establishment. Let us not then hastily arraign the conduct of providence, when we see the wise and good persecuted and oppressed; nor let us murmur or complain, when we ourselves suffer in a good cause. We are probably doing more essential service to mankind by our sufferings, than we could do in any other way.

2. The conduct of Peter, in rejecting money with indignation, when offered him upon dishonourable terms, deserves our admiration and applause. He hereby showed that, in preaching the gospel, he had some nobler object in view than enriching and aggrandizing himself, and that his sole motive for entering upon the course of life in which he had now engaged, was to fulfil the purposes of Divine Providence, and to promote the interests of mankind, by communicating the most important truth. In such an honourable employment, he is willing to remain poor, and to trust for protection and support to the favour of heaven and the

charity of the benevolent. And in doing so, he has wiped away all suspicion of interested views from himself and his associates, as well as adhered to the injunction of his divine Master: "Freely ye have received, freely give."

In this behaviour let other Christians learn to imitate Peter. Let no regard to money, or any worldly interest, induce them to conceal or renounce the truth, or to violate any duty which they owe to God and man. For this honourable integrity they may be condemned to live in poverty; but they will find more peace of mind in that condition, than all the splendour of riches could bestow; and what they lose in temporal emoluments in this life, will be amply repaid at the resurrection of the just.

I shall here subjoin the observation of a learned commentator: (Dr. Benson:)—"From this crime of Simon, a purchasing the ministerial function with money or bribes was called Simony, in the ancient canons of the Christian church. But it is now called so, to procure ecclesiastical benefices by bribing and corrupting such as have the disposal of them. Nor can they who take such bribes be wholly clear of all crime."

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SECTION XII.

*Conversion of the queen of Æthiopia's treasurer.*

ACTS viii. 26—40.

26. AND an angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south, unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.

As Stephen had called the voice that spake to Moses from the bush an angel of the Lord, it is possible that what is here called an angel might be something of the same kind, that is, a miraculous voice from heaven, or, perhaps a secret suggestion of the Spirit. This supposition seems so be confirmed by what is said below in verse the twenty-ninth, where we are told that not an angel, but the Spirit, gave directions to Philip how to act; although it be highly probable that the second directions came from the same instrument, whatever it might be, as the first. It is not easy to determine whether the word desert in this verse belong to the town of Gaza, or to the road which led from Jerusalem to it, being equally applicable to both. For the town was in ruins, and the road to it passed through a desert country.

27. And he arose and went; and behold an eunuch of Æthiopia, of great authority under Can-

dace, queen of the Æthiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship,

28. Was returning, and, sitting in his chariot, read Isaiah the prophet.

This man was probably a Jew by descent, although a native of Æthiopia; which will not appear extraordinary, considering that there was a great body of Jews at Alexandria in Egypt, a neighbouring country. Notwithstanding the prejudices which prevailed among the Gentiles against that people, he had recommended himself by his talents to the first post in the court of the queen of that part of Æthiopia which bordered upon Egypt. Like other foreign Jews, he went up to Jerusalem, at one of the great festivals, to worship God. A queen of this part of Æthiopia, of this name is mentioned by Pliny, and other heathen writers;\* which circumstance may be regarded as a confirmation of the truth of the Scripture history.

29. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.

30. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Isaiah, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?

31. And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.

32. The place of the Scripture which he read, was this; He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb dumb before the shearer, “*before the butcher,*” so he opened not his mouth.

This prophecy is found in Isaiah liii. The first part of the verse refers to slaughter; it is more probable, therefore, that the last clause refers likewise to the same subject, and, agreeably to this supposition, it is found that both the Greek and Hebrew word signifies a destroyer, or devourer, as well as a shearer.†

33. In his humiliation his judgment was taken away, “*his condemnation was extorted,*” and who shall declare his generation? *i. e.* “*the men of his generation who shall be able to describe,*” on account of their wickedness? for his life is taken from the earth.‡

In the former of these two verses, the prophet predicts the silence and patience of Jesus, on two very remarkable occa-

\* See Doddridge. Benson, Harwood. † Wakefield's Note and Silva Crit. I. p. 43.

‡ Dodson's Isaiah.

sions, his trial and his execution. In the other, he foretels that his condemnation would be extorted, and not the result of free opinion. The prophet also expresses his astonishment at the wickedness of the people, who could accomplish the death of so innocent and excellent a person by such means. In giving this character of the Jews of that age, he is supported not only by the testimony of the evangelists, but also by that of Josephus, the Jewish historian.

34. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself, or of some other man?

35. Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

He took occasion, from this passage, to show how exactly the character and sufferings of Jesus corresponded with the prediction of the prophet, and to infer hence that he must be the Messiah promised to the Jews.

36. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water: what doth hinder me to be baptized?

37. And Philip said, if thou believest with all thy heart, *If thou art perfectly convinced of the truth of the Christian doctrine*, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

This verse is omitted in the Alexandrian and many other manuscripts, and is, therefore, probably an addition to the text, made by some one who intended to supply what he conceived a proper answer to the eunuch's question.\* But even if it were genuine, it would argue great ignorance, to infer from Philip's calling Christ the Son of God, that he had instructed the eunuch in the doctrine of Christ's divinity; nothing being more clear than that the Son of God signifies, in the language of the Jews of Christ's time, no more than Messiah or Christ, that is, the highly-favoured messenger of God.

38. And he commanded the chariot to stand still; and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

39. And when they were come up out of the water, the spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, and the eunuch saw him no more; for he went on his way rejoicing.

\* It is omitted by Griesbach.

His going on his way is assigned as the reason why he saw Philip no more; it may be doubted, therefore, whether the expression, "the Spirit caught away, or took away, Philip," refers to his being miraculously conveyed through the air, as seems to have been the case with some of the ancient prophets; or merely to his being directed to leave him. The eunuch went on rejoicing, both because he was relieved from the perplexity which he before experienced respecting the passage which he was reading, and likewise because of his faith in the Christian religion, which affords just ground for joy. Some manuscripts† add to this verse, "The Holy Spirit fell upon the eunuch;" but, as none except the apostles appear to have had the power of communicating miraculous gifts, it is probable that this is a spurious addition to the text.

40. But Philip was found, *or*, "*appeared*," at Azotus; *the Ashdod of the Old Testament*; and, passing through, he preached in all the cities, till he came to Cæsarea.

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#### REFLECTIONS.

1. We may observe how honourable is the character here given of the *Æthiopian* treasurer. He is not ashamed of his religion in a foreign country, nor in a luxurious court, but cheerfully exposes himself to all the ridicule, and all the contempt, which the public avowal of it would necessarily bring upon him, from his fellow-courtiers. Notwithstanding the importance of his office, he undertakes a long journey to fulfil his duty as a Jew, and employs the leisure which that journey affords, in reading the Scriptures. Such fortitude, piety, and zeal, reflect more lustre upon his character, than all the honours conferred upon him by his royal mistress. Justly were they rewarded by an early communication of the gospel of salvation, and with a place in these pages, in which he will be handed down to all succeeding generations.

Happy are they who, like this nobleman, have courage to avow their religious principles in the most trying situations; who, amidst the cares and pleasures of exalted stations and important employments, can find leisure to attend to the duties of religion, and to improve their minds in useful knowledge. They will find that the time thus employed has not been spent in vain. In the principles which they hereby acquire, they will experience support when every earthly succour fails. The favour of princes is uncertain, and soon lost. All worldly grandeur will cease at death, if not before; but of the delightful prospects and divine consolations which religion affords, men can never be deprived. These will follow them to the grave, and live beyond it. Let no business or station

† See Griesbach



induce us to neglect what is so necessary to our welfare. It is the only consolation of the poor; the last resource of the rich.

2. When reading the Scriptures, let us often put to ourselves the question proposed by Philip to this treasurer of Æthiopia, Understandest thou what thou readest? Unless our reading be accompanied with the knowledge of the sentiments of the author, it is of no value, and the time employed in it is wasted and mispent. To acquire this understanding of the Scriptures, is not so easy as some imagine. These sacred writings have suffered so much injury from time, and the carelessness of those through whose hands they have passed; their phraseology, and the manners of ancient times, are so different from those of the modern, and they have been so perverted by false glosses and interpretations, that it often requires great attention and care to discover their true meaning. To this object let our attention be directed, with unceasing diligence; and let us judge of our value of these sacred records of divine truth, not by the time which we spend in reading them, but by the labour which we employ to ascertain their sense, and by the proficiency which we make in divine knowledge. In examining the Scriptures, let us not despise the assistance of any, but be ready, like this eunuch, to receive information from every quarter.

3. We learn from this story, that a belief in the gospel of Christ affords just ground for joy. The treasurer of Æthiopia, after believing and being baptized, went on his way rejoicing. And Christians of the present day have a like reason for gladness. Their religion removes all painful apprehensions from the minds of the guilty, by assuring them of pardon: it furnishes the best rules for the direction of their conduct in future, and it promises the the virtuous a resurrection from the dead to eternal life. Those who enjoy such blessings, and who entertain such hopes, may well rejoice.

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#### SECTION XIII.

#### *The conversion of Saul.*

ACTS. ix. 1—19.

1. AND Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high-priest,

2. And desired of him letters to Damascus, to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

Saul was exasperated to the highest degree to find that those whom he had driven from Judæa, by persecution, were employed in propagating the same doctrine in the places to which they fled; he resolves, therefore, to pursue them whithersoever they go. Damascus was a city of Syria, in which there were many Jews. And it appears by the letters now granted to Saul, that the Romans allowed the Jewish high-priest to exercise authority over those of the Jewish religion who resided in foreign countries.

3. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven.

The other accounts which Paul gives of this transaction, say that it took place at noon, and that the light exceeded the brightness of the sun. They also say that it appeared to his companions, as well as to himself. Acts xxii. xxvi.

4. And he fell to the earth, *as his companions did likewise*, and heard a voice, saying, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

5. And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.

The remainder of this verse, and a great part of the next are omitted in the best manuscripts, and were probably inserted here by mistake, from other accounts of this transaction, in which they are found. The ready answer which Saul gives to the question proposed to him, shows that he could not be struck to the ground by lightning; for that deprives men of the use of their mental faculties, as well as of their sight.

6. But arise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

7. And the men, which journeyed with him, stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

In the parallel passage, Acts xxii. 9, we are told that the attendants heard not the voice of him that spake to him. To reconcile these two places, it has been supposed, that they heard indeed a voice, but no articulate sound, so as to understand what was said. Thus when Daniel saw a vision, Daniel x. 7, the men that were with him saw nothing.

8. And Saul arose from the earth, and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man, "*saw nothing*," *i. e. he was blind*; but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.

9. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

During this time, he was, no doubt, employed in deep reflections upon the vision, which he had just seen upon the evidences of the divine origin of the Christian religion, upon his own guilt in opposing it, and in praying to God to forgive his offence. The result was, that he was convinced of the divine mission of Jesus, and that God heard his prayer, as appears from what follows. His fasting was the effect of the agitation of his mind.

10. And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias ; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias ! And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.

11. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus : for, behold, he prayeth,

12. And hath seen in a vision, a man named Ananias, coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.

Saul might well consider his blindness as a punishment inflicted upon him by Heaven, for the evil purpose which he had entertained ; and therefore, earnestly prays for the restoration of his sight, as a proof of the divine forgiveness. To assure him of this forgiveness, he was favoured with the above-mentioned vision, and Ananias is sent to confer upon him a miraculous cure.

13. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem.

The word saints, in this passage, has no reference to moral character, but is used to denominate persons who, by the profession of faith in Christ, had become parties in that new covenant which God had now established with all believers in the divine mission of his Son, as he had established the old covenant with the children of Israel. Christians were now become ceremonially clean and holy, as the Israelites were formerly, and were therefore called saints.

14. And here he hath authority from the chief priests, to bind all that call upon thy name ; *“to bind all that call themselves by thy name.”*

As the disciples of Jesus were never directed to address their prayers to him, and as it does not appear that it was their common practice, whatever they might do on particular occasions, it is not likely that they should be characterized by this circumstance. The words, besides, admit of a different construction, such as has

just been given.\* That Christians should distinguish themselves from other Jews by the name of their Master, at a very early period, is highly probable; although the name of Christian might not be current till some time afterwards.

15. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way; for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the gentiles, "*before nations,*" and kings, and the children of Israel:

Christ here informs Ananias, that Paul was not to be neglected, since he intended to employ him in the most important services, for the propagation of his religion in the world, and since he was well qualified for the purpose.

16. For I will show by him what ought to be suffered for my name's sake.

In this manner some good judges† render this passage, supposing only that a single word has been added to the text, which is also omitted in a few manuscripts. It will then furnish a sense extremely well adapted to the occasion. For the meaning will be that Christ would give an example, in the sufferings which Paul would voluntarily endure, in promoting the gospel, of what every man ought to be willing to suffer for his sake. Accordingly, it appears by the subsequent history, that the sufferings of Paul were more numerous and distinguished than those of any other of the apostles. If the common reading be retained, Christ declares that he will communicate to Paul, a knowledge of the great sufferings which he should afterwards endure in his cause.

17. And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house, and, putting his hands on him, said, Brother Saul, the Lord (even Jesus, that appeared to thee in the way, as thou camest) hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

As Ananias was to tell Saul what he was to do, it is probable, that he instructed him in the nature of the Christian religion, although it be not here mentioned.

18. And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

19. And when he had received meat he was strengthened.

\* Lindsey's Dissert. on praying to Christ, p. 93, &c.

† See Markland in Bowyer, and Wakefield.

## REFLECTIONS.

1. This story furnishes an example of a wonderful change produced in an individual in a very short time.

He who was lately an inveterate enemy, is become a sincere and zealous friend. He who breathed out threatening and slaughter against the church, whose fury is not satiated with the havoc which it makes at home, but pursues its victims into foreign countries, has assumed the mildness of the lamb, and breathes the spirit of benevolence and affection to those who were before detested and persecuted. He who was the inveterate agent of the high-priest and Jewish Sanhedrim; he whose zeal would entitle him to what preferment he pleased, renounces all connexion with his employers, abandons his ambitious projects, esteems it an honour to be ranked among the followers of Jesus, and is willing to be treated with the same contempt and injustice with which he treated Christians. He who blasphemed Jesus himself, by calling him an impostor, and compelled others to do so, now falls down before him, calls him Lord and Master, and is happy to enlist himself in his service. How astonishing a change, and produced in three days only! Yet,

2. There is nothing unnatural or accountable in this change. It arose from a sufficient and adequate cause. It was the natural and genuine effect of truth upon an unenlightened and bigoted, but not vicious and hardened, mind. It was the result of conviction, produced by an evident miracle, and undeniable fact, performed at mid-day, and not in the darkness of the night, when the senses are so liable to be deceived; before one who was not alone, when the imagination is most apt to be at work, but in company with his attendants; not coinciding with, and inflaming his prejudices, but in direct opposition to them. In these circumstances he sees a light which nothing could counterfeit, he hears a voice which speaks to him in articulate sounds, and reproaches him for his folly and rashness; he has such full possession of himself as to be able to reply to what he hears. What could this appearance be, but the miraculous interposition of Heaven, in behalf of a cause which he was bent upon ruining. Such he concluded it to be at the time, and as such he regarded it to the latest period of his life. To listen to such an admonition, to desist from his pursuit, and to abandon his prejudices, at such a call, was perfectly just and rational. It was doing no more than what every ingenuous and virtuous mind would have done in like circumstances.

3. How glorious a triumph for the gospel of Christ was the conversion of this persecutor! Far more honourable than his immediate death would have been. How strong and irresistible the evidence which could overcome the unbelief supported by the prejudices of birth and education, and fortified by worldly preferment, by the fear of shame and of suffering! What satisfied the mind of such an adversary, may surely be sufficient to satisfy

the mind of every candid and rational man, through all future generations.

4. Let all persecutors take a lesson of caution from the example of Saul. No one could be more confident that he was doing right than he: yet he found himself mistaken. How humbling must it be to human pride, to be compelled to applaud those who were once so severely condemned; how painful to the conscience of a virtuous man, to consider himself as an active agent in injuring and depreciating the friends of truth, the greatest benefactors of mankind, the favourite servants and messengers of the Most High! Let others, who are now zealous and active in opposing what they call error, and who scruple not to have recourse to violence for this purpose, beware, lest they be found one day guilty of a like mistake, and, therefore, suffer the same shame and remorse.

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#### SECTION XIV.

*Paul having provoked the enmity of the Jews, goes first to Jerusalem, and then to Tarsus.*

Acts ix. 19--31.

BEFORE I enter upon this history it is necessary that I observe, that there is a chasm here in the life of Paul, of no less than three years, of which time Luke takes no notice, but which is mentioned by the apostle in his Epistle to the Galatians, chap. i. 16, &c. where, speaking of his conversion, he says, "Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood, neither went I up to Jerusalem, to them which were apostles before me, but I went into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then, after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter." These three years some suppose him to have spent in preaching the gospel to the Arabians. But, as this is no where mentioned, either by himself, or by Luke, I think it more probable, that the time was employed in acquiring a knowledge of the principal facts and doctrines of the gospel of Christ, which, he tells us, he received by immediate revelation from the Lord Jesus Christ, in reading the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, and particularly in studying the prophecies which relate to the Messiah, and in receiving miraculous gifts, with which he was endued in as extraordinary a degree as any of the apostles. Being thus qualified for his office, without any communication with the apostles, he returned to Damascus, and began to preach the gospel in that city. Here it is that Luke takes up his history again.\*

19. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.

\* Lardner, article *Paul*, Vol. VI. p. 254. &c.

20. And straightway he preached Jesus in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

Some of the best manuscripts and versions\* read Jesus instead of Christ, in this verse, and the sense seems to require this reading. For, to preach Christ to be the Son of God would, in the apprehension of the Jews, be quite superfluous, for Christ and the Son of God signified the same thing, and were only different names for the Messiah. Thus John the evangelist says, that he wrote his gospel, that they might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Moreover, by the Son of God, the apostle did not mean a being derived in an ineffable manner from the Father, but merely a highly-favoured messenger, one who was entrusted with a more important commission than any preceding prophet.

21. But all that heard him were amazed, and said, Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name, "*which were called after this name,*" in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?

So extraordinary a change appeared incredible to them, and their incredulity would have discouraged a mind of less firmness than Paul's; but he was continually acquiring fresh confidence, arising from stronger convictions of the truth.

22. But Saul increased the more in strength, "*was continually more confirmed,*" i. e. in the faith, and confounded the Jews that dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ, "*the Christ.*"

He silenced the Jews and put them to shame, by the arguments which he produced to prove that Jesus was the Messiah.

It is here that some persons place Paul's Journey to Arabia,† and suppose that the preceding verses relate to his preaching at Damascus, immediately after his conversion. But it is not likely that a proselyte to the Christian religion, such as he was, would begin to preach so soon after he became one, without any preparation, or that, if he did preach, he would procure to himself any attention. His retirement, therefore, probably took place immediately after his call from heaven, and the circumstances which are here related, may very well be supposed to have happened after his return from Arabia. But, however this matter be determined, the omission of this journey by Luke, while it is mentioned by Paul, is one of those variations which tends to confirm rather than to destroy the authority of the history; since it shows that it was not written in concert by Luke and Paul. Each of them, therefore, may be regarded as independent evidences for the facts wherein they concur.

\* Griesbach adopts *Ιησους*.

† See Paley's *Horæ Paulinæ*, p. 160, Note.

23. And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him ;

That is, after he had spent some time at Damascus, and had met with considerable success in making proselytes. In so doing, they paid involuntary homage to his talents and his zeal ; for unless both had been conspicuous, their fury would not have impelled them to so desperate a measure.

24. (But their lying in wait was known of Saul ;) and they watched the gates, day and night, to kill him.

25. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.

Paul gives the following account of this event in 2 Cor. xi. 32, 33. "In Damascus, the governor under Aretas the king, kept the city with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me : and through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands." This Aretas was king of Arabia, and at this time had possession of Damascus, where the Jews prevailed upon the deputy-governor to grant them the assistance of the garrison to apprehend Paul. But, having intelligence of their design, he escaped from their hands.

26. And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples ; but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.

It may seem strange that the disciples at Jerusalem should not have heard of the conversion of Paul by this time. But this is accounted for by the violent persecution which happened, not only in Judæa, but also in other places, after the death of Stephen, which prevented the Christians at Damascus from having any communication with those at Jerusalem ; by Paul's retired manner of life in Arabia, and by his having but lately begun to preach at Damascus. It is probable too, that the high-priest would not be forward to publish the defection of so active an agent a Paul.

27. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

Hence it has been inferred that Barnabas was an old acquaintance of Paul ; but no intimation of this is given in the history, which probably would have been the case had it been true. When Paul returned to Jerusalem, the persecution had not ceased ; the apostles and other Christians were, therefore, concealed, and it was difficult for a stranger to gain access to them, especially for one of so suspicious a character as Paul. But happening to meet



with Barnabas, and informing him of the circumstances of his conversion, he communicated them to the rest, and thus procured him admittance into their company. Paul tells us, however, in the passage before referred to, in the Epistle to the Galatians, that he only saw Peter and James: "Other of the apostles," says he, "saw I none." They might possibly be absent from Jerusalem. After he had seen them, he was received by the brethren in general.

28. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.

29. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians :

These are supposed to be proselytes to the Jewish religion from the heathens of Asia, who were in general called Greeks or Grecians; and they seemed to have possessed the genuine zeal of proselytes, by the account here given of them.\*

But they went about to slay him.

30. Which, when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Cæsarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.

Tarsus was the chief city of Cilicia, and Paul's native place. Here he had not been since he went up to Jerusalem, to study the law under Gamaliel. He probably travelled hither by land; for he tells us that after his visit to Jerusalem, he went into the parts of Syria and Cilicia.† In this journey, he probably met with some of those dangers which he describes in his epistles, and of which we have no account in this history. The Cæsarea here spoken of was not the maritime town of that name, so often mentioned in the book of Acts, but Cæsarea Philippi, which lay to the north of Judæa, and which must be in his way to Tarsus by land.

31. Then had the churches rest throughout all Judæa, and Galilee, and Samaria, and were edified, "increased," and, walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirt, were multiplied.

This period of peace is said, with great probability, to have been occasioned by an order given by Caligula to Petronius, governor of Syria, to set up a statue of the emperor in the temple of Jerusalem, in order to have divine honours paid to it; which was deemed so great a profanation, and was so highly offensive to the Jews, as to divert their attention from the persecution of Christians to a concern for the security of their own religion.‡ The Christians increased in numbers during the late persecution, as appears from the churches which were established in different parts of the country, and they continued to increase during this period of rest, and enjoyed, at the same time, great comfort from the miraculous powers which they possessed, and from the knowledge of true religion which they acquired.

\* Lardner, Vol. VI. pp. 262, 264, Note. † Doddridge. ‡ Lardner and Doddridge.

## REFLECTIONS.

1. WE have here decisive and satisfactory proof of the sincerity of Paul's conversion to the Christian faith. He is not satisfied with the bare profession of Christianity, but resolves to teach it to others. He undertakes the office of an apostle in this cause, not hastily, not in a moment of rashness, but after due deliberation and reflection; not in a foreign country, where his history was not known, but in the very place where he had before persecuted the church, or where he intended to persecute, where he had reason to suppose that the story of his conversion would be well known, and where it was most likely to be controverted and exploded, if a forgery; and where he might probably have been confronted with the companions of his journey. These were the places which the apostle chose as the first scene of his ministry; a scene where he must expect to encounter the bitter reproaches and violent animosity of his former associates and patrons, and where his life would be perpetually in danger. Would he have exposed himself to so much suffering for the sake of a falsehood? If he were not fully convinced of the truth of what he related, would he have published it in a place where the falsehood was most likely to be detected and exposed?

2. We see also a striking proof of his benevolence. He was conscious, no doubt, that his former conduct had done much harm, not only to those who were the objects of his persecution, but also to their enemies, by inflaming their zeal and confirming their prejudices. He is resolved, therefore, to proclaim the truth in the very place where his errors had been made public, that he may thus prevent, or at least lessen, the mischief which his former conduct was calculated to produce; that those may be benefitted by his recantation who had been injured by his mistakes. He, no doubt, thought, and there was good reason to believe, that his appearance at Jerusalem as a Christian, where he had been once so zealous an opposer of Christianity, would attract the attention of other zealots, lead them to inquire into the ground of the change, and, at least, moderate their zeal, if not produce a similar change. To accomplish so important an object, therefore, he is willing to appear in the humiliating character of a rash and mistaken man, among his former acquaintance and friends, and to risk the dangers which might arise from the same zeal by which he was once animated.

3. We see that the gospel of Christ spreads under all circumstances; which is a plain proof that it is founded in truth. Persecution proved favourable to its advancement, by dispersing into various distant places the professors of this religion, who carried it with them where it was not before known. And when tranquillity returned, the fortitude and patience of the first Christians, in the profession of the truth in the hour of danger, could not fail to make a strong impression in its favour on the minds of those who had

been spectators of their conduct, and induce great numbers to embrace the Christian religion, when the danger arising thence was removed. They reasoned then, as we do now, that facts, in support of which so many hazard their lives, must be believed, and, if believed, be true.

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SECTION XV.

*Æneas is cured of a palsy, and Dorcas raised from the dead by Peter.*

ACTS ix. 32—43.

32. AND it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda.

As Christians were no longer molested by their enemies, but allowed a free intercourse with each other, Peter took advantage of this season of tranquillity, to visit every place in which there were any brethren, in order to encourage and animate them, in the profession of their new religion, by his presence and exhortations. Christians are here called saints, not with any reference to their moral character, as if they had better claims to sanctity than other men, but merely on account of their being members of the Christian community. The term was first applied to those who lived under the Mosaic dispensation, because the revelation of the divine will and other privileges which they enjoyed, consecrated them, as it were, to God, and was afterwards applied to Christians, because they were consecrated in a similar manner.

33. And there he found a certain man named Æneas, who had kept his bed eight years, being ill of the palsy.

34. And Peter said unto him, Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed, "*Arise and spread thy house thyself,*" *i. e. for the reception of guests*; and he arose immediately.

From the common translation of this verse, we might be led to suppose that Æneas was directed by Peter to rise and make his bed, that he might lie down upon it again immediately; but what occasion for lying down, if he was really cured of his malady? We cannot suppose that the cure was temporary, and only continued for a few hours; for then it would differ from all the other miracles of the same nature mentioned in the gospels; or, if it should be imagined that he was directed to make his bed for the following night, this, it is observed, does not correspond with the

usage in eastern countries, where beds are nothing more than mats laid upon the floor, which are taken up and laid aside in the morning, and spread again at night. It seems much more probable, therefore, that Æneas was directed by Peter, who might intend to eat bread with him, to spread couches or carpets for his guests himself, in order to prove to all that he was perfectly recovered. To spread rooms for entertainments in this manner, is perfectly agreeable to the modern practice of the East, and was probably the ancient custom of the country. For we find an allusion to it in our Lord's time, who tells his disciples, when they asked him where he would have them prepare the passover, that they should find, in a particular place which he pointed out to them, a large upper room furnished, in the original, *spread*, Mark xiv. 15.; Luke xxii. 12, that is, spread with carpets or couches. Peter seems to have required from Æneas something like what his wife's mother, when cured of a fever, performed for Jesus, for "she arose, and ministered unto him."\*

35. And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron that had turned to the Lord, saw him.

In this manner this verse ought to be rendered. The writer asserts that all Christians of these two places, being probably assembled together to hear Peter preach, were witnesses of the miraculous cure of Æneas. The common version asserts that all the inhabitants of Lydda and Saron saw him, and became Christians; a change which is very unlikely, considering the prejudices of the Jews; the more especially, as the latter of these two places was not a town, but a district; and is by no means countenanced by the words of the original. Luke now proceeds to give an account of another remarkable miracle, that was performed at the same time.

36. Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, (which by interpretation is called Dorcas :) this woman was full of good works and alms-deeds which she did.

37. And it came to pass in those days that she was sick and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber.

38. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay, "*that he would not think it much,*"† to come to them.

They grounded their request to Peter to come and raise her

\* For the above illustration of this passage we are indebted to Mr. Harmer in his *Observations on Scripture*. Vol. II. p. 66. Note.

† Pearce and Wakefield.

from the dead, upon the excellent character of Dorcas, and hoped that he would not think much of going so far, to restore to life so useful a person. The sooner this was done, the more desirable, no doubt, it would be, both to herself and to her friends. But it does not appear that the words of the messengers refer to any despatch with which he was desired to come, but merely to the reluctance which he might be supposed to feel, to confer so great a favour upon an ordinary person.

39. Then Peter arose and went with them : when he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber : and all the widows stood by him, weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, "*was making,*" while she was with them.

Being herself, probably, a widow, she employed herself in making clothes for the poor, and what were shown to Peter were the things which she was making when she fell sick and died. In eastern countries, it was usual, and the custom still continues, when a person dies, for the friends and neighbours to assemble in the room where the dead body lies, and to utter loud cries and lamentations. This is considered as an honour to the deceased.\* And this was the purpose for which these women were assembled. As they might be noisy and troublesome, Peter thought it prudent, as Jesus had done in a like case, to put them all forth.

40. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down and prayed, *begging God, no doubt, to exert his power,* and turning him to the body, said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

41. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up ; and when he had called the saints, *the Christians,* and widows, he presented her alive.

He congratulated them, no doubt, on the joyful event which had taken place, and upon the recovery of their friend. The circumstances of this resurrection are highly favourable to the supposition that the mind dies with the body, and is restored to life with it. For the mind of Dorcas remained with her body many hours after death, and would probably have remained with the corpse till the general resurrection, had she not, in the meantime, been raised to life by Peter. So remarkable a miracle was well calculated to make a strong impression upon the minds of all who heard of it, and to convince them of the divine mission of those that preached the gospel. Accordingly we find that it had that effect.

42. And it was known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

\* Harmer's Observations, Vol. II. p. 135, &c.

43. And it came to pass that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon, a tanner.

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### REFLECTIONS.

1. THE benevolent exertions of Dorcas, in making clothes for the poor, may teach us an useful method of exercising our charity. Such donations discover greater benevolence of heart, and are frequently more valuable to the poor than presents of money. What is bestowed in this last way is often given without thought, and spent without economy. But the other gifts are not so easily misapplied. Requiring sometimes labour and exertion, they discover more of a benevolent spirit than pecuniary assistance, which may be afforded without any trouble. The hands of Dorcas were more honourably employed in making necessary articles of dress for the poor, than in adorning her own person; and so will the hands of all those of her sex who imitate her example; nor let them be displeased to hear that much time, now wasted and lost, might be applied to advantage in this way.

2. We learn, also, how acceptable such alms-deeds and other good works are to God, as well as to man. They procured for this excellent woman and benevolent Christian, the esteem of her acquaintance and the gratitude of the poor. But they did something more; they procured for her the great honour and singular advantage of being raised from the dead; which was a clear proof of the approbation and favour of God. I call it an honour to be thus restored to life, because only a few were thus distinguished, and those eminent, probably, like Lazarus, for the excellence of their characters: and an advantage, because it afforded fresh opportunities of doing good to others, of improving her own religious character, and hereby of greatly increasing her future reward. To one who knew so well how to employ her time, a restoration to life was a valuable blessing. But ill would it deserve that name, if, during the interval between her death and resurrection, her soul went to heaven, where the pleasures of good men, and their advantages for improvement, are multiplied an hundred-fold, and was sent back from this happy state, to occupy her body again, and to struggle with the disadvantages and evils of mortality. Life, restored in such circumstances, would be a misfortune rather than a blessing; a subject of condolence rather than of congratulation. But not such, undoubtedly, was the favour conferred in the present instance. Time, that would have been unproductive in the grave, was now bestowed upon one who knew how to apply it to the best purposes.

3. The joy which took place between Dorcas and her friends, when she was presented to them alive, may give us some faint idea of the pleasure which will be felt by good men, at the first interview with each other at the general resurrection from the

dead. How delighted will they be to behold each other again; with what joy will they be transported to find themselves safely landed on the happy shores of that world; to find their fears and anxieties dissipated, their hopes and wishes realized; to behold themselves in the company of friends whom they most valued and esteemed, entering upon a new state of existence, abounding with all good things, and never to have an end; where pleasure will be enjoyed without any mixture of pain, and where friends will have no reason to fear a separation any more! Blessed and glorious period! for the prospect of which we are indebted to the gospel of Christ. May we do nothing now that may forfeit our title to this happiness; nothing that may unfit us for those blissful regions.

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SECTION XVI.

*The Conversion of Cornelius.*

ACTS x. 1—13. xi. 1—13.

1. THERE was a certain man in Cæsarea, called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band,

A centurion was a captain of one hundred soldiers. This was the rank of Cornelius, in a band of men called the Italian, because composed principally of natives of that country. They were probably the life-guard of the Roman governor, who generally resided in the city of Cæsarea.

2. A devout man, and one that feared God, with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.

This is evidently a description of the personal character of Cornelius, and not, as some have supposed, a mere denomination of a proselyte to the Jewish religion. Although a Gentile and uncircumcised, he was a devout and benevolent man; which dispositions he manifested by acts of beneficence, and by praying to God at those hours which were observed for prayer by the Jews. A man of this character was justly selected from among the Gentiles, for receiving the first communication of the gospel.

3. He saw in a vision evidently, about the ninth hour of the day, *one of the Jewish hours of prayer*, an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius!

The circumstance of his appearing in bright clothing, is mentioned in verse the thirtieth.

4. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? "*What is the matter, sir?*" and he said, Thy prayers and thy alms are come up for a memorial before God.

That is, they are not unobserved by him, but graciously received, like the sacrifice or the incense offered upon the altar.

5. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter.

6. He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea-side.\*

From the manner in which some circumstances in this story are related, we might be led to suppose, that what Cornelius saw on this occasion was real; but in verse the third, we are expressly told that it was in vision, the same word which is afterwards applied to what Peter saw. A vision is an exhibition of certain scenes and appearances to the mind of a prophet, or inspired person, while he is awake, and intended to foretel some future event, or to give him information on some religious subject. It differed from a divine dream, in as much as that was a communication when the senses were locked up in sleep, and the prophet had not the free use of his understanding. But in a vision, the prophet had the use of his understanding, and was affected in exactly the same manner by the objects presented to him as if they had been real. It is called a vision, not because the faculty of seeing was used, but from an analogy which subsisted between the effect of sight and this kind of inspiration, both presenting certain images to the mind. Thus Cornelius seems to hear a voice, and to see a man, although it was nothing more than a divine illusion. What he perceived was only images presented to his mind, just as what we see in a mirror is not the object but the picture of it. In most cases the prophet was enabled to distinguish a vision from a real appearance, when the vision was over: but in the case of Paul it seems to have remained a matter of uncertainty all the rest of his days; for, after saying that he was carried up into the third heaven, he adds, "Whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell:" that is, I know not whether I was carried there corporeally in person, or only in idea.†

7. And when the angel which spake unto him was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually;

8. And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.

\* The words, "He shall tell thee what thou shalt do," are omitted by Griesbach.

† Farmer on Christ's Temptation, pp. 36, 39, 95.



9. On the morrow, as they went on their journey, Peter went up upon the house to pray, about the sixth hour :

The common hours of prayer among the Jews were the times of morning and evening sacrifice, or nine in the morning and three in the afternoon ; but the more devout of them observed another hour of prayer, which is here called the sixth hour. Agreeably to this, David says, “ Evening, morning, and at noon, will I pray.” Ps. lv. 17.

The roofs of houses in Judæa and other eastern countries, were not sloping like ours, but flat, and therefore convenient places for retirement.

10. And he became very hungry, and would have eaten ; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance.

A trance, or, as it is in the original, an extasy, is that supernatural state of the mind of an inspired person, in which he sees visions, and in which his mind is so engaged by the scenes presented to it, as to be inattentive to every other object. Thus Peter, in giving an account of this transaction in the next chapter, xi. 5, says, “ being in a trance, I saw a vision.” However, as trance and vision mutually imply each other, one word is frequently used for the other. Thus it is said above of Cornelius, that *in vision* he saw an angel, when the meaning evidently is, that in a trance he saw that appearance. In the same manner it is said of Saul that in vision, that is, in trance, he saw Ananias coming unto him. In this preternatural state, certain symbolical representations were exhibited to the mind, with a view to convey instruction to the prophet, as we find to be the case here.

11. And saw heaven opened, *i. e. he beheld the sky part*, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet, knit, “ *tied*,” at the four corners, and let down to the earth :

12. Wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth,\* and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

That is, living creatures of all sorts, such as were reckoned clean and fit for food by the Jewish law, and such as were esteemed unclean.

13. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter, kill and eat.

\* “ And wild beasts,” is thought to be an interpolation. See Griesbach.

14. But Peter said, Not so, Lord ; for I have never eaten any thing that is common.\*

Peter, although in a trance, has the exercise of his understanding, and declines to partake of particular kinds of food, which the Jewish law had prohibited.

15. And the voice spake unto him again, the second time ; what God hath cleaved, that call not thou common.

16. This was done thrice : and the vessel was received up again into heaven.

By the clean beasts in this vision, we are to understand the Jews, who had been formerly the people of God, and those who had embraced Christianity were so still :—by the unclean and the creeping things, the Gentiles, who were held in abomination by the Jews ; and by the mixture of both together, and by his being commanded to slay and eat of all without distinction, Peter was instructed, that Gentiles, as well as Jews, were to be received into the Christian church, and to form one body with the pious descendants of Abraham. Christ had instructed his apostles to go and teach all nations, and to preach the gospel to every creature ; which must include Gentiles. But they did not understand his command in this extensive sense, confining it to the Jews dispersed through all nations ; or, if they imagined that it extended to others, they supposed, that they were first to become Jews by circumcision, before they could become Christians. And it required the extraordinary vision now exhibited to Peter, to make him acquainted with the comprehensive plan of the gospel.

17. Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate,

18. And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there.

19. While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee.

20. Arise, therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing, *i. e. without scruple*, for I have sent them.

In the preceding verses we had an example of revelation by vision, where Peter was left to collect the meaning of the Divine Being from symbolical representations. Here we have an example

\* The words "or unclean," are omitted in many copies, and supposed to be a gloss. See Griesbach, 2nd edition.

of direct revelation. The Spirit directs Peter in so many words what he is to do.

21. Then Peter went down to the men which were sent to him from Cornelius, and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek; what is the cause wherefore ye are come?

22. And they said, Cornelius, the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by a holy angel, to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee; *that he may hear what thou hast to say.*

23. Then called, "*invited,*" he them in, and lodged them: and on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

Peter, being now aware of the design of the vision, took with him these persons, who were six in number, as we learn from the next chapter, to prevent misrepresentations of his conduct.

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### REFLECTIONS.

1. WE may observe, that the account here given of Cornelius, may teach men in what excellence of character consists—in devotion and beneficence. Each is defective without the other. Where they exist together, they improve and exalt each other, and the character becomes complete; the outline at least is perfect, and the picture only wants to be filled up, and to receive the last touches. To be without devotion, is to be insensible to supreme excellence, to have no love for perfect goodness, no fear of Almighty power. It is to be a son without filial affection; a receiver of benefits without gratitude to the benefactor; a partaker of the bounties of Heaven, without thinking on him from whom they come, or his design in bestowing them. But devotion, which is not accompanied with beneficence, must be pretended and not real; for how is it possible to admire goodness, without endeavouring to imitate it?—to be sensible of the kindness of a friend, and to be inattentive to his wishes? Can we love a father, and yet show no respect to his children, when he has expressly recommended those children to our regard?

On the other hand, beneficence without devotion is destitute of its best principle and noblest support; it wants a motive to do good in secret; it wants fortitude to bear ungrateful returns and disappointed expectations. It has nothing in it that is generous and noble. It is the offspring of vanity, the bait for fame, or the advancement of worldly interest. In us, my brethren, let these two

characters be united ; while we profess piety towards God, let us show charity to men. When called upon to perform acts of beneficence, let us prove our devotion by our good works, and give ourselves the satisfaction of knowing, that it is not a mere name, an empty sound.

It is to the honour of Cornelius, that his household feared God as well as himself, because it is a proof of his fidelity and care. Having acquired the knowledge of the true God, he resolves to communicate it to others ; to his children and domestics, and even the to soldiers under his command, that they may share with him in the blessings of this invaluable discovery. He is not ashamed of the religion of a despised and conquered people, but professes it publicly, and teaches it diligently to all, with whom he is connected. It is to his honour, that he maintained the character here given of him in a profession which is generally distinguished by a disregard of religion, and in which his piety and virtue must have been exposed to many severe trials. Principles which could withstand such powerful attacks, must have had no small strength.

2. Let us remember how acceptable to God are works of piety and beneficence. Cornelius, who was distinguished for them, is honoured with a vision from Heaven, although a soldier and a heathen, and receives the further and greater honour of being the first among the Gentiles, to whom the gospel of Christ was communicated. Let all men, therefore, whatever be their condition, cultivate the same virtues, in hopes of the like acceptance. An angel may not be sent from heaven, in vision or in reality, to assure them, that they will be well received ; but they are assured of it by an authority not less certain than the voice of an angel, by the inspired messenger of God.

3. From the conduct of Peter, in taking friends with him when he went to visit the Gentiles, we may learn the propriety of using precautions, to prevent our good actions from being misrepresented and evil spoken of. What he did was clearly right in his own estimation, and the circumstances in which he stood, and after what had taken place ; but it was possible that it might not appear so to others, and, therefore, some regard was to be had to their satisfaction. To resolution in doing what we think to be right, and courage in professing the truth, it is necessary to join prudence and regard to our own reputation ; and, where we break through established customs, or deny established doctrines, to show our authority for doing so, that we may not unnecessarily expose ourselves to the suspicion of impiety and irreligion.

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24. AND the morrow after they entered into Cæsarea ; and Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends,

25. And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him, "*did him homage.*"

26. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.

Cornelius cast himself at Peter's feet. This was a customary form of respect in eastern countries, to princes and other great personages: but, in the western world, it was thought too solemn or too humiliating to be employed upon any occasion, except in an address to the gods. Peter, therefore, knowing that Cornelius was a Roman, and that among his countrymen such prostrations were not used, refused to accept from him this token of respect, imagining that he had conceived too high an opinion of his character; although it is probable, that Cornelius intended nothing more, in this instance, than to conform to the customs of the country, by paying the usual respect to an extraordinary personage. Christ permitted several persons who came to pay him this testimony of respect, because the persons by whom it was offered were Jews, who practised such ceremonies, and had actually paid the same respect to former prophets.\*

27. And as he talked with him, he went in, "*he went in talking with him,*" and found many that were come together.

These were no other than the relations and intimate friends before-mentioned.

28. And he said unto them, Ye know that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew, to keep company, or to come unto one of another nation: but God hath showed me, that I should not call any man common or unclean.

There was no law of Moses, that prohibited Israelites from having intercourse with strangers: but such a maxim, it seems, was inculcated upon the people by the scribes and Pharisees; and Peter intimates, that he had entertained the same opinion, until better instructed by a vision, which taught him, that he was to regard every nation as pure and holy, which was treated as such by God.

29. Therefore came I unto you, without gain-saying, as soon as I was sent for. I ask, therefore, for what intent have ye sent for me?

He had already been informed by the messengers of the reason for sending for him; but he is desirous to have this reason repeated by Cornelius himself, for the instruction of others.

30. And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour, and at the ninth hour, I prayed in my house; and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, "*in white clothing;*"

\* Harmer's Observations, Vol. II. p. 35.

31. And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.

32. Send therefore, to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon, a tanner, by the sea-side; who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee.

33. Immediately, therefore, I sent to thee: and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now, therefore, are we all here present before God, *or, as some copies read it, "before thee,"* to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.

34. Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive, that God is no respecter of persons;

35. But in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

The meaning of these words as explained by the preceding circumstances, seems to be this: I now clearly perceive that the regards of the Divine Being to his creatures are not partial and limited, extending only to a particular nation and family; but that every one who doth well, of whatever nation he may be, although not of the people of Israel, or family of Abraham, is accepted by God, and deemed worthy of receiving extraordinary favours. For I find that Cornelius, an uncircumcised Roman, has been favoured with a divine vision, and been directed to send for me, that I may communicate to him the knowledge of the gospel of Christ, which I am now about to do. In these words is an allusion to a judge, who, in trying causes, pays more regard to the person of him who pleads than to the cause which he defends. Not such is the character of the Judge of mankind.

36. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace, by Jesus Christ, (he is Lord of all:)

The last clause may be rendered, "This is lord of all," meaning, that the doctrine of Christ was intended to exercise authority over all, i. e. over Jews and Gentiles. Or, if the common translation be retained, and the words refer to Christ, the sense will be nearly the same; Christ is head, i. e. ruler over all. The peace here mentioned means reconciliation with God, which was offered by the gospel; all men, before that period, having been in a state of alienation and enmity; but by that reconciliation he offers to take them into a state of knowledge and favour, i. e. to be at peace with those whom he before regarded as enemies.

37. That word, I say, you know, which was published throughout all Judæa, and began from Galilee,

or, “*Ye know the thing\* which was done throughout all Judæa, beginning from Galilee,*” after the baptism which John preached :

38. How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit, and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

It is well known, that the kings of Israel and the high-priests were appointed to their respective offices by anointing the head with oil. But in course of time, the word anoint came to be used for conferring other benefits besides those of priestly and kingly power, and is here employed to express the miraculous powers, with which Jesus was invested. The proof adduced of his being possessed of these powers, is his healing all that were oppressed with the devil; by which is not meant *dæmoniacs* in particular, but all afflicted persons, whatever might be the nature of their disorders. For the Jews considered all disorders, at least the most grievous of them, as proceeding from the devil, the supposed author of all evil. Agreeably to this idea, Christ describes the woman who was bowed together and could not stand upright, as one whom Satan had bound. The language of Peter, on this occasion, therefore, is equivalent to that of Matthew iv. 23, when he says of Christ, that he healed all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.† Such miracles are very properly mentioned in the one place, and alluded to in the other, as proofs of his divine commission.

39. And we are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they slew and hanged on a tree, “*whom they slew, having hanged on a tree,*” *i. e. on the cross.*

40. Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly, “*and appointed to be shown,*”

41. Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, *i. e. to the disciples of Christ,* even to us who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.

Nothing could be better calculated to give credibility to the miracles and resurrection of Christ, than the evidence which is here offered, the testimony of men who had been themselves eye-witnesses of the fact.

42. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained

\* Schlesneri Lexicon in verb. Πηλα, No. 8. † Farmer on *Dæmoniacs*, pp. 74, 76.

of God to be judge of quick and dead, "*the living and dead.*"

That is, of those who shall be alive upon the earth at his second coming, and of those who shall be lying in the tomb, but shall then be raised from the dead. This was probably one of those commands which Christ gave to his disciples, during the forty days that he remained with them after his resurrection.

43. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name, *or, "in his name,"* whosoever believeth in him, shall receive remission of sins.

It has been supposed, with considerable probability, by Bishop Pearce, as more suitable to the design of this verse, that the prophets referred to by Peter, are not the ancient prophets of the Old Testament, but the teachers of the Christian church, so called in several of the apostolical writings, particularly in 1 Cor. xii. 28, where it is said, "God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers." Of these teachers or prophets, Peter asserts that they all maintained the doctrine which he then declared, viz. that whosoever believed in Christ should receive remission of sins; that is, not the forgiveness of moral guilt; for that depended upon their good conduct, not upon their faith; but the removal of that ceremonial uncleanness and pollution, in which all unbelievers, whether Jews or Gentiles, were involved, and which is in Scripture frequently called sin; and their being received into a state of favour and privilege. Before they believed in Christ they were sinners, but by this change their sin is remitted, and they become saints; they were before unholy; they are now sanctified; that this is what is meant by remission of sins, might be shown by the use of the same term in other passages of Scripture, but its meaning is sufficiently illustrated by the remarkable circumstances which took place on the present occasion; for no sooner has Peter declared that all who believe in Jesus should be taken into a state of favour, or, which is the same thing, have their sins remitted, than God seals the truth of his declaration, while the words are yet in his mouth, by bestowing miraculous powers on all the believing Gentiles who were present.

This address of Peter to the Gentiles contains a short epitome of the gospel; but I cannot help observing that it takes no notice of several articles which are now deemed its distinguishing doctrines; neither the deity of Christ, nor his pre-existence, nor his atonement, is once mentioned or alluded to; nothing more is asserted of Jesus than that he was a man of Nazareth, whose commission extended to the Gentiles, as well as to the Jews, who began his ministry after the baptism of John, and proved his divine mission by the miraculous cures which he performed, and by his resurrection from the dead; and that he is appointed the final judge of all men. This is all that Peter deemed essential to Christianity, or deserving of notice in it; and it is all that the Divine Being deemed to be so likewise; for upon those who believed thus, much miraculous powers are bestowed.



44. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the word.

As a proof that Peter spoke the truth, in declaring that all who believed in Christ should be taken into that state of privilege which the Jews once possessed, and which was now occupied by Christians, the Holy Spirit is sent down upon these Gentile believers, while he is yet speaking, which was an instance or example of the very thing which he had asserted. This effusion of the Spirit was manifested, probably, by some suitable appearance, like that which was exhibited upon the heads of the apostles on the day of Pentecost, or over Jesus at his baptism, as well as by what is mentioned immediately afterwards.

45. And they of the circumcision which believed, were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit :

46. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God.

The Jews, to whom miraculous gifts had been confined, might well be surprised to behold them conferred upon the Gentiles ; men whom they had always been taught to regard as outcasts, and as wholly unworthy of such favours. Had the Jews, on the memorable occasion of the conversion of Gentiles, expressed nothing more than surprise, they would not have deserved censure ; but their violent opposition to the admission of Gentiles into Christian fellowship, of which we read so much in Paul's epistles, proceeded from inveterate prejudice or base envy.

Then answered Peter, "*then said Peter,*"

47. Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we ?

The words, "who can forbid water?" seem to imply that the water was to be brought to them, and not they taken to the water, and that, therefore, it was Peter's purpose to baptize them by sprinkling or washing, and not by immersion. His question seems also to imply that some might, perhaps, forbid water to be brought upon the present occasion for the purpose of baptism.

48. And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord, *of Christ Jesus who is our Lord, or Master.*

It is observable that in this and every other instance in which the baptism of Christians is mentioned, it is said to have been performed, not in the name of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit, but in the name of the Lord, or of Christ.

Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

That he might give them further instruction in the Christian doctrine.

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### REFLECTIONS.

THIS portion of history contains an account of one of the most memorable and interesting events which occur in the sacred writings, the communication of the gospel of Christ, and of miraculous powers to the Gentile world, without their being required to conform to the observances of the Mosaic law; an event which astonished all who heard of it, whether Jews or Gentiles, which gave new views to Christian teachers, and exhibited their religion in a new light. The mystery hidden from ages is now revealed; the purposes of God from before the foundation of the world are accomplished; those who were once treated as despised outcasts, are taken into the kingdom and family of God, and hold the same honourable station which the Jews once occupied, but from which they had now fallen by transgression. In this event we see,

1. The unbounded goodness of the great Father of mankind, who extends his gracious regards to the most ignorant, the most depraved, and wretched of his offspring, the idolatrous heathens, loves them notwithstanding their follies and their crimes, and adopts the most efficacious measures for their recovery to knowledge, virtue, and happiness. If these measures were long delayed, it was not because his children were overlooked or forgotten, but because the proper time for executing them was not yet arrived; if only a small portion of the Gentiles have hitherto partaken of this blessing, it is for a like reason. When Christianity has been purified from those corruptions which have sullied its beauty and destroyed its efficacy, it shall spread throughout the world. The favour which has already been shown to a few, is a pledge and security for the benefit which shall hereafter be bestowed upon the many. How grateful, then, should we be to God for bestowing upon our ancestors of the heathen race this important favour, and, through them, upon us! The apostle Paul and other early Christians, seem to be at a loss for words to express the greatness of the divine goodness in the present instance. They speak of the breadth and length, of the depth and height of the love of God in Christ, manifested to the Gentiles, as passing knowledge; but we, alas, who are educated in the principles of Christianity, and know nothing of the evils of idolatry but from report, are scarcely sensible of our obligations.

2. We see in this event, also, secondly, the impartiality of the divine character: what is bestowed upon the Jews is given to the Gentiles also; one being as dear to God as the other, and equally the object of his benevolent regards. If, in former times, more favour has been shown to one part of the human race than to another, it is not for their own sake, or from blind partiality to them, but from a regard to the interest of all, which has been promoted in this manner.

3. Lastly, we behold in this event plain marks of the hand of God. To conceive the idea of extending the kingdom of God to the Gentiles, who were regarded with so much hatred and contempt, and of raising them to a state of equality with themselves, was a scheme far too liberal and comprehensive for narrow-minded and bigoted Jews. It was totally opposite to the principles of their education.

This story ascribes it wholly to God; and it bears evident marks of coming from him: it resembles his conduct in other instances, since he causes the sun to shine, and the rain to descend upon one part of the earth as well as another; and the most valuable blessings of life are the most common. The early design of communicating the gospel of Christ to the heathens, which appeared amongst the first teachers, is itself no inconsiderable proof of the divine origin of our religion.

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1. AND the apostles and brethren that were in Judæa heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.

The gospel of Christ is here called the word of God, because it contained an account of a revelation from heaven; and in the same sense the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament may be called the word of God likewise, because they contain authentic accounts of such revelations, although not themselves inspired.

2. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended, *or*, "*expostulated*," with him,

3. Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.

This, the maxims of the elders, but not the law of Moses, declared to be unlawful. From the conduct of these Jewish Christians, it is plain that they did not consider Peter as under the direction of inspiration in all his actions: otherwise they would not have ventured to censure his conduct in this instance; nor does Peter himself seem to be conscious of having such inspiration; for he appeals not to his authority as an apostle, but to the particular instructions which he had received on this subject.

4. But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, "*then Peter began and laid the matter before them in order*," saying,

5. I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, a certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners, "*by four strings*," and it came even to me.

6. Upon the which, when I had fastened my eyes, I considered, and saw four-footed beasts of the earth, and creeping things and fowls of the air.

7. And I heard a voice, saying unto me, Arise, Peter, slay and eat.

8. But I said, Not so, Lord ; for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.

9. But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

10. And this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven.

11. And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Cæsarea unto me.

12. And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting ; moreover, these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house.

13. And he showed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood, and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter ;

14. Who shall tell thee words, *or*, “*tell thee things,*” whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved, “*may be saved.*”

The salvation here promised to Cornelius, from hearing the words of Peter, could not be final salvation, or the happiness of a future life : for that he might, no doubt, have secured, by persevering in the prayers, and the alms which had already recommended him to the divine notice ; but it must be something which, in his present condition, he was not in the way to obtain ; and, therefore, to be saved, must signify here deliverance from his heathen state, a state of great disadvantage and danger, and introduction to the privileges of the gospel dispensation. This salvation he could not obtain without the knowledge of the gospel ; the other might be secured without it, although, no doubt, it would be highly conducive to that end.

15. And as I began to speak, *or*, “*after I had begun to speak,*” the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at the beginning.

That is, in flames of fire, as on the day of Pentecost, intended to represent the approach of God to perform a miracle, by bestowing the gift of tongues.

16. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John, indeed, baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

This was the language of Jesus to his apostles after his resurrection; and if this baptism with the Spirit, or pouring out of the Spirit, was a proof of their being accepted as disciples of Christ, in the first instance, it was equally so on the present occasion.

17. Forasmuch, then, as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I, that I could withstand God?

To have refused to receive as brethren those upon whom God bestowed the same marks of favour, would have been to oppose the designs of God, and an instance of great presumption.

18. When they heard these things, they held their peace, "*they had no more to say,*" and glorified God, saying, then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

Repentance does not here signify reformation of conduct, but merely a change of opinion from heathenism to Christianity. These Jews bless God for inclining the Gentiles, contrary to their expectations, to such a change. The words, "unto life," have generally been supposed to refer unto eternal life, to the prospect of which Gentiles were raised by the profession of Christianity; but as the Jews spoke of the Gentiles as dead, they would naturally express a recovery from that state by a restoration to life. Repentance unto life, then, will mean no more than a change of mind which produces life. Agreeably to this interpretation, the apostle Paul exhorts Gentiles to yield themselves to God, as those who are alive from the dead.

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#### REFLECTIONS.

THE conduct of those Jews who so readily acquiesced in the admission of the Gentiles to the same privileges as themselves, is highly worthy of commendation. They had been taught to conceive of themselves as a peculiar people; standing high in the favour of God, and alone worthy of divine revelation; the Gentiles they were taught to regard with contempt and abhorrence, as a people abandoned by God, as a nation of sinners, unclean and unholy. This opinion had been inculcated upon them from their earliest years, and was one of the strongest of their prejudices; they hear, therefore, with surprise and indignation of Peter's visit to them, and of his receiving Gentiles by baptism into the Christian church; they blame him for his conduct, and resolve to discountenance what he had done, by refusing to associate with this people. But no sooner are they satisfied that what he did was agreeable to the will, and by

the express direction of God, than they resign their prejudices at once, and submit to the decisions of infinite wisdom. Nay, in this measure of admitting the Gentiles to embrace the gospel, they discover a new proof of the goodness of the universal Parent, and fresh motives for thanksgiving and praise. They glorify God for granting repentance unto the Gentiles.

If, after having fallen into error, we have discovered our mistake, let us not be backward to acknowledge the truth, but imitate the conduct of those devout Jews: if we find that it is the plan of Providence that mankind be saved by one of the human race, and not by a pre-existent being or by a God; that man should possess a natural capacity of doing the divine will, independently of supernatural aid, and that we should be restored to God's favour upon repentance and reformation alone, without the intervention of a third person; whatever our pre-conceived opinions may have been, and however long established, let us learn to submit our judgments to superior authority, and to admire the wisdom which can produce such great effects by such simple means.

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#### SECTION XVII.

*Mission of Barnabas and Saul to Antioch. They return to Jerusalem.*

ACTS xi. 19—30.

19. Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen, travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, (*in Syria*,) preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

This was the practice of the first teachers of Christianity; but what had lately occurred at Cæsarea, induced them to extend their labours. Phenice was a country which lay to the north-west of Judæa: Cyprus was a large island in the Levant or Mediterranean Sea.

20. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, *a region of Africa*; which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, or, "*Greeks*,"\* preaching the Lord Jesus, *i. e. the gospel of the Lord Jesus*.

The inhabitants of Antioch and of these parts of Asia were called Greeks, because they spoke the Greek language. To them, although Gentiles, these disciples ventured to preach the gospel, after having heard, probably, what Peter had done in Judæa.

\* See Griesbach.

21. And the hand of the Lord was with them, *i. e. they were enabled to work miracles* : and a great number believed, and turned to the Lord, *i. e. professed themselves the disciples of Jesus*.

22. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem, and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.

23. Who when he came, and had seen the grace of God, "*the kindness of God,*" *in inclining Gentiles to believe in Jesus*, was glad, and exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord, *that they would adhere to Christ*.

The reason for his earnestness is assigned in the next verse.

24. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith ; and much people was added unto the Lord.

25. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul.

He had been sent to Tarsus, which was his native place, by the brethren at Jerusalem, to avoid an attempt made against his life by some zealous Jewish proselytes with whom he disputed, as we were informed in the ninth chapter. Barnabas, who had been before acquainted with Saul, went to seek him, as a useful fellow-labourer in the work in which he was engaged.

26. And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

As Antioch was a populous city, and the inhabitants discovered a readiness to receive the gospel, Paul and Barnabas found encouragement to take up their residence, and to preach there, for a long time.

Some have supposed that Christians were so called by divine appointment, and that this is implied in the Greek word used on this occasion ; but it was so natural and so common to give to disciples the name of their teacher or master, that there is no occasion to have recourse to a miracle. Before this time they had undoubtedly a name ; but they had been hitherto called Nazarenes, disciples or believers. Their new name seems to have been of Latin origin ; for it has a Latin and not a Greek termination, and

was probably given them by the Romans, to whom Antioch was at this time subject. Had Christians given it to themselves, it is probable that the writer of this history would have used it; but it is remarkable that he carefully avoids this appellation, calling them brethren, believers, and saints. The same observation has been made respecting the apostle Paul, who never calls the disciples of Christ Christians, but speaks of them under some other denomination. They are once called so by Peter. (1 Ep. iv. 16.) The reason of this caution in Paul and Luke was probably an apprehension that by giving them that name, they might make Christ appear like an ordinary leader of a sect among the heathen philosophers.\*

27. And in these days came prophets, "*teachers,*" from Jerusalem unto Antioch.

Their office was that of instructors, and they came hither for the purpose of preaching the gospel: one of them, indeed, delivers a prediction, but as this power of foretelling future events was only occasional, it would not entitle him to the appellation of a prophet, in the same sense in which we apply the term to the prophets of the Old Testament; or, if he deserved the name, there appears no reason for giving it to all his companions.

28. And there stood up one of them, named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there would be great dearth, "*a great famine,*" throughout all the world, which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cæsar.

The words which we translate all the world, frequently signify no more than all the land, and are to be taken in a more enlarged or limited sense, according to the subject of which the writer is speaking: as, in the present instance, Jerusalem is the place last mentioned, the whole land will signify the whole country of Judæa, and the meaning of the writer is, that the famine was not confined to Jerusalem, but extended over all the neighbouring territory. Luke tells us that this prediction was fulfilled under Claudius Cæsar, and we learn from Josephus that such a famine actually took place in Judæa, in the reign of this prince, and about this time.

29. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judæa:

This itself is a proof that the famine was not expected to extend to this country; for otherwise they would not have determined upon this act of liberality, when they themselves were likely to want; or, if they had done so, such an act of generosity could not have failed to be noticed by this historian.

\* Lardner, Vol. VI. p. 265, &c



30. Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

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REFLECTIONS.

1. THE exhortation of Barnabas to the Christians at Antioch, that with purpose of heart they would cleave to the Lord, is equally proper for the professors of the gospel at the present day. The temptations to desert him are not few or light; if we are not now exposed to persecution, we have trials of another kind, which are not less dangerous. Unlawful pleasure and unrighteous gain entice us to violate the precepts of Christ; the insinuating arts of unbelievers are calculated to undermine our faith; in either case the effect will be equally fatal: Guard yourselves, Christians, against these evils, and be not offended with those who warn you of your danger.

2. The liberality of the Christians at Antioch to their brethren in Judæa, in a season of distress, is a pleasing proof and specimen of the spirit of the gospel. To the inhabitants of Judæa in general, and particularly to the church at Jerusalem, they were indebted for the knowledge of the most important truth. They could not make them a sufficient return by communicating a like favour; but what they have they are willing to give; having received spiritual blessings, they send them such as are temporal, as a proof of their thankfulness. In this instance they acted the part of gratitude and benevolence; and where men are sensible of the value of the gospel in the present day, they will be ready to manifest their gratitude in a like manner.

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SECTION XVIII.

*Herod puts to death James, and imprisons Peter, who is miraculously delivered. Death of Herod.*

ACTS xii. 1—25.

1. Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hand to vex, “to hurt,” certain of the church:

This Herod is not the same with the prince of that name who put John the Baptist to death, and before whom our Lord appeared at Jerusalem; but one of the same family, who, therefore, takes the family name: he is distinguished by the additional name of Agrippa, as the other is by that of Antipas. Josephus represents

him as strongly attached to the institutions of the Jews, and as taking much pains to render himself agreeable to them ; which disposition, probably, induced him to commence a persecution against the disciples of Jesus.\*

2. And he killed James, the brother of John, with the sword.

These were the two sons of Zebedee, the fisherman, and our Lord had informed them, that they should drink of the same cup with himself ; a prophecy which was in part fulfilled upon the present occasion.

3. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded farther to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)

He did not choose, perhaps, to disturb the harmony of the festival by an execution. The Jews ate unleavened bread for several days before the passover ; hence the whole festival came to be called the feast or festival of unleavened bread.

4. And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers, *i. e.* to sixteen soldiers, to keep him ; intending, after Easter, “*after the passover,*” to bring him forth to the people.

He set so many soldiers to guard Peter, because he came out of prison the last time he was put there, in a way which they did not know how to account for.

I can see no reason for introducing the term Easter into the English translation of this verse, but a desire to countenance a modern festival by the authority of the apostolic age. The word used in the original, signifies passover, and ought so to be rendered.

5. Peter, therefore, was kept in prison ; but prayer was made without ceasing, *or,* “*earnest prayer was made,*” of the church unto God for him.

The object of these prayers was, no doubt, to entreat Heaven to exercise the same miraculous powers for his benefit in the present instance, which had been exerted before. To pray to God for benefits which we desire for ourselves or our friends, is highly proper at all times.

6. And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, *to bind him to each of the soldiers,* and keepers before the door kept the prison.

7. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, "*came to him,*" and a light shined in the prison, "*in the room,*" and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly; and the chains fell off from his hands.

8. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, "*gird thy coat about thee,*" and bind on thy sandals: and so he did; and he saith unto him, Cast thy garment, "*thy mantle,*" about thee, and follow me.

9. And he went out and followed him, and wist not, "*knew not,*" that it was true which was done by the angel, but thought he saw a vision.

10. When they were past the first and second ward, they came unto the iron gate, *so called because it was covered with iron plates,\** that leadeth unto the city, which opened to them of its own accord, *i. e. without the application of any external means;* and they went out, and passed on through one street, and forthwith the angel departed from him.

11. And when Peter was come to himself, *was recovered from his surprise,* he said, Now I know of a surety, *or, "certainly,"* that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

Peter knew something of the nature of vision, because he had already seen one; yet he seems to have been doubtful for some time, whether what happened to him at this time, might not be one, which shows, that the impressions made upon the imagination by visions were not easily distinguishable at the time, from those made upon the senses, however they might be discerned afterwards. Paul remained in uncertainty upon this subject many years after the event; for, after saying that he was caught up into the third heaven, he adds, "whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell;" *i. e. whether literally and truly, or only by mental representation.†*

12. And when he had considered the thing, "*after some consideration,*" *i. e. about what he should do, or whither he should go,* he came to the house of

\* Harmer's Observations, Vol. I. p. 207.

† Farmer on Christ's Temptation, p. 36.

Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying.

13. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, “*of the porch,*” a damsel, “*a maid servant,*” came to hearken, named Rhoda.

Her caution is a proof of the state of alarm in which the Christians were at this time.

14. And when she knew Peter’s voice, she opened not the porch for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the porch.

15. And they said unto her, Thou art mad: but she constantly affirmed, that it was even so, Then said they, It is his angel.

It was an opinion amongst many of the Jews, that every man had his guardian angel, who waited upon him, and took care of him. To this notion Christ seems to refer, without, however, giving it the sanction of his authority, when speaking of little children, he says, “Behold, I say unto you, their angels behold the face of my Father.” Upon this idea, some seem to have improved, by supposing, as in this passage, that the guardian angel, as he was called, might assume the voice and figure of the person whom he protected; and truly, if men will indulge their imaginations on the subject of angels, there will be no end to their suppositions. It was the opinion of the Sadducees, however, that the angels mentioned in Scripture, who bore the character of intelligence, were not a distinct order of beings, but either men or phantoms, raised up for the occasion; which opinion, if found to be true, as I am inclined to think it will be, would have the good effect of freeing the world from much superstition on this subject.

16. But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished.

17. But he, beckoning to them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go, show these things unto James and to the brethren. And he departed, and went to another place, *in order to conceal himself.*

The James, mentioned in this verse, was the son of Alphaeus, our Lord’s relation, and the author of the epistle which bears his name. The James, who was slain, was one of the sons of Zebedee. Peter directs them to give information to him respecting his deliverance from prison, because he resided at Jerusalem, and was a distinguished person among the apostles.

18. Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter.

They were probably thrown into a deep sleep, when the events before-mentioned took place.

19. And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death, "*led out for execution.*" And he went down from Jerusalem to Cæsarea, and there abode, *or*, "*he went down from Jerusalem, and abode at Cæsarea.*"\*

Having finished the story of Peter, the historian proceeds to relate the death of Herod, which put an end to the persecution that began to rage against the Christians.

20. And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus, the king's chamberlain, their friend, desired peace, because their country was nourished by the king's country.

Their territory being small, they were not able to furnish themselves with grain, but depended upon Judæa, and other countries subject to Herod, for supplies. It was from interested motives, therefore, and not from a sense of their fault, that they made submission.

21. And upon a set day, Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them.

22. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.

23. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory; and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost, "*expired.*"

This account given by Josephus of the death of Herod, corresponds in many particulars with that now read: for he represents him as suddenly seized with violent pains in the bowels, in the midst of the theatre of Cæsarea, after he had appeared there in his royal robes, and been complimented with the appellation of god, and as dying of this complaint in five days. He also seems to attribute his death to God, as a punishment for his not reproving the persons who offered him such impious flattery. The circumstance of his being eaten by worms, is not mentioned by the Jewish historian; but it is not surprising, that he should omit a particular so little consistent with the dignity of the prince whom he meant to

\* Wakefield's *Silva Critica*, Part Second, Sect. IV.

honour. Luke says, that he was smitten with this disorder; *i. e.* with a disorder that bred worms, by an angel, which affords a proof among many others, that any instrument employed by the Divine Being to inflict punishment, or to confer favours, is, in the Scriptures, called an angel of God. Thus we find it said, in one place, that the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel, to punish David for numbering the people; and in another, that he sent an angel to inflict this punishment; and thus, likewise, God is said to have sent his angel to shut the mouths of the lions to whom Daniel was thrown. This account of angels is by no means inconsistent with the preceding; for there is no reason to suppose that there was any appearance of an intelligent being in any of these cases. The historian, having finished his account of the death of Herod, proceeds with his narrative.

24. But the word of God grew and multiplied:

25. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, *i. e.* had conveyed to that city the contributions of the Christians at Antioch, and took with them, John, whose surname was Mark.

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### REFLECTIONS.

1. WE learn hence the danger to which the first preachers of the gospel were exposed, and the value of their testimony in such circumstances. We see that James, an apostle and leader among the Christians, is apprehended and slain for his attachment to the cause, and although others who are seized do not share his fate, yet the event, being unknown, it would have upon their minds, all the effects of real danger; for one miraculous deliverance did not ensure a second for the same person, much less a like deliverance for all. To persist in asserting the divine commission of Jesus in such circumstances, and in preaching the truths which he taught, was to do what nothing but a conviction of their doctrine being divine, and of its supreme importance to mankind, could have dictated. Here then, Christians, you behold the rock upon which your faith is erected; the evidence of men who delivered what they taught, at the hazard of their lives. Of better testimony than this it is impossible to conceive.

2. How vain is the power of man when opposed to that of God! Peter is seized by order of the king; he is inclosed within a triple wall; he is watched by more than an usual number of guards, and he is fastened by a chain to his keepers: but all these precautions are to no purpose, and had they been multiplied ten-fold, they would have been equally ineffectual. The chains drop from his hands; the keepers are thrown into a deep sleep, and the iron gates open of their own accord. Vain is the contest between an

arm of flesh and the arm of Omnipotence ! All strength is His ; the powers of nature are only His energy ; let not mortals, however exalted, dare to oppose His counsels.

3. We see how absurd is the flattery paid to princes and other great men. They are often denominated the Most High and Mighty, the Sovereigns of mankind, and the Lords of the Universe, and are addressed in language which belongs exclusively to the Supreme Being. Yet diseases attack them as they do other men, and they are as liable as others to the stroke of death. Yea, the smallest and the meanest worm is their superior, and able to accomplish their ruin. To flatter such frail beings, by ascribing to them the attributes of Deity, is degrading and absurd : to accept such flattery is still more reprehensible.

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SECTION XIX.

*Barnabas and Saul visit Cyprus. The punishment of Elymas and conversion of Sergius Paulus.*

ACTS xiii. 1—12.

1. Now there were in the church that was at Antioch, certain prophets, “*instructors,*” and teachers ; as Barnabas and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, *i. e. who was Herod’s foster-brother,* and Saul.

As Paul and Barnabas had spent a whole year in preaching at Antioch, and the disciples were first called Christians at that place, it is probable that their number was considerable. This will account for their having so many teachers, who might be employed in instructing many different societies. Of the persons here mentioned, we know nothing besides, with certainty, if we except Paul and Barnabas. Lucius of Cyrene, it has been thought, was Luke, the author of this history and of the gospel which bears his name. The foster-brother of Herod must have been a person of some rank and consideration.

2. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them ; *i. e. separate them from the rest of the teachers, or from the church.*

This message was delivered in the name of God by one of the

company; and the particular service to which these persons were called, was mentioned at the same time, although it be not recorded by the historian; unless, indeed, we suppose, what is not very improbable, that Barnabas had already been informed that he was to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, as we know that Paul had, Acts ix. 15, xxii. 21. This divine message is said to have come while they ministered to the Lord and fasted; i. e. while they were engaged in such solemn prayer as was accompanied with fasting; the object of their prayer being, probably, to procure the assistance of miraculous powers, for the prosecution of their work. These powers, although sometimes given unasked, could at other times only be procured by prayer, and that of the most solemn and earnest kind. Accordingly, our Saviour says, when speaking of dæmons, “this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.” Matt. xvii. 21.

3. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Paul and Barnabas had both been preachers of the gospel for some time, and, therefore, could want no authority for that purpose; but, being about to enter upon a particular ministry, the above-mentioned teachers at Antioch, or the church there, (for it is not certain which of these is referred to,) assembled together to offer up earnest prayer for their success. It is said they laid their hands on them; but by this action they could not mean to express the communication of authority or of miraculous powers; for they were in possession of both already; but merely to point out to the assembly, the persons who were the objects of that prayer.

4. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Spirit, departed unto Seleucia, *a town in Syria*, and from thence they sailed to Cyprus, *a large island in the Mediterranean*.

5. And when they were at Salamis, *a considerable town in the island*, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews, and they had also John to their minister.

He did not preach, but assisted them with those services for which they would have occasion in such a journey. This John had the surname of Mark, as we are told in the last chapter, verse the twelfth, and is supposed, with great probability, to be the same person with the evangelist.\*

6. And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, “*a magician*,” a false prophet, “*a false teacher*,” a Jew, whose name was Bar-Jesus:

\* Lardner, article Mark.



7. Who was with the deputy of the country, "*with the proconsul,*" Sergius Paulus, a prudent man, "*a sensible man,*" who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.

Some have supposed that Luke was guilty of a little inaccuracy in calling the governor of this island a proconsul, as the original word signifies; but Dr. Lardner has shown, in a very satisfactory manner, that this appellation was strictly accurate, and that, in this respect, he was better informed than those who have pretended to correct him.

Sorcerers or magicians were persons who, by their pretended knowledge of the secret powers of nature, and the assistance of the gods, professed to foretell future events, and to do other extraordinary things. Such was the character of Bar-Jesus or Elymas, who is, therefore, justly branded with the name of a false teacher or impostor. He pretended to knowledge which he was conscious that he did not possess, and was, therefore, with good reason, treated by the apostles as a wicked man.

8. But Elymas the magician (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the proconsul from the faith.

Elymas expresses in the Arabic or Persian language what the Greek for magician does. He was well aware that if the Christian doctrine were believed by the people in general, and more especially by the governor, his own art and character would sink into disrepute; he therefore strove to oppose them; but in what manner his opposition was conducted we are not told.

9. Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, set his eyes on him,

Some suppose that Paul's name was given him by the Romans, on account of the similarity which it bears to the word Saul; but others suppose by himself, out of compliment to his illustrious disciple, Sergius Paulus.

The phrase, "being full of the Holy Spirit," does not refer to the words which follow, as if they proceeded immediately from God, but to the miraculous punishment which Paul inflicted, which was a proof that he abounded with the gifts of the Spirit. The confidence, however, with which he spoke, proceeded, probably, from his consciousness of possessing these powers.

10. And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?

This is a proper description of a man whose great object was to enrich himself by false pretences, and by imposing upon the credulity of mankind. He is called the child or son of the devil,

because he resembled the supposed author of all evil in disposition, as a child resembles its parent.

11. And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness, *a mist came over his eyes first, and darkness afterwards*, and he went about, seeking some to lead him by the hand.

12. Then the proconsul, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

He was astonished at the effect of the doctrine, and induced, on this account, to embrace it.

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#### REFLECTIONS.

1. IN commending to God by prayer the first preachers of the gospel, Christians showed the idea which they entertained of the importance of their message, and the anxiety which they felt for its success, regarding it as connected with the honour of God and the best interests of men. To express this anxiety before their Father and their God, would have a natural tendency to impress their minds with a sense of the value of the gospel, and to increase their attachment to it, whatever might be its effect upon the progress of Christianity in the world; it was, therefore, an important and useful exercise.

Similar prayers for the success of the ministers of Christ, are equally proper in the present day; for his doctrine has not lessened in value by distance of Time; if it is not now new to the world, yet it has been altered and corrupted in a manner that has greatly injured its beauty and destroyed its efficacy: in its original purity it is still an unknown doctrine to many. It becomes us, therefore, to pray that those who preach the gospel may have wisdom to discern, integrity and courage to avow, the truth on all occasions; that the love of gain and the love of the favour of men may never tempt them to be ashamed of Christ and his cause; and that the truth, when taught, may be received with unprejudiced minds by men in every condition of life.

2. We see, here, that the gospel obtains fresh triumphs. Its proselytes, hitherto, had been principally men of ordinary occupations in life, fishermen, tent-makers, and other mechanics: men who had not the prejudices of wealth and high station, in addition to those of education, to overcome; but now we see a Roman governor, trained up in idolatry and superstition, and regarded as the protector and patron of the religion of his countrymen, a man of good understanding, and enjoying the best education which

Rome could afford, sacrificing his prejudices and his interests, and yielding to the force of truth, professing the gospel, not perhaps at the hazard of his life, but at the hazard of what he probably esteemed as more valuable, his place. No slight motive could surely induce him to make such a change; evidence which could overcome so many prejudices must have something in it peculiarly forcible; a doctrine which could produce the sacrifice of so many interests must have something in it of more than ordinary value and importance. The apostle's declaration is, however, still true, that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. Some there were, however, of this description, and their conversion is an illustrious proof that the gospel was adapted to gain the attachment of men in all situations, and ought to recommend it to our regard.

We see, also, a celebrated professor of magic, actuated by jealousy and self-interest, opposing the gospel; who, inured to the arts of deceit himself, was most likely to detect them in others; but so far is he from injuring the cause of truth, that his opposition serves to confirm and establish it, and to bring entire disgrace upon himself.

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SECTION XX.

*Paul and Barnabas preach the gospel at Antioch in Pisidia.*

Acts xiii. 13—52.

13. Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia, and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.

He was either discouraged by the difficulties of the undertaking, or thought it necessary to attend to his own private affairs.

14. But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, *so called to distinguish it from Antioch in Syria*, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath-day, and sat down;

15. And after the reading of the law and the prophets, *that is, a section of each, according to the custom of the Jews*, the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.

It was usual for the rulers to call upon some one to explain what had just been read from the Scriptures; or to found some exhortation upon it; and seeing strangers there who, they had heard, were professed teachers, they call upon them to do it. With this request Paul readily complies.

16. Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand, *waving it as a signal for silence*, said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.

The persons whom he addresses are Israelites, and those religious proselytes who joined with them in the worship of Jehovah.

17. The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, *i. e. separated them from all other nations to be the object of peculiar religious privileges*, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, *rendered them great and prosperous*, and, with a high arm, *with an arm exerted in many miraculous acts of power*, brought he them out of it.

18. And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness, *or, according to some of the best manuscripts, "and carried," or, "fed them, as a nurse her child."*\*

19. And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he divided their land to them by lot, *or, "gave it to them as an inheritance."*†

20. And after that, he gave unto them judges, about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet.

21. And afterward they desired a king, and God gave unto them Saul, the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years.

Interpreters have found some difficulty in reconciling these dates with the chronology of the Old Testament; but some degree of inaccuracy in either is a matter of little consequence, provided the inspiration of the historian or speaker be not insisted upon. Paul, probably, spoke according to the method of computation in use amongst the Jews of his own time.

22. And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king, to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after my own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.

This does not refer to David's private character, in which were several things highly exceptionable and contrary to the divine will, but merely to his conduct as a prince, in which character he always demeaned himself well, manifesting a becoming zeal against

\* Griesbach, 2d edition.

† Griesbach, 2d edition.

idolatry, and constantly observing the divine injunctions that were given him; for disregarding which, the entail of the kingdom was cut off from the house of Saul. Few, if any, of his successors in the kingdom equalled him in this respect. To mark his approbation of his conduct, God entailed the crown upon his posterity, and ordained that the Messiah should descend from him.

23. Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise, raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus :

This promise was delivered by the prophet Isaiah, xi. 1, "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." It is observable that Paul says nothing about the miraculous birth of Christ, in order to obviate an objection which would naturally arise in the mind of a Jew, from the circumstance of Jesus not being a natural descendant of David in the male line: it is probable, therefore, that he had never heard of this miracle, and, from that and other circumstances, that it never had a real existence.

24. When John had first preached, before his coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.

25. And as John was fulfilling his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not he: but, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose.\*

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#### REFLECTIONS.

WE have here an example of a laudable custom which prevailed amongst the Jews, and which deserves to be imitated amongst Christians, that of reading their law and their prophets, every sabbath-day in their public assemblies.

I am far from thinking, indeed, that the mere reading of a book, or hearing it read, is all that is necessary to understand it; more especially, one of such ancient date, and which comprehends such a variety of style and matter. On the contrary, I conceive it to be very possible that men may read the bible, or hear it read, all their days, in such a manner, that they may be grossly ignorant of what it contains; and this, I am persuaded, is the condition of a great number of Christians, who seem to think their reading the bible often will supply the place of studying it. Nevertheless it must be acknowledged that the slightest impression in favour of virtue and piety, such as may be acquired by the most careless reader or hearer, is not to be despised; while the best informed minds require to have their good impressions renewed, it is only

\* See the commentary on Matt. iii. 11.

by having a constant intercourse with these sacred records that they can keep their faith alive and active, and render the invaluable principles of the gospel familiar to their minds.

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26. BRETHEREN, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word, "*the doctrine,*" of this salvation sent.

Paul, continuing his discourse to the Jews in the synagogue at Antioch, tells them, that although they lived not in Judæa, yet, being descended from Abraham, the father of the Jewish race, or joined to that people by proselytism, this doctrine is addressed to them, and is interesting to them both ; for it promises deliverance to all who embrace it ; deliverance from the evils and judgments to which they are liable who no longer enjoy the divine favour.

27. For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath-day, have fulfilled them in condemning him.

28. And though they found no cause of death in him, *i. e.* "*no just cause,*" yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain.

Their ignorance furnished the Jewish people and rulers with no excuse for their conduct, since it proceeded from evil passions, which blinded the understanding, and prevented them from discerning the truth.

29. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre :

30. But God raised him from the dead ;

31. And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people.

Nothing could be better and more unexceptionable testimony than that which is here mentioned, the evidence of men who had been long acquainted with him in Galilee, where he spent the greatest part of his ministry, and who saw him several times after his resurrection.

32. And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers,

33. God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again, as it

is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.

This second psalm the apostle uses as referring wholly to the Messiah, and this verse in particular, as foretelling his resurrection from the dead. The same passage is applied in the same manner by the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, i. 7, "For to which of the angels, says he," i. e. to which of the divine messengers said he, "at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." This coincidence of sentiment may be regarded as a presumption that that epistle was written by the apostle Paul. Some interpreters consider the words, "I have begotten thee," as referring, not to a resurrection to life, but to being raised to kingly power; it being not unusual to speak of the days of accession of kings to their thrones as their birth-days.\*

34. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.

This is a quotation from Isaiah lv. 3, where the prophet declares to the children of Israel, in the name of God, "I will make with you an everlasting covenant, even the sure mercies of David;" in which words is a reference to a covenant made with David, and often renewed, that some of his seed should sit upon his throne for ever. The sure mercies of David, then, are the mercies promised to David, which are sure; and the apostle's argument to prove that Christ rose from the dead is this, that this covenant must have been broken, if he had remained in the grave.

35. Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not, "*thou wilt not,*" suffer thy Holy One to see corruption;

36. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, "*after he had performed the will of God during his own life,*" fell asleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption:

37. But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.

The apostle reasons that David could not be the person referred to in the passage quoted, because he died and was turned into dust; and that there was no one in whom the words could be fulfilled, but Jesus, who lay only three days in the grave, and who could not, therefore, experience corruption. It is observable, that Paul, in this passage, speaks of death as a sleep not of the body, as distinct from the mind, but of the whole man, and that he repre-

\* Beza, Pearce, &c.

sents the whole person as experiencing corruption; his language, therefore, strongly favours the opinion of those who suppose that all consciousness is suspended at death.

38. Be it known unto you, therefore, brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins:

In the language of the writers of the New Testament and particularly of Paul, all mankind, whatever the moral character of individuals might be, were at this time sinners, i. e. no longer enjoyed the benefits of that covenant of favour and privilege by which the Jews were once distinguished. This they call an impure and unholy state, or a state of sin; and it is the great object of this apostle, in his epistle to the Romans, to prove that the Jews were reduced to this state, but that by embracing the gospel which was preached to them in the name of Christ, they were brought out of this state, or, speaking agreeably to the same language, that their sins were forgiven them. This is that forgiveness of sins to which he here refers.

39. And by him all that believe are justified, "*cleared,*" from all things from which ye could not be cleared by the law of Moses.

The law of Moses having been violated in its essential points by the Jewish nation, no longer secured to them the divine favour, but left them exposed to all the evils to which they are liable who are cast out of God's covenant: but by faith in Christ, to which he exhorts them, they would be received to the state of privilege which they had lost by their sins, and saved from the calamities which were hanging over the heads of the unbelieving Jews.

40. Beware, therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets:

Beware, lest you merit the reproachful language of one of the prophets to your fathers, which, though used on a different occasion, may be addressed to you in this case.

41. Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish, "*hide yourselves,*" i. e. from shame and confusion; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.

To refuse to believe a plain fact, supported by the clearest evidence, is an act of great folly, of which every reasonable man ought to be ashamed. Of this folly would they be guilty, who rejected the divine mission of Christ; of such unwise conduct, therefore, he warns them to beware.



## REFLECTIONS.

FROM the apostle's address to these Jews at Antioch, we see what abundant evidence there is of the divine mission and prophetic character of Jesus. Such a character corresponds with the peculiar circumstances of the Jewish people, who had been selected by God from the rest of mankind, to enjoy peculiar religious privileges. If a great prophet, therefore, is to be sent into the world, among whom can he so properly appear as among the Jews; the only people, who, for many ages, had been favoured with miraculous communications? Such an event corresponds, also, with other remarkable facts in their history, from which it appears, that God often interposed in an extraordinary manner for their benefit, by delivering them from Egypt, by nourishing them in the wilderness, by settling them in Canaan, and giving them judges and kings. One additional favour, after so many already bestowed, appears by no means improbable. The appearance of such a person had been foretold by other prophets, both of earlier and later date; by John the Baptist, who announced his immediate approach, and by Isaiah, who mentioned the family of which he should be born, even the seed of David.

The extraordinary personage thus announced, although opposed by the great body of the Jewish rulers and people, and cruelly put to death, could not be convicted of any crime; nay, his pretensions are completely justified by God's raising him from the dead. Of this event, those were the witnesses who are best qualified to furnish satisfactory testimony, his intimate friends and companions. These were sufficient to establish the truth of the fact, independently of any other evidence; but their testimony is also corroborated by several predictions which foretold such an event.

To these united arguments, who can refuse to yield assent, that is not deaf to the voice of reason, and the language of truth? To every candid and unprejudiced mind, which will judge of the truth of Christianity as of any other historical fact, they must, I conceive, carry irresistible conviction.

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42. AND as they, *i. e. the apostles*, went out of the synagogue, they besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath.

The words, "the Jews and the Gentiles," which occur in this verse in our version, are omitted in some of the best manuscripts and versions, and probably with good reason; for they seem rather to embarrass than to aid the sense.\*

43. Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed

\* See Griesbach, who omits them.

Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God, *i. e.* exhorted them to continue in the profession of the gospel.

44. And the next sabbath-day came almost the whole city together, to hear the word of God.

45. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.

They contradicted Paul in asserting the divine mission of his Master, and spoke of him in injurious and reproachful language, which is the proper signification of blaspheming; calling him a deceiver and impostor.

To this conduct, the Jews were instigated by envy. What awakened their jealousy, was to hear the same terms offered by the apostle to the Gentiles, as to themselves, and to see them treated with the same respect. To those who had been taught to regard themselves as the peculiar people of God, and to look upon the Gentiles with contempt, this could not fail to be highly grating. A system which thus counteracted their favourite prejudices could not be of divine origin, and was, therefore, rejected by them.

46. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, "*using great freedom of speech, said,*" It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

When the apostles were commissioned to preach the gospel to the world, they were directed to begin at Jerusalem, *i. e.* to offer it first to the Jews; for the language of Christ to them was, that repentance and remission of sins were to be preached in his name amongst all nations, beginning at Jerusalem, Luke xxiv. 47. This preference given to the Jews, they considered as a direction for their conduct in other instances; and accordingly, wherever they came addressed themselves first to that people, and only to the Gentiles when they found their first overtures rejected. When Paul and Barnabas declare in this passage, that they would turn from one to the other, they do not mean that they would never offer the gospel to the Jews again; but only that, in the present instance, they would endeavour to make no more proselytes among the Jews at Antioch, seeing they had shown themselves unteachable and obstinate, but preach, thenceforwards, to the Gentiles of that place, who had shown a better disposition to receive their message.

47. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that

thou shouldst be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.

These words are taken from a prophecy of Isaiah, xlix. 6, in which the prophet complains, in the name of Christ, of want of success. "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought:" to which God replies, that if the issue of his labours should be the most unfavourable that could be supposed; if Israel should not be gathered, yet he should not fail of his reward; but so far would his labours be from being fruitless in regard to others, that he should be successful in raising up the tribes of Jacob, and instrumental, likewise, in enlightening and saving the Gentiles. From this passage, Paul and Barnabas might justly infer, that the Christian religion was intended for the benefit of the heathens, as well as of the Jews; yet it must be acknowledged, that it contains no direct command to preach the gospel to them. Such a command, however, Paul had received at his conversion, as the other apostles also had, when they received their commissions from their Master.

48. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord;

They extolled the gospel of God, which extended its benign influences to them, as well as to the Jews, and which could not fail, on this account, to recommend itself to their esteem.

And as many as were ordained, "*prepared*," for eternal life, believed.

Many interpreters\* have shown that the words, "ordained to eternal life," which appear in our common version in this place, and which seem to imply some decree of Heaven, necessarily forming them for eternal life, are not justified by the original. The proper meaning of the word is *disposed*; and the sacred writer seems to have intended nothing more by the expression, than to contrast the temper and disposition of the Gentiles with those of the Jews. The latter were adverse to the offer of eternal life, and, from motives of pride and envy, rejected it with scorn; but many of the Gentiles were well disposed to the doctrine, and therefore believed.

49. And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region, *i. e. through the neighbourhood of Antioch and Pisidia.*

50. But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coast.

By devout and honourable women in this passage, we are not to understand persons of distinguished piety and worth; for persons

\* Pearce, Benson, &c.

of this character would not have behaved thus ; but merely female proselytes to the Jewish religion, or worshippers of the true God, and persons of rank. These the Jews easily instigated to employ their influence with their husbands, who were still Gentiles, to persecute the apostles, by representing them as seditious and dangerous men. By this influence, and the assistance of the magistrates, they were enabled to drive them from the country. This ill usage, however, did not provoke Paul and Barnabas to call for fire from heaven, or to utter any anathemas against them. They satisfied themselves with declaring, in the mild manner recommended by their Master, that they abandoned them to their fate.

51. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came to Iconium.

This was as much as to say, We desire no farther intercourse with you : keep to yourselves what belongs to you ; we wish not to share in the smallest particle.

52. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

The joy which they felt was the consequence of possessing miraculous gifts, and of being assured that they were chosen into the family of God.

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THE advice which these apostles gave to their new converts is equally proper for Christians of the present day—to continue in the grace of God ; to persevere in the profession of the gospel, in the midst of all temptations to desert it, notwithstanding the example of the great, the arguments of those who are deemed wise, and the wit and ridicule of the profane. To be ashamed of the gospel from these motives, while we are assured of its divine origin and happy tendency, would be to be ashamed of our highest honour and noblest privilege ; to accept of any other system in its place, would be to exchange light for darkness, the wisdom of God for the wisdom of man.

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SECTION XXI.

*Paul and Barnabas being persecuted in Iconium, flee to Lystra and Derbe.*

ACTS. xiv. 1—7.

1. AND it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude, both of the Jews, and also of the Greeks, believed.

2. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.

Iconium was a town of Lycaonia, in which, as well as in the other principal towns of Asia, was a considerable number of Jews. In this place they possessed no political power, but they had influence enough to sow suspicion and jealousy in the minds of the Gentiles against the preachers of the gospel.

3. Long time, however, abode they, speaking boldly in the Lord, "*about the Lord,*" who gave testimony unto the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

The Lord here spoken of, is Christ Jesus our Lord; and the word of his grace is that gracious doctrine of God which was entrusted to him, to be dispensed to the world, and by him to the apostles. To the divine origin of this doctrine he gave testimony by the miracles which he enabled them to work in his name. From this passage it appears, as well as from others in the book of Acts, that miraculous powers, although undoubtedly the gift of God originally, were considered as coming immediately from Christ.

4. But the multitude of the city was divided, and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.

5. And when there was an assault made, *rather an attempt made,* both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, "*to abuse them,*" and to stone them,

6. They were aware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lyeth round about :

7. And there they preached the gospel.

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#### REFLECTIONS.

1. THE conduct of the Jews in rejecting the gospel, in persecuting those who preached it, or stirring up others to persecution, affords a melancholy example of the force of prejudice in blinding the eyes and hardening the heart: so contrary to their taste was the idea of a suffering Messiah and a spiritual kingdom, that the force of miracles and the voice of the prophets could not overcome their objections. How base and odious the spirit by which they are animated! What evil could it be to the Jews that Gentiles

were honoured with equal privileges, and placed on a level with themselves? Must their happiness be necessarily diminished, if others possess an equal portion of good? Ought they not rather to rejoice that the divine bounty, which was once confined to a single people, is now become so much more extensive, that provision is made for promoting the virtue and piety of thousands, who seemed to be before neglected, and who will, by these means, be saved from destruction? But they are actuated by the spirit of envy, and that evil passion converts all these causes for joy into so many sources of pain. See by what wicked passions men may be governed, and to what wicked actions they may be instigated, under the idea of a zeal for religion—even to hate, to assault, and stone innocent and virtuous characters. Let Christians take care how they foster the delusive idea that they are the peculiar favourites of Heaven; that its regards are limited to them, and that those who think differently from them, are necessarily its enemies, the objects of its aversion and hatred. It is an idea which inevitably leads to pride and envy, to hatred and cruelty. Let all men beware how they shut their eyes against the light, and refuse to listen to what may be advanced against that which they deem established truth; for under the idea of preserving the truth, they may be cherishing the most fatal errors.

2. While we admire the perseverance and fortitude of these first preachers, in publishing the gospel in the midst of much opposition and danger, let us also take encouragement from their success. Wherever they went, they gained proselytes, notwithstanding the opposition which they encountered, and those proselytes procured more, until, in the course of time, the whole country was converted to Christianity. Thus, agreeably to the prediction of their Master, the grain of mustard-seed became a great tree, and a little leaven leavened the whole mass. Let not the friends of truth, then, who are engaged in like arduous struggles, be discouraged in their exertions. If they find many, or even the majority, blind, obstinate, and violent, yet, in every place, there are a few of a different description, whose minds are open to conviction, who will receive the truth with joy, as soon as it is proposed, and who will communicate the valuable prize to others. Let them renew their labours, therefore, in every place, and persevere in their endeavours to gain an audience of the candid and well-disposed, not doubting the force of truth or the favour of Providence, while they are engaged in so benevolent a work.

## SECTION XXII.

*Cure of the cripple at Lystra. Paul is stoned by the people. He returns with Barnabas to Antioch, after visiting several cities of Asia.*

ACTS xiv. 8—28.

8. AND there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, *unable to use them*, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked.

9. The same heard Paul speak, "*was hearing Paul speak*," who, steadfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed,

10. Said, with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet; and he leaped and walked.

"Perceiving that he had faith to be healed." These words plainly imply that if he had not had faith, the favour of being healed might not have been granted to him, which corresponds very well with the language of Christ, who often said to the person upon whom he wrought a miraculous cure, Thy faith hath saved thee. Agreeably to this idea, we are likewise told, that in some places Christ did not many mighty works, because the people believed not. Miraculous cures might sometimes be performed for all alike; but in general they were confined to those who believed in the divine mission of Christ and his apostles; God not choosing to honour unbelievers with a display of his power. The miracle on this cripple seems to have been performed while Paul was speaking to the multitude, and would be the more striking for its being sudden and unexpected.

11. And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying, in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.

12. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, "*Mercury*," because he was the chief speaker.

The miracle which had been just wrought, evidently exceeded the power of man to produce, and must have some supernatural origin. The Lycaonians, therefore, could think of no better method of accounting for it than by supposing, what was indeed no uncommon thing according to their mythology, that two of

their gods had assumed a human shape, and were come down amongst them. As Paul was the chief speaker, and Mercury was the messenger of the gods and the patron of eloquence, they supposed that the apostle was this deity, and that Barnabas, who said but little, represented Jupiter, the chief of the heathen gods, whose companion and interpreter, Mercury frequently was.

13. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, or, “*the guardian god of their city,*”<sup>\*</sup> brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people :

That this was the usual method of paying honour to their gods, is well known to those who are at all acquainted with the history of the heathen world. Nothing, therefore, could afford a stronger proof of the faith of this people in the divinity of Paul and Barnabas, than their readiness to offer them the same homage as they paid to those whom they esteemed gods. The gates here mentioned, were not the gates of the city, but of the building where these preachers resided ; at this place, it seems, the people assembled to offer sacrifice.

14. Which, when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran out<sup>†</sup> among the people, crying out,

15. And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things ? We also are men of like passions with you, “*We are men alike mortal with yourselves,*”<sup>‡</sup> and preach unto you, that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, who made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein :

16. Who, in times past, suffered all nations to walk in their own ways, *i. e. sent no prophet amongst them, as he had done among the Jews.*

17. Nevertheless, he left not himself without witness, in that he did good from heaven, and gave you<sup>§</sup> rain and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness, “*with food and good cheer.*”

18. And with these words scarce restrained they the people that they had not done sacrifice unto them.

“We are men alike mortal with yourselves.” This undoubtedly is the apostle’s meaning, as is evident from the connexion, and not, as we render the phrase, “of like passions ;” for he could never intend to assert that himself and Barnabas were governed by

<sup>\*</sup> Wakefield’s Translation and Silva Crit. Pt. I. p. 33.

<sup>†</sup> Griesbach.

<sup>‡</sup> Pearce.

<sup>§</sup> Griesbach.



the same vicious passions with idolatrous Gentiles. The same thing is likewise evident from the original, which may be literally rendered, “of like sufferings,” referring, principally, to the sufferings of death. To those the apostle and his companion were alike subject with other men, and therefore, had no pretensions to that immortality which was the distinguishing characteristic of divinity.

The heathen gods are called vanities in the Old Testament, (1 Kings xvi. 13,) and thence by the apostles, because they were the vain inventions of men: they were gods which had no real existence.

In this passage, the apostle has given us an excellent specimen of the arguments from the light of nature, for the existence of a Deity. He has likewise shown, what indeed we might have known without being expressly informed of it, that it was one great object of his preaching, to turn men from idolatry to the worship of one God.

19. And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded, “*gained over,*” the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.

20. But as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city; and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

The words of the historian, who says that they supposed him to be dead, seem to imply that he was not really so; and yet, as he had been stoned, and dragged through the streets out of the town, it is highly probable that he must be dead, the more especially as it is not likely that his enemies would leave him before they had satisfactory evidence that they had accomplished their purpose. While in this state, and surrounded by the disciples, who were viewing his corpse with deep concern, he rose to life again by the power of Christ. That there was some miracle in the case, is evident from his being able to walk immediately into the city, and to leave it the next day, when, according to the usual course of things, he must have been more disqualified for moving than at first. Alluding to this fact, he says, in the second epistle to the Corinthians, xi. 25, “Once was I stoned.”

21. And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, “*made a great many disciples,*”\* they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and to Antioch,

22. Confirming the minds of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that, “*seeing that,*” we must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God.

\* Wakefield and Worsley.

They showed them that persecution was no more than what might be expected from the purity of the Christian institution, and the predictions of its author. They exhorted them, therefore, to continue in the profession of Christianity, notwithstanding these evils.

23. And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, in whom they believed.

These elders seem to have been chosen by the apostles, from among the most eminent of the first converts to Christianity in every society, in order to preside over it, and deliver instruction during their absence. This was a necessary and wise regulation in the first ages of the gospel, however it might be afterwards abused. This verse has occasioned violent debates among the advocates for the different forms of church-government; some maintaining that the election was made solely by the apostles, and intended as a model of the election of ministers by ministers in all succeeding generations; while others maintain from the nature of the term made use of in the Greek, that they must have been chosen by the people: but although it should be allowed that the apostles chose these elders or ministers, it will not follow that those who are destitute of the same divine authority ought to be invested with the same privilege.

These elders are said to have been commended to the Lord in whom they believed, that is, as some suppose, to God, who was able to protect them from all danger, but, as others imagine, with more reason, I conceive, to Christ, who is often called the Lord; and the design of Paul and Barnabas seems to have been to ask for these elders those extraordinary powers which were necessary for their preservation in a season of persecution, or for their success in preaching the gospel. This language corresponds with other passages in this book, which represent Christ as the source whence miraculous powers proceeded, after he had ascended up, as well as while he continued in the world, and rendered it proper for the apostles and other teachers, who derived the power of working miracles from Christ, to address him on the subject, but lays no foundation for addressing similar petitions to him at the present day, when those powers have long ceased. It was to this power that Christ seems to have referred, when he said to his disciples, as he was about to leave them, Lo, I am with you always to the end of the age.

24. And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia.

25. And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia;

26. And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the favour of God for the work which they fulfilled.

27. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.

28. And there they abode long time with the disciples.

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### REFLECTIONS.

1. LET us often and seriously weigh the description here given of the Deity, as the living God who made heaven and earth, and the sea and all things therein, and as the source of all our pleasures and comforts. Let us remember that in this character he is entitled to the highest reverence, and to our supreme and constant affection. When experiencing the goodness of Providence in fruitful seasons, in particular, or tasting his bounty in the plenty with which our board is covered, let us trace all these blessings to his hand, and acknowledge them as his gifts. This will make every repast an act of devotion to God, and give double relish to all our pleasures. To have prophets and instructors, is highly desirable, in order to lead us to a more perfect acquaintance with God and our duty, by explaining his nature, and pointing out the proofs of his existence and government; but these are not absolutely necessary. Lectures of theology and devotion are daily read to us by every event of our lives, by every object which we behold. If we attend not to these instructions, we are left inexcusable.

2. From the horror which these two apostles manifest at idolatry, let us learn to be careful that we do not fall into this gross error. It was no light mistake in their apprehension: it destroyed the very foundation of all genuine piety and devotion, by depriving the Deity of his essential and incommunicable perfections. They rend their clothes with grief, and manifest the greatest eagerness to dissuade the Lycaonians from so weak and impious an act; yet the Lycaonians are not the only persons who call for such expressions of sorrow. It is a lamentable truth that by far the greater part of the Christian world is, at the present day, guilty of the very idolatry which they are so ready to condemn in this people: for they ascribe divine attributes and pay divine honours to a man subject to the same frailty and mortality as themselves, and one who actually died, but whom they call God in the likeness of man, or God and man united together. With whatever specious pretences such practices may be covered, they are nothing short of gross idolatry, and would have been viewed with as much horror by the apostles as the conduct of the Lycaonians.

3. In this history we see a striking example of what little value is the favour of the multitude. Him, whom this deluded

people had once been ready to worship as a god, they afterwards treat as worse than man; they stone him with their own hands, and drag him through the streets; not allowing him the respect which was paid to the vilest malefactors, that of interment. Let us learn hence not to make popular favour the object of our pursuit, much less sacrifice to it any principle of truth and duty. It is as changeable as the wind: it may be enjoyed to-day and lost to-morrow. It is only to be acquired, frequently, by flattering the prejudices and countenancing the vices of mankind, and is often forfeited by the noblest acts of integrity and benevolence.

## SECTION XXIII.

*Disputes respecting the observance of the Mosaic law. The apostles decide that it is not incumbent on Gentile converts.*

ACTS xv. 1—35

1. AND certain men which came down from Judæa, taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

It was not upon circumcision, in itself considered, that they so strongly insisted; but upon that rite as expressive of an obligation to observe the whole law of Moses. In this light, circumcision was regarded by the Jews, and in the same light did the apostles view it; for Paul says to the Galatians, v. 3, I testify to every one of you that is circumcised that he is a debtor to do the whole law. By the phrase, "being saved," used in this verse, the Jews did not refer to final salvation in a future life, which was not the object of the law, but to deliverance from a heathen state, which is called salvation, and being introduced into the liberty of the people of God. To enjoy this privilege, these Jews maintained it was necessary to observe the law of Moses; but Paul and Barnabas asserted that it was sufficient for this purpose to profess faith in Christ, without conforming to the law.

2. When, therefore, Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined, that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, *i. e.* some of those who maintained the opposite opinion, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

Paul, who was once as bigoted as the rest of his countrymen, tells us, that he was made acquainted with the privileges of the Gentiles by revelation, probably from Christ himself, from whom he derived the knowledge of the gospel. "Be it known unto you, that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery," Eph. iii.

3; but some of the converted Jews were not willing to admit his authority upon this subject, and persecuted him with great violence for this opinion: he maintained the rights of the Gentiles, however, with invariable perseverance and intrepidity, both in his discourses and writings. On the present occasion, he is willing to refer the question to the opinion of the apostles and brethren at Jerusalem.

3. And being brought on their way, "*being deputed,*" by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles, and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.

The apostles were first encouraged to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, by the conversion of Cornelius, in consequence of a divine vision to Peter; but they do not seem to have undertaken to do it, until Paul went among them to the neighbourhood of Antioch, encouraged by the advice of Christ to him at his conversion, or, perhaps, by a particular revelation. The conversion of Gentiles, therefore, was new and unexpected intelligence to the brethren, and excited in their minds unfeigned joy.

4. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received, "*they were joyfully received,*" of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them, "*what they and God had done,*" *the miracles which God had wrought, and the services which they had performed.*

This was Paul's third journey to Jerusalem, seventeen years after his conversion: so long was it before much progress had been made in converting the Gentiles, and before this controversy arose respecting their conformity to the law of Moses. The words of the next verse, as they are at present translated, seem to contain an account of a party formed at Jerusalem, of the same principles with those at Antioch, who were for imposing the law upon the neck of the Gentiles: but they are, in reality, nothing more than the report of Paul and Barnabas to the church of the conduct of those at Antioch, who had been the occasion of their taking this journey.

5. "But there arose up, "*there had risen up,*" *i. e. in foreign parts,* certain of the sect of the Pharisees who believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."

This was the language of the believers at Antioch, who opposed Paul; they are mentioned before as men who came down from Judæa; but we here learn, what indeed we might have supposed before, that they were Pharisees, since that sect was the most zealous for the law.

6. And the apostles and elders came together, for to consider of this matter.

7. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Brethren, ye know how that a good while ago, God made choice among us, that the Gentiles, by my mouth, should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

8. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as he did unto us ;

9. And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

Peter endeavours to prove, that the Gentiles who believed were in a state of favour and privilege, as well as the Jews; and his argument for this purpose is God's having given them the Holy Spirit, or poured out upon them miraculous powers, as was the case in the instance of Cornelius, to which he himself had been witness. This was a proof of their faith in the gospel; since it was a favour that would never have been conferred, except upon a believer. This faith is said afterwards to purify the heart; this refers, not to any moral efficacy of their faith, but its cleansing them from that uncleanness which adhered to them as idolaters and unbelievers. In allusion to this, the vision said to Peter, "what God hath cleansed, that call thou not common or unclean."

10. Now, therefore, why tempt ye God, "*why try ye God,*" to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear ?

Why try ye the patience of the Divine being, by treating the Gentiles in a manner so contrary to his own conduct towards them ? so contrary, likewise, to the principles of humanity, which teaches us not to lay upon another what we are unwilling or unable to bear ourselves. It was certainly true of the ancient Jews, that they were not able to bear the yoke of the law, for they were continually forsaking it to worship idols; it was also true of the modern Jews, who had so corrupted or broken their law, as to cast themselves wholly, as a people, out of the divine covenant, and to reduce themselves to the state of the Gentiles. By believing in Christ, however, they were reinstated in the divine favour, not on the ground of merit but of mercy.

11. But we believe as well as those men, *Paul and Barnabas*, that they, *the Gentiles*, are saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I have given what appears to me the sense of this passage, and

what the language of the original will certainly bear. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is the favour of God in the gospel of Christ: by this favour Peter expresses his persuasion, that the Gentiles are saved. The apostle is speaking of what has actually taken place, and not of what will be in future; and he refers to the sentiments of Paul and Barnabas, and not to those of the Gentiles.

12. Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.

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### REFLECTIONS.

1. WE may observe, how early a spirit of imposing doctrines and practices began in the church, and what mischief it was likely to produce. The Jews will not associate with Gentiles, nor allow them the name of brethren, unless they conform exactly to their faith and manners, unless they submit to every rite and to every ceremony which they had been taught to regard as sacred and important; thus imposing restraints upon their brethren, which it would be impossible for them to bear, and placing a bar in the way of all improvement in religion, by requiring every generation of men rigidly to adhere to the practices of their ancestors. The same spirit still prevails in the world, and has the same pernicious tendency. There are men who are for imposing their own opinions, their own feelings and language, upon others, as the only genuine standard of religion, as the only terms of acceptance with God. Those who cannot conform to it they will not acknowledge as brethren; they anathematize, and condemn, and treat them with the most opprobrious language; limiting the favour of the Almighty and their own benevolence to the few who constitute their own party, and cherishing a spirit of aversion and hatred to the rest of the human race; compelling mankind, as far as they are able, to retain a system of faith erroneous in the extreme, merely because it is that in which they have been educated.

But, blessed be God, true Christianity breathes a different spirit; it lays but little stress upon ceremonies, and allows of great diversity of sentiment in articles of belief, if there be but genuine faith in Christ; it thus tends to cement into one body the various classes of mankind, instead of dividing them. This spirit let us cherish and cultivate, both in ourselves and others, with the utmost care, and discountenance every appearance of pride and bigotry.

2. We learn, from this portion of history, the utility and necessity of disputes on religious matters. They are necessary to correct the errors of the mistaken, to oppose the usurpation of the

arbitrary and assuming, and to defend the cause of truth. The apostolic age was not exempt from contention, and the world still enjoys the benefit of the firmness and resolution of the preachers of the gospel. Had no disputes then taken place, we must at this time have been observers of the law of Moses, and not Christians at all, being Jewish Christians.\* Had no disputes taken place at a subsequent period, we must have been what our ancestors were, idolaters and papists. If the same zeal in opposing error and usurpation had been manifested in all ages, which was displayed by the apostles, popery would never have raised its head; but some becoming indifferent to the truth, while others were zealous in propagating error, a huge mass of Jewish ceremonies or heathen superstitions were added to Christianity, which destroyed every appearance of the original system. Let us not, therefore, lay aside weapons of defence, because they have sometimes been applied to a bad purpose; let disputes be conducted with candour and good temper, and we shall have nothing to fear from them: they will become the source of liberty and knowledge.

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13. AND after they, *i. e.* Paul and Barnabas, had held their peace, James answered, saying, Brethren, hearken unto me:

14. Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name; *referring to the conversion of Cornelius by Peter.*

15. And to this agree the words of the prophets.

Peter had already mentioned a very powerful argument in favour of the admission of Gentiles to the privileges of the Christian church, without conformity to the law, the circumstance of their receiving the Holy Spirit, or miraculous powers, upon faith in Christ alone. This afforded a strong presumption that God did not require from them the observance of Jewish rites, since the marks of his favour were bestowed without them. The apostle James has recourse to another argument of no small weight, upon the same subject, the circumstance of the call of the Gentiles being foretold by the prophets.

As it is written,

16. After this, I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down, and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up.

17. That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is

\* Galatians, v. 2.



called, “*who are called by name,*” *i. e. who are called my people*, saith the Lord, who doth all these things.

18. Known unto God are all his works\* from the beginning of the world.

These words are taken from the book of Amos, in which the recovery of the glory of the house of David by some illustrious person of that family, and, by his means, the conversion of the Gentiles, are foretold. It seems to be foretold, likewise, that they would be the people of God without becoming Jews; for Gentiles are spoken of in it as called by his name. The apostle subjoins to his quotation, that known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. This may prevent all surprise at such predictions, since God foresees all things, the minutest events as well as the most important.

19. Wherefore my sentence is, “*my opinion is,*” that we trouble not them which from among the Gentiles are turned to God;

20. But that we write unto them that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.

21. For Moses of old time hath in every city, them that preach him, being read in the synagogue every sabbath day.

“From pollutions of idols,” *i. e.* from things relating to idols, which cause pollution. By these, the apostles evidently mean meats offered to idols; for it is so expressed in the letter which was written on his recommendation. Persons might partake in two ways of meats offered to idols, according to the current forms of idolatry which prevailed in the heathen world; for sometimes one of the company took part of the flesh, and threw it into the fire, accompanied with libations of wine, as an offering to some god, who was invoked upon the occasion; at other times, those who had offered sacrifice in the temple, invited their friends to partake with them of the flesh of the victim, at an entertainment which they had provided, or sent it to them to their own houses. To partake of entertainments in either of these ways, which had so evident a relation to idolatry, was by the Jews justly considered as participating in idolatrous worship, and as producing pollution; and they felt exceedingly averse from associating with those who had been guilty of it. To prevent offence from being given to the Jews, the Gentiles are advised to abstain from such entertainments.

“And from fornication.” By fornication in this place, some understand that irregular intercourse between the sexes, which took place in heathen temples, and made a part of their worship; but I con-

\* The words *ἔσται τῷ Θεῷ πάντες τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ* are omitted by Griesbach.—*Editor.*

ceive that the word is here to be understood, not in its natural, but in its metaphorical sense, and that it refers to every species of idolatry.

It is well known, that in the Jewish Scriptures the connexion between God and his people Israel is compared to the marriage contract, and that any violation of it, by a regard shown to the heathen gods, is spoken of as adultery and fornication. Hence it came to pass that the word fornication was in familiar use amongst the Jews for idolatry. Thus we find them saying to Christ, when he told them that they were of their father, the devil, "we be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God;" i. e. we are not idolaters, but the people of God. In the same metaphorical sense, is this word used in the book of Revelation.\*

When, therefore, the apostle James proposes, that it should be recommended to the Gentile churches, to abstain from fornication, after mentioning eating things offered to idols, he must mean every species of idolatry, or rather, what might appear to countenance or support it, of which partaking of meat offered to idols was only one instance.

"And from things strangled, and from blood." These two things are closely connected together, as well as the two preceding. To eat an animal that is strangled, is to eat its blood, a thing which was strictly prohibited to the Jews, but generally practised by the heathens. To prevent the horror which this would occasion, and to enable the two bodies of people to coalesce into one church, they are now directed to abstain from it.

The reason assigned for these prohibitory recommendations is, that Moses has those who preach him in every city; that is, there are Jews in every place, to whom such things would be highly offensive. This shows that what the apostle recommended was adapted to the times, and only regarded as temporary.

22. Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren;

The latter became the intimate friend and companion of Paul, as we find from this history. Some, indeed, have supposed that he is the author of the history.†

23. And they wrote letters by them after this manner: The apostles, and elders, and brethren send greeting, "*wish health,*" unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch, and Syria, and Cilicia:

24. Forasmuch as we have heard that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, "*with doctrines,*" subverting your souls, "*un-*

\* Schleusner's Lexicon, Verb. II: *εἰσελάττειν*.

† Evanson's Dissonance, p. 106, & c. first edition.

*settling your minds,”* saying ye must be circumcised, and keep the law, to whom we gave no such commandment :

It seems hence, as if they had pretended to speak in the name of the church at Jerusalem.

25. It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

26. Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, *i. e. for the sake of his religion.*

27. We have sent you, therefore, Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth.

28. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us, *our own natural reason and the miraculous powers communicated to us convince us that it is proper,* to lay upon you no greater burthen than these necessary things ; *not necessary to salvation, but to the peace of the church ;*

29. That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication ; from which, if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

30. So when they were dismissed, “*when they departed,*” they came to Antioch, and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle,

31. Which, when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation, “*for this encouragement.*”

32. And Judas and Silas, being prophets, “*teachers,*” also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.

The word prophets, in this passage, evidently means no more than teachers, and not persons who predicted future events, as the term is generally understood ; for all that they did, was exhorting and confirming the brethren, which was a work of instruction, and not of prophecy.

33. And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go, “*they departed,*” in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.

They were received at first with joy, and now departed from them on the best terms: so far were they from taking offence at what had been done.

34. Notwithstanding, it pleased Silas to abide there still.

This he did from attachment to Paul, as it afterwards appeared; for he accompanied him in his travels.

35. Paul also and Barnabas, continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others.

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### REFLECTIONS.

1. CHRISTIANS may learn instructions from the caution with which the Jews avoided every action which might be construed into an approbation of idolatry. They would not partake of those things which were offered to idols, although sent to their own houses, because they were regarded by the heathen as connected with religion; much less would they appear to countenance the worship of the temples, by honouring them with their attendance. Similar conduct becomes Christians of the present day, in respect to that fundamental article of religion, the worship of one God, every deviation from which, in modern, as well as in ancient times, has been followed by many debasing superstitions, and a great corruption of morals: we cannot, therefore, be too careful in guarding against a practice which has always been followed by such pernicious consequences. The first and great commandment is, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, and thou shalt love him with all thy heart; there is one God, and none other but he;" when false objects of worship are joined with the true, the affections must necessarily be divided, and the heart estranged.

2. Christians would do well to learn an example of moderation from the conduct of the apostles and early Christians. Although they observed the law themselves, because accustomed to it from their earliest infancy, they did not require the observance of it from others, who had not been bred in the same habits, and to whom it would have proved painful and burthensome. Of some degree of conformity to the law, indeed, they approved; such as might be complied with without trouble, and would tend to soften the prejudices of the zealous Jews: but this conformity they do not authoritatively enjoin, but only recommend. Those who comply, do well, but those who refuse, are not condemned. "This gentle manner of concluding their letter," says Dr. Doddridge, "was worthy of the apostolic wisdom and goodness. Too soon did succeeding councils, of inferior authority, change it for the style of anathemas; forms which have, I doubt not, proved an occasion of consecrating some of the worst passions of the human mind under sacred names, and which,

like some ill-adjusted weapons of war, are most likely to hurt the hand from which they are thrown."

Christians may also learn hence, that to comply with the prejudices of mankind, where it can be done without injuring their own consciences, or misleading the judgments of others, is not only innocent, but laudable, as it tends to soften animosities and to produce peace.

3. Let us ever keep in mind the important truth which the apostle James has suggested, when he says, that known unto God are all his works; for hence it will follow, that under his government, no event can happen which has not been foreseen or intended; that there is nothing accidental or fortuitous; that there is nothing which can oppose or counteract his designs; but that every thing is contrived, even to the minutest circumstance, so as to favour the accomplishment of his purposes. Let this idea be continually present to our minds, and it will promote peace and tranquillity under the greatest personal sufferings, and under the most painful apprehensions for the public welfare.

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#### SECTION XXIV.

*Paul and Barnabas determine to visit the churches. Their dissension and separation.*

ACTS xv. 36—41. xvi. 1—5.

36. AND some days after, Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again, and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do, "*how they go on.*"

The object proposed by the journey was, to inquire about their spiritual welfare; to see whether any errors had crept in among them, whether they remained steady in the profession of the gospel, in the midst of opposition and danger; in short, what occasion they had for reproof or encouragement.

37. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.

This person, who was the same with the evangelist, is called sister's son to Barnabas, Col. iv. 10. The circumstance of his being a relation might bias the judgment of his uncle in his favour, and incline him the more readily to overlook his ill behaviour when in a like situation before; but Paul had not the same motives for partiality, and, therefore, refused the offer which he now made of his services a second time.

38. But Paul thought not good to take him with

them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.

We are informed in the thirteenth chapter, that Paul and Barnabas, in their first circuit to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, had for a short time John for their assistant; but when they came to Perga, in Pamphylia, he departed from them, and returned to Jerusalem, discouraged, probably, by the difficulty and danger of the work. Paul was, therefore, naturally afraid that he would manifest the same timidity again, and thus desert them when they stood most in need of his assistance.

39. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they parted asunder, one from the other, and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus :

40. And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace, "*the favour,*" of God.

In the opinion which he entertained of the unsuitness of Mark for being their companion in preaching the gospel, Paul was mistaken, and he had the magnanimity to retract his opinion, and to acknowledge his mistake: for after this time, we find Mark in his company, and recommended by him to the churches. He sends salutations from him to the Colossians, and exhorts them to receive him when he should come. To Timothy he says, "Take Mark, and bring him with thee; for he is profitable to me for the ministry."

41. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

This effect he would be able to produce, by repeating the truths which he had before taught, or by working fresh miracles.

1. THEN came he to Derbe and Lystra, and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek :

2. Which was well reported of, by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium.

In the second epistle to Timothy, Paul thus writes; "Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy when I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois and thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded that in thee also." "Here we have a fair unforced example of coincidence;" I quote the words of Dr. Paley.\* "In the history, Timothy was the son of a Jewess that believed; in the epistle, Paul applauds the faith that dwelt in his

\* Horæ Paulinæ, pp. 356, 348.

mother Eunice ; in the history it is said of the mother, that she was a Jewess, and believed ; of the father, that he was a Greek. Now when it is said of the mother alone that she believed, the father being nevertheless mentioned in the same sentence, we are led to suppose of the father that he did not believe, i. e. either that he was dead, or that he remained unconverted. Agreeably hereunto, while praise is bestowed in the epistle upon one parent and upon her sincerity in the faith, no notice is taken of the other. The mention of the grandmother is the addition of a circumstance not found in the history ; but it is a circumstance, which, as well as the names of the parties, might naturally be expected to be known to the apostle, though overlooked by his historian. In the same epistle St. Paul says of him, that from a child he had known the Holy Scriptures. This is accounted for in the history, when it is said that his mother was a Jewess : perhaps he was not less likely to be carefully instructed in them, for that his mother alone professed that religion.\*

3. Him would Paul have to go forth with him ; and took and circumcised him, because of the Jews which were in those quarters : for they knew all that his father was a Greek.

As they knew that his father was a Greek, they would conclude that he had not been circumcised, and, therefore, be offended by seeing him in the company of Paul, and employed with him in preaching the gospel. The conduct of Paul on this occasion, has been thought by some to furnish a proof that he regarded the law of Moses as of perpetual obligation to the Jews ; since he recommended to a Jew to conform to it in one of its most distinguishing rites. This, however, seems to be inferring more from his conduct than it will warrant : but it appears as if Paul and the other apostles thought it enough to represent the law of Moses in their writings as abolished, and soon to be laid aside by the destruction of their polity and temple, while, to prevent the Jews from taking umbrage at their conduct, they conformed to it themselves, and recommended it to be observed by all of Jewish extraction. In another case, where the Jews required Titus, who was a Greek by descent, to be circumcised, as a mark of subjection to the law, we know that Paul resolutely refused to gratify their wishes : † whether the present compliance with the prejudices of the Jews was proper, some persons may perhaps question.

4. And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.

5. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.

\* *Horæ Paulinæ*, p. 349.

† *Galatians*, ii. 3, 4.

Had the Gentiles been required to observe the law of Moses, many of the new converts would have given up their profession of Christianity in disgust, and many others been prevented from joining them; but, by the wise determination of the church at Jerusalem, both these evils were avoided; the first converts were retained, and many new ones added to their number.

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### REFLECTIONS.

1. From this history we learn that great and virtuous characters may differ, and that those differences may proceed to contention: for such is the situation of Paul and Barnabas, each of them pleading with earnestness for the excellence of his own plan, and for the insufficiency or impropriety of that which is recommended by his friend: yet their difference is accompanied with no hatred or ill-will; it produces no disgust with the work in which they are engaged. They separate with mutual esteem; they continue to devote themselves to the same benevolent employment of instructing mankind, although in different ways, and prosecute their work with the same zeal. This controversy reveals no secret, which betrays the bad conduct or evil designs of one of the parties, as contentions among the wicked have uniformly done; no plot for imposing upon the credulity of mankind, no scheme of private interest or ambition, pursued under colour of zeal for the public welfare. Such has been the usual effect of contentions and separations amongst others, which have proved fatal to the undertaking in which they were engaged; but as nothing of this kind occurs here, it is a proof that nothing of a private or secret nature entered into the views of Paul and Barnabas. Thus it is, that we gain evidence for the truth of the gospel-history from the concurring testimony of the first teachers, and especially from their holding the same language under every other variety of opinion.

2. We see what advantage Christianity derives from the separation of those things from it, which do not belong to the system. To have imposed the law of Moses upon all converts, would have been gratifying to the Jews, but would have given disgust to the Gentiles, and proved a great obstacle to the success of the gospel: to have retained it, would have been a constant source of contention and dispute, of rancour and hatred. By rejecting it, the apostles preserved the good will of those who were already converted, and prepared the way for the conversion of many more. The churches were established in the faith, and increased in number daily.

The like benefit would arise to the gospel of Christ by our separating from it many other doctrines and rites, which have been added to it by the folly or wickedness of mankind. By such errors and additions, inquisitive and thoughtful minds are disgusted, and many are induced to reject Christianity altogether, or prevented from embracing it; and while they are retained, we must expect that unbelievers will increase and abound.



Let all those, therefore, who wish well to Christianity, exert all their influence to purify it from every foreign admixture, from every thing which is not essential to its nature. For this purpose, let them make an undisguised profession of the truth themselves, and aid every scheme for communicating it to others. In doing this they may awaken the fears of some, who may be apprehensive that by such proceedings they are taking from Christianity every thing that rendered it interesting, or even undermining its foundations; but let them not be deterred by such fears. They are, in fact, restoring it to its native dignity, and placing it on a firmer foundation than before; they will, by this means, secure the wavering attachment of its friends, and invite many to return who had deserted its standard.

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SECTION XXV.

*Paul having preached the gospel in Asia Minor, crosses over into Macedonia; and at Philippi heals a woman that had a spirit of divination.*

ACTS xvi. 6—18.

6. Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia, *i. e. in Asia Proper, or Proconsular Asia;*

7. After they were come to Mysia, they essayed, “*they attempted,*” to go into Bithynia; but the Spirit of Jesus\* suffered them not.

8. And they, passing by, “*passing through,*” Mysia, came down to Troas.

The reason of this prohibition was, that they might meet with no interruption in their progress towards Europe, to which they seem to be miraculously called, and in which the inhabitants were better prepared to receive the gospel. That the restrictions were only temporary, we learn from the eighteenth chapter of this history, where we find Paul preaching at the city of Ephesus, which lay in this part of Asia, but especially from the nineteenth, in which we are informed that he spent two years at Ephesus, “*so that,*” it is added, “*all they of Asia heard the word.*”

In the seventh verse, the best manuscripts read, the Spirit of Jesus, instead of the Spirit, as it is in our translation, and that is, probably, the original reading. The miraculous influence which accompanied

\* Griesback.

the gospel might with propriety be denominated the Spirit of Jesus, because it came from him, and was intended for the establishment of his cause in the world.

9. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

10. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.

It appears from this verse that the writer of this history was the companion of Paul on this journey; for he says, "*we* endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us." This circumstance gives peculiar authenticity to his narrative.

11. Therefore, loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothrace, *an island in the narrow part of the Archipelago*, and the next day to Neapolis, *a town on the continent of Europe*.

12. And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony; and we were in that city abiding certain days.

The Roman historian, Livy, calls Amphipolis the chief city of this part of Macedonia, and therefore seems to contradict the assertion of Luke: but both accounts may be true; for although Amphipolis merited this distinction when Livy wrote, yet in the time of Luke, above one hundred years after, the condition of the two places might be much changed,\* so as to justify the precedence which is here given to Philippi.†

13. And on the sabbath-day, we went out of the city, by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made, and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted there.

Many persons have supposed that the word which we render "prayer," should be understood rather of the place than of the act of prayer. It is certain that the Jews had such places of worship, without the gates of the cities, where they resided in foreign countries, either because they were too poor or too few to provide a synagogue, or because they were not allowed to observe their form of worship within the gates; and that these oratories or places of prayer

\* Pearce, Doddridge, and Benson are for altering the text.

† By using the Latin word, *colony* of Philippi, Luke plainly shows its connexion with Rome, which will serve to explain what the Philippians afterwards say of themselves in the twenty-first verse, that they were Romans, that is, enjoyed the privileges of Roman citizens.

were often situated near the sea or a river, for the sake of those purifications which the Jews practised.\*

14. And a certain woman, named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, (*a city of Lydia,*) which worshipped God, heard us, whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

Lydia, perhaps, derived her name from the country in which she dwelt, which was a province of the Lesser Asia. This woman, who appears to have been a person of property, from her selling purple, the most expensive kind of cloth used by the ancients, and from her receiving the apostle and his companions at her house, was a proselyte to the Jewish religion, which is intimated, when it is said that she worshipped God. This prepared her for the reception of the gospel. It is said, indeed, that the Lord opened her heart for this purpose; but we are not to infer thence, that any supernatural influence was exercised over her mind, to make her a convert; for that would have superseded the use of all means. This change was produced entirely by the arguments and reasoning of the apostle Paul and of those who were with him, but, being a good effect, is attributed by the historian, as was usual with pious Jews, to the immediate hand of God, although produced in the ordinary course of things.

15. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there. And she constrained us, "*she pressed us to compliance.*"

16. And it came to pass as we went to prayer, "*to the oratory,*" or, "*place of prayer,*" a certain damsel, "*a maid-servant,*" possessed with a spirit of divination, *in the original,* "*a spirit of Python,*" or, "*Apollo,*" met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying, "*by prophecying.*"

To understand the account that is given of this woman, it is necessary to observe, that amongst the Greeks it was supposed that the spirits of their dæmons took possession of the living, and that in this state they prophecied, or predicted future events; their prophecying being accompanied with fits of raving madness. Hence it arose that mad persons of a particular description came to be considered as animated by a dæmon or god, and capable of foretelling future events. This was the condition of the person here mentioned: she was insane, and, therefore, supposed to be possessed by the spirit of Apollo, and regarded as a prophetess. She had probably lucid intervals, which qualified her better for the purpose of her

\* Lardner, Vol. I. p. 110.

masters, whose object it was to get money by her pretended predictions. The historian, entertaining the same opinion on this subject as the pagans, adopts their language, i. e. he speaks of her as possessed; but no well-informed Jew, as the writer of this history must have been, could suppose that the heathen demons had a power of foretelling future events; for that power is expressly appropriated to Jehovah in the Jewish Scriptures.

17. The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, these men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation.

For mad persons to utter what is true and rational, is no unusual thing, especially if they have intervals of sanity, as this woman probably had, when they may acquire the knowledge of what is passing around them. We are not, therefore, to be surprised, that she was so well acquainted with the pretensions and true character of these preachers.

18. And this she did many days; but Paul, being grieved, turned, and said to the spirit, I command thee, in the name of Jesus Christ, to come out of her. And he came out the same hour, "*that moment.*"

Her disorder was madness, but being supposed to be possessed by the spirit of a dæmon by the spectators, and probably by the apostle himself, he addresses the spirit by which she was animated, and commands him to come out of her. When her madness was cured, the people would no longer suppose her to be inspired.

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### REFLECTIONS.

1. The practice of these pious women, in assembling together every sabbath-day to worship the Divine Being, redounded much to their honour, and deserves our imitation. It was a public acknowledgment of the true God in the midst of idolaters; it was, therefore, a profession of the truth, where there was the strongest temptation to deny it; it was a noble instance of firmness in a good cause, and well calculated to awaken the attention of spectators, and to reclaim them from their errors: it was a practice, also, which had a happy tendency to relieve their minds from anxiety, while living among strangers, at a distance from their native country, and to inspire their hearts with the most exalted hopes, and purest affections. Justly did Providence honour such worshippers, by hastening Paul through the provinces of lesser Asia, to communicate to them, without delay, the invaluable treasure of the gospel; and well had they prepared their minds by these devout exercises for discerning the evidences of its divine origin, and for feeling its purifying influence! Let Christians of the present day imitate their example, and be assured that, although they may not be distinguished by supernatural benefits,

their conduct will be attended with an abundant reward of religious improvement and comfort at present, and be honoured with the divine approbation at the last day: "Wherefore," as this apostle writes to these Philippians, in the epistle which he afterwards addressed to them, "be careful for nothing, but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God."

2. The image of a man imploring assistance, is a just emblem of the state of the ancient heathen world. Even those countries where knowledge and civilization were most advanced, were sunk, in regard to religion, into the grossest errors and most abject superstition; not only mistaking the ravings of insanity for the inspired dictates of divine wisdom, but imagining that the most important events were predicted by the situation of the stars, by the flight of birds, and the entrails of a beast; not only mistaking the object of worship, but supposing him the patron of vice, and seeking his favour by vicious practices. What a perversion of religion! How wretched a condition! How loudly did it call for assistance! Let us bless God, who had compassion upon his creatures, and sent them the aid which they needed. Let us remember with gratitude and pleasure, the event which is here recorded, the landing of the apostle in Europe, and the first communication of the gospel to the inhabitants of this quarter of the globe. It was the prelude to the downfall of superstition and vice: it was the commencement of a new æra of virtue and happiness to an extensive portion of the human race.

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SECTION XXVI.

*Paul and Silas being imprisoned at Philippi, are miraculously set at liberty, and honourably dismissed.*

ACTS xvi. 19—40.

19. AND when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the market-place unto the rulers;

20. And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city.

21. And teach customs which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.

In the nineteenth verse they are said to be brought to the rulers, but in the twentieth, to the magistrates; the same persons, however, are probably intended in both places, unless, indeed, as some suppose, the first words have been added to the text. As Philippi was a

Roman colony, the military commander might be the civil officer. The market-place among the Greeks and Romans, was the place where courts of justice held their sittings, as well as where other public business was transacted. Paul and Silas were selected, when Luke and Timothy were in company, as being the most distinguished and obnoxious persons.

22. And the multitude rose up together against them, and the magistrates rent off their clothes, *i. e. the clothes of the persons accused, as was usual with the Romans*, and commanded to beat them, *i. e. to beat them with rods.*

23. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the gaoler to keep them safely ;

24. Who, having received such a charge thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.

These severities were inflicted without examination, and even without inquiring who they were ; but these illustrious preachers of the gospel were far from being discouraged by such treatment.

25. And at midnight, *when they were not likely to be heard or to disturb any one*, Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God, and the prisoners heard them, "*were listening to them.*"

26. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.

The bands of the other prisoners were loosed, as well as those of Paul and Silas, which shows that the earthquake was supernatural. An ordinary earthquake would not have produced such an effect.

27. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.

28. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm ; for we are all here.

29. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,

30. And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved ? "*to be safe ?*"

31. And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be safe, and thy house.

In asking this question, "What shall I do to be saved?" or, to be safe, the gaoler, who had probably never heard of a future life of happiness or misery, as preached by the apostles, referred entirely to his personal security, about which he was naturally alarmed, in consequence of the earthquake which had shaken the house to its foundations, and opened the doors of the prison. The answer of Paul and Silas, therefore, assuring him, that if he would believe in Christ he should be safe, and his house, must refer to the same subject. In the circumstances in which the parties were placed, this was the natural and obvious meaning of the question and reply, and the interpretation is confirmed by the language of the apostles on a variety of occasions. To deliverance from Jewish superstition and heathen idolatry, by embracing Christianity, they uniformly apply the term salvation, or being saved. Thus we are told, that God will have all men to be saved and brought to the knowledge of the truth, where the latter expression explains what is meant by the former. The principal idea included in this salvation, was evidently a deliverance from ignorance, superstition, and false worship; but it seems, also, to have been connected with a deliverance from temporal calamities; for with such calamities, we know that the Jews were threatened, and actually visited, for their rejection of the gospel, while those who embraced it, were preserved safe. On this ground, the apostle Peter, Acts ii. 40, exhorts his countrymen to save themselves from this toward generation. To similar evils the heathen world might likewise be exposed, if they acted in like manner: with evils of this nature, the gaoler was evidently threatened, when, on account of his severity to the preachers of the gospel, his house was shaken from the foundations. They might, therefore, with propriety, tell him, that if he believed in Christ, both he and his family would escape danger. This, indeed, was not the whole or principal benefit which he would derive from his faith; but it was all about which he inquired.

I have dwelt the longer upon this passage, because the interpretation given, is unusual, and may probably to some appear harsh; but I am persuaded, that a proper consideration of the occasion, and of the usual language of the apostles, will reconcile the mind of the attentive inquirer to it.

32. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.

33. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.

34. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

His joy arose from the assurance which had been given him of security, and from the happy prospects which he had been taught to entertain.

35. And when it was day, the magistrates sent the sergeants, "*the lictors,*" saying, Let those men go.

They imagine, that the punishment already inflicted, is sufficient to deter them from pursuing the same course of life, and are now very willing to let them depart.

36. And the keeper of the prison told this saying, "*this message,*" to Paul; The magistrates have sent to let you go; now, therefore, depart, and go in peace.

37. But Paul said to them, They have beaten us openly, uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privately? Nay, verily, but let them come themselves and fetch us out.

The Roman law strictly forbade the beating of Roman citizens with rods; that ignominious punishment being thought only suitable to a slave. The magistrates, therefore, had been guilty of a great offence, in ordering it to be inflicted on Paul and Silas, who were entitled to that privilege; and their offence was aggravated by inflicting the punishment without sufficient grounds, and without a trial. It was necessary to exact from them some acknowledgment for their error, as the means of preventing the like arbitrary proceedings and similar outrages in future. Besides, the infliction of the most ignominious punishment publicly upon these strangers, was a great reflection upon their character, and tended to obstruct the success of their mission. To have left the prison privately, would have confirmed the suspicions which had been thus excited in the minds of the people. On this account, Paul insisted upon the magistrates coming themselves to release them, that their innocence might be rendered as public as their punishment.

38. And the officers told these words unto the magistrates, and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans.

39. And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city.

40. And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia, and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, "*exhorted them,*" and departed.



## REFLECTIONS.

1. From the conduct of those men who were the accusers of these preachers, and the cause of their punishment, we may learn, how a pretended zeal for religion and the public welfare, may be employed to cover interested and selfish motives. So long as their actions interfere not with the interests of individuals, they are allowed to be innocent and peaceable men; they are allowed to worship and teach as they please; but no sooner do their enemies find their property affected, and the hope of their gain departed, than they are denounced as troublers of the city, and teachers of unlawful customs, and justice is demanded against them as public nuisances. Men of the same character and temper are to be found in every age, who raise a noisy clamour about religion and the public good, whenever any new doctrine or practice is proposed, while they are actuated only by resentment for past, or by fear of future losses. Happy are they who have wisdom to discern their motives, and firmness to resist their clamours, and suffer not themselves, as these magistrates at Philippi did, to be hurried into acts of violence and injustice to the instructors and reformers of mankind. From this example we may judge how much opposition Christianity must have experienced from those who found themselves interested in the support of pagan worship and pagan superstition, and how strong that evidence must have been which could establish it in the world, in the face of this opposition.

2. We see what joy a belief in the gospel is capable of producing in the most afflicted circumstances. The objects of general indignation, confined to the closest part of a prison, lying in the most uneasy posture, and smarting with the anguish of the wounds which had been just inflicted—one might have supposed, that these two companions in wretchedness would have spent the night in sighs and groans, and mutual lamentations, or in deep and sullen silence; or, that if they had formed any articulate sound, it would be to exclaim against the violence of the populace, and the injustice of the magistrates; to call for vengeance upon their persecutors, or to arraign the justice of Heaven in suffering them to go unpunished: but to find them easy in such circumstances, rejoicing in their sufferings, and singing psalms of praise to God, is truly surprising: yet is it the natural effect of a firm faith in the gospel of Christ, and of a well-grounded expectation of those glorious rewards which are promised to all who suffer in its defence. Happy men! Ye are more to be envied in your dungeon than the men who placed you there, than the greatest and most affluent of the human race, who are sleeping upon beds of down. If such be the fruits of your principles, Christians, cherish them in your hearts with the utmost care: fear not pain, or sorrow, or death; these principles will obtain for you a glorious triumph in every scene.

3. We learn that Christianity does not require men to abandon their civil rights, and tamely to submit to tyranny and oppression.

Paul claims his privileges as a Roman citizen, reproves the magistrates for violating them, and insists upon their conducting him out of prison, as an acknowledgment of their fault, and as a tribute of homage to the laws.

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SECTION XXVII.

*Paul preaches at Thessalonica and Berea, and being persecuted by the Jews, comes to Athens.*

ACTS xvii. 1—15.

1. Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews.

This convenience Philippi, the last place which they had visited, did not afford. The apostle takes advantage of it, as usual, to preach the gospel first to his countrymen. The two first of these places were considerable cities, which lay to the westward of Philippi, along the coast of the Ægian sea. Thessalonica was upon the same sea, and a large and trading city. As Luke speaks of Paul and his companions in the third person, it is probable that he accompanied him no further than Philippi; but Silas and Timothy were still with him.

2. And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath-days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures,

3. Opening, *i. e.* the Scriptures, and alleging, “*proving*,” that Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead, and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.

As the Jews entertained a firm expectation of a great deliverer under the character of the Messiah, founded upon the prophecies of their Scriptures, the readiest way to bring them over to Christianity, was to show that these prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, and particularly in that least-expected part of the history of the Messiah, his death and resurrection. This was what the apostle often attempted to do, and not without success. In this exposition of the prophecies there is no reason to suppose that he was miraculously assisted; his own judgment, aided, as it must be, by the other evidence which he possessed to prove that Jesus was the Messiah, would be sufficient for this purpose: a prophecy, which requires inspiration to understand it, does not deserve the name.

4. And some of them believed, and consorted

with Paul and Silas, “*joined them,*” and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women, not a few.

The labours of the apostle at Thessalonica, at this time, laid the foundation of a very considerable church in that city, to which he afterwards addressed two epistles, which we have at this day; but we learn thence, that the church principally consisted of converts from heathenism; for thus the apostle writes, 1 Thes. i. 9, “For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God;” whereas, according to the account given by Luke in this history, the converts were all Jews or devout Greeks, who were worshippers of God, and could not be said to be turned from idols. This seeming difference, however, between the history and the epistle, is removed by supposing that the passage in the history describes only the effects of Paul’s discourses, during the three sabbath-days that he preached in the synagogue; and that his application to the Gentiles at large, and his success amongst them, were subsequent to this.\* It may be seen in Griesbach that there is a reading of the passage, supported by respectable authorities, which entirely removes the difficulty; viz. “and of devout persons *and of Greeks,*” &c. Paul must have spent a longer time in the place than three weeks; for during his residence there, he received supplies once and again from the Philippians for his support, which he would not have wanted in so short a period. He tells the Thessalonians, also, that he wrought with his own hands, that he might not be chargeable to any of them: it is probable, therefore, that after having spent three sabbath-days in preaching to the Jews, and having found his labours attended with little success, he quitted the synagogue, and preached to a Gentile audience, by whom his services were better received.†

5. But the Jews took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, “*wicked men of the rabble,*” and gathered a company, “*gathered a mob,*” and set all the city on an uproar, and came up to the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.

6. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;

7. Whom Jason hath received; and these all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying, That there is another king, one Jesus.

The charge brought against Jesus by the Jews, before Pontius Pilate, was, that he made himself king of the Jews, because he

\* Paley’s *Horæ Paulinæ*, pp. 309, 311. † Paley’s *Horæ Paulinæ*, pp. 306, 311.

represented himself as the head of a new dispensation, which was called the kingdom of heaven; and the same charge is now exhibited against his disciples, probably on the same ground.

8. And they troubled the people, "*the common people,*" and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things.

They were alarmed, lest some scheme should be carrying on, in opposition to the Roman government, which might involve them in trouble.

9. And when they had taken security of Jason and of the other, they let them go.

During the violence of the mob, the apostle and his companion were in concealment; but as soon as the tumult had subsided, his friends took the first opportunity of sending him away to a place of safety.

10. And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night, unto Berea, a *town of Macedonia, at some distance from Thessalonica*, who, coming thither, went into the synagogue of the Jews.

11. These were more noble, "*of a better disposition,*" than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so.

The apostle pursued the same method of proof with the Bereans, as he had done before with the Thessalonians, appealing to the prophecies of the Old Testament, but with greater success, because he addressed himself to a more candid and inquisitive audience.

12. Therefore, many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men not a few.

He made many converts, not only from the Jews, but likewise from the Gentiles, and some of them persons of the first rank.

13. But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul in Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.

Having seen their success in raising a mob against these strangers, they resolved to try the same experiment a second time at Berea, and they were unhappily successful. The apostle and his companions are again obliged to flee from them.

14. And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul, to go, as it were, to the sea, "*as if on his way to the sea;*" but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.

15. And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens, *no doubt by his own direction*, and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.

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### REFLECTIONS.

1. LET not the friends of truth and of the best interests of man, be offended or discouraged at the ill treatment which they experience from the world. Anxiously endeavouring to rescue men from ignorance, superstition, and vice, to deliver them from those disorders which are the natural consequences of such evils, and hereby to promote virtue, good order, and general tranquillity, are they represented as enemies to the public peace, and as wishing to promote anarchy and disorder? Is their zeal spoken of as pride? their benevolence as selfishness? their courage in avowing the truth as obduracy in wickedness, and their desire for reformation as restless ambition, aiming to exalt itself upon the ruins of public order? Are they accused of being artful men, who, under cover of zeal for religion, are propagating political principles of the most dangerous tendency? However painful it may be to the feelings of a generous mind to have its views thus misunderstood or misrepresented, there is no reason for complaint or discouragement, for arraigning the justice of Heaven, or for despairing of a good cause. The same, or even more atrocious calumnies have been uttered against men whose upright intentions and unspotted character are universally acknowledged; against men who have obtained the esteem and veneration of all ages, and who are celebrated as the deliverers of the world. By ignorantly or maliciously uttering them against you, men pay involuntary homage to your characters, and rank you with apostles, who are represented as those that turn the world upside down, as teaching things contrary to Cæsar, and endeavouring to overthrow his government.

2. Let us admire and imitate the undaunted zeal and fortitude of these first preachers. No sooner are they delivered from close imprisonment and severe scourging at Philippi for preaching the gospel, than they renew their labours at Thessalonica; when driven from this city, by a mob of misguided or malicious rabble, they resume the same undertaking at Berea; and when driven thence, in like manner, we shall still find them engaged in the same hazardous office. No clamours can silence their voice, no dangers deter them, no obstacles arrest their progress. If you ask what is the cause of this undaunted courage and invincible resolu-

tion, you will find it in the persuasion, that they were the bearers of a divine message, the preachers of the most important and salutary truth. Read the epistles which, with the affliction of parents, they address to their children in Christ, at Philippi and Thessalonica, and you will there see this short history illustrated; the motives of their conduct and principles by which they are animated; and both will unite to increase your admiration of their characters. Let those who have a like well-founded persuasion of being engaged in promoting the glory of God and the best interests of mankind, display the same zeal, and they need not doubt of the same happy issue.

3. Let us observe the honourable mark of distinction which is bestowed upon those who cherish a spirit of inquiry; they are reckoned more noble than those of a contrary disposition. They discover a greater love of truth, more candour, more humility, more wisdom than other men. Those who call in question old opinions, and attend to such as are new, are condemned by some persons as manifesting an indifférence to the truth, as men who will soon destroy the foundations of true religion; but not in this light were such men regarded by the sacred historians; he commends their spirit and records its success.

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SECTION XXVIII.

*Paul, preaching at Athens, is brought to the Areopagus.*

ACTS xvii. 16—34.

16. Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, *i. e.* for Silas and Timothy, his spirit was stirred in him, “*he was provoked,*” when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry, “*full of images.*”

This account of Athens is confirmed by the testimony of contemporary historians and poets: one of the former asserts, that there was no place in which more images were to be seen than Athens; and one of the latter, that it was at Athens more easy to find a god than a man. What provoked Paul was, to find a city, so celebrated for its wisdom, so much addicted to idolatry.

17. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, *i. e.* with *proselyte Gentiles*, and in the market daily with them that met with them.

The market-place in Greece, and the forum at Rome, were the places where courts of justice were holden, and where persons assembled for conversation. This was, therefore, the best place for the apostle to attempt to gain the attention of the Gentiles.

18. Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics, encountered him, and some said, What will this babbler say, "*What does he mean?*" other some, "*others said,*" He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods, "*of new gods,*" because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.

The principles of these two leading sects of philosophy were sufficiently from each other, as well as from those of the apostle. The Epicureans believed, that there were gods, but maintained that the world was made by chance, and that they did not exercise any providence over it; that man's chief good consisted in the enjoyment of pleasure, and that there was no life after the present.

The Stoics, on the contrary, asserted, that pain was no evil; that virtue was its own reward, and vice its own punishment; that all things were subject to a blind and irresistible necessity. About a future state the Stoics spoke doubtfully, although they appear to have had some expectation of it.

Because the chief subject of Paul's discourse with them was Jesus and the resurrection, they supposed the resurrection to be some new god, which he wished to introduce to their acquaintance.

19. And they took him and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whercof thou speakest, is?

20. For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears; we would know, therefore, what these things mean.

21. For all the Athenians and strangers which were there, spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

Areopagus was a building at Athens, in which a court, called the court of Areopagus, was holden; a superior tribunal amongst the Athenians, instituted for the purposes of presiding over the laws, and over manners; of taking care, in particular, that no innovations were made in the established religion.\* On this account, some have supposed, that Paul was brought into this court in order to be formally tried on the charge of introducing new gods; but the historian plainly intimates that their object in bringing him thither was nothing more than curiosity, that they might have a better opportunity than they could enjoy in the market-place, of hearing the new and strange doctrine which he professed to teach.

The account here given of the manner in which the principal inhabitants of Athens, and the foreigners who came to visit them,

\* Travels of Anacharsis, article Areopagus.

spent their time, accords very well with the character of a polished, inquisitive, and wealthy people, such as we know the Athenians to have been : it corresponds, likewise, with what is said of them by some of their own writers.\*

22. Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' Hill, "*of Areopagus,*" and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive you altogether much given to religious worship.

In this manner, I conceive, the passage may be best rendered, which makes the apostle's language far more agreeable to that decorum which, we may suppose, he would be careful to observe in addressing such an audience, than that which he is made to speak in our translation, where he is supposed to say, "Ye are in all things too superstitious," a charge which would disgust his hearers at the outset, and prevent them from paying further attention to his discourse.†

23. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, "*the objects of your worship,*" I found an altar with this inscription, to an unknown God. Whom, therefore, ye ignorantly worship, "*worship without knowing him,*" him declare I unto you.

Paul did not imagine, I suppose, that by an unknown God, Jehovah, or the true God was intended : but he took advantage of this singular inscription to make them acquainted with the nature and attributes of the Supreme Being ; avoiding the offence which professedly preaching to them a new god might produce. He would have an additional motive for this mode of address, if what Josephus asserts be true, viz. that it was death by the Athenian law to propose to the people a new object of worship. That the Athenians worshipped some deity under the character of the unknown God, we know on the authority of heathen writers, whose testimony in this instance, as well as in many others, coincides with, and confirms the account given by the sacred historian.

24. God that made the world, and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands ;

25. Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all, life, and breath, and all things :

26. And hath made of one blood "*one nature,*" all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation ; "*hath determined*

\* See Pearce.

† Wakefield and Lardner. Vol. I. p. 191



*the times and bounds of their habitation ;” i. e. where and in what age they should live.*

27. That they should seek the Lord, if haply, “*if possibly,*” they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us :

28. For in him we live, and move, and have our being, as certain also of your own poets have said, ‘*For we are also his offspring.*’

This is a passage from Aratus, a poet of Cilicia, Paul’s native country.

29. Forasmuch, then, as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think, that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art or man’s device, *as mankind had long thought.*

30. And the times of this ignorance God winked at, “*overlooked,*” *i. e. made no extraordinary exertions for their instruction,* but now commandeth all men every where to repent, *i. e. to forsake their idolatry.*

31. Because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained ; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

This was a proof of his intentions respecting Jesus, who was to be the judge, and likewise respecting those who were to be judged, inasmuch as his resurrection was a proof of the possibility of theirs. The apostle was proceeding to say more on the subject of Jesus, and the Christian religion ; but his audience would hear him no longer.

32. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, “*began to laugh.*”

This doctrine, in the apprehension of some, had so little foundation, that it was a subject of ridicule, rather than of serious refutation by argument.

And others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.

33. So Paul departed from among them.

34. Nevertheless certain men clave unto him, and believed, among the which was Dionysius the Areo-

pagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Dionysius was called an Areopagite, because he was one of the judges of the court holden in the place where they were now assembled, and must have been, as the judges were in general, of a very respectable character.

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### REFLECTIONS.

1. In the conduct of Paul at Athens, and in the account which the historian has given of his reception, we see fresh proofs of the truth of our religion. In this seat of learning and of the arts, where the human mind was improved to the highest degree, where lived the first masters of philosophy and eloquence, to which foreigners resorted from all countries for instruction, and which had conquered the world, if not by arms, yet by the more powerful influence of manners and science—in this enlightened and illustrious city the apostle is not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; he ventures to preach it in the places of public resort, and wherever he can find an audience; he has the resolution to defend it against the attacks of the ablest reasoners and the acutest philosophers; and this when alone, and a stranger, unprotected, unaccompanied by a single individual. What confidence in the truth of the gospel! What zeal for communicating its discoveries to the world! Surely such confidence and such zeal must have some solid foundation, something better than the fictions of his own mind, or the unauthenticated reports of other persons.

The historian, who mentions his preaching at Athens, does not scruple, we see, to record his reception there, although by no means the most favourable. He informs us that this distinguished advocate of Christianity was denominated by the most contemptuous appellations; that the principal doctrine which he professed to teach could not be heard without laughter, and that he made but few proselytes in this renowned city. How confidently, then, may we rely upon his narrative, when he relates the success of the gospel in other places, and the respect paid to its teachers.

2. We learn from this story what is the substance of the gospel: not such doctrines as many Christians would now expect to find: not such as are to be found in modern creeds, the atonement of Christ, or the deity of his person, but Jesus and the resurrection; a restoration to life of the individual who has died, never to die any more. This is the interesting truth, which, next to the divine mission of our Master, holds the most conspicuous place in the Christian revelation. This is the doctrine, to communicate which, he was sent into the world, and to establish which, he died, and was raised again. Let this doctrine, Christians, hold the first place in your regards, notwithstanding the ridicule which it once received from the philosophers of Athens, and the opposition which it still experiences from modern unbelievers.

3. Let us often read and carefully fix in our memories the sublime description here given of the Supreme Being. It is replete with interesting truth and divine consolation. He is the great Creator of the universe, the impartial Father of all mankind, their present Governor and Sovereign, their final Judge, the all-sufficient and omnipresent Deity, infinitely superior to every thing which we behold or can conceive. To him we are indebted for all that we possess; to him we are accountable for all that we have received, for all that we do: him, therefore, let us serve with thankfulness and joy.

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SECTION XXIX.

*Paul leaves Athens, and goes to Corinth. He is brought by the Jews before Gallio, the proconsul.*

Acts xviii. 1—17.

1. AFTER these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth:

This was a large and opulent city of Greece, which, being situated on a narrow neck of land between two seas, was resorted to, for the purposes of commerce from both the western and eastern parts of the globe. The natural consequences of extensive trade and manufactures, were luxury and dissipation of manners,\* which soon sunk it into one of the most corrupt and effeminate of the states of Greece. It was not much less celebrated for philosophers and orators than Athens itself.

2. And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome,) and came unto them.

3. And because he was of the same craft, "*of the same trade,*" he abode with them and wrought: (for by their occupation they were tent-makers.)

This is the first time that Paul was introduced to these persons, whose names are mentioned more than once in this history, and still more frequently in the epistles. They were, on several occasions, his companions, and he received from them very essential services. As nothing is said about their conversion, it is probable that they became Christians by their intercourse with him, and that it was for this reason, as well as because they pursued the

\* Travels of Anacharsis, Vol. III. article Corinth.

same occupation, that he immediately joined himself to them. Though Jews and natives of Asia, their names are of Latin origin.

In assigning the reason of their departure from Rome, an event is referred to in the Roman history, by means of which, we may, in some degree, ascertain the truth and accuracy of that which we are reading: for we are told that Claudius, the Roman emperor, had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome. The same thing is asserted by Suetonius, a Roman historian, who lived near that time; for he tells us that the emperor Claudius “expelled the Jews from Rome, who were continually raising disturbances, Chrestus being their leader.” The fact, probably was, as we have seen in other instances, that the Jews, alarmed at the progress of the Christians, endeavoured to excite tumults and insurrections at Rome, and that the emperor, considering Christians as only a sect of the Jews, commanded one as well as the other to depart from the city. Here then, we see the testimony of a heathen writer coinciding with, and confirming, that of the sacred historian.

It has often been observed, that it was almost an invariable custom with Jewish parents, however affluent their circumstances, to teach their children some handicraft business, as a useful resource for maintenance in case of unavoidable misfortunes in life. Hence it is, that we find Paul, although a person who had had a liberal education, (for he was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel,) able to employ himself in the ordinary occupation of a tent-maker. The tents which he and his companions were employed in making, were composed of linen or skins, and used as a summer residence in hot climates, by travellers upon their journeys, where no other lodging was to be found, and by soldiers in their camps. Paul has often asserted his right to maintenance from those who enjoyed the benefit of his labours in preaching the gospel; but for prudential reasons he declined enforcing this claim at Corinth and Ephesus.

4. And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.

5. And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in spirit, “*was closely employed in the word,*” *i. e. in preaching the gospel,* and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.

This alteration in the translation is authorized by several circumstances, and seems consonant to the design of the writer, who intended to mention something which was the consequence of Silas and Timothy coming to Paul; this was more likely to be, that he was to labour more abundantly in the work of preaching, together with them, than that he was pressed in spirit or discouraged. But the more the zeal and earnestness of the apostle increased, the more violent was the opposition made to him, and the more evident did the temper of the unbelieving Jews appear.

6. And when they opposed themselves and blas-

phemed, *i. e.* reviled Jesus and his religion, he shook his raiment, *i. e.* his loose upper garment ;

He thus expressed his entire renunciation of all further intercourse with them ; as if he had said, I will not keep any thing that belongs to you, not so much as the dust which adheres to my clothes. Take what is yours, as I will keep what is mine. Christ had directed his disciples to shake off the dust from their feet in like circumstances, which meant the same thing.

And said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads ; I am clean ; henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles ; “ *your blood,*” *i. e.* *your guilt,* “ *is upon your own heads.*”

The apostle does not mean to express an imprecation, but his being clean from whatever guilt or whatever evil belonged to the rejection of the gospel.

7. And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man’s house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, *a proselyte to the Jewish religion,* whose house joined hard, “ *was near,*” to the synagogue.

He left the house of Aquila, who was a Jew, and went to reside with Justus, either because his house was more convenient for teaching, or because he wished to please the Gentiles by residing with one of them. The apostle’s labours, even among the Jews, were not wholly unsuccessful.

8. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord, with all his house ; and many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed, and were baptized.

In his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul tells the church that he baptized none other among them that Crispus and Gaius ; but how Crispus came to obtain so honourable a distinction as to be baptized by the apostle’s own hand, while the rest did not enjoy that honour, the epistle does not inform us ; but this matter is explained by the history ; for we here learn that he was ruler of the synagogue, and, therefore, entitled to some distinction for his rank, as well, probably, for his property and character. This is one of those undesigned coincidences between the history and the epistle, which serve to confirm the authenticity of both.\*

Notwithstanding the number of converts at Corinth, and the respectable character of some of them, the apostle’s prospects here were not so encouraging as to induce him of themselves to spend much longer time in that city. The violent temper which the Jews had just discovered, naturally led to a suspicion that they would soon have recourse to the same measures which they had successfully employed against him in other places. The supernat-

\* Paley’s *Horæ Paulinæ*. p. 39.

ural communication mentioned in the next verse became necessary, therefore, to inspire him with confidence, and in induce him to persevere in his labours.

9. Then spake the Lord, *i. e. probably the Lord Jesus*, to Paul, in the night, by a vision. *probably in a dream*, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace :

10. For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee ; for I have much people in this city.

11. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

Luke calls the gospel of Christ, as preached by the apostle Paul, the word of God, because it was a revelation made to him by God ; but the same denomination cannot with propriety be applied to a history like the present, which contains, indeed, an authentic, but not inspired, account of the reception which it met with in different places.

It was during the apostle's residence at Corinth that he wrote his first and second epistle to the Thessalonians ; a church which he had lately established, and which required all his attention and care.

12. And when Gallio was deputy, *in the original, "proconsul,"* of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment-seat ;

It has been observed that this province, of which Corinth was the chief town, had undergone various revolutions, and been called by different names, but that the name given to it by Luke, is what belonged to it at this period, which is one proof among many, of the care and accuracy with which he writes.

13. Saying, This fellow persuadeth men, *meaning Jews*, to worship God contrary to the law.

14. And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, "*wicked mischief,*" O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you, *i. e. it would be reasonable that I should hear you patiently.*

15. But if it be a question of words, "*doctrines,*" and names, *i. e. whether Jesus ought to be called Messiah or not*, and of your law, look ye to it, for I will be no judge of such matter.

16. And he drove them from the judgment-seat.

This Gallio was brother to Seneca, the stoic philosopher, and a man of a remarkably mild and amiable disposition ; but his conduct on the present occasion in protecting Paul from the violence of the Jews, seems to have been directed by a regard to the Roman law, which forbade their magistrates to interfere in religious disputes.

17. Then all, *i. e. the Jews*, took Sosthenes the chief ruler of the synagogue, *who succeeded Crispus, and seems to have favoured Paul*, and beat him before the judgment-seat, and Gallio cared for none of these things.

The common translation reads “then all the Greeks took Sosthenes,” &c. but the word *Greeks* is omitted in some manuscripts and versions, and, therefore, I have left it out, as it appears to embarrass the sense. That the Jews should beat one of their own countrymen, who was supposed to favour the Christians, and that they should be permitted to do it, is not unlikely ; but that the Greeks, or unbelieving Gentiles should do this, and be suffered to proceed without opposition, is highly improbable.

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#### REFLECTIONS.

1. FROM the condition of the apostle, in being obliged to work with his own hands for a maintenance, we may derive an argument to prove the sincerity of his attachment to the gospel. He has not been induced to support it by interested or ambitious prospects, by the hope of gain or of power ; for, although he had now been a preacher of this doctrine many years, we find him neither rich nor at ease, but, on the contrary, so poor as to be obliged to labour for his own support. Of the danger and trouble to which he was exposed, we have had repeated proofs in the course of this history ; yet his zeal is unabated, and his exertions unrelaxed. If unsuccessful in one place, he renews his efforts in another. Whence could this undaunted zeal and persevering fortitude proceed, but from an overpowering conviction of the truth and divine origin of Christianity, and from a persuasion that in preaching it he was promoting the best interests of mankind ? The motives and arguments which satisfied him, ought to satisfy us also.

2. The success of the apostle in the circumstances above described, ought to afford us the like satisfaction. In the great city of Corinth, a city distinguished for the opulence and dissipation of its inhabitants, abounding also in philosophers and orators, Paul was honoured with great success in preaching the gospel, and had numerous converts ; notwithstanding that he spent the greater part of his time in providing, by the labour of his hands, for his necessities, and that labour not of the most honourable kind ; not in casting statues

of Corinthian brass, or carving idols of wood or stone, not in portraying the persons or the actions of Grecian gods and heroes, but in the humble occupation of tent-making. What then could induce the rich, the polished, and proud Corinthians, to attend the instructions and to receive the doctrine of this vagabond Jew, who was a tent-maker? Not the choice words, the flowing periods, the elegant and animated gestures of the orator: not the curious speculations of a profound philosophy; for to these the apostle made no pretensions; but it was the all-powerful voice of truth, the irresistible evidence of miracles. These gave dignity to the mechanic, and enabled him to speak with the voice of Heaven. His speech and his preaching, as he tells these Corinthians in his first epistle, was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and of power.

3. How happy would it have been for the world, if all magistrates had acted with the same propriety as Gallio; if they had considered the authority with which they are invested, as given them for civil purposes only, to restrain and punish vice and immorality, and not to direct or control religious opinion, which every one has a right to form for himself, in the best manner he is able! Too often have those, who have been placed in this station, pursued an opposite conduct; and, by making themselves parties in religious disputes, by lending their power to gratify the wicked passions of men, thinly covered over with the veil of religion, filled the world with oppression, outrage, and bloodshed.

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SECTION XXX.

*Paul goes to Jerusalem, and thence to Antioch and Asia Minor.  
Apollos becomes a preacher of the gospel.*

ACTS xviii. 18—28.

18. AND Paul, after this, tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila, having shorn his head in Cenchrea; for he had a vow.

The vow here referred to was that of the Nazarite, which consisted in abstaining from wine, and in letting the hair grow for a certain season. This seems to have been a popular practice at this time amongst the Jews. We have another reference to the same vow in the twenty-first chapter of this history, where the apostle is advised by the brethren to be at charges with four men who had a vow, that they might shave their heads. The occasion of the apostle's assuming this vow is not mentioned; but, as he had spent a long time at Corinth in security, though violently threatened by his inveterate



enemies the Jews, it is not improbable that it might be an act of thanksgiving to God for that favour; the more especially, as we know that it was usual with the Jews at this time, when afflicted with any distemper, or when in any difficulties, to bind themselves by a vow. Whatever might be the occasion of the vow, it seems that he thought it necessary to go up to Jerusalem, to offer the sacrifices which the law of Moses required, in order that it might be completed. This was the reason of his present journey; in showing his gratitude in the observance of a Jewish custom, he might intend to conciliate the affections, or remove the prejudices of his countrymen, who were very violent against him. Other examples of a similar conformity to the law of Moses we read of in different parts of this history, which were thought proper from motives of prudence, as long as the Jewish temple and service were in being. Some have, indeed, thought that not Paul, but Aquila, the person last named, undertook this vow; but the connexion plainly shows that the apostle was intended. Cenchrea was the port of Corinth from which he sailed. It was here he shaved his head, and his vow commenced.\*

19. And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.

20. When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not.

21. But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast, "*this festival*," that cometh in Jerusalem; but I will return again unto you if God will: and he sailed from Ephesus.

The festival referred to is the passover: as Paul did not spend every passover at Jerusalem, the reason of his being so anxious to be present at this time, must have been the fulfilment of his vow, for which he had undertaken this journey. He preferred the time of the passover for the purpose, because he would then have an opportunity of meeting many of his brethren from the country, who assembled at Jerusalem on this occasion, as well as of observing a festival which was held in great account by the Jews. He promises to return to Ephesus if he had an opportunity: accordingly, we find him there in the next chapter.

22. And when he had landed at Cæsarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch.

The historian has not told us in this verse what Paul did at Jerusalem; nor was it necessary that he should; for he had before informed us that the object of his journey was to fulfil his vow. This being accomplished, he returned immediately to Antioch: saluting

\* Lardner, Vol. I. p. 206.

the church was a mere act of civility, which could not induce the apostle to undertake so long a journey. Antioch was a city of Syria, where we learn from the eleventh chapter that Paul and Barnabas spent a whole year in preaching the gospel, and where they made numerous converts. The object of his visit at this time was to strengthen and encourage them.

23. And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.

These were countries through which he had travelled before in his way to Greece, and in which he had planted many churches: his design at present was to correct any errors into which they might have fallen, and to establish the faith of those who were wavering.

Here the historian quits the apostle for a short time, to give some account of Apollos, a person of some distinction in the church, to whom we are here introduced for the first time.

24. And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, "*an intelligent man,*" and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus.

Apollos was well acquainted with the Scriptures of the Old Testament, which enabled him to enforce what he said with great power or energy. The Jews were very numerous at Alexandria.

25. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord, and being fervent in the spirit, "*of a zealous disposition,*" he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.

The way of the Lord seems here to mean the kingdom of the Messiah, of the approach of which, Apollos had been informed by the preaching of John, and which he now zealously announced to his countrymen, supporting his doctrine by authorities drawn from the Scriptures of the Old Testament, in which the Messiah is plainly predicted, and calling upon all to repent, and to be baptized for the remission of sins: for one, therefore, who was acquainted with the doctrine of John only, he taught the doctrine of the gospel accurately; but he now met with those who were qualified to give him fuller and more correct information upon this subject.

26. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue; whom, when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

Observing in him marks of an ingenuous mind, from his readiness to receive the truth, and his zeal in communicating it to others, they desired a private interview with him, in the hope of inducing him to accept better information upon this subject; and in this hope they were not disappointed.

What they said to him we are not informed; but it may be easily conjectured that they communicated to him what Christ taught respecting the nature of the kingdom of heaven, the various events of his life, and, more especially, the miracles which proved him to be the Messiah, his death and resurrection, the miraculous powers which were now bestowed upon those who believed, and the important doctrine for which Paul was such an intrepid advocate; that Gentiles were to be received into the church, upon professing faith in Christ, without conforming to the law of Moses. Of these things Apollos was ignorant, having left Judæa immediately after the preaching of John, and having heard nothing of the subsequent events.

27. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace, *“he helped the brethren that believed, by his gift,” i. e. his knowledge of the Scriptures before-mentioned.*

28. For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ.

By his superior knowledge of the Scriptures, he removed the obstacles arising from false interpretations of them, which prevented the Jews from receiving Christ as the Messiah, and confirmed the faith of those who had already believed, but were still embarrassed by some of the objections of their countrymen.

This visit of Apollos to Achaia or to Corinth, which was the capital of that province, is noticed in the first epistle to the Corinthians. “I have also planted,” says Paul; “Apollos watered.”\*

## REFLECTIONS.

1. LET us learn from the example of the apostle, to carry on every undertaking with a sense of our dependence upon Providence for its success. When intending to visit his friends at Ephesus, to give them further instruction in the gospel of Christ, he says, If the Lord will, I will come unto you. The advice which the apostle James gives, corresponds with the language of this great apostle of the Gentiles: “Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy, and sell, and get gain; whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow; for what is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away; for that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that.” In pursuing schemes of business or of pleasure, or of doing good to mankind, remember

\* 1 Cor. iii. 6.

then, the uncertainty of human life, and the various obstacles which Heaven may interpose to the execution of your designs ; not indeed by changing the course of nature, but by pursuing plans which are inconsistent with yours ; and prepare yourselves for the disappointments which may arise from any of these sources.

2. The conduct of Priscilla and Aquila, in giving, and of Apollos in receiving, instruction, is highly worthy of commendation. He knew the way of the Lord in some degree, but he did not know it perfectly, and he is willing to receive further information upon the subject, although that information comes from private persons, and in an ordinary situation of life. Christians of the present day are often in a like situation, and happy would it be for them, if they were disposed to act in the same manner. There are many over whose heads not a few years have passed, who are far from having been inattentive to religion, who yet, from the influence of education, or want of opportunity for inquiry, know the way of God but imperfectly. There are many who possess much learning on other subjects, yet remain ignorant of the pure and simple doctrine of the gospel. Let not such persons be displeased or offended, if their inferiors in age and acquirements attempt to give them instruction. It is not presumption or arrogance, but proceeds from a desire of promoting your welfare, which is intimately connected with a more comprehensive acquaintance with the truth. They impute not guilt, nor charge you with any crime : they only suppose, that you may be mistaken, where you have inquired, or ignorant, where you have not been favoured with opportunities of knowing better ; disadvantages to which wise and excellent persons may be liable. They only suppose that you are willing to become wiser and better informed, which is a tribute to the excellence of your disposition, if not to your knowledge. Treat not with disdain, persons who come to you in this character ; attend to what they offer, and receive their instructions with a desire to be better informed, wherever there may be occasion.

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SECTION XXXI.

*Paul returns to Ephesus and remains there two years. The practitioners of magic are persuaded to renounce their art.*

ACTS xix. 1—20.

1. AND it came to pass, that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul, having passed through the upper coasts, “*the upper part,*” of the country, *i. e. Phrygia and Galatia as mentioned in the last chapter,* came to Ephesus, agreeably to his promise, Acts xviii. 21, and finding certain disciples,

2. He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Spirit since ye believed? “*Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed?*”

This question he asked, because he had not observed among them those miraculous powers which he had seen in other churches.

And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Spirit.

We have not so much as heard whether there be those miraculous powers which are denominated the Holy Spirit, of which we may partake. To account for their ignorance on this subject, it must be supposed, either that these Jews left Judæa immediately after the preaching of John, and before Jesus had manifested the extraordinary powers with which he was endowed, or before they had been communicated to his followers; or that they were proselytes to Apollos, who, we are told, knew only the baptism of John. On either of these suppositions, their ignorance is easily accounted for.

It is plain from this answer, that by the term, Holy Spirit, we are not to understand a being; for had there been such a being, these Jews must have heard of his existence; but miraculous powers, such as the power of healing distempers, the gifts of tongues, and of knowledge. These gifts, which constituted the Holy Spirit, these disciples had not yet received, nor even heard of; but as soon as they received the Holy Spirit, by the laying on of the hands of Paul, as we read in the sixth verse of this chapter, they spake with tongues, and prophesied.\*

3. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized?

Had they been baptized in the name of Jesus, they must necessarily have heard of those miraculous powers with which he was endowed, and which he likewise communicated to his followers; but their ignorance on this subject led the apostle to suppose, that they were not Christians, and their answer confirmed his apprehensions.

And they said, Unto John's baptism.

4. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him who should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus, “*on Jesus,*” as it is found in some copies and versions.†

John the Baptist called upon the people to repent, and to prepare themselves for the kingdom of Heaven, which he declared to be at hand, and which was to be introduced by a prophet far superior to himself. He referred the people to Jesus, as a superior prophet; but he seemed to be doubtful whether he were the Messiah. To believe in John, therefore, and to be baptized by him, did not con-

\* Lardner, Vol. XII. pp. 154, 165.

† See Griesbach.

stitute men Christians; but it was necessary that such believers should profess faith in Jesus as the Messiah, and undergo the ceremony of baptism a second time, in order to be entitled to that honour. To this the apostle's present audience are willing to submit.

5. When they heard that, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

By submitting to this ceremony, they acknowledged their faith in Jesus as a divine messenger, and the promised Messiah; for it was in the character of a divine messenger, that he instituted this rite; they acknowledged, likewise, that they were brought from a less pure, to a more perfect dispensation of religion. When Jesus sent out his apostles to preach the gospel, his command was, "Go, and disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit;" but these words seem to have been intended as a summary of Christian faith, rather than as a formula to be used whenever the ordinance was administered; for we never find it so employed in any of the instances of baptism which are mentioned in the book of Acts. On these occasions, we see, that the believers were baptized, as in this verse, into the name of Jesus, or with words of a like import. These words, therefore, ought to be deemed sufficient in the administration of this ordinance at the present day.

6. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spake with tongues, and prophesied, "*taught.*"

To prophesy, here signifies teaching the Christian doctrine. This is what these disciples appear to have done. Being favoured with the gift of speaking different tongues, which they had never learnt, they employ it in teaching the Christian religion, like those who were thus favoured on the day of Pentecost.

7. And all the men were about twelve.

8. And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.

9. And when divers were hardened, "*continued hardened,*" and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.

From the name of this person, which is Greek, and from his having a school, it has been supposed that he was a Greek rhetorician, who delivered lectures to his followers for hire. To this place Paul resorted when he found the Jews obstinate, and went no more to the synagogue, turning, as he had done before, to the Gentiles. He separated the disciples also from the Jews, because their continuance with men of such a turbulent disposition was not safe, or because

he did not wish them to associate with men who were doomed for their obstinacy in error, to so many calamities.

10. And this continued by the space of two years, so that all they which dwelt in Asia, heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

By Asia is meant proconsular Asia, where Paul was forbidden to preach on his first journey. All the neighbouring inhabitants came to Ephesus, which was a principal city in this part of the country, either for business or pleasure, and, therefore, had an opportunity of hearing Paul preach.

11. And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul :

12. So that from his body were brought unto the sick. handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.

A miracle of a similar nature was performed by Christ, when he healed a woman who only touched the hem of his garment. In both cases the faith of the person benefitted, if in his sound mind and capable of exercising faith, was directed to the power of God, and not to any virtue in the things applied. The expulsion of the evil spirits, or the curing of madness and epilepsy, is mentioned separately, because the cure of these disorders was thought peculiarly difficult.

13. Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits, the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.

Exorcists pretended to expel evil spirits from those who were supposed to be possessed, by adjuring them in the name of God to depart from them. That this was practised among the Jews, we learn from the history of the evangelists, where we hear Jesus saying, in answer to an objection made to him by the Pharisees, "If I by Beelzebub, cast out dæmons, by whom do your children, i. e. your disciples, cast them out? wherefore they shall be your judges." That they did not succeed in these attempts is certain, although they might sometimes persuade the deluded multitude to believe that they did. Several of the Jewish exorcists travelled about the country, exercising their pretended art; and some of them, seeing dæmoniacs suddenly cured by Paul's calling over them the name of Jesus, imagined that by using the same name they should be alike successful; but they were miserably disappointed.

14. And there were Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so.

15. And the evil spirit answered, and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know ; but who are ye ?

16. And the man in whom the evil spirit was, leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

The historian attributes that to the evil spirit which was, in reality, spoken and done by the mad man, who supposing himself to be an evil spirit, or possessed by one, addresses the exorcists in that character. As Paul had spent two whole years at Ephesus, and in that time ejected many dæmons in the name of Jesus, we are not to be surprised that this dæmoniac should be well acquainted with the names of Paul and Jesus. The extraordinary strength which he discovered in overcoming and driving away the exorcists, who were unattended, and did not expect resistance, is nothing more than what is common to persons afflicted with this unhappy disorder.

The disappointment and disgrace of these men served to vindicate the miracles of Paul from all suspicion of imposture ; to create a high reverence for Jesus, in confirmation of whose divine authority they were wrought, and to prevent the name of Jesus from being any more used as a charm.\*

17. And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus, and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.

18. And many that believed, came and confessed, and showed their deeds, "*their practices.*"

19. Many also of them which used curious arts, "*magic arts,*" brought their books together, and burnt them before all men ; and they counted the price of them, and found it to be fifty thousand pieces of silver.†

20. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

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#### REFLECTIONS.

I. OBSERVE, first, how indefatigable is Paul in preaching the gospel. He travels from country to country, by land or by water, to communicate the important intelligence. From Ephesus he

\* Farmer on Dæmoniacs, p. 276.

† About £1600



goes to Jerusalem, from Jerusalem to Ephesus again. Wherever he goes he plants churches of Christians, and visits them repeatedly, to confirm and establish their faith. At some places he spends only a few days or weeks, but those days are well employed; if he continue a longer time, it is not wasted in sluggish ease, but wholly occupied in the same work. In the synagogue of the Jews he preaches every sabbath-day, while the synagogue is open to him, and there is any prospect of success; and when compelled to depart thence, he will preach every day in the week to the Gentiles. To him every day is a sabbath, and every place sanctified, whether it be the forum at Athens, the synagogue of the Jews, or the school of Tyrannus. How warm the zeal which produced such incessant efforts! How important the doctrine from which it originated! The consequence was, as might be expected, that the word of God mightily grew and prevailed.

2. Observe how inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel, are all the arts of magic and every species of imposture. One of the first duties which the gospel inculcates is truth in our words and sincerity in our actions; the most illustrious example which it holds out to our view, is that of inviolable attachment to the truth, and an utter abhorrence of all falsehood and disguise; but magical arts consist of fair pretences to bestow benefits which can never be conferred; of contrivances to enrich the possessor at the expense of the ignorant and credulous multitude; with such arts Christianity can hold no communion. No sooner, therefore, do men believe the gospel, than they renounce this profession, and disclose the evil practices by which they had imposed upon the world and carried on a gainful trade; and that they might not be tempted to renew their evil deeds, or expose others to a like temptation, they commit to the flames the books which contained the principles and rules of their art; thus making a noble sacrifice to truth and integrity. This was the conduct of the first Christians; but I am sorry to add that many, who have pretended to that honourable name in modern times, have not shown a like temper; they have renewed these exploded practices, and attempted to conceal the fraud by sanctimonious pretences to religion: but let them know that the gospel of Christ disdains to acknowledge such disciples, and that it requires no further proof of their being ignorant of its nature and entirely hostile to its principles.

## SECTION XXXII.

*A tumult is excited at Ephesus by the workmen who make models of the temple Diana.*

ACTS xix. 21—41.

21. AFTER these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, “*resolved in his mind,*” when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, *where he had planted considerable churches,* to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome.

To the latter place he intended to go to preach the gospel, but he was brought thither in a manner which he little expected.

22. So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus ; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season.

The object of Paul’s intended journey into Greece, was to make a collection for the poor Christians at Jerusalem, or rather in Judæa, and these persons were sent by him, that the collection might be ready when he came. Timothy was peculiarly proper for this errand, because he had accompanied the apostle when he planted these churches. Erastus was chamberlain of Corinth.\*

23. And the same time there arose no small stir, “*no small disturbance,*” about that way, “*that doctrine.*”

24. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, “*models in silver of the temple of Diana,*” brought no small gain unto the craftsmen, “*to the workmen.*”

25. Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, “*with all employed in the business,*” and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth.

26. Moreover, ye see and hear that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying, that they be no gods which are made with hands :

27. So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought, *or*, “*of being abandoned*,” but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth, “*reverenceth*.”

23. And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

It will give us some idea of the grandeur and magnificence of this temple, when we are told that it was two hundred and twenty years in building, that it was erected at the common charge of all Proconsular Asia, and that when Erostatus was condemned to death for setting it on fire, he acknowledged that he did it to perpetuate his memory by destroying so magnificent an edifice. Small models of this temple, made of silver, were, it seems in great request, and purchased as objects of curiosity and devotion. The manufacture of them afforded a lucrative employment to Demetrius and a number of other persons. The decline of their employment, in consequence of the apostle's preaching, is a proof of the prevalence of Christianity. Diana was not only the goddess of hunting amongst the heathens, but was known also under several other characters and titles.

29. And the whole city was filled with confusion, and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre.

The theatre was a large building, erected in the open air, without any covering, for the exhibition of public games, and so large as to contain frequently thirty thousand persons. This building, when not so employed, might be used for other purposes, as on the present occasion. Aristarchus, who is here called the fellow-traveller of Paul, we find, was afterwards his fellow-prisoner, Col. iv. 10. The design of forcing these men into the theatre was probably to try them. Paul, hearing of the danger of his friends, wished to employ his influence to rescue them, but is discouraged from the attempt by the prudence of the disciples.

30. And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not.

31. And certain of the chief of Asia, who were his friends, sent unto him, desiring that he would not adventure himself into the theatre.

These chiefs of Asia are supposed to be magistrates of that country, as the Greek term seems to imply, who might have the further office of presiding over the games celebrated in honour of

Diana. Being acquainted with Paul, and perhaps converts to the Christian religion, they are anxious to preserve him from the danger to which he would be exposed, by trusting himself to such a tumultuous assembly.

32. Some, therefore, cried one thing, and some another; for the assembly was confused, and the greater part knew not wherefore they were come together.

33. And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward: and Alexander beckoned with the hand, "*waved his hand, to obtain silence,*" and would have made his defence unto the people, "*for the people.*"

As he is said to have been a Jew, his object must have been to defend not the conduct of Paul, (to whom a Jew could be no friend,) but the zeal of the people, in assembling in this tumultuous manner, and to show that Paul excited disturbances wherever he went, and that they had no connexion with him, and ought not, therefore, to be thought ill of on his account.

34. But when they knew that he was a Jew, *and, therefore, an enemy of their goddess as well as Paul,* all, with one voice, about the space of two hours, cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

35. And when the town-clerk, "*recorder,*" had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper, "*a guardian,*" of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?

This was the story forged by the Ephesian priests; a similar one had been framed respecting the Palladium, or image of Minerva.

36. Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly.

37. For ye have brought hither these men, who are neither robbers of churches, "*of temples,*" nor yet blasphemers of your goddess.

It seems he did not think the charge brought by Demetrius against Paul, as asserting that those were no gods which were made with hands, a reflection upon Diana, because her image was

supposed to come down from heaven, and, therefore, could not be made with hands.

38. Wherefore, if Demetrius and the craftsmen who are with him have a matter against any man, the law is open, "*court days are kept*," and there are deputies, "*Roman proconsuls*," who are judges, let them implead one another, "*accuse one another*."

39. But if ye inquire any thing concerning other matters, *if it be a question relating to the public religion, and not of a civil nature*, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly :

40. For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, "*this day's rising*," there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse.

41. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.

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#### REFLECTIONS.

1. WE have here a memorable and instructive example of a pretended zeal for religion being employed to conceal selfish fears, and to advance private interests. The cry of Demetrius and his companions was, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians; her temple will be despised; her magnificence will be destroyed:' thus pretending to be concerned for the honour of their goddess, and alarmed for the security of her worship. But the real motive for their clamour is a fear of losing their usual profits, "this, our craft, by which we get our wealth, is in danger of being set at naught." Since the time of Demetrius a like clamour has often been raised, and from similar motives. The supporters of national superstition, when alarmed at the progress of truth and liberty, have cried out, The church is in danger, religion will be trampled under foot; when they only mean that the profits of their profession are likely to fall, the splendour of their equipage, the luxuries of their tables, the revenues by which they were fed and clothed. Politicians and statesmen have likewise exclaimed, Religion and morality are in danger; let the friends of both unite for their defence, when religion and morality were no part of their concern, when they were violating every principle of both, in pursuit of some ambitious project, and have put this cry into the mouths of the ignorant multitude, in order to conceal their evil designs. Let not the world any longer be deceived by such gross artifices; they have been practised and exposed two thousand years ago.

2. The good sense which appears in the observations of the town-clerk or recorder of Ephesus, may serve to quiet the fears of those who are really alarmed about the security of their religion. If it be of divine origin, as you profess to believe, it cannot be overturned or destroyed: it is founded upon a rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Adopt not rash and hasty measures for its defence. If individuals have violated the principles of justice, under pretence of promoting the interest of religion, the courts are open, let them be brought to a fair trial, that they may be condemned and punished; but excite not against them the violence of an angry multitude, before their cause has been heard.

3. We see from this story what powerful impediments Christianity had to contend with; not merely the errors of a senseless superstition, and the charms of a religion which allowed to its votaries the free indulgence of their grossest passions, but the zeal of men who considered their wealth and even their subsistence as necessarily connected with the popular opinion; with the zeal of priests, and augurs, and craftsmen without number, who obtained their support by the heathen worship. A religion which, by its own intrinsic force, without the aid of civil power, could in so short a time triumph over such obstacles, must surely be accompanied with the irresistible evidence of a divine original.

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#### SECTION XXXIII.

*Paul leaves Ephesus, and travels through Macedonia and Greece. He returns to Asia, and at Troas raises Eutychus from the dead.*

#### ACTS xx. 1—16.

1. AND after the uproar had ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, “*saluted them,*” in taking leave, and departed for to go into Macedonia.

Although the tumult at Ephesus had been appeased, without any act of violence, he did not choose to expose the Christians in that city to fresh odium and danger, by continuing any longer amongst them.

2. And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece.

3. And there abode three months:

The principal object of Paul's journey was to establish the disciples in the Christian profession, to confirm the faith of the

wavering, and to correct any errors in discipline or doctrine into which they might have fallen. He had also in view the farther object of making a collection among the Gentile churches, for the benefit of the poor saints who were at Jerusalem. With this view he had already sent Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia, xix. 22, to prepare them for his arrival. This object being now accomplished, he proposed to return the shortest way to Jerusalem, through Syria, but is obliged to go by another route, in consequence of the designs formed against him by the Jews.

And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed, "*he resolved,*" to return through Macedonia, *the way by which he came.*

4. And there accompanied him into Asia, Sopater of Berea; but Aristarchus and Secundus of Thessalonica, Gains of Derbe, Timothy of Lystra, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia,

5. These, going before tarried for us at Troas.

There are different methods of reading and pointing the fourth verse. According to that which I have adopted, Paul had but one companion to attend him from Greece, namely Sopater. The other persons here mentioned went before to wait for him at Troas. I must, indeed, add the name of the writer of this history to that of Sopater; for by using the pronoun *us* he modestly intimates, that he was one of the companions of Paul on this journey. The persons above-mentioned were the messengers of the several churches jointly commissioned with Paul to convey their charity to Jerusalem.

6. And we sailed away from Philippi, after the days of unleavened bread, and came to them to Troas in five days, where we abode seven days.

The days of unleavened bread, were the days of preparation for the passover; they are here mentioned either merely for the sake of marking the time at which the apostle began his journey, or to intimate that it was deferred till after that time, which was deemed more than ordinarily sacred with the Jews, even when in a foreign country, where that festival could not be observed; for although the apostle contended so earnestly for exempting the Gentile converts from the observance of the law of Moses, yet he allowed the Jews, after they became Christians, to keep it, and complied with it himself.

7. And upon the first day of the week when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow, and continued his speech until midnight.

The first day of the week, here mentioned, is undoubtedly the day on which Christ rose from the dead, answering to our Lord's-day, or Sunday. As the breaking of the bread occurs in this verse in connexion with disciples, it is generally supposed to refer to the Lord's Supper, which is aptly described by that action, and was celebrated on this day, in preference to any other, on account of the relation which it bore to his resurrection. From this passage it appears that it was the custom of Christians, in early times, to meet together on the first day of the week for celebrating the Lord's Supper, and for other purposes of religious worship and instruction, and that they were countenanced in doing so by the apostle Paul; but it does not appear from this, nor, I conceive, from any other passage of the New Testament, that they regarded this day as more sacred than any other, or that they observed it, as the Jews did their sabbath, as a day of total cessation from all ordinary occupation. Religious worship and instruction were evidently not confined to the Lord's-day; for we find that Paul taught daily in the school of one Tyrannus. As this was the last time Paul would have to address them, being resolved to depart on the morrow, he extended his discourse to an extraordinary length.\*

8. And there were many lights in the upper chamber where they were gathered together.

This circumstance is noticed, I apprehend, to account for what is mentioned in the next verse, the windows being open in the night; that precaution being necessary for the purpose of admitting air, and of preventing the apartment from being too much heated by the lights, as well as by the company assembled.

9. And there sat in the window a certain young man, named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep, and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, "*the third story,*" and was taken up dead.

The windows of the ancients were not covered with glass, as ours are, but were small doors, which, when uncovered, were quite open. Through one of these doors, therefore, a man might fall, when oppressed with sleep. From the height from which Eutychus fell, that of three stories, we may suppose that he was not merely dead in appearance, but actually killed, and that, therefore, the symptoms of life which appeared soon afterwards, were the effect of miraculous powers exerted for his recovery.

10. And Paul went down, and fell on him, and, embracing him, said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him.

In this action Paul seems to have imitated the conduct of Elijah and Elisha, who, when they endeavoured to raise a dead child to life, threw themselves upon him. 1 Kings xvii. 21. 2 Kings iv. 34.

\* Theological Repository, Vol. VI. pp. 335, &c.; Vol. V. pp. 345, &c.



11. When he, therefore, was come up again, and had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, he departed.

That this was not the bread of a common meal is evident from its not having been eaten till midnight.

12. And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted.

13. And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, *a sea-port town, at a little distance from Troas*, there intending to take in Paul; for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot, “*by land.*”

14. And when he had met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene, *the principal town in the island of Lesbos.*

15. And we sailed thence, and came the next day over against Chios, *another island in the same sea*, and the next day we arrived at Samos, *an island on the coast of Asia*, and tarried at Trogyllium, *a promontory of the Lesser Asia*, and the next day we came to Miletus.

This sea-port was situated on the continent beyond Ephesus, in the direction in which they were now sailing, and gives occasion for the observation in the next verse, that Paul purposely passed by Ephesus, lest it should prevent him from arriving in time at Jerusalem.

16. For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia; for he hasted, if it were possible, for him to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost.

At this time Paul hoped to meet a greater number of Christians at Jerusalem, and to have a better opportunity of distributing the charity with which he was entrusted.

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#### REFLECTIONS.

1. LET us follow the example of these early Christians, who assembled for observing religious ordinances and for receiving religious instruction, on the first day of the week. No precept of our religion, indeed, enjoins upon us a like practice; no declaration of Christ or his apostles is recorded, by which it can be made to appear, that the day is appropriated to such purposes; yet the

practice is recommended to us on the same principles of expediency and utility as it was to them. We have the same wants as they had, and are exposed to the same dangers from the snares of the world and the frailty of our nature. We have, therefore, the same occasion for religious information, and the same necessity for having divine truth frequently inculcated upon the mind. While we are urged by the same powerful motives, it will be our wisdom to follow the same conduct.

If Christians so near the time of Christ found it so useful to break bread in remembrance of their Master, when many circumstances conspired to preserve his memory, can it be less useful to us, who are removed to so great a distance from the period in which he lived, and who are under so many stronger temptations to forget him? Let those who live in the habitual neglect of this ordinance seriously consider, whether their conduct can be justified.

2. The conduct of Paul furnishes us with a fresh instance of his zeal. He spends a whole evening, nay, a whole night until break of day, in discoursing concerning Jesus and his religion; and this, also, when about to encounter the fatigues of a journey, for which, others would think it necessary to prepare by previous repose. This, it seems, was a most interesting and delightful theme, which never appeared exhausted, and on which he could dwell for ever. To most of his hearers, also, no doubt, it was alike interesting and delightful. If there was one of them who, instead of listening with watchful attention to his words, fell into a sound sleep, yet had he a better apology to offer for his conduct than those who indulge themselves in the same manner at the present day, namely, that the preacher's discourse had been continued till midnight. Happy apostle, whose heart was so deeply interested in the work in which he was engaged; whose mind was animated with such divine ardour; and happy they, among the ministers of Christ of the present day, who feel any portion of this spirit!

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#### SECTION XXXIV.

*Paul's farewell address at Miletus to the elders of the church of Ephesus.*

ACTS xx. 17--38.

17. AND from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.

These were persons the most respectable for their years, characters, and knowledge, whom the apostle, with the consent of the church, had chosen to preside over it for the purpose of instruction. It seems to have been the practice of the apostles and first teachers, to appoint such persons to this office, in every place

where a society of Christians was established; for we read, xiv. 23, that they appointed them elders in every city. This was no more than a necessary provision for accomplishing the design of religious societies. The reason of his sending for these elders at this time, was, to warn them of some dangers to which they would shortly be exposed, and to exhort them to a faithful discharge of their office.

13. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you, "*I have behaved among you,*" at all seasons.

This he might with propriety say to the elders of the church at Ephesus; for the greatest part of the time which he had past in Asia he had spent in that city.

19. Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears and temptations, "*trials,*" which befel me by the lying-in-wait of the Jews;

He refer them to his modest and unassuming manners, as proofs that his motive was not ambition; and to the dangers which he encountered, as evidences of his sincere attachment to the gospel, and especially to those parts of it which were obnoxious.

20. And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and taught you publicly, and from house to house,

21. Testifying, both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

By the word repentance in this place, I understand the same thing as in xi. 18, where it is said that God had granted to the Gentiles also repentance unto life; a change of mind, by their abandoning their former errors, and embracing Christianity. This was the great subject of the apostle's preaching to Jews as well as Gentiles. To exhortations to abandon their errors, might very well be added, exhortations to believe in Christ; but if the common interpretation were true, faith in Christ must precede repentance, and be the cause of it, which is directly the reverse of the order in which the apostle preached. By saying that he kept back nothing that was profitable, the apostle probably refers to that doctrine which he seems to have received by peculiar revelation from heaven, and which he elsewhere calls a mystery, namely, that the Gentiles were to be admitted into the Christian church upon professing faith in Christ, without conforming to the law of Moses. This doctrine was of high importance to the Gentiles, and, if denied or concealed, might have caused many of them to reject Christianity altogether. It was, therefore, explicitly avowed, and strenuously insisted upon by the apostle in all the Gentile churches;

although he knew that it would render him extremely obnoxious to the Jews, and expose him to much danger.

22. And now, behold, I go bound in the Spirit to Jerusalem, *i. e.* “*in my mind already bound,*”\* *pre-saging my imprisonment*, not knowing the things that shall befall me there ;

23. Save that the Holy Spirit witnesseth in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me, “*await me.*”

The apostle here refers to such prophecies as that mentioned in the next chapter, where we are told that when he came to Cesarea, Agabus took his girdle, and bound himself with it, saying, So shall it be done to the man who owneth this girdle. Similar prophecies, it seems, had been delivered to him in almost all the cities through which he passed.

24. But none of these things move me, “*I make no account of any such thing ;*” neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, *i. e.* *the apostolic office which I have received immediately from his hands*, to testify the gospel of the grace of God, “*to declare the glad tidings of the favour of God.*”

The object of the commission which the apostle had received from Jesus Christ, was to preach to the Gentiles, *i. e.* to assure them that God was willing to extend his favour to them, as well as to the Jews, by communicating to them a knowledge of true religion, and bestowing miraculous powers. To fulfil this commission, to the satisfaction of his own mind, he now declares his readiness to suffer imprisonment, and even to sacrifice his life.

25. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.

26. Wherefore I take you to record this day, “*I declare unto you,*” that I am pure from the blood of all men, *i. e.* “*of you all,*” for it is of them only that he is speaking ;

27. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

In this place the apostle probably refers to what I have mentioned already, the obnoxious doctrine respecting the Gentiles, which

\* Mangey, in Bowyer's Conjectures.

he was under such great temptations to conceal, on account of the opposition of the Jews. This he had not forborn to publish; and, therefore, if any of them fell away from Christianity, and were thereby lost, the blame could not be imputed to him, but must lie upon themselves.

Having mentioned his own conduct, Paul proceeds to exhort them to manifest like care and integrity.

28. Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, or, “*bishops*,” for so the word is in the original, to feed, or, “*tend*,” the church of the Lord, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

The best manuscripts and versions read in this verse, the church of the Lord, i. e. of Christ, and not the church of God, the reading which our version has followed. The former, therefore, is probably the true reading, and the latter a corruption.\* To such wretched expedients have men had recourse, in order to support a weak cause. Common sense, indeed, seems to require this construction of the apostle’s language, whatever his words might be supposed to be; for to talk of the blood of God, as if the spiritual and omnipresent Deity could bleed and die, is such horrid impiety as could never for a moment be supposed to enter the thoughts of this illustrious preacher of the gospel.

From this verse, it plainly appears that by bishops and elders are meant, in the New Testament, the same persons; for the elders of the church of Ephesus are expressly called *Bishops*: but our translators, contrary to their practice in other places, have here rendered the word overseers. The opinion, therefore, which many maintain, that bishops are a distinct order of persons, enjoying superior authority, and presiding over the elders and churches of a particular district, has no foundation in the New Testament. These elders are said to have been made bishops by the Holy Spirit, because they were made such by the apostle, who was assisted by the gifts of the Spirit, or miraculous powers.

The apostle’s solemn exhortation is founded on apprehensions which he entertained of the danger to which they would be exposed, which he now proceeds to state.

29. For I know this, that after my departure, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

30. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

\* See Griesbach, who, in his second edition, has taken *κυριου*, of the Lord, into the text.

The persons who principally disturbed the peace of the churches planted by Paul were Jews, who, as we learn from the epistles, endeavoured every where to divert men from the pure gospel of Christ, by recommending the observance of the ceremonies of the Mosaic law. Those who refused to comply with their injunctions they persecuted themselves, or stirred up others to persecute. To these men the apostle here gives the denomination of wolves, as he does elsewhere that of dogs.\*

31. Therefore watch, and remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one, night and day, with tears.

The Jews, it seems, began to show themselves in the churches even while the apostle was present with them, and made it necessary for him incessantly to caution them, with much earnestness, against their plausible language.

32. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them who are sanctified.

That is, as the words are commonly interpreted, I commit you to the care of Divine Providence and to the influence of the gospel of Christ, which is able to build you up in virtue, and to give you a portion amongst the righteous in a future life; but, perhaps, by "the sanctified," the apostle only means Christians in the present life, who are often said to be sanctified, and are called saints; and by "an inheritance," a place amongst the professors of the gospel at present.

33. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel.

34. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.

35. I have showed you all things, *every part of your duty*, how that, so labouring, ye ought to support the weak, "*the sick*," and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

36. And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all.

37. And they all wept sore, and fell upon Paul's

\* Philippians iii. 2.

neck, and kissed him, *that is, took leave of him by saluting him*;

38. Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.

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### REFLECTIONS.

THIS affectionate address of the apostle to the elders of the church at Ephesus abounds with lessons of instruction, both to ministers and people.

1. The former it teaches how they may most faithfully discharge their office; not by professing what they do not believe, not by withholding their sentiments, or disguising them by the use of ambiguous language; but by teaching the truth openly and fully, without concealment or reserve. Thus it was that the apostle acted, who kept back nothing that was profitable, and shunned not to declare the whole will of God; and those who wish to acquire the same character for honesty and integrity must act in the same manner. To withhold or conceal the truth, is to incur the blame of, and to render ourselves answerable for, all the evils which are inseparably connected with ignorance and error; for the enthusiasm, superstition, and idolatry, of some, the scepticism and infidelity of others. If, by our misrepresentations or silence, any fall into fatal errors; if they mistake the object of the gospel or reject it altogether, their ruin must be attributed to us; their blood will lie upon our heads. Let no one say that the disclosure of the truth may be premature, or do harm. The Being, from whom we have received it, is the best judge of its tendency; and if he thinks that the knowledge of it will be useful to mankind, which he has plainly declared by communicating it, whether by the light of reason or by revelation, let no man pretend to be wiser than his Maker.

If this be the duty of Christian teachers, it is no less the duty of Christian hearers to bear with that openness and sincerity in ministers, which their religion enjoins. To be offended with this freedom is to be offended with the performance of the first duty which man owes to his neighbour—integrity; and to tempt men to concealment and artifice, where openness and courage are of the highest importance.

2. We learn, that to discharge our duty with fidelity and to the satisfaction of our own minds, is more desirable than ease, liberty, or life. All these the apostle was willing to give up, in order to finish his course with joy, and to fulfil the ministry which he had received; and every wise man will be willing to make the same

sacrifices. Peace of mind is a prize which kingdoms cannot purchase, and which no earthly power can destroy. Never part with it for any consideration.

3. Observe how disinterested was the apostle's attachment to the gospel. Instead of amassing wealth by the enterprise in which he was engaged, we find him labouring with his own hands for the support of himself and his companions. Instead of being received with applause in every place, he is warned to expect, and experience has taught him to look for, bonds and imprisonment: yet none of these things retard his progress, or induce him to slacken his course. What can attach him to a cause attended with so little profit, and accompanied with so many personal evils? What but a conviction of its divine origin, and of its supreme importance to mankind? In his labours and sufferings, therefore, we read a perpetual testimony in favour of the gospel.

4. Let us all remember the divine maxim delivered by our Master, with which Paul closes his address—that it is more blessed to give than to receive; that there is more pleasure in conferring favours than in receiving them. To enjoy this sublime pleasure, let us submit to labour and practise self-denial. The satisfaction to be derived from an ability to succour the infirm and indigent, acquired by this means, will more than repay our sacrifices.

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SECTION XXXV.

*Paul returns to Jerusalem, and performs his vow.*

ACTS xxi. 1—26.

1. AND it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara.

Coos was one of the islands of the *Ægean* sea, now called *Zia*; Rhodes was another island, remarkable for a temple of the sun and its colossus; and Patara was a seaport on the continent of Asia.

2. And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth.

3. Now when we had discovered Cyprus, (*see chap. xiii. 4.*) we left it on the left-hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unlade her burthen.

The ship was said to be bound for Phenicia; but here the country at which she arrives is called Syria, because Phenicia was



sometimes reckoned part of Syria. Hence it is, that in the gospels we read of a Syro-Phenician woman.

4. And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul, through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem.

This they did not say by the direction of the Spirit; but the dangers, which this illustrious preacher of the gospel would encounter in Jerusalem, were revealed to the disciples at Tyre, as they had been before to those in other places, and their dissuasion of the apostle from pursuing his journey was founded upon this revelation, but made no part of it. Had it been really dictated by the Spirit, he must have yielded to it.

5. And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city; and we kneeled down on the shore and prayed.

6. And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship, and they returned home again.

7. And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, *a town in Palestine, now called Acre*, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day.

8. And the next day we departed, and came to Cæsarea, and we entered into the house of Philip the Evangelist, (who was one of the seven,) *i. e. one of the seven deacons mentioned in chapter vi.* and abode with him.

The words, "we that were of Paul's company," which appear in our English translation of this verse, are not found in some of the best copies of the original, and therefore have been omitted.\*

9. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, who did prophecy.

It has been observed more than once in the course of this history, that the term prophet does not always imply a power of foretelling future events, but frequently the office of a Christian teacher. This was probably the employment of these daughters of Philip, whom their father, himself a preacher, had trained up for this purpose, in an age when teachers were so much wanted. Miraculous powers were undoubtedly communicated to both sexes, without distinction, in the first ages; but it is not probable that four

\* Griesbach.

persons in the same family should all be endued with the same extraordinary talent. Had this really been the case, we should have been informed of the subject of their prophecies as we are in the next verse of those of Agabus.

10. And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judæa a certain prophet, named Agabus.

This is the same person who is mentioned, Acts xi. 28, as being at Antioch, and foretelling a dreadful famine in Judæa, in the days of Claudius Cæsar.

11. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Spirit, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.

By such symbolical actions, the ancient prophets frequently foretold future events.

12. And when we heard these things, both we and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.

His friends, probably, regarded this prediction of the sufferings which he must endure if he went up to Jerusalem, as containing intimations that he ought not to go, and urged them upon him in that view. But as the apostle had received no prohibition upon the subject, he was not to be discouraged by the prospect of persecution from discharging what he conceived to be his duty.

13. Then Paul answered, What, mean ye to weep and to break my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

The affectionate concern which you show for my safety, distresses me beyond measure, but does not move my purpose. I entreat you, therefore, to spare me this pain, by ceasing your importunities; for so great is my desire to advance the Christian doctrine, that for this purpose I am willing not only to be imprisoned, but also to suffer death. The name of Christ is here, by a common figure of speech, put for his cause.

14. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.

Since thou appearest to act from a sense of duty in going up to Jerusalem, we acquiesce in thy resolution to expose thyself to danger, since it seems to be the will of Heaven.

15. And after those days we took up our carriage

ges, “*we made ourselves ready,*” and went up to Jerusalem.

16. There went with us, also, certain of the disciples of Cæsarea, and brought with them one Mnaason of Cyprus, an old disciple, *i. e. one who had professed the gospel from the beginning*, with whom we should lodge.

17. And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

It is worthy of observation, that, although the followers of Christ had been called Christians for many years, yet Paul and Luke decline the use of the term, calling them, as here, brethren or believers. They probably thought that it rendered them too much like the different sects of philosophers, which were called after the names of their leaders.

18. And the day following, Paul went in with us unto James, and all the elders were present.

James was one of the apostles, who resided many years at Jerusalem—the rest were the elders of different churches in the city.

18. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry, “*by his services.*”

This work was done by the apostle; yet so accustomed was he to see God in every thing, that he ascribes it to him; and strictly and philosophically speaking, the work was his; for he furnished Paul with ability to perform it; not in a miraculous way, but by endowing him with talents that qualified him for preaching the gospel.

20. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, *they praised God for this fresh proof of his goodness*, and said unto him, thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe, and they are zealous for the law;

21. And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying, that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs, *i. e. of Moses.*

22. What is it, therefore? “*what is to be done, therefore?*” The multitude must needs come together; for they will hear that thou art come.

23. Do this, therefore, that we say unto thee. We have four men which have a vow on them ;

The vow, it seems, was that of the Nazarite—abstaining from wine, and letting the hair grow long.

24. Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads ; and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing ; but that thou thyself, also, walkest orderly, and keepest the law.

To assume the vow of a Nazarite, after recovery from illness or some remarkable deliverance, seems to have been a common practice among the Jews at this time. The accomplishment of a vow of this kind, is thought, by many, to have been the object of Paul's late journey to Jerusalem. As the expenses of the vow were considerable, it was a popular act to bear a part, or the whole of them, for those who could not afford to do it themselves. For this reason, Agrippa, when he came to the throne, ordered, as Josephus tells us, a good number of Nazarites to be shaved, in order to ingratiate himself with the people.\* A similar act the brethren at Jerusalem now advise Paul to perform, in order to remove the prejudices entertained against him by his countrymen, as encouraging men to forsake the law. Of the prudence and propriety of this advice, there is much reason to doubt. One thing, at least, is certain, that it did not answer the purpose intended. For it proved the cause of the tumult which was afterwards excited.

25. As touching the Gentiles who believe, we have written, and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from things strangled, and from fornication, *from every species of idolatry.*†

The apostles and first Christians, as long as the temple stood, thought proper to conform to the law of Moses ; but after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, they exempted themselves, as well as the Gentiles, from observing it.

26. Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself with them, entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.

\* Lardner, Vol. 1. pp. 211, 212.

† See the note on Acts xv. 20.

## REFLECTIONS.

1. FROM the example of the apostles and the Christians at Ephesus and Tyre, we may learn in what manner religious friends should take leave of each other—by prayer, private or public, by committing each other to the divine protection and blessing. For this purpose, the apostle and his friends knelt down on the shore of that dangerous element on which he was about to embark, and with no other covering than the canopy of heaven; and he addressed his petition to Him who rules over the sea as well as over the land. From such an act of devotion they would rise with minds free from anxiety and care. The apostle would pursue his voyage with alacrity, knowing that he was under the protection of God; his friends would return to their several occupations with tranquillity and composure, satisfied with having done for him the best thing they were able to do, by commending him to the care of Heaven. In this manner let us also introduce devotion to God into all our transactions; when we separate from our friends, and when we meet them again; when we go to rest at night, and when we rise in the morning; when we engage in important undertakings, and when we abandon them; when we prosper, and when we fail. By thus introducing the Divine Being into all our concerns, we shall render our pleasures more delightful, our pains and sorrows less burthensome.

2. Let us admire the fortitude of this illustrious advocate of the truth, in going up to Jerusalem, notwithstanding the predictions of so many prophets foretelling his sufferings there, and notwithstanding the importunate entreaties of his friends. It was not the fortitude of constitutional courage, or of stoical apathy, but the fortitude of a man who felt all the tender sympathies of human nature, who wept with his friends when they wept, and whose heart was almost broken by their anxious cares for his own safety. It was the fortitude of a man who acted from principle, and not from feeling; whose sense of duty, and a desire to do good, were stronger than the love of friends, of liberty, or of life. Where shall we find so illustrious a pattern of Christian integrity and zeal? No where, but in him who went up to the same city, with the certain prospect before him of dying a most ignominious and painful death.

3. Let us adopt the language of these pious Christians under similar disappointments, and learn to say, like them, 'The will of the Lord be done.'

If our friends are doomed to affliction which we cannot prevent; if we are ourselves overtaken by great and unexpected calamities; if schemes for doing good, which we had long entertained and fondly cherished, are defeated by events over which we had no control, in all these circumstances let us learn to say, with cheerful resignation, 'The will of the Lord be done.'

## SECTION XXXVI.

*A tumult is excited by the Jews against Paul, who is rescued by the Romans.*

ACTS xxi. 27—40.

27. AND when the seven days were almost ended, *i. e.* the days of Paul's separation as a Nazarite, at the completion of which, several offerings were to be made in the temple, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him,

28. Crying out, Men of Israel, help. This is the man that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place; and farther, brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.

29. For they had seen before with him, in the city, Trophimus, an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.

Paul had spent three years in Asia, and experienced much opposition from the Jews in that quarter. From them, therefore, a persecution against him was most likely to commence at Jerusalem. The apostle's having accused the Jews of rejecting and crucifying the Messiah, was considered by them as speaking against the people; the support of a new dispensation of religion was opposition to the law, especially if he intimated, as he probably did, that that law was soon to be laid aside. He foretold that the temple was to be destroyed, and this laid the foundation of the charge against him, as well as against Stephen, of speaking against that place. It is well known that the outward court of the temple was called the court of the Gentiles, because so far they were allowed to advance in this sacred place: but these people could not justly charge Paul with defiling the temple, by bringing them into the inner court or the court of the Israelites, into which none but native Israelites, or proselytes to their religion, were allowed to enter. For a Gentile to be found here was regarded as a sufficient cause for instant death, as we learn from the testimony both of Josephus and Philo; and, therefore, they went about to inflict it upon Paul, whom they supposed to have been instrumental in bringing one hither.

30. And all the city was moved, and the people

ran together, and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple, *that that sacred place might not be defiled with his blood*, and forthwith the doors were shut.

This precaution might be thought necessary, to prevent Paul from taking refuge at the altar, which was deemed a sacred asylum.

31. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar ;

32. Who immediately took soldiers, and centurions, and ran down unto them, and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers they left beating of Paul.

Adjoining to the temple, but on higher ground, so as to overlook it, was placed the castle of Antonia. In this place a garrison of Roman soldiers was constantly stationed for the purpose of keeping Jerusalem in awe, and particularly of preserving tranquillity at the temple, where the people assembled in vast numbers to celebrate their festivals. It was to the commanding officer on this station that intelligence was brought of the present tumult, perhaps by one of the centinels who might observe it from his post. The vicinity of the castle will account for the speedy succour which the chief captain brought. Had he been stationed in a distant part of the city, Paul must have been put to death by the mob long before he could have arrived. The beating, now inflicted, is said to have been called by the Jews the beating of rebels, and was frequently so severe, as to terminate in death ; and this was, no doubt, their intention in the present instance, had they been suffered to proceed.

33. Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains, and demanded who he was, and what he had done.

34. And some cried one thing, and some another, among the multitude ; and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle.

There he could obtain silence, and ascertain the charges brought against him. We see here how the prophecy of Agabus was fulfilled, who foretold that Paul should be bound at Jerusalem.

35. And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people.

36. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him, “*kill him.*”

Although they could no longer offer him violence, they cease not to express their wishes openly that others would do it. The stairs here mentioned were the steps ascending to the castle from the temple. Being in this commanding situation, and guarded from violence by soldiers, it occurred to Paul that it afforded a favourable opportunity of speaking to the multitude. He, therefore, addresses the captain to ask permission for this purpose.

37. And as Paul was to be led, “*was about to be led,*” into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? who said, Canst thou speak Greek?

38. Art thou that Egyptian, who, before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?

This Egyptian, according to the account given of him by Josephus, was a pretended prophet, who, coming to Jerusalem, obtained a considerable number of followers, whom he led out into the wilderness, where they increased to thirty thousand. Returning hence to mount Olivet, with a view to attack Jerusalem, he was defeated by Felix, the Roman governor, but escaped with his life. It was not, therefore, an improbable supposition of the chief captain, that as the Jews in Jerusalem did not in general favour his cause, the present tumult might be occasioned by his return.\*

39. But Paul said, I am a man who am a Jew, of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city, and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people.

Paul in his answer very properly says that he was a Jew, because that proved that he had a right to be in the temple.

Ancient authors tell us that Tarsus was so distinguished for learning, commerce, wealth, and grandeur, that it might dispute the palm with Athens and Alexandria. Paul was justified, therefore, in saying that it was no mean city.

40. And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, “*on the steps,*” and beckoned with the hand, “*waved his hand,*” unto the people.

\* Lardner, Vol. I. p. 414



## REFLECTIONS.

1. FROM this portion of the history, we may observe the deplorable effect of an intemperate zeal for religion: it blinds the understanding, hardens the heart, and converts men into savages thirsting for blood. Such was its effect upon these Jews, who, having charged an innocent and virtuous person with crimes which he had never committed, seek his life, and are so impatient to accomplish their wishes, that they cannot wait for the usual forms of justice. Nothing short of his immediate death will satisfy their fury. Religion, however, disdains the use of all such means for its support: reason and argument are its only weapons of defence: if these fail, it allows us not to have recourse to others. While we view the conduct of these Jewish zealots with horror, let us not forget that we are liable to the same passions, and endeavour to check, at its first appearance, every thing in ourselves or others, which has this tendency. Their violence, as here recorded, serves as a useful warning to all future generations, to avoid a conduct which mankind, in all ages, have been but too much inclined to imitate. It likewise serves to prove, what the history asserts, the eminence which the apostle had attained, and the success of his labours in preaching the gospel. Against a person less illustrious they would not have been so exasperated.

2. From the conduct of the multitude on this occasion, we may learn the danger of tumultuous proceedings, and the necessity of having courts of law, where witnesses may be examined at leisure, and the truth sifted out with deliberation and care. We see, that when the contrary method is employed, when men become judges in their own cause, when an ignorant and heated multitude take the law into their own hands, and administer it according to their own pleasure, nothing but tumult and confusion arise, and while some cry one thing and some another, truth and error, justice and injustice are confounded, and the innocent suffer instead of the guilty. With such proceedings, under whatever specious pretence conducted, let us, my brethren, have no concern.

3. Let us admire the presence of mind which the apostle discovered, in thinking of an address to the multitude from the steps by which he ascended to the castle. He had just been cruelly beaten by an enraged populace; he was still sore with the bruises which he had received; they were pressing upon him with the utmost violence, and uttering the most horrid cries for his life: yet he had no sooner reached an eminence, from which he might be seen and heard, than he feels an irresistible desire to address them in vindication of himself and of his religion. That he experienced some resentment at such unjust usage cannot be doubted, since his feelings were as acute as those of other men; yet he represses his resentment, and forgets the injury, as soon as he has an opportunity of do-

ing good. Happy are they who, when placed, like the apostle, in new and extraordinary circumstances, know how to seize every incident and every circumstance, and to apply it to some useful purpose.

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SECTION XXXVII.

*Paul makes his defence to the Jews in the temple.*

ACTS xxi. 10. ; xxii. 1--29.

40. AND when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying,

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1. BRETHREN and fathers, hear ye my defence, which I now make unto you.

2. And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence :

As this was their native language, they were well pleased to find him make use of it, and not of Greek.

And he saith,

3. I am verily a man who am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city, at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, "*instructed after the strictness of the law of the fathers,*" his master being a Pharisee, and was zealous towards God, "*very zealous,*" as ye are all this day.

When the Hebrews express themselves in the superlative degree, they use the name of God. Rom. x. 2.

4. And I persecuted this way, "*the professors of this religion,*" unto death, binding and delivering into prison both men and women.

5. As also the high-priest doth bear me witness, "*can bear me witness,*" and all the estate of the elders : from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, *i. e. to the Jews*, and went to Damascus, to bring them that were there, bound unto Jerusalem, that they might be punished.

6. And it came to pass that as I made my jour-

ney, and was come nigh unto Damascus, about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me ;

7. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice, saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me ?

8. And I answered, Who art thou, Lord ? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.

9. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid ; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.

The former account of this transaction says, that the persons who accompanied Paul heard a voice, but saw no man ; it is probable, therefore, that they heard a noise, although no articulate sound, not being near enough for that purpose. This supposition will reconcile the two accounts.

10. And I said, What shall I do, Lord ? and the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus, and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.

11. And when I could not see for the glory of that light, *for its excessive brightness*, being led by the hand of those that were with me, I came to Damascus.

12. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews that dwelt there, (*and therefore not likely to be concerned in an imposture*),

13. Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight ; and the same hour, "*the same moment*," I looked upon him, *i. e. my sight was restored*.

The former account informs us that this visit was made to Paul, in consequence of a vision with which Ananias was favoured, directing him to go.

14. And he said, the God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth.

Jesus of Nazareth is denominated the Just One, more than once

in this history, Acts iii. 14, vii. 52 ; and the appellation seems to have been borrowed from 2 Sam. xxiii. 3, where the Messiah is foretold under that name, when the language is properly translated.\*

15. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.

16. And now, why tarriest thou ? “ *why delayest thou ?* ” Arise, and be baptized, “ *get thyself baptized,* ” and wash away thy sins, calling upon the name of the Lord, “ *calling thyself after the name of the Lord.* ”

Two things are worthy of observation in this verse : First, that baptism is said to wash away sins, and that these sins, therefore, could not be moral guilt, but must be some kind of ceremonial uncleanness, something which belonged to all mankind who had not faith in Christ, both Jews and Gentiles, whatever their character might be, the virtuous as well as the vicious. Agreeably to this language, we are said to be justified and saved by faith ; and the blood of Christ, which established the truth of the new covenant, is said to be shed for the remission of sins, and to cleanse from all sin. From inattention to this meaning of the word sin, in Scripture, and particularly in the writings of Paul, many professors of Christianity have fallen into the grossest mistakes in interpreting the language of the New Testament. The second thing which deserves notice is, that Paul is not here directed, as some have erroneously supposed, to address his prayers to Christ ; for he is exhorted not to call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ after baptism, but to call himself after his name, i. e. to become a follower or disciple of Christ. Nor is there any passage of Scripture, which authorizes or encourages Christians of the present day to address their prayers unto him : on the contrary, when the disciples desired to be taught how to pray, he directed them to say, Our Father, who art in heaven.

At what time the apostle was favoured with the vision, mentioned in the next verses, cannot fully be ascertained ; but it was probably on his first visit to Jerusalem, after his return from Arabia, at the distance of at least three years from his conversion. He imagined that an account of his conversion, and the reasons of it, after his having so violently persecuted the Christians, could not fail to make a favourable impression upon the minds of his old acquaintance, and induce them to embrace the gospel. With this expectation he came up to Jerusalem ; but he was informed by Christ that he would be disappointed, and was ordered to return.

17. And it came to pass, that when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance ;

The Greek word signifies an ecstasy, i. e. a supernatural state of mind, in which prophets were favoured with visions and revelations.

\* Grey on the last words of David.

18. And I saw him, saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem ; for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me.

To this the apostle replies by mentioning his own violent persecution of the disciples, as a ground for expecting, that the conversion of such a persecutor was likely to awaken their attention to Christianity, and dispose them to embrace it.

19. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned, and beat in every synagogue, them that believed on thee ;

20. And when the blood of thy martyr, "*thy witness,*" Stephen, was shed, I, also, was standing by, and consenting, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.

21. And he said unto me, Depart, for I will send thee far hence, unto the Gentiles.

22. And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth ; for it is not fit that he should live.

As soon as his mission to the Gentiles was mentioned, all their former rage against him returned, because they imagined that he was going to say, that the Jews were to be rejected, and the Gentiles introduced into their place ; the crime with which they charged him.

23. And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, "*shook their garments,*" and threw dust into the air, *actions expressive of their abhorrence of what he said ;*

24. The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined, "*put to the torture,*" by scourging, that he might know wherefore they cried so against him.

The chief captain, not understanding Hebrew, might not know what it was in Paul's speech which gave them so much offence.

25. And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned ?

These words imply, that it was customary with Romans to examine by the torture, in order to discover crimes ; that this torture was inflicted by scourging or whipping ; but that it was unlawful to scourge a Roman, especially uncondemned, and not legally con-

victed of any crime. So much is implied in the question of Paul; and the truth of what is here supposed has been confirmed by the testimony of Roman writers.\*

26. When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest; for this man is a Roman.

27. Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea.

28. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born.

29. Then straightway they departed from him that should have examined him, "*that were about to put him to the torture,*" the chief captain having satisfied himself, that what Paul said, was true; and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because† he had bound him.

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### REFLECTIONS.

1. IT deserves to be noticed what confirmation the account given by Paul, of the manner of his conversion, receives from the circumstances in which it was delivered:—in the presence of his bitterest enemies, who heard him with patience while relating the transaction, but who would not have failed to contradict and silence him, had it been known to be false: in the city of Jerusalem, where the high-priest and elders resided, from whom he had received his commission, and to whom he now appeals for the truth of what he says, where several of his companions were still living, who attended him on his journey. But neither his former companions, nor the high-priest or elders take any effectual methods to prove the falsehood of the narration; for the story prevails, and gains increasing credit. A report, which could pass uncontradicted in such circumstances, must be true. Nothing but truth could have stood such a test.

2. How unjust and cruel the practice of putting men to the torture, to compel them to confession! This is to make suspicion of guilt the ground of punishment, and to inflict suffering where there is a presumption of innocence: it is to tempt men to become involuntary accusers of themselves or others, of crimes which they have never committed, in order to put an end to sufferings which they are no longer able to endure. It is as inconsistent with humanity as with the principles of equity and justice. Wretched, indeed, must be that

\* Lardner, Vol. I. pp. 221—223.

† Wakefield, on the authority of the Æthiopic version, omits this last clause.

government which authorizes or encourages such treatment ; yet it has prevailed among nations who have called themselves enlightened and civilized, among the professed friends and advocates of freedom, but who had no claim to this character ; among the Romans in ancient times, among the modern nations of Europe, and even by some in our own day. But the custom is equally odious by whomsoever practised, and cannot be too much reprobated.

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SECTION XXXVIII.

*Paul defends himself before the Sanhedrim. A dissension arising, he is brought back to the castle.*

ACTS xxii. 30. ; xxiii. 1—11.

30. ON the morrow, because he would have known, "*because he wished to know,*" the certainty, wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priest and all the council, "*the whole Sanhedrim,*" to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them.

As he had been accused of doing things against the law, and against the temple, the charge was of a religious nature, and, therefore, properly cognizable by the Sanhedrim, to whom the care of religion was entrusted.

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1. AND Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

He looked steadily at the council, to discover whether he could recollect any of their persons, having been formerly acquainted with them. He might, with good reason, say this of himself while a Jew, no less than while he was a Christian ; for he acted from conviction in one case as well as in the other ; but, as it was his conduct as a Christian that was called in question upon the present occasion, it is probable, that he refers to that period of his life which succeeded his conversion, and that he means to assert, with a solemn appeal to an omniscient Being for the truth of what he says, that he had acted from the dictates of conscience in embracing the gospel at first, and in preaching it afterwards, and not from any selfish and dishonourable motive. Nothing could be more proper for vindicating himself, than such an assertion before his present audience, who were assembled for the purpose of inquiring into his conduct : but to the high-priest, who was greatly inflamed with prejudice against him, it ap-

peared to savour too much of boasting, in one who was brought as a prisoner before him, with such heavy crimes laid to his charge. He, therefore, commanded him to be smitten on the face.

2. And the high-priest, Ananias, commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth “*on the face.*”

This was an act of gross injustice to a man who had yet been convicted of no crime, and was called before the council only for the purpose of being examined, and might well betray the apostle into some warmth.

3. Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, “*is about to smite thee,*” thou whited wall : for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law ?

In calling the high-priest a whited wall, the apostle has recourse to the same kind of image as that which was employed by Christ, when he said, that the Pharisees were like whited sepulchres, which appear fair outwardly, but within are full of rotten carcasses. Of the same kind was the character of this high-priest, who, pretending to observe the forms of law, was guilty of the grossest injustice. Examples, indeed, of similar treatment were to be found in the Jewish history ; for Zedekiah, the son of Chenaniah, ordered Micaiah the prophet to be smitten on the face, when he delivered a prophecy with which he was not pleased ; and Pashur the governor, ordered Jeremiah to be treated in the same manner,\* on a like occasion. The conduct of the high-priest, in this case, was contrary to the express language of the law, which forbade them to do unrighteousness in judgment ; and to its whole spirit and tenor, the great end of it being to administer justice on the principles of equity.

By saying, “*God will smite thee,*” or, “*is about to smite thee,*” the apostle has been supposed to utter a prophecy, predicting the speedy destruction of the high-priest, which was fulfilled in his violent end about five years afterwards, at the beginning of the Jewish wars. But perhaps he meant to express no more, than that God would punish him for this brutal action at the period when all injustice will meet with its reward.

4. And they that stood by, said, Revilest thou God’s high-priest ?

The office was originally appointed by God, and Aaron chosen to it by the particular destination of the Divine Being. From him it was to descend in succession to the eldest son of the family. In one sense, therefore, the high-priest was God’s high-priest ; but every one that filled the office was not appointed by God, much less did he behave in a manner becoming his sacred trust.

5. Then said Paul, I wist not, “*I knew not,*” or

\* 1 Kings xxii. 24. Jer. xx. 2.



“ *I did not consider,*”\* that he was the high-priest : for it is written, *Thou shalt not speak evil of, “ Thou shalt not revile,”* the ruler of thy people.

It is not easy to conceive how Paul could be really ignorant in respect to the high-priest ; for his dress and station would sufficiently point him out, if he had been unacquainted with his person. His language, therefore, must be supposed to refer to want of consideration, rather than to ignorance. It is as if he had said, Excuse the language which I have used ; the warmth of my indignation has led me to speak too freely of this personage, and made me forget the decorum due to his character, even when he acts in a manner unworthy of his office. Had I duly considered this circumstance, and the language of Scripture, I should not have used this freedom.

Paul has now recourse to a stratagem, in order to defeat the malicious purposes of his enemies, by sowing dissensions among them. His language was undoubtedly ambiguous, and understood with greater latitude by other persons than by himself ; for when he calls himself a Pharisee, he does not mean to say, that he embraced all the sentiments of that sect. Some may, therefore, doubt how far the apostle’s conduct, on this occasion, was strictly proper. This is a question into which I shall not now enter, but shall content myself with observing, that it is not necessary for Christians to maintain, that the apostle was, on every occasion, free from mistake. It is sufficient for their purpose if he never acted wrongly from intention.

6. But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee ; of the hope and resurrection of the dead, “ *for the hope and for the resurrection of the dead,*” I am called in question, “ *I am judged.*”

Christianity must have been particularly obnoxious to the Sadducees, on account of the clear manner in which it taught the doctrine of a resurrection, and the strong evidence which it affords for this truth, by the resurrection of Jesus. Their enmity to Paul might justly be said to arise from his being so illustrious an advocate for that cause.

7. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees ; and the multitude was divided.

8. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit : but the Pharisees confess both.

The Sadducees maintained that the angels mentioned in Scripture

\* Pearce’s Note on Matthew xxii. 29.

were not permanent existences, but beings, or rather phantoms, raised up for the occasion on which they were employed; and as they denied the existence of angels, so they did likewise that of any other beings of a similar nature, which men have called spirits, and asserted that the Deity was the only immaterial Being in the universe. In these opinions, with the exception only of that which regards the resurrection, many professors of Christianity of the present day will think they were not far from the truth. The reason why angels are mentioned here by the historian, is to account for the language of the next verse.

9. And there arose a great cry, and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part, arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.

In saying that an angel might possibly have spoken to Paul, they refer to the story which he had told of his conversion, of his having seen Jesus in the way to Damascus, and having heard him speak to him.

10. And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.

11. And the night following, the Lord, *i. e.* Jesus Christ our Lord, stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul, "take courage;" for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

This seems to have been an appearance of Jesus Christ to Paul, not in vision, like that in the temple, but in person, and will serve to explain 1 Thess. iii. 11, "Now God himself and our father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you;" for he prays for such a miraculous appearance of Christ to him to direct his journey as he had enjoyed upon the present occasion. It must be remembered that the apostle was called to the profession of Christianity: was instructed in its doctrines, and invested with the apostolic office by Christ; and he appears from this and other passages, to have been in all his progress, under his special direction. It might, therefore, be very proper in him to offer up an address to Christ: but this is no warrant for our addresses to him, which would indeed be contrary to his express authority, and idolatrous. The apostle's circumstances were peculiar; and he is not, in this respect, an example to Christians in general.

## REFLECTIONS.

1. How happy was the apostle, in being able to say, when a prisoner, accused of crime before the Jewish Sanhedrim, "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." It is, indeed, his own testimony in favour of himself; yet the history of his life proves the truth of his declaration. Nothing but a supreme regard to the convictions of his own mind could have induced him to abandon all worldly prospects, and to embrace a cause which was every where opposed, and its advocates persecuted, by his countrymen. For all his sacrifices and dangers he received no other return than a consciousness of integrity, and the approbation of his own mind. But this return was a sufficient recompense: it was a pledge of the divine favour and of an everlasting reward. It furnished him with a secret joy which was a continual feast, and which he might in vain have looked for from wealth, or honour, or any temporal enjoyment. It made the prisoner at the bar more to be envied than the judge who sat upon the bench. Happy is the man who can adopt this language, not only with respect to one action, but to the whole tenor of his life! The censures of the world cannot wound his heart or distress his mind: he possesses a treasure of which he cannot be deprived by any temporal calamity. If you, my brethren, wish to obtain this prize, pursue the same course; follow the dictates of conscience, whithersoever they may lead, although they may expose you to calumny, suffering, and death.

2. How odious the character of those who pervert the forms of justice, which were established for the protection of innocence and the punishment of guilt, to gratify their private passions! Such was the conduct of this high-priest, who took advantage of his situation as a judge, to offer a cruel and unprovoked insult to a helpless prisoner; and if other judges have not often been guilty of the like indecency, yet they have suffered themselves to be biassed by motives which have proved equally injurious to the cause of justice. They have allowed their opinions and language respecting the guilt or innocence of the persons brought before them to be governed by party spirit, by the prospect of favour or of gain. To such men, the language of the apostle, however improper to be addressed to them in the exercise of their office, is justly applicable. They are whitened walls; they bear the fair show of candour, equity, and truth; but they are in reality the reverse of all this; being full of pride, passion, and self-interest. Let such men know that a day is coming, when their evil deeds will be examined by a superior judge, and receive a just recompense of reward.

## SECTION XXXIX.

*The Jews conspiring to kill Paul, he is sent to Casarea.*

ACTS xxiii. 12—35.

12. AND when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, “*met together,*” and bound themselves under a curse, “*an oath of execration,*” saying, that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

They imprecated the most dreadful calamities upon themselves if they violated their oaths.

13. And they were more than forty who had made this conspiracy, “*had entered into this joint oath.*”

14. And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves with an oath of execration that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul.

15. Now, therefore, ye, with the council, signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to-morrow, as though ye would inquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever “*before ever*” he come near, are ready to kill him.

Paul’s enemies, finding that they could not reach him so speedily as they wished by the slow forms of justice, and fearing that he might ultimately escape, resolve to take away his life with their own hands, and to have recourse to stratagem for that purpose. They persuade the chief priests and Sanhedrim, or at least, a certain number of that body, who seem to have approved of their wicked project, to send for Paul again, under pretence of further examination; intending to lie in wait for him by the way, and to put him to death. That their zeal in the execution of this diabolical design might be quickened, they resolve to abstain from food until it should be accomplished. From the circumstance of forty persons immediately entering into this conspiracy, it seems natural to conclude, that the lawfulness of putting to death an apostate from their religion, without waiting for the forms of law, was a prevailing opinion among the Jews at this time. Accordingly we learn, both from Philo and Josephus, Jewish writers, that such was their sentiment. The former recommends the practice to his countrymen from the example of Phineas, mentioned in the Old Testament, and persuades them, when they meet

with such persons, to reckon themselves to be all things, senators, judges, prætors, serjeants, accusers, witnesses, the laws, the people. The latter mentions an instance of zeal dictated by the same principle, very similar to the present, in which ten men bound themselves by an oath to kill Herod, who had departed, in many instances, from the customs of the country.\*

16. And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, *i. e. of their intention to do so*, he went and entered into the castle and told Paul.

17. Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him.

18. So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul, the prisoner, called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee.

19. Then the chief captain took him by the hand, *either as a mark of courtesy, or to prevent him from making an attempt against his life*, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me?

20. And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to-morrow into the council, as though they would inquire somewhat of him more perfectly.

21. But do not thou yield unto them; for there lie in wait for him, "*there will lie in wait for him,*" *the ambush was not yet laid,*† of them more than forty men, who have bound themselves with an oath of execration that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him, and now are they ready, looking for thy promise.

They are ready to lay the ambush, as soon as thou shalt declare that thou wilt bring him down the next day.

22. So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, saying, See thou tell no man, that thou hast showed these things to me.

He was unwilling, perhaps, to provoke these Jews to acts of resentment against himself, or feared that an attempt might be made,

\* Lardner, Vol. I. p. 212.

† Bishop Pearce.

in case of its being discovered, to defeat the plan which he had formed for removing Paul to a place of security.

23. And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Cæsarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen, “*body guards*,”\* two hundred, at the third hour of the night, *i. e. nine in the evening*.

24. And provide them beasts, *i. e. a succession of them, in case they should be wanted*, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.

25. And he wrote a letter after this manner, “*to this purpose :*”

26. Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting, “*sendeth health.*”

27. This man was taken of the Jews, and would have been killed of them. Then came I with an army, “*with the soldiers*,” and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman.

This colour he chooses to give to the transaction, in order to court the favour of a Roman governor, although it appears from the history, that he did not know him to be a Roman till he had rescued him.

28. And when I would have known, “*when I wished to know*,” the cause, wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council :

29. Whom I perceived to be accused of questions, “*on some questions*,” of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death, or of bonds.

30. And when it was told me how that the Jews lay in wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also, to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell.

31. Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris ; *so called from Antipater, the father of Herod.*

32. On the morrow they left the horsemen to go

with him *being now out of all danger of interruption from the Jews*, and returned to the castle :

33. Who, when they came to Cæsarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him.

This was not the settled residence of the governor at this time ; but he happened to be at this place, while on his visit to different parts of the province. It was distant seventy miles from Jerusalem.

34. And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was, and when he understood that he was of Cilicia ;

35. I will hear thee, said he, when thy accusers also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment-hall.

This was a palace built by Herod, when he beautified and enlarged the city of Cæsarea.

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#### REFLECTIONS.

THE most remarkable circumstance in this story, which is related with too much simplicity and plainness to require any comment, is the illustration which it gives of the fatal tendency of religious bigotry. In the first part of the chapter we behold the high-priest, in the sacred office of a judge, animated with religious zeal, grossly violating the duties of his station. Here we find the common people, from the same cause, deviating still further from the rules of justice and propriety. They form the dreadful resolution of imbruing their hands in the blood of an innocent and illustrious man, and, to render their efforts more effectual, they combine their forces. Lest their zeal should cool or their efforts slacken, they lay themselves under the most solemn obligations which they can devise, not to taste food until it be accomplished. The artful plot is laid, the several steps by which they shall approach their victim are marked out, and they are already furnished with the weapons of death for executing their diabolical design. No remorse of conscience, no pity for the sufferer, no fear of offending Heaven touches their hearts and betrays the secret, but the imprudence of their own zeal. They communicate their design without shame or fear, to the Jewish council. And could it be religion which thus divested men of humanity, and inspired them with the fury of the beasts which roam the desert ? So they pretended, and, probably, believed. They thought that they were doing God service, by attempting to rid the world of the most active and inveterate foe of their religion. They already applauded themselves for their pious

intention, and were ready to pronounce the crime of unprovoked murder the noblest action of their lives. But in framing this wicked project, true religion had no share. The authors of it were animated with pride and implacable resentment; they could not bear to see their opinions opposed — to see the cause, which they supported, overthrown or declining. Their zeal is not the offspring of benevolence, but issues from the gloomy region of hatred and malice.

The conduct of these zealots, these bloody assassins, exhibits a picture of religious bigotry, which fills every spectator with horror. But let us not imagine that the spirit which they manifested is peculiar to themselves. It is still to be seen, though in an inferior degree, among every class of Christians, where impositions are attempted upon conscience, where artifice or violence are employed to maintain truth, or to stop the progress of apprehended error. True religion disdains such aids: she appeals solely to the understandings of men for support; and the only weapons which she employs for defending herself or overcoming an adversary, are reason and argument. With these all her sincere followers are contented.

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SECTION XL.

*Paul makes his defence before Felix.*

ACTS xxiv. 1—21.

1. AND after five days, Ananias the high-priest descended with the elders, *the members of the Sanhedrim, so called, because generally persons advanced in life*, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul.

2. And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, “*thy prudence,*”

3. We accept it always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.

This passage has been more intelligibly rendered, “seeing that we enjoy great quietness, and that all things go on well with this nation, through thy prudence, at all times, and in all places, we acknowledge it, most noble Felix.” Notwithstanding this flattering address to Felix, the Jews were so dissatisfied with his government, that two years afterwards, when he left the province, they followed him with their complaints to Rome; and nothing saved him from exemplary punishment, but the powerful interest of friends. He



had conducted himself, indeed, with some prudence and resolution, in suppressing the religious contentions which arose between the Romans and the Jews, and in detecting some impostors ; but the character, generally given of him, is that of a bad governor. Tacitus, the Roman historian, says, that while he was procurator of Judæa, he acted in a very arbitrary manner, and scrupled no kind of injustice. A memorable instance of this is mentioned by Josephus, who tells us, that with a sum of money he had caused Jonathan the high-priest to be assassinated, because he remonstrated with him on the errors of his administration.

4. Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency, “ *of thy goodness,*” a few words.

5. For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews, *or, “ against all the Jews,”* throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes ;

6. Who also hath gone about to profane the temple : whom we took, and would have judged according to our law.

Such is the representation which he thinks proper to give of the irregular conduct of a tumultuous assembly of the people, who were going to put Paul to death without a trial.

7. But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and, with great violence, took him away out of our hands ;

8. Commanding his accusers to come unto thee ; by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things whereof we accuse him.

6. And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so.

The circumstance of the high-priest and elders of the Jews being ordered to accuse Paul before Felix, the Roman governor, is a plain proof of the state of subjection to which the Jews were at this time reduced, and of their having lost the power of life and death ; while the language which they instructed their advocate to use, almost every word of which is false, sufficiently shows how much the minds of the first men in the state were corrupted. To this invective, Paul replies with perfect calmness and self-possession.

10. Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him, “ *had nodded unto him,*” to speak, answered : For as much as I know that thou hast

been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself :

Paul begins his defence with bespeaking a favourable hearing from his judge, not, like Tertullus, by fulsome compliments, but by taking notice of the long time which he had presided over the province, and of his being well qualified, from his knowledge of Jewish affairs, and especially of the peaceable behaviour of the Christians, to form an impartial judgment in this matter.

11. Because that thou mayest understand, "*thou mayest know,*" that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship.

The circumstances, which I am going to mention, are recent : I may, therefore, be easily contradicted, if they are not true.

12. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, either in the synagogues or in the city :

13. Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me.

This is his answer to the charge of sedition, in which he denies that they have any single fact by which it can be supported. He next replies to the charge of being the ringleader of a sect or heresy.

14. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I, "*so serve I,*" the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets ;

15. And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, "*which they themselves also entertain,*" that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.

He acknowledges himself to belong to the obnoxious sect of Christians ; yet maintains that there is nothing in this which ought to deprive him of the protection which the Romans extended to his countrymen, since he served the same God, received the same sacred books, and entertained the same hopes. It appears hence, that the Jews, in the time of Paul, or at least the most numerous sect of them, the Pharisees, believed in a resurrection from the dead. Josephus, however, informs us that they limited this resurrection to the just. Upon what ground this hope was first entertained by the Jews it is not easy to determine. Some have conjectured that it was derived from tradition, founded upon some revelation made to mankind in very early times. What the Jews believed, upon imperfect evidence, Christians were taught by the highest authority, and in the most complete manner.

16. And in this I exercise myself, “*this is my endeavour,*” to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

It is my study to be free from blame, both in regard to God and man. It is not likely, therefore, that I should be guilty of what is laid to my charge.

17. Now after many years, *i. e. after an absence of many years,* I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings.

He mentions offerings, because they were the occasion of his going into the temple. This proved that his conduct was not only free from blame, but meritorious.

18. Whereupon, certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude nor with tumult ;

The purification was not confined to the temple, but consisted in an abstinence from wine and certain meats. Paul alleges that he had brought no Greeks into the temple, and excited no disturbance there.

19. Who ought to have been here before thee and object, if they had ought against me.

20. Or else let these same here say if they have found any evil-doing in me, while I stood before the council,

21. Except it be for this one voice, *or, “respecting this one declaration,”* that I cried, “*which I pronounced aloud,*” standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day.

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### REFLECTIONS.

1. How unsafe is it to trust to the accounts given of the characters of men by different religious parties! The disinterested friend of truth, the prudent, the peaceful advocate of the mild, benevolent, and equitable principles of the gospel, which inculcates submission to civil governors, in every thing to which their office can reasonably be deemed to extend ; which teaches us to bear injuries with patience, to return good for evil, to respect the rights and happiness of others as much as our own—this man is represented as the pest of society, and a promoter of sedition and tumult, throughout the world. After reading in the foregoing history, of

the inveterate hatred of the Jews against the Christians, how in every city they stirred up the rulers or the people to ill treat and persecute them, how are we surprised to find all these evil practices attributed to Paul and his friends, and to hear them represented as the authors of those tumults of which they were perpetually the victims! Yet thus it is that the adversaries of the truth in all ages have, with malicious artifice, imputed their own faults to their opponents, and endeavour to conceal their own guilt by boldly charging it upon others. Let not those who experience such treatment, however, be discouraged by it: they are fellow-sufferers with the most illustrious characters that ever appeared on the stage of the world. Let them calmly and resolutely pursue their course, through evil report and good report; justifying their conduct when an opportunity occurs of doing it, with any probability of success, yet not too anxious to wipe off all aspersions, and trusting to impartial posterity to do them that justice which the present age may deny. From the example here mentioned, let wise and reflecting men learn this maxim of prudence:—When they hear opinions branded with the name of heresy, or characters vilified as destitute of every principle of goodness, not to trust with implicit faith in such representations, but to inquire and judge for themselves. They may then find, that these troublers of Israel, these pests of society, are honest and upright men, faithfully discharging their duty, and that their supposed errors are important and useful truths.

2. How noble was the conduct of the apostle, and how worthy of our imitation, in making it his endeavour to be free from blame with regard to both God and man. This was to make truth, piety, and justice, compassion, candour, and equity, the rule of his conduct—principles which ennoble the human mind, and raise it almost to the character of divine. Armed with the consciousness of being actuated by such principles, he had nothing to fear from his enemies; their foulest calumnies cannot disturb his peace; the severest tortures which they are able to inflict, cannot deprive him of self-enjoyment. With this treasure, having nothing, he possessed all things. If you, my brethren, wish to attain the same dignity and worth; if you wish to secure solid and lasting peace, propose to yourselves the same object; follow the same course.

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#### SECTION XLI.

*Paul defends himself first before Felix, and afterwards before Festus; from whom he appeals to Cæsar.*

ACTS xxiv. 22—27.; xxv. 1—12.

22. AND when Felix heard these things, he put them off, saying, After I have been more accurately informed concerning this way, “*this doctrine,*” when

Lysias the tribune comes down, I will take cognizance of the affair between you.\*

The common translation of this verse would lead one to suppose, that Felix put off the decision of this matter, because he had a more perfect knowledge of the Christian doctrine, and did not believe the accusations of Paul's enemies; but this idea is not countenanced by the original, which is more correctly rendered as above. According to this translation, Felix professes to delay the matter, until it should be more thoroughly investigated by the examination of Lysias, the person who had been engaged in first apprehending Paul. From the general character of this governor, however, and especially from what is mentioned below, there is great reason to suspect that he was influenced by a less honourable motive.

23. And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or to come unto him.

When Paul was first apprehended by Lysias, he ordered him to be bound with two chains, Acts xxi. 33. This severity Felix now ordered the centurion to remit, and to grant him as much indulgence as was consistent with security. By this treatment, although he had delivered no opinion, he showed Paul pretty clearly, that he thought favourably of his cause, and that he might probably be induced to release him entirely, if properly rewarded. But finding no offer of this kind made to him, his chains were again put on the prisoner, and he was left bound.

24. And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.

Of Drusilla we have this account from Josephus. She was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa, and married to Azizus, the king of Emesenes, who, to remove all objections to the marriage on the ground of religion, had conformed to the law of Moses; but Felix having seen her, fell in love with her, and prevailed upon her by his agents, to forsake her husband, and marry himself.† This was an act of gross injustice and incontinence, as well as contrary to the law of Moses, which forbade Jews to form connexions in marriage with Gentiles. Hence the alarm of Felix, when he heard the apostle discoursing of justice, and continence, and a judgment to come. He was afraid that Drusilla, who was conscious that she had acted in violation of the law, would be influenced by his discourse, and that his happiness with her would be interrupted. In regard to himself, he seems to have felt no remorse of conscience; for he sent for the apostle often, to converse with him, and intimated his readiness to receive a bribe.

\* Doddridge.

† Lardner, Vol. I. p. 25.

25. And as he discoursed of righteousness, temperance, "*continence,*" and a judgment to come, Felix trembled, "*was alarmed,*" and answered, Go thy way for this time, "*for the present ;*" when I have a convenient season I will send for thee.

Although he felt no compunction himself, while the apostle was insisting upon these topics, he was afraid that it might be felt by his wife, who was a Jewess, and had had the advantage of a religious education. He, therefore, puts a sudden stop to Paul's discourse, and dismisses him. The subject about which Felix inquired seems to have been faith in Christ, or the grounds of belief in his divine mission as a prophet ; but, having satisfied the governor's curiosity in these points, Paul was naturally led to make mention of those grand principles of morality, which Christ came to enforce, by the sanction of a resurrection from the dead, and a judgment to come ; the recital of which was particularly well adapted to the character of his audience.

26. He hoped, also, that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him : wherefore, he sent for him the oftener, and communed, "*conversed,*" with him.

As Felix permitted Paul's friends to have access to him, he would soon perceive by the number and character of his visitors, if he did not know it before, that he was highly respected by great numbers of all ranks and conditions. He might, therefore, suppose that his friends would be willing to raise a large sum, in order to purchase his liberty ; or, as the apostle had declared, that he came up to Jerusalem to bring alms to his nation, he might suppose that this money was not all distributed, and found his hopes on a large bribe on what might be obtained from this quarter. But whatever gave rise to his expectations, the apostle did not choose to gratify them. As he had been accused of a crime, he was not willing to procure his release from prison, in a manner which must have been a tacit acknowledgment of his guilt.

27. But after two years, Porcius Festus came into Felix's room, "*succeeded him as governor,*" and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.

He did not close his government with this act, merely to procure popularity, but principally to avert the resentment of the Jews, who were highly exasperated against him for his injustice and cruelty, in the administration of his province, and who, he was afraid, might follow him with their complaints to Rome ; — an event which actually took place, notwithstanding this wicked artifice to prevent it. Pilate was guilty of a more atrocious act of injustice, from a like motive.

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1. Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Cæsarea to Jerusalem.

2. Then the high-priest, and the chief of the Jews, informed him against Paul, and besought favour against him,\* that they would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him.

These men, who, on this occasion, intended to put Paul to death, were probably some of the forty whom we read of before, as having laid themselves under an oath, not to eat nor drink until they had slain him; and their design having been communicated to the high-priest and chief persons in the nation, they join in endeavouring to forward their wicked purpose, by requesting that Paul may be brought up to Jerusalem. That persons of such rank should be privy to such a plot, will not be surprising to those who consider the state of Judæa at this time, when the country abounded with assassins, and when the office of high-priest, according to Josephus, was filled by a man of the most abandoned character.

4. But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Cæsarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither.

He had probably heard of the reason of his being first brought to Cæsarea, and suspected that a similar design was again formed.

5. Let them, therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.

6. And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, *or, as some copies read, "not more than eight or ten days,"*† he went down unto Cæsarea, and the next day, sitting in the judgment-seat, commanded Paul to be brought.

7. And when he was come, the Jews, which came down from Jerusalem, stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove;

8. While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Cæsar, have I offended any thing at all.

\* Some copies read, Παρ' instead of Κατ' αὐτοῦ. See Griesbach.

† See Griesbach, who adopts this reading.

The historian does not inform us what the complaints brought against him were, or what was his defence : probably, because they were both the same as before.

9. But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me ?

These words are repeated, verse 20, and the last words, “ before me,” are left out ; and they are to be omitted in both places ;\* for if he went up to Jerusalem, he was to be tried before the Jewish council.

10. Then said Paul, I stand at Cæsar’s judgment-seat, where I ought to be judged ; to the Jews have I done no wrong as thou very well knowest, “ *as thou mayest very well know.*”

Festus might know Paul’s innocence from the nature of the charges, and from his defence. To stand at the judgment-seat of the procurator was standing before Cæsar’s, from whom he received his commission.

11. For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die : but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Cæsar.

It is well known, that a Roman citizen, under a criminal charge, might appeal from an inferior court to Cæsar, and that in this case he was to be sent to Rome, and tried by persons holding a commission from the emperor. Of this privilege the apostle availed himself in the present instance, despairing of justice from his countrymen.

12. Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, *not the Sanhedrim, but a number of persons who attended the governor to give advice,* answered, Hast thou appealed unto Cæsar ? unto Cæsar shalt thou go.

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## REFLECTIONS.

1. FROM the language of Paul before Felix, we learn that the gospel of Christ is of a moral tendency. No sooner has the apostle satisfied the inquiries of the Roman governor respecting faith in

\* The reader is not to conclude from these words that there is any external evidence for the omission in this passage.—*Editor.*



Christ, by showing the ground of his belief of the Christian religion, than he proceeds to discourse upon justice, and continence, and a judgment to come; asserting that these virtues were enjoined by the gospel of Jesus, no less than by the law of Moses and the light of nature, and that they received additional authority from the prospect of a future judgment, the certainty of which was established beyond all doubt, by the resurrection of Christ from the dead. These, indeed, are not the only moral virtues which it enjoins, and upon which this enlightened preacher insisted; but they are more particularly noticed by the historian, because they were the cause of that alarm which occasioned the interruption of the discourse. There were, doubtless, many others which he proved to have a similar foundation in the Christian doctrine. Christianity, then, does not consist, as some persons seem to suppose, in the belief of certain speculative and abstruse articles of faith, much less in the persuasion that Christ died to make atonement for our personal sins, and to substitute something for our imperfect righteousness. Its first and leading object is to inculcate upon men personal, social, and divine virtues, and to enforce the practice of them by the awful sanction of a future judgment, when every one will be called to give an account of his conduct before an impartial judge, and be rewarded or punished, according as he has observed or neglected these duties. This is the great design of the gospel—a design worthy of being countenanced by God, and calculated to promote the best interests of man. Those who overlook this design are ignorant of its fundamental principles.

2. We see the danger of an evil conscience. Those who have rendered this power their enemy, by the commission of any crime, are constantly liable to suffer by its reproaches and alarms; and their happiness is never secure. Although its voice may for a time be drowned in the noise and tumult of society and business, or may be stupified by the intoxicating draught of pleasure, yet there are occasions when it will have an opportunity to speak; and these opportunities it will not fail to improve. Little was it to be expected that a prisoner, when called upon to speak, should be able to say any thing which should alarm the apprehensions of his judge; yet his language fills him with the most lively fear, not so much, indeed, for himself as for his less criminal associate, whose mind was not hardened beyond the reach of remorse, and whose tranquillity was necessary to his own peace. Felix had reflection enough to know that conscience acknowledged no distinction of rank, that it binds the rich as well as the poor, and that it is equally hostile to all those, whatever their condition may be, by whom its dictates have been violated. He well knew that the authority of example, the violence of passion, and every other plea by which the offender endeavours to excuse his wicked conduct to himself, are of no avail at the bar of conscience, and that nothing can avert the sentence of this inexorable judge, if once called to exercise his authority. He resolves, therefore, to hear no more from this awakening preacher, lest the repose of conscience should be disturbed. Foolish and wicked expedient, which could only serve a present purpose, but could afford no lasting security! Let it ever be remembered that

when the peace of the mind has once been destroyed by the commission of sin, there is but one way in which it can be restored—repentance and reformation.

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SECTION XLII.

*Paul defends himself before Festus, in the presence of Agrippa and Bernice.*

ACTS xxv. 13—27.; xxvi. 1—32.

13. AND after certain days, king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Cæsarea, to salute, “*pay their respects to,*” Festus, *to compliment him on his appointment to the province.*

This Agrippa was son of the Herod, king of Judæa, who persecuted the church, and of whose tragical death we had an account in the twelfth chapter of this history. He did not, however, succeed his father; the emperor Claudius thinking him too young, as he was no more than seventeen years of age. Acquiring considerable territories in other quarters afterwards, he assumed the title of king, which is here given him, and by which he is frequently denominated by Josephus. That Luke did not consider him as king of Judæa, is evident from his representing him as paying a visit to Festus.\* Bernice was sister to Agrippa and to Drusilla, the wife of Felix, mentioned in the last chapter. The conduct of Bernice was not free from censure, any more than that of her sister. She had been married to her uncle Herod, and was now suspected of living in incestuous intercourse with her brother. She was at one time in so much favour with the emperor Titus Vespasian, that he would have married her, had he not been prevented by the murmurs of the Romans.†

14. And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul’s cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix,

15. About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him :

16. To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he who is accused have the accusers face to face, and

\* Lardner, Vol. I. p. 26.

† See Pearce and Doddridge

have license to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.

How fundamental an article of the Roman law this was, may be inferred from the language of Cicero, the Roman orator, who reckons it one of the highest charges against Verres, a Roman governor, that he had condemned men who were absent, and without a hearing.\* From the conduct of the Jews upon this occasion, it appears that what they wanted from Festus was not a trial of Paul, but a sentence of condemnation; pretending that his guilt had been already proved.

17. Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay, on the morrow I sat on the judgment-seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth;

18. Against whom, when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed,

19. But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, “*of their own religion,*” and of one Jesus, who was dead, who Paul affirmed to be alive.

That Festus, in addressing Agrippa, who was a Jew, and who had come to Cæsarea to pay him a visit of compliment, should call his religion a superstition, is not credible. Besides, we have other examples in which the word is taken in a good sense for religion. It ought, therefore, to be so rendered in this place. From the vehement language of the Jews in accusing Paul, Festus supposed that they charged him with some crime against the state. He was surprised, therefore, to find that they only accused him of some religious errors, and especially of a mistake of so little consequence as that of believing that a man who had been dead was alive.

20. And because I doubted of such manner of questions, “*because I was doubtful how to inquire hereof,*” *i. e.* whether Jesus were alive after his death, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters:

The fact being said to have taken place at Jerusalem, it would be easy to procure information on the subject there.

21. But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Cæsar.

Augustus here means Nero, each of the Roman emperors, from

\* Lardner, Vol. I. p. 230.

the time of Octavius, having assumed this appellation. Cæsar, was another name assumed by the Roman emperors from Julius Cæsar, the first of them.

22. Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To-morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him.

Agrippa had doubtless heard of the Christians from his father, who had put James the apostle to death with the sword, and imprisoned Peter. His curiosity was, therefore, awakened to hear so illustrious an advocate of this cause as Paul, who was probably more celebrated than any of the other apostles, on account of his early opposition to Christianity.

23. And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, *i. e.* the room of audience used by the governor, and not a court of justice; for Paul was not now tried, with the chief captains and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth.

24. And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men who are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, "*have applied to me,*" both at Jerusalem and also here, crying, that he ought not to live any longer.

25. But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him;

26. Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my Lord; wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and especially before thee, O king Agrippa, that after examination had, I might have somewhat to write:

As Agrippa was a Jew, and well acquainted with Jewish customs, he hoped that he might relieve him from his present embarrassment, and enable him to describe in what the peculiar nature of Paul's offence consisted.

27. For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.

At this time it is plain that there was no law of the Roman state,

as there was afterwards, pronouncing it a crime to be a Christian. As the followers of Jesus conformed to the law of Moses, the Romans now considered them as composing one of the sects, of all which were allowed the free exercise of their religion.

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### REFLECTIONS.

1. IN the preceding history we see that it was an invariable maxim of Roman jurisprudence that no man should be condemned unheard, and without enjoying every aid for his defence which could arise from confronting his accusers. This is, indeed, an essential branch of criminal justice; and small is the title to the praise of equity in that judgment where it is not allowed. Happy would it be for the world, if the same regard to propriety were observed in forming a decision upon other matters. How often are actions and characters condemned by us, without our hearing what men have to offer in their defence! How often are opinions pronounced to be absurd, unscriptural, and dangerous, without inquiring into the evidence on which they are founded, or their tendency to do harm! When disputes and contentions arise, how often do men decide in favour of one party, before they hear their opponents! If their wish be to obtain a plausible excuse for censure or hatred, this method of judging is doubtless well calculated to answer their purpose; but nothing can be more hostile to their design, if they look for truth and justice. The maxim of prudence is to hear both sides of every question, and to suspend the judgment until each has been examined. It was an observation which long since suggested itself to the royal preacher, and which the experience of every day has confirmed, that “he who is first in his own cause seemeth just, but his neighbour cometh, and searcheth him.”

2. Observe with what indifference men of the world look upon the most important topics and characters in religion. The illustrious captain of our salvation, the most eminent prophet who ever appeared in the world, whose distinguished endowments entitled him to the character of the Son of God, the patient martyr for the truth, the perfect pattern of human excellence, who was honoured with the privilege of being the first to rise from the grave to immortal life—this distinguished personage is, in the language of a Roman governor, *one Jesus*, an unknown and obscure individual. His resurrection from the dead, the most interesting event which ever took place, and which ought to have attracted the attention of all men throughout the world, is a matter about which he has formed no opinion, but must inquire. But wisdom is justified of her children. The virtuous and the good have not failed to do honour to Jesus and his doctrine in all ages.

3. How honourable to Paul is the declaration of the Roman governor! He has been detained two years in prison; his enemies have been repeatedly heard against him; all the arts of oratory have been employed to aggravate his offences, and to blacken his char-

acter ; he has been examined by Felix ; he has been examined by Festus. But in all these trials not a shadow of guilt has been discovered ; an impartial judge is ashamed to send him a prisoner to Rome, because he can find nothing to allege against him. Such, Christians, is the character of the first witnesses of your religion. Can you doubt their testimony ? Can you believe them to be wicked impostors ?

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1. THEN Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself, "*made his defence.*"

2. I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall make my defence this day before thee, touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews :

3. Especially, because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews : whereof, I beseech thee to hear me patiently.

Agrippa was the son of Herod Agrippa, a prince who professed a great zeal for the Jewish religion, and who, no doubt, had all his children instructed in it. Beside this advantage which Agrippa enjoyed for becoming acquainted with the manners and customs of the Jews, he had the important post of commanding the temple, and disposing of the sacred money, as well as of nominating the high-priest ; — situations which would necessarily lead him to an intimate acquaintance with their affairs, and particularly inform him of the different sects which prevailed in the country. To make his defence before so competent a judge, afforded Paul peculiar satisfaction.

4. My manner of life from my youth, "*since my youth,*" which was at the first among my own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews,

5. Which knew me from the beginning, (if they would testify,) that after the most straitest sect, "*the strictest sect,*" of our religion, I lived a Pharisee.

Paul was born at Tarsus in Cilicia, and brought up there till he was a young man, when he came to Jerusalem, to complete his education under Gamaliel. To the inhabitants of this place, therefore, he might with propriety appeal for his past conduct, and for the truth of the assertion that he was a Pharisee.

6. And now I stand, and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers ;

7. Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instant-

ly, “*earnestly*,” serving God, day and night, hope to come ; for which hope’s sake, “*on account of which hope*,” king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.

The hope here referred to, seems to be the hope of the Messiah, who was the subject of expectation among the Jews, at the time when the apostle spoke, as he is at the present day. The doctrine of a resurrection was disbelieved by the Sadducees ; the apostle could not, therefore, say that the twelve tribes hoped to come to this promise, when he well knew that only a part of them looked for it. Besides, if he had referred to a resurrection, he could not have asked, as he does in the next verse, why they thought a resurrection from the dead impossible. To this it may be added, that it will be difficult to find any passage in the Old Testament in which a resurrection is promised by God, although intimations may perhaps be found there that it was the faith of some.

The apostle wishes to show Agrippa and the rest of his audience, that in believing in the Messiah he admitted nothing but what had been the common hope of the nation. The principal evidence of this fact was, in his judgment, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead ; but this they thought incredible, as he himself had once thought. He therefore proceeds to show how his unbelief was removed ; namely, by his seeing Jesus and receiving a message from him.

8. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead ?

That is, raise to life Jesus who had been put to death. Into this error he acknowledges that he himself had once fallen.

9. I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name, “*against the name*,” of Jesus of Nazareth ;

10. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem ; and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests ; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.

He speaks of *persons* in the plural number, as being put to death, as if they were many ; but he probably refers only to one, and that Stephen.

11. And I punished them oft, *or*, “*by punishing them oft*,” in every synagogue, I compelled them to blaspheme, *to revile the name of Jesus* ; and, being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them, “*I was pursuing them*,” even to strange cities.

12. Whereupon, as I went to Damascus, with authority and commission from the chief priests,

13. At mid-day, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them who journeyed with me.

14. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me ? it is hard for thee to kick against the goad.

This familiar proverb represented to me the folly and danger of my undertaking,

15. And I said, Who art thou, Lord ? And he said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest :

16. But rise, and stand upon thy feet ; for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness, both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee ;

More than one instance has already occurred in the course of this history, of Jesus' appearing personally to Paul, agreeably to the declaration which he now makes. It was on some one of these occasions that he received from him the knowledge of the gospel. For he says, I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.\*

17. Delivering thee from the people, *i. e.* the Jews, and from the Gentiles, unto whom I now send thee ;

It appears hence that the apostle had a commission to preach the gospel to the Gentiles from the beginning, although he did not exercise it till some time afterwards.

18. To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God ; that they might receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith in me.

By these expressions, nothing more is intended than a conversion from heathenism to Christianity. Gentiles are in the New Testament denominated sinners, and unholy ; they are represented as in a state of darkness, and subject to the authority of Satan, an imaginary being, the supposed patron of wickedness. By their professing

\* Galatians i. 12.



faith in Christ, all these characters are reversed ; they are transferred into the kingdom of God ; they are enlightened, forgiven, and sanctified. This language is well illustrated by a parallel passage in the epistle of Paul to the Colossians, i. 12—14, where, speaking of the conversion of that people, he says, “ Giving thanks unto the Father, which has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son, in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.”

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THE story of Paul’s conversion, though now repeated for the third time, has not ceased to be interesting, but is accompanied with such additional circumstances or remarks, as serve to throw fresh light upon the subject, to display the eloquence of their narrator, and to confirm our faith in the event. The appeal which is made to king Agrippa, a Jew, well acquainted with the transactions of his own nation, for the truth of the principal circumstances of this story, gives it, in particular, fresh claims to our credit. For they cannot be denied by him, and, when joined with the testimony of the prophets, they almost persuade him, as we afterwards find, to become a Christian. If they have not completely this effect, it is not from a deficiency in the evidence, but from the influence of fashion, and the fear of disgrace. These motives often control the convictions of the mind, and prevent it from giving assent to the plainest truths.

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19. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision ;

The word vision, sometimes signifies in Scripture an appearance presented to the mind or fancy only, in opposition to what is the object of the senses : but in this place it is used to express what is real and what is actually seen. Hence Paul says, “ Am I not an apostle ? Have I not seen the Lord ?”

20. But showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts, “ *all the country,*” of Judæa, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do, “ *by doing,*” works meet for repentance, *i. e. suitable to repentance.*

The meaning of the word repentance, has been noticed more than once in the course of this history, namely, the abandonment of heathen and Jewish errors ; and it is connected with the forgiveness of sins before explained. They were further exhorted to turn to God by doing works of repentance, *i. e. to return to the service of God, by acting in a manner becoming their new profession.*

21. For these causes, “ *for these things,*” the

Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me :

22. But having obtained help of God, (*agreeably to the promise, v. 16,*) I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying, none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come :

Bishop Pearce thinks, that the name of Moses is an interpolation in this place, because it follows that of the prophets, which it ought to have preceded ; and when they are again mentioned in the twenty-seventh verse, the name of Moses is omitted.

23. That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles, “*that being the first that should rise from the dead, he should show light unto the people and to the Gentiles.*”

That Christ was the first that rose from the dead, is the language of Paul, and not of the prophets, whose testimony goes no further than his sufferings, and his being a light to the Gentiles. The method by which this light was to be communicated,—a resurrection from the dead, to eternal life, remained a mystery till the actual appearance of Christ. Nothing can more distinctly mark out the age of the Messiah, than the prediction that he should be a light to the Gentiles : no prophet beside Jesus, and those authorized by him, ever proposed to the Gentiles to enter into covenant with Jehovah.

24. And as he thus spake for himself, “*when he was in this part of his defence,*” Festus said, with a loud voice, (*referring to Paul’s vision, which he supposed to be the effect of a disordered imagination,*) Paul, thou art beside thyself ; much learning doth make thee mad.

25. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.

26. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom, also, I speak freely, “*with confidence,*” for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him ; for this thing was not done in a corner.

27. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets ? I know that thou believest them.

It is probable that Paul was proceeding to mention some of the prophecies which proved Jesus to be the Christ, had he not been interrupted by Agrippa.

28. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

29. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.

This refers to the guards by whom he was surrounded, or to his being a prisoner ; for his person was not bound.

30. And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor and Bernice, and they that sat with them.

So strong was the impression made upon the mind of Agrippa, by the language of Paul, that he could bear to hear him no more, fearing that he might be compelled to yield to his arguments. He, therefore, puts a stop to the defence by rising up ; and his companions follow his example.

31. And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.

32. Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Cæsar.



OBSERVE the dignity and value of those prospects which the gospel of Christ communicates. They induce a prisoner to prefer his situation to that of a Roman governor, surrounded with the ensigns of power ; to that of a royal prince, seated upon a throne ; and the best wish that he can form for them is, that they may become like himself, believers in Christianity. This faith, he is persuaded, will confer upon them more real dignity, more solid happiness, than the pleasures of a court or the authority of a prince. For, to use his own language, although he appears as sorrowful he is always rejoicing ; poor, yet making many rich : as having nothing, but possessing all things. The same happiness, Christians, is yours. If you know its value, you will prefer it to all the honours and pleasures of the world.

## SECTION XLIII.

*Paul's Voyage and Shipwreck.*

ACTS xxvii. 1—14.

1. AND when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one, named Julius, a centurion of Augustus's band.

From the writer's making use of the plural number, in this verse, it appears that he was a companion of Paul in the voyage. This circumstance enabled them to give so particular an account of it. The port from which they sailed was Cæsarea.

2. And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coast of Asia; "*entering into a ship of Adramyttium, which was bound to the coasts of Asia, we set sail;*" one Aristarchus, a Macedonian, of Thessalonica, being with us.

He was a Christian brother, who, as well as Luke, accompanied the apostle in his travels, and is afterwards mentioned as his fellow-prisoner at Rome. Col. iv. 10.

3. And the next day we touched at Sidon, *a city of Phœnicia*. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself.

He permitted him to experience the attention of Christian friends, who might furnish him with necessaries for the voyage.

4. And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary.

They sailed under the north, rather than the south-side of the island, in order to shelter themselves from the violence of the wind.

5. And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia.

6. And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria, *laden with wheat, as it should seem*, sailing into Italy, and he put us therein.

7. And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, *a promon-*

tory on the continent of Asia, the wind not suffering us, "*the wind opposing us,*" we sailed under Crete, a large island now called Candia, over against Salmone, or, "*by Salmone,*" a promontory on the island;

8. And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called the Fair Havens, *the principal port, and still called by the same name,* nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea.

9. Now, when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them ;

The fast was that of the Atonement, observed on the tenth day of Tisri, or the nineteenth of September, and near the approach of winter.

10. And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt, "*with injury,*" and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.

This he declared, probably, from his own natural sagacity, without any divine assistance : the final issue of the voyage, was not communicated to him till afterwards. To justify the conduct of Paul in thus giving his opinion to mariners, it has been observed, that he had often been at sea, in the different journies which he undertook, and might thence acquire some knowledge of maritime affairs. From himself we learn, that he had often been exposed to great danger on this element, having, as he tells us, been thrice shipwrecked, and having spent a night and a day floating in the deep.

11. Nevertheless, the centurion believed the master and the owner, "*the pilot and the master,*" of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul.

12. And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter, which is a haven of Crete, and lieth towards, "*looketh towards,*" the south-west and north-west.

Having two different aspects, this harbour would be sheltered from most winds.

13. And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, *i. e. that*

*this wind would enable them to accomplish it, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete.*

14. But not long after, there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon.

As this word never occurs in any other author, it is not easy to ascertain what kind of wind it means; but it was probably the same with that which is now called a *Levanter*, and which is not confined to one point, but blows from the north-east or south-east. From the fears entertained on the present occasion of being driven to the coasts of Africa, it should seem that it came from the north-east; as such a wind would carry them directly to that quarter.

15. And when the ship was caught, "*was carried away with it,*" and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive :

16. And running up under a certain island called *Clauda, at the western extremity of the island*, we had much work to come by the boat, "*to make ourselves masters of the boat ;*"

17. Which when we had taken up, *to prevent it from being staved*, they used helps, *they called for the assistance of all*, undergirding the ship, *throwing cables round it to prevent it bulging* ; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, *in the Greck, the Syrtis, a sand-bank on the coast of Africa, noted for shipwrecks*, strake sail, and so were driven.

18. And, being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship, *by casting out the heaviest and least valuable articles.*

19. And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship, *perhaps, "the lading of the ship ;"* for the tackling could not add much to its weight.

20. And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.

As the compass was not then discovered, if the sun and stars were not seen, there was nothing whereby to guide their course.

21. But, after long abstinence, Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, *Sirs, ye should have*

hearkened unto me, and not have loosened from Crete, and to have gained, “*to get,*” this harm and loss.

22. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer, “*of good courage;*” for there shall be no loss of any man’s life, among you, but of the ship :

23. For there stood by me this night an angel of God, “*of the God,*” whose I am, and whom I serve,

24. Saying, Fear not, Paul. Thou must be brought before Cæsar, and lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.

Paul had, probably, prayed for their lives ; and God was graciously pleased to comply with his request.

25. Wherefore, Sirs, be of good courage ; for I believe God, “*I trust in God,*” that it shall be even as it was told me,

26. Howbeit, “*moreover,*” we must be cast on a certain island.

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OBSERVE the advantage which religion gives to men in the most critical and trying situations. Amidst the horrors of the tempest, while the ocean every moment threatens destruction, while every heart is overwhelmed with despair, the Jewish prisoner, conscious of the favour and protection of the Almighty Being, whose he is, and whom he professes to serve, is calm and undisturbed, courageous and thankful. He alone is capable of reviving the drooping spirits of his companions. He well knew that the raging sea and furious hurricane were under the control of Omnipotence ; and that wherever he has promised security, his engagement will be fulfilled. Endeavour, my brethren, to acquire a like temper. Cultivate the same exalted ideas of divine power : perform your duty at all times with the same zeal and ardour as this eminent servant of the Most High, and you will enjoy the same serenity, you will display the same greatness of mind.

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27. BUT when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country.

The Adriatic sea was not limited by the ancients to the gulph which now bears that name, but included the Ionian, which lay

without the gulph, and in which this ship was now tossed by the tempest.

28. And sounded, and found it twenty fathoms ; and when they had gone a little farther, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms.

29. Then, fearing lest we should have fallen, "*lest we should fall,*" upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.

30. And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the fore-ship, *or what is usually called the fore-castle ;*

31. Paul said unto the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.

Without the assistance of the sailors, the ship would naturally be unmanageable, and incapable of being conducted toward the shore.

32. Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off, *in order to prevent the intended escape.*

33. And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried, and continued fasting, having taken nothing.

These words cannot be understood literally, as if the crew had been absolutely without food for so long a period ; for then they must have perished by famine ; but they had taken nothing comparatively, having been reduced, probably, to short allowance. For although the ship might be a corn vessel, and we read afterwards of wheat being thrown into the sea, it is probable that the greater part of it had been disposed of in that way before, and that this was no more than what was thought absolutely necessary for supplying their wants till they came to land.

34. Wherefore, I pray you to take some meat ; for this is for your health, "*for this concerns your safety ;*" for there shall not a hair fall from the head of any of you.

A proverbial expression, signifying that they should be safe.

35. And when he had thus spoken, he took bread,



and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all, and when he had broken it, he began to eat.

36. Then were they all of good cheer, "*then were they all encouraged,*" and they also took some meat.

They seem now to have believed Paul, in respect to the assurances which he gave them that their lives should be preserved.

37. And we were in all in the ship two hundred, threescore and sixteen souls.

38. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.

39. And when it was day, they knew not the land; but they discovered a certain creek, "*a bay,*" with a shore, into the which they were minded, "*they resolved,*" if it were possible, to thrust in the ship.

40. And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, "*cutting away the anchors they left them in the sea,*" and loosed the rudder-bands, and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.

The rudders of this ship, (for the ancients made use of two,) had probably been fastened with chains, while the vessel was driven before the wind, but were now loosed to direct its course.

41. And falling into a place where two seas met, *i. e. a point of land washed on either side by the sea,* they ran the ship aground, and the forepart stuck fast and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.

42. And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape.

An inhuman and barbarous proposal, but sufficiently agreeable to the manners of the times.

43. But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land:

44. And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship; and so it came to pass that they escaped all safe to land.

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IN this chapter we have a striking picture of those distresses and dangers to which many persons are exposed, who trust their safety to the unstable winds and waves: but if we experience these distresses ourselves, or hear of them from others, or of something more calamitous than what is here recorded, let us not arraign the wisdom or goodness of the Divine Being, for exposing his children to them, by assigning so large a portion of the globe to the watery element: for it is by this element that the deficiencies of one country are supplied from the abundance of another, and the miseries of famine averted. It is by this that we have easy access to the remotest nations, and make the rich productions of their soils or the happy fruits of their skill our own; that we enjoy in our own houses the treasures of the eastern and western world, without the inconveniences of a scorching sun or pestilential climate, and convey to them the valuable exchange of our knowledge, our arts, and our manufactures. Thus the advantages of every soil, of every climate and country, are rendered the common blessings of all the inhabitants of the earth, and the whole mass of mankind is connected together as one family. Let no one, therefore, censure a part of the plan of Divine Providence, which is productive of so much benefit. If affecting examples of distress and shipwreck in the deep sometimes appear, yet these instances are but few; while those of prosperous voyages and safe conveyance are many. Besides, we are not without hope that these evils, however great they may be at present, will be greatly alleviated, if not entirely removed. By the discovery of the compass and other improvements, the dangers and uncertainty of navigation have been greatly diminished; and who will presume to say that the bounty of Providence or the skill of man, in relation to this subject, is exhausted?

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#### SECTION XLIV.

*Paul and his companions are hospitably received on the island of Melita. He pursues his voyage, and arrives at Rome.*

Acts xxviii. 1—16.

1. AND when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita.

This island lies between Sicily and Africa, and is now called Malta. The circumstances of the apostle's shipwreck and residence here, produced a kind of superstitious veneration for the place, in consequence of which it was given to the knights of St. John of Jerusalem, when they were expelled by the Turks from Rhodes. These knights continued to occupy it, till it was lately taken possession of by the French. Several learned men have indeed maintained of late that the place of the apostle's shipwreck was not the African, but the Illyrian Melita, another island bearing

the same name in the Adriatic gulph, and now called Melada. But the course which he observes in his passage hence to Rome, plainly shows, I conceive, that he must have come from Malta, and not Melada.\*

2. And the barbarous people showed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.

It is well known that the Latins and Greeks called all nations barbarous who spoke a language different from their own. Hence the inhabitants of this island are so called, being a colony of the Phœnicians, and speaking that language. That they were not an uncivilized people appears from their behaviour, which is full of humanity and kindness. That a very considerable degree of cold accompanies rain, even in southerly and warm climates, is a fact well established by the testimony of travellers. We are not, therefore, to be surpris'd that it should be felt at Melita.

3. And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, "*driven out by the heat,*" and fastened upon his hand.

4. And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast, "*the animal,*" hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.

5. And he shook off the animal into the fire, and felt no harm.

6. Howbeit, "*nevertheless,*" they looked when he should have swollen or fallen down dead suddenly; but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm came to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.

The bite of this animal is well known to be mortal, and accompanied with such swellings and inflammations as the inhabitants expected. Such, no doubt, would have been its effects in the present case, had not the apostle been miraculously healed by the power of God; the more especially, as the wound was inflicted by the venomous creature, when enraged by heat. In this instance, therefore, the promise of Christ to his disciples was literally accomplished, Mark xvi. 18, "They shall take up serpents, and if they shall drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them."

7. In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius, *either the Roman governor, to which people the island was subject, or a Roman of rank*, who received us, and lodged us three days courteously.

8. And it came to pass, "*it happened,*" that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux; to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.

Paul laid his hands upon him to point out for whom he prayed, or to show that the divine virtue came from himself.

9. So when this was done, others also, who had diseases in the island, came, and were healed;

10. Who also honoured us with many honours, "*with many presents,*" and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary, *they put on board the ship things necessary for the voyage.*

11. And after three months, we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux.

This ship, as well as that in which the apostle first embarked, was probably carrying corn from Alexandria to Rome. In such a voyage, the island of Malta would lie directly in her course, and, from the excellence of its harbours, be a convenient place in which to spend the winter, to avoid the storms which prevail at that season, and which were so nearly fatal to the apostle and his ship's company. The same thing cannot be said of the other island, which has no good harbours, and is quite remote from the line of sailing. This serves to confirm what was before said about the identity of Melita and Malta.

Castor and Pollux, according to the theology of the heathens, were the twin-sons of Jupiter, and ranked among the gods. To the protection of one or both these deities the ship was entrusted, and carved images of them were fixed in some conspicuous part of it. To mention what sign the ship bore, may appear to some unworthy of the historian: but it served to distinguish this ship from another, and to record the kindness which they experienced from the commander. It is also one of those particulars in a narrative, a reference to which gives it credibility.

12. And landing at Syracuse, *a port in the island of Sicily*, we tarried there three days.

This place lay directly in their passage from Malta to Rome.

13. And from thence we fetched a compass,

“coasted round,” and came to Rhegium, a sea-port in the most southern part of Italy, and after one day, the south wind blew, and we came on to Puteoli, a celebrated town on the bay of Naples ;

There were Christians at this place before the arrival of the apostle and his companions, probably in consequence of the intercourse which the inhabitants had with foreign nations.

14. Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days ; and so we went toward Rome.

15. And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appi Forum, about fifty miles from Rome, and the Three Taverns, or, “*Tres Tabernæ*,” distant about thirty miles from the city.

We read of strangers of Rome being at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. It is probable, therefore, that Christianity was taught in that city upon their return. We know that a church had been long established in this metropolis of the world ; for the apostle had written his epistle to the Romans several years before this time. The members of this church came out to meet Paul, to testify their respect for his character.

Whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.

Before this time he had been a little dejected by the prospect of appearing alone before the emperor of Rome, to take his trial ; but the sight of so many Christian friends, by whose society he might be refreshed in his confinement, and who might aid his design of doing good, revived his spirits, filled his heart and lips with gratitude to the great Disposer of all events, and enabled him to proceed with cheerfulness and vigour.

16. And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard : but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself, with a soldier that kept him.

This distinction was made between him and the other prisoners, probably, in consequence of the representations given of his character and behaviour by Julius, the centurion who had conducted him to Rome.

## REFLECTIONS.

1. How commendable was the conduct of these islanders, in their readiness to relieve the unfortunate sufferers by shipwreck ! They have furnished an example of attention and humanity, in reading of which the more enlightened professors of the gospel may well blush, who frequently, with a barbarity that would disgrace savages, take away what the fury of the tempests has spared, and endeavour to add to distress, instead of alleviating it. The dictates of nature had taught these men to behave in a different manner. Their hearts were open to the impressions of pity, and every selfish passion was extinguished and lost in the divine power of sympathy. In the calamities which they beheld, they recognized evils which they themselves had already experienced, or might one day suffer, and cheerfully gave that relief, which, in like circumstances, they would reasonably desire. Justly was their meritorious conduct rewarded by that Providence, which suffers not a cup of cold water presented to the distressed to pass unnoticed, by healing their sick, and sending among them the doctrine of the gospel. But double vengeance must they expect, who trample upon all the principles of humanity, by making the unfortunate and helpless their prey.

2. In the opinion which these islanders formed of Paul, when they saw him attacked by a venomous creature, whose bite was mortal, we perceive a disposition to judge of men's characters by their condition, and to conclude that there must be uncommon guilt, wherever there are uncommon calamities—a conclusion which is certainly false and dangerous: for it not only misleads the judgment, but perverts the heart. For such an error, in the present instance, we may find a ready apology in the ignorance of those who had fallen into it, who were unacquainted with the true God and with the character of his providence: but it cannot be so easily excused, when found, as, alas, is too often the case, among Christians, whose religion plainly inculcates upon them this maxim, that although virtue be, upon the whole, accompanied with happiness, and vice with misery, yet, in regard to particular events and circumstances, all things come alike to all, and one event happeneth to the righteous and to the wicked.

3. When men are employed in useful undertakings, and especially when they suffer in a good cause, let us do every thing in our power to encourage their exertions or to alleviate their sufferings. Such was the conduct of these pious Romans toward the apostle; and it proved like a cordial to his heart. If this divine messenger, conscious as he was of possessing miraculous powers, and of being under divine direction, experienced the benefit of such assistance, it must be still more necessary for ordinary Christians. Let us not, therefore, withhold from them services which are so easily performed. They are recommended upon the plain

principles of humanity and benevolence ; they are also enjoined by the authority of our Master, who has pronounced a severe sentence of condemnation upon those who refuse to visit and comfort his disciples, when in prison or in bonds.

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SECTION XLV.

*Paul addresses himself to the Jews at Rome, who are divided in their opinions. He continues for two years preaching the gospel.*

ACTS xxviii. 17—31.

17. AND it came to pass, that after three days, Paul called the chief of the Jews together, and when they were come together, he said unto them, Brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans,

18. Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me.

19. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Cæsar ; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of.

20. For this cause, therefore, have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you ; because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.

As Paul came to Rome as a prisoner, he was well aware that the Jews would entertain an unfavourable opinion of him ; especially when they heard that he was a prisoner for acting contrary to the customs of their ancestors, to which they were all zealously attached. To remove this impression, he assures them that the Romans, by whom he had been examined, had judged him innocent, and were willing to let him go ; and that if their countrymen did not concur in this opinion, it was only in consequence of his believing that God had raised up that illustrious person who was the common hope of the whole nation ; in short, that he was guilty of no crime but that of being a Christian. But his motives for becoming one he was willing to explain. To this the Jews reply, that neither by letter nor by word of mouth had any evil been reported of him ; that, therefore, they were not prejudiced against him, but willing to hear what he had to say in defence of himself

and the Christians; although they entertained little hope of being convinced, since they found that Christians were every where censured.

The usual method of guarding prisoners among the Romans, was to fasten one end of a chain of suitable length to the right hand of the prisoner, and the other end to the left arm of the soldier, who must, therefore, constantly attend him. This was the way in which Paul was confined, and to this he alludes, when he says, that he was bound with a chain.

21. And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judæa concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came, showed or spake any harm of thee.

22. But we desire to hear of thee, what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, "*in respect to this sect,*" we know that every where it is spoken against.

So inveterate was the malice of the Jews against Paul, that it may perhaps appear extraordinary, that they should not send misrepresentations of his character to Rome. But as he went thither as a prisoner, they did not probably expect that he would have any intercourse with his countrymen, and in regard to the emperor, they could not interfere with his decision.

23. And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging, to whom he expounded and testified, "*earnestly declared,*" the kingdom of God; persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening, "*from the dawn of day until the evening.*"

What he declared concerning the kingdom of God, was, no doubt, that it was not of a temporal, but a spiritual nature; and concerning Jesus, that he was the Messiah. This he endeavoured to prove from the prophets, who had spoken in very clear terms of him. The law of Moses, indeed, is mentioned as furnishing him with proofs: but this can be no more than the books of Moses, which went by the name of the law, and in one of which, he is represented as saying to the people, "a prophet will the Lord your God raise up unto you from among your brethren like unto me—unto him ye shall hearken." Deut. xviii. 15. This language may be understood of a succession of prophets; but it was applied to Christ by the first preachers of the gospel. The earnestness which Paul discovered on this occasion is remarkable; he began his discourse with the dawn of the day, and continued it until evening.



24. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.

Some were convinced by his arguments, and became Christians: others remained unbelievers.

25. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, "*one thing*," Well spake the Holy Spirit by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers,

26. Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing, ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing, ye shall see, and not perceive:

27. For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

This character was given of the Jews in the time of the prophet Isaiah, vi. 9; but when the prophet asks, "Lord, how long?" i. e. how long will this incorrigible temper continue? he answered, "Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without men, and the land be utterly desolate." This reply from God shows that the prophecy was intended as a description of the children of Israel, until the destruction of Jerusalem, and therefore in the times of the Messiah. In this view it is frequently used by Christ.

28. Be it known, therefore, unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.

It was usual with this apostle, in the different places which he visited, to preach the gospel first to the Jews, and if they rejected it, then to address himself to the Gentiles. It was in this manner that he proposed to proceed on the present occasion.

29. And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves, "*debating much among themselves*."

As many remained unconvinced by what the apostle had said, while others were convinced, this occasioned many debates between the two parties.

30. And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came unto him;

31. Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching

those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

It was during the period of his confinement, likewise, that he wrote several of his epistles.

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HERE this history closes, rather abruptly, without informing us what became of the apostle after this time, and especially, what we should particularly desire to know, the issue of his trial: for that he was soon tried there can be little doubt, considering that his accusers would be eager to bring matters to this conclusion, and that the witnesses whom they might send would be in haste to return to their own country. By saying that he continued a prisoner in his own house for two years, the historian intimates, that at the end of that time he was set at liberty. This two years' confinement must be supposed to be what was allotted him by the emperor, either to please the Jews, or to punish a supposed offence. At the end of this time it is thought that he departed from Rome, and, after visiting parts of Asia and Greece, returned to it, intending to make it his residence for the remainder of his life, on account of the success which he had had in preaching the gospel there, and because it was the place of principal resort from all parts of the known world, and might afford him a more extensive field of usefulness than any other place. His prospects, however, were soon interrupted; for both he and Peter were put to death at Rome, in the year 64 or 65: Paul having first arrived there as a prisoner, in the year 61.

It was not Luke's design to write the life of Paul, but to give an account of the first planting of Christianity in different parts of the world, which he has done in a very admirable manner, and having accomplished this object, by bringing down his history to the arrival of Paul at Rome, or to about the thirtieth year from the death of Christ, he closes his narrative.

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WITH the end of this history I finish the plan which I proposed to myself about nine years ago—that of delivering an exposition, accompanied with reflections, upon the historical books of the New Testament; having gone through the entire gospels of Matthew and John, such parts of Luke as are not to be found in the above-mentioned books, and the book of Acts. If Mark has been passed over, it is only because he agrees in general with Matthew, with only slight variations.

I shall now conclude with making a few general deductions from the whole of the exposition.

I. From this exposition it appears, in the first place, that the New Testament does not contain certain doctrines which many persons suppose to be important, if not essential, parts of the

Christian system. I have already had occasion to observe, that the four evangelists are wholly silent on the subject of such doctrines;—that, far from countenancing them, they, on the contrary, uniformly represent Jesus Christ as one of the human race, only distinguished from the rest by prophetic gifts and miraculous powers;—that where they have been supposed to hold a different language, it has arisen from taking literally what ought to be understood metaphorically, or from judging by the mere sound of words, without regard to sense or connexion. The same observation is suggested by the history which is just closed, where the apostles and first preachers speak of their Master as of a man, “proved to be from God by signs and wonders which God wrought by him,” and mention no other terms of acceptance with God than those of fearing him and working righteousness. The obvious conclusion hence is, that these doctrines form no part of the Christian system; since it is impossible to suppose that writers, whose professed object is to give an account of the principles as well as the actions of Christ and his apostles, should omit to mention what is deemed so important a part of their commission. That the essential doctrines of Christianity should be found only in the epistles is in the highest degree improbable, and if true, would be no small reflection upon the character of the evangelists.

2. I observe, that Christianity loses nothing of its practical efficacy or value by the absence of these doctrines. The great principles of piety and morality remain unimpaired: it still enjoins, with irresistible authority, industry, temperance, and chastity, with respect to ourselves; justice, truth, and benevolence, in regard to others; humble reverence and cheerful submission, in regard to God. It raises man to the most exalted virtue, and supplies him with the purest enjoyment. This I have endeavoured to show by the reflections which have been suggested, throughout the course of the employment in which I have been engaged. But the tendency of pure Christianity to produce these effects is much more happily illustrated by the lives and characters of the first disciples, than by any thing which can be said upon this subject. Here we see the conclusions of reason verified by experience. In the book of Acts, in particular, we behold the noblest acts of fortitude and benevolence performed by those who had nothing to support or animate them, but the belief of a doctrine which represented Christ in no higher view than one of the human race. If the same faith produces not the same effects at the present day, the cause is to be sought for in men, and not in their principles.

3. This exposition is sufficient to show, I apprehend, the propriety of a new translation of the New Testament. To the general fidelity of the present version, I have more than once borne my testimony. But it is easy to show, that it has many inaccuracies and errors, which render it but an imperfect transcript of the original. It is highly desirable, that a more complete version should be made from the Greek language, after the original itself

has been corrected by the assistance of various manuscripts and versions; for there is no reason why we should be satisfied with secondary excellence, when we are capable of attaining the first. This opinion is entertained by persons of the highest eminence for judgment and learning, both in the established church, and among protestant dissenters, who have expressed a wish that a new version should be made by the joint labours of several learned men. I hope that the time is not far distant, when these wishes will be accomplished. In the mean time, it will be proper for Christians, who desire to understand the Scriptures, to avail themselves of such translations as have been produced by the industry of private individuals. In this view I will recommend to your perusal the translation of the New Testament, by Mr. Wakefield, as excelling in perspicuity and accuracy any which has yet appeared in our language.\*

\* At the time when this sentence was written, the excellent version of the late Archbishop Newcome had not appeared.—*Editor.*

END OF THE EXPOSITION.

**CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE**

OF THE

**HISTORIES**

OF THE

**EVANGELISTS.**



# CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

## OF THE HISTORIES OF THE EVANGELISTS.

As the author of this Exposition adopted Dr. Priestley's opinion respecting the duration of our Lord's ministry and the succession of its events, it has been judged proper to exhibit the Chronology of the Gospels according to that writer's scheme. See his Greek Harmony.

N. B. The days distinguished by an asterisk are Jewish Sabbaths.

JULIAN.	JEWISH.	
March	Nisan	
17	1	Before the Passover, Jesus had passed forty days in the wilderness; had preached in Judæa, and turned water into wine at Cana of Galilee.
20	*4	The precise time of his baptism is not known.
27	*11	
30	14	THE PASSOVER.
April		
1	16	

Matt. iii. iv. 1—11. Mark i. 1—13.  
 Luke iii. iv. 1—13. John i.  
 19—, ii. 1—12.

John ii. 13. 23—25. iii. 1—21

JULIAN.	JEWISH.		
April	Nisan		
2	17	John imprisoned about this time	.. .. .
3	*18		.. .. .
4	19	Jesus leaves Judæa for Galilee	.. .. .
5	20	Passes through Samaria	.. .. .
7	22	Cures the Nobleman's son of Capernaum	.. .. .
9	24	Calls Peter, John, James, and Andrew	.. .. .
10	*25	Cures a demoniac and Peter's wife's mother	.. .. .
11	26	Leaves Capernaum early in the morning, and during his absence delivers his sermon on the mount, and cures a leper	.. .. .
16	Yihar		
17	1		
18	*2		
	3	Returns to Capernaum, and heals the centurion's servant	.. .. .

Luke iii. 19, 20.

Matt. iv. 12. Mark i. 14, 15. John iv. 1—3.

John iv. 4—45.

John iv. 46—54.

Matt. iv. 18—22. Mark i. 16—20. Luke v. 1—11.

Matt. viii. 14—17. Mark i. 21—31. Luke iv. 33—39.

Matt. iv. 23—. Mark i. 39. Luke iv. 42—. vi. 17—19. Matt. v. vi. vii 1—27. Mark iv. 21—24.

ix. 49, 50. Luke vi. 20—. viii. 16, 17. xi. 1—13. 33—36.

xii. 22—34. 53, 59. xiii. 23—30.

xiv. 31, 35. xvi. 13, 17. Matt. viii. 1—4. Mark i. 40—45. Luke v. 12—16.

Matt. viii. 5—13. Luke vii. 1—10.



CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE.

JULIAN.	JEWISH.				
April	Yihar				Luke vii. 1E—17.
20	5	Raises the widow's son	"	"	Matt. viii. 18—, Mark iv. 45—, v. 1—21. Luke ix. 57—, viii. 22—40.
21	6	Crosses the lake, and cures a dæmoni- ing	"	"	Matt. ix 1—26. Mark ii. 1—22. v. 22—, Luke v. 17—, viii. 41—.
22	7	Cures a paralytic—calls Matthew—cures a woman, and raises Jairus' daughter	"	"	Matt. xii. 1—21. Mark ii. 23—, iii. 1—6.
24	*9	Walks through a corn-field, and restores a withered hand	"	"	Matt. x. 1—4. Mark iii. 13—19. Luke vi. 12—16.
25	10	Sets apart the twelve	"	"	Matt. xii. 22—, xiii. 1—52. Mark iii. 20—, iv. 1—20. 25—34. Luke xi. 14—23. xii. 10. xi. 24—32. viii. 19—21. 1—18.
27	12	Cures a deaf and dumb dæmoniac; discourses on the sin against the Holy Ghost, delivers the parable of the sower, &c.	"	"	Matt. xiii. 53. Mark vi. 1.
30	15	Goes to Nazareth	"	"	Matt. xiii. 54—, Mark vi. 2—6. Luke iv. 16—30.
May	*16	Is insulted there	"	"	Matt. ix. 35—, x. Mark vi. 7—13. Luke ix. 1—6. xii. 1—9. 11, 12. 49—53.
1	17	Mission of the twelve	"	"	

JULIAN.	JEWISH.		
May	Yihar		
3	18	John sends his disciples to Jesus during the absence of the twelve	Matt. xi. 1—19. Luke vii. 18—35. xvi. 16.
5	20	Jesus dines with Simon about this time	Luke vii. 36—50.
8	*23		
11	26	Retires from Herod's dominions on hearing of John's death	Matt. xiv. 1—13. Mark vi. 14—29. Luke ix. 7—9.
13	28	Feeds the five thousand, and walks upon the sea	Matt. xiv. 14—21. Mark vi. 30—44. Luke ix. 10—17. John vi. 1—14. Matt. xiv. 22—Mark vi. 45—John vi. 15—21.
14	29	Arrives at Capernaum	John vi. 22—24.
15	Sivan		
*1	*1	Discourses concerning bread, &c.	John vi. 25—.
3	3	Leaves Galilee for Jerusalem	John v. 1.
6	6	PENTECOST.	
*8	*8	Jesus heals the infirm man at Bethesda, and quits Judæa for Galilee	John v. 2—, vii. 1.
13	13	Discourses concerning traditions	Matt. xv. 1—20. Mark vii. 2—23
27	*15		
29			

JULIAN.	JEWISH.		
June	Sivan		
1	18		
5	*22		
6	23	Cures the daughter of a Syro-Phœnician woman ..	Matt. xv. 22—28. 24—30. Mark vii.
12	*29		
13	30	Travels through Decapolis, and cures a man who had an impediment in his speech .. ..	Matt. xv. 29—31. 31—37. Mark vii.
	Thammuz		
14	1		
19	*6		
26	*13		
27	14	Feeds the four thousand .. ..	Matt. xv. 32—38. Mark viii. 1—9.
28	15	Goes to Dalmanutha, and discourses with the Pharisees .. ..	Matt. xv. 39. xvi. 1—4. Mark viii. 10—12. Luke xii. 54—57.
30	17	Crosses to Bethsaida, and cures a blind man ..	Matt. xvi. 5—12. Mark viii. 13—26.
July			
1	18		
3	*20		
4	21	Sets out for the neighbourhood of Cæsarea Philippi, and, in some part of his journey, foretels his own sufferings .. ..	Matt. xvi. 13—. Mark viii. 27—. ix. 1. Luke ix. 18—27.

JULIAN.	JEWISH.	
July	Thammuz	
10	*27	
13	Abib	
17	1	
18	*5	
	6	
24	*12	
31	*19	
August	20	
1	*26	
7		
12	Elul	
14	1	
21	*3	
28	*10	
	*17	
September		
1	21	

The transfiguration. Cure of a dæmoniical boy.  
Discourses respecting humility and forgiveness

Matt. xvii. 1—23. Mark ix. 2—29.  
Luke ix. 28—45. Matt.  
xviii. Mark ix. 33—48. Luke  
ix. 46—.

JULIAN.	JEWISH.		
August 4	Elul *24		
10	Tisri 1	About this time Jesus sets out for Jerusalem, and sends out the seventy. On his way he cures the ten lepers .. .. .	Matt. xix. 1. Luke ix. 51—56. xiii. 31—, xvii. 11—19. x. 1—12. John vii. 1—11.
11	*2		
18	*9		
24	15		
25	*16		
October 1	22		
2	*23		
9	*30		
	Marchezvan		
10	1		
16	*7		
23	*14		
30	*21		
November 1	23	We have no account of what Jesus did in the whole interval between the feasts of Tabernacles and the Dedication. Dr. Priestley introduces here the discourses and incidents related by Luke ..	Luke x. 17—, xi. 37—, xii. 13—21. xiii. 1—17. xiv. 1—15. 25—33. xv. xvi. xvii. 7—10 xviii. 1—14.
		FEAST OF TABERNACLES .. .. .	John vii. 14—, viii. ix. x. 1—21.

JULIAN.	JEWISH.		
November 6	Marchezvan *28		
9	Casleu 1		
13	*6		
20	*13		
27	*20		
December			
1	24		
2	25	FEAST OF THE DEDICATION. The Jews seeking to kill Jesus, he retires beyond Jordan .. ..	John x. 22— x. 1. Matt. xix. 1. Mark
4	*27		
7	Thebet 1		
11	*5		
18	*12	Jesus discourses concerning riches, &c., and blesses the children .. ..	Matt. xix. 2— x. 2—31. Luke xviii. 15—20.
25	*19		
January 1	*26		

JULIAN.	JEWISH.	
January	Sebat	
5	1	
8	*4	
15	*11	
22	*18	
29	*25	
February	28	
1	Adar	
3	1	
5	*3	
12	*10	
19	*17	
26	*24	
March	27	
1	Nisan	
4	1	
5	*2	

John xi. 1—54.

In this month, probably, Jesus raised Lazarus at Bethany, and retired thence to the desert of Ephraim

JULIAN.	JEWISH.		
March 12	Nisan *9	Jesus comes to Bethany, where he sups, and Mary anoints him; on his way thither he cures two blind men, and is entertained by Zaccheus ..	Matt. xx. 17—34. Mark x. 32— Luke xviii. 31. xix. 1—28. 41—44. Matt. xxvi. 6—13. Mark xiv. 1—9. John xii. 1—11.
13	10	Enters Jerusalem, purges the temple, and retires to Bethany .. .. .	Matt. xxi. 1—11. Mark xi. 1—10. Luke xix. 29—40. John xii. 12—19. Matt. xxi. 12—17. Mark xi. 11—19. Luke xix. 45, 46. John ii. 14—22.
14	11	Curses the fig-tree, and discourses in the tem- ple, &c. .. .. .	Matt. xxi. 18—22. Mark xi. 20—26. Matt. xxi. 23— xi. 27—, xii. 1—12. Luke xix. 47, 48. xx. 1—19. xiv. 16—24. Matt. xxii. 15—, Mark xii. 13—37. Luke xx. 20—44. Matt. xxiii. Mark xii. 38—, Luke xx. 45—, xxi. 1—4.
15	12	The Greeks introduced to Jesus—the voice from heaven; the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem .. .. .	John xii. 20—, Matt. xxiv. xxv. Mark xiii. Luke xxi. 5—36.
17	14	The Passover. Institution of the Lord's Sup- per .. .. .	Matt. xxvi. 17—30. Mark xiv. 12—26. Luke xxii. 7—38.
18	15	Jesus is tried and crucified .. .. .	Matt. xxvi. 57—, xxvii. Mark xiv.



JULIAN.	JEWISH.		
March	Nisan		
20	17	The Resurrection	.. .. .
26	*23		
27	24	Jesus appears to his disciples, Thomas being with them	.. .. .
April			
1	29		
2	*30		

53—, xv. Luke xxii. 54—, xxiii. John xviii. 12—, xix.

Matt. xxviii. 1—10. Mark xvi. 1—11. Luke xxiv. 1—12. John xx. 1—18.

Mark xvi. 14. Luke xxiv. 36—43. John xx. 26—29.

# CHRONOLOGY

OF THE

## ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

- | A. D. |   |
|-------|---|
| 29    | The ascension takes place April 28.<br>Effusion of the Holy spirit on the day of Pentecost.<br>Cure of the lame man.<br>Deaths of Ananias and Sapphira.<br>Imprisonment of the apostles.  |
| 35    | Martyrdom of Stephen.   |
| 36    | Conversion of Saul.   |
| 39    | Rest of the Christian churches.   |
| 41    | Conversion of Cornelius.  |
| 42    | Barnabas and Paul come to Antioch.  |
| 44    | Persecution by Herod. Paul and Barnabas come to Jerusalem, with relief to the brethren, and return to Antioch.  |
| 45    | Paul and Barnabas set out from Antioch on their first apostolical journey. Their course was from Antioch to Seleucia, Salamis, Paphos, Perga, Antioch (in Pisidia,) Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Antioch, (in Pisidia,) Perga, Attalia, Antioch.          |
| 49    | Council of Jerusalem, which Paul and Barnabas attend, and afterwards return to Antioch.   |
| 50    | Paul's second apostolical journey, in company with Silas, from Antioch, to Syria, Cilicia, Derbe, Lystra, Phrygia, Hierapolis, Laodicea, Colosse, Galatia, Mysia, Troas, Samothrace, Neapolis, Philippi, Amphipolis, Apollonia, Thessalonica, Beræa, Athens, Corinth. |
| 51    | Paul remains a year and six months at Corinth, and writes thence his epistles to the Thessalonians, and perhaps to the Galatians.   |
| 53    | Sails into Syria, and proceeds to Ephesus, (whence he wrote his first epistle to the Corinthians,) Cæsarea, Jerusalem, Antioch, Galatia, Phrygia, Ephesus.  |
| 56    | Leaves Ephesus and visits Macedonia, Crete, Illyricum, Nicopolis, Macedonia, (whence he wrote the second epistle to the Corinthians,) Greece, Corinth. In the course of the year fifty-six, he wrote his first epistle to Timothy and that to Titus.                  |
| 58    | Leaves Corinth, (whence he wrote his epistle to the Romans) and comes to Philippi, Troas, Assos, Mitylene,  |

A. D.	Chios, Samos, Trogyllium, Miletus, Cós, Rhodes, Patara, Tyre, Ptolemais, Cæsarea, Jerusalem. Here he is taken into custody, and carried to Cæsarea, where he remains two years.
60	He is sent to Rome; but on his way is wrecked on the island of Malta.
61	Reaches Rome, and after two years' confinement, (during which he wrote his epistles to the Ephesians, second to Timothy, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon,) is released.

N. B. The chronology and arrangement of Dr. Lardner have been followed.



AN  
I N D E X  
OF THE  
PRINCIPAL SUBJECTS TREATED OF  
IN THIS  
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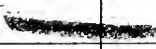








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