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THE
HISTORY
AND
CHARACTER
OF

St. PAUL, examined :

In a Letter to THEOPHILUS,
a Christian Friend.

Occasioned by Observations on the Conversion
and Apostleship of St. PAUL : in a Letter to
GILBERT WEST, Esq;

With a PREFACE by way of
POSTSCRIPT.

It is not good to have respect of persons in judgment.
Prov. xxiv. 23.

*Antehac non soleo multum tribuere fabulis, quæ vulgò
feruntur; sed posthac multò minus tribuam: suspi-
cor enim ab hominibus credulis multa pro veris
prodita literis.*
Erasmus.

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HISTORY

CHARTER

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*The Historians Account
of PAUL.*

Acts ix.

1. **A**ND 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*.

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

PAUL'S Account before the Roman chief Captain and the People at Jerusalem.

Acts xxii.

3. **I** am verily a man which am a Jew, born in *Tarsus*, 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, and was zealous towards God, as ye all are at this day.

4. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.

5. As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to *Damascus*, to bring them which were there bound unto *Jerusalem*, for to be punished.

6. And it came to pass, that as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto *Damascus*, about noon suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me.

PAUL'S Account before Agrippa Festus and principal Men at Cæsarea.

Acts xxvi.

9. **I** verily thought with my self, that I ought to do many things contrary to 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 receiv'd authority from the chief priest; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.

11. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme, and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto 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 that journeyed with me.

4. And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*

5. And he said, who art thou, Lord? and the Lord said, I am *Jesus* whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

6. And he trembling and astonished, said, Lord what wilt thou have me to do? and the Lord said unto him, arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

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

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.

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.

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.

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 pricks.

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 appear'd 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.

17. Delivering thee from the people, and from the *Gentiles*, unto whom now I send thee.

18. To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified, by faith that is in me.

19. Whereupon O king *Agrippa*, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.

8. And *Saul* arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into *Damascus*.

11. And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into *Damascus*.

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

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 *Strait*, and enquire 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.

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

14. And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

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*, and Kings and the children of *Israel*.

16. For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name sake.

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 unto thee in the way as thou camest) hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the holy ghost.

18. And immediately there fell from his eyes, as it had been scales; and he received sight forthwith, and he arose and was baptized.

12. And one *Ananias* a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the *Jews*, that dwelt there.

13. Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, brother *Saul* receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked upon him.

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.

19. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was *Saul* certain days with the disciples which were at *Damascus*.

20. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the son of God.

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

22. But *Saul* increased the more in strength, and confounded the *Jews* which dwelt at *Damascus*, proving that this is very Christ.

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

24. But their laying 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.

26. And when *Saul* was come to *Jerusalem*, he assayed to join himself to the disci-

15. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men, of what thou hast seen and heard.

16. And now why tarriest thou? arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

20. But shewed first unto them at *Damascus*, and at *Jerusalem*, and thro' out all the coasts of *Judea*, and then to the *Gentiles*, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

17. And it came to pass, that when I was come again to *Jerusalem*, even while I

ples, but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.

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*.

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

29. And he spake boldly in the name of Lord *Jesus*, and disputed against the *Grecians*; but they went about to slay him.

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

31. Then had the churches rest, &c.

prayed in the temple, I was in a trance.

18. And saw him saying unto me, make haste, and get thee quickly out of *Jerusalem*, for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me.

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 *Stephen* was shed, I also was standing by and consenting unto his death, 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*.

21. For these causes the *Jesus* caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me,

22. Having therefore obtained help of God, 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.

23. That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people and to the *Gentiles*.

BOOKS written by the same Author.

- I. *The History of JOSEPH considered, in answer to Mr. Chandler against Dr. Morgan's Moral Philosopher.*
- II. *The Resurrection of JESUS considered, in answer to The Trial of the Witnesses.*
- III. *The Resurrection reconsidered, in answer principally to The Resurrection cleared.*
- IV. *The Resurrection-Defenders stript of all Defence, in answer to Mr. Jackson, Mr. Sylvester, Mr. Chandler, and the Clearer.*
- V. *Supernaturals Examined: containing 1. An Answer to the Observations of the Evidence of the Resurrection of JESUS by Gilbert West Esq; 2. An Answer to Mr. Jackson on Miracles and Prophecies, shewing the Impossibility of the one, and the Falshood of the other. 3. An Answer to A Defence of the peculiar Institutions and Doctrines of Christianity, against Deism fairly stated and fully vindicated.*

A N

EXAMINATION, &c.

I. *To Theophilus, of friendship and examination.*

I Know very well that difference in opinion makes no difference with you, *Theophilus*, in Friendship; and therefore the disagreement of our *sentiments* in any respect, that has no relation to our moral conduct, will never break through those sacred bounds; we having resolved it shall be an invincible maxim with us, that nothing shall destroy our amity but knavery; concluding that true friendship is founded in natural affection and moral virtue.

The mighty performance, *Theophilus*, you recommended to my perusal, and desired my opinion concerning, which hath indeed that subtilty and art that are needful to the subject, I have considered; and now communicate my thoughts on it to you, and to those that are disposed to examine carefully into things. Superficial views often deceive the judgment. Truth seldom runs like water after a shower, upon the surface, or in the open channels, but is like a spring at the bottom of a deep well, and he must labour that will draw it up. The passions of men hurry them on with impatience, that they neither take time nor pains sufficient to inspect and attend to the intrinsic truth

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of

of things: their minds being eagerly employed in shifting scenes, they take up with a transient view, and seldom make those wise observations that are necessary to come at wisdom and truth.

II. *On the introductory Part of the Observations on St. Paul.*

In * my contemplations on this subject, O! *Theophilus*, I am surpris'd that any reasoning christian can pretend to draw proofs for his religion from *prophecies of the Old Testament*; since very few, if any, can be literally applied; and I am no less surpris'd that it should be presumed to have any *necessary connection with the Jewish system of religion*, which *St. Paul* sets up christianity to pull down: and abrogates the *Jewish, as well as the Pagan*. 'Tis also strange it should be conceived that *proofs* can be drawn from *the miracles of Christ*, † seeing the Evangelists themselves bewray this information to us, ‡ that the Jews were not convinced of any miracles done by him; and that *the evidence of his resurrection* has upon the strictest examination appear'd by invincible proof insufficient to convince any impartial enquirer. (a) These things induce me to search, whether *the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul alone, duly considered, is a demonstration sufficient to prove christianity to be a divine revelation*; because if so, this proof is independent of that.

III. *The Acts and Paul's epistles antiently rejected.*

The honourable vindicator of this apostle says,
* *The*

* Obs p. 1.

† Mat xii. 38. xvi. 1

‡ John ii. 18.

(a) See the resurrection of Jesus considered, the resurrection re-considered, and the resurrection defenders stripped of all defence.

* *The authenticity of St. Paul's writings cannot be doubted, without overturning all rules by which the authority and genuineness of any writings can be proved, and confirmed.* But how does the truth of this assertion appear? Have they not been a matter of doubt to many? Have not the genuineness of several of what are now called *St. Paul's epistles* been doubted of by whole churches of christians themselves? and if any should do the same now, *what rules do they overturn by which the authority and genuineness of any other writings can be proved or confirmed?* The *Manicheans*, once no inconsiderable sect of christians, rejected as spurious our whole New Testament, and shewed other scriptures *The acts of the apostles* was denied by the *Cerinthians* and *Marcionites*. Not only *the Acts* were rejected by the *Incratites* and *Severians*, but all *Paul's epistles*. *St. Chryssostom*, in a Homily he made on the title of *the Acts* says, "that in his time (which was the end of the fourth century (not only the author and collector; but the book it self was unknown to many." The *Valentinians* and many ancient sects of christians accused our scriptures of *error* and *imperfection*, of *contradiction* and *insufficiency without tradition*, as we are informed by *Irenæus*. The *Ebionites* or *Nazarenes*, who were the first christians, rejected all *Paul's epistles* as those of an enemy and an impostor, as say *Origen* and *Eusebius*.

IV. *Of the credibility of the heretics and orthodox.*

If it be objected that the authority of *heretics* is of no validity. I answer, with me 'tis equal to that of the *orthodox*; for every sect were ever heretics to one another. What credit can be given to the

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orthodox;

* *Obf. p. 7.*

orthodox, when they report falsehoods one after another, as if it were for company's sake, and then their different Writings are produced for proof to one another of what they say. So this notorious falsity is asserted by the *orthodox*, that Celsus *allowed of the miracles of Christ*, because they have been taught to say so, they proceed (either without or against conviction) to assert after one another what the first falsely said. In *other cases* this would argue the greatest *partiality* in the world, and overturn *all those rules by which* the want of *the genuineness of writings can be examined* and detected. It follows then, that because either side has attested or rejected any thing, 'tis no argument with me that it is true or false, on their authority or the want of it. Where is opposition to be sought for but among those of a different party? And 'till it can be proved that one are given to lying more than another, their evidence will be esteemed alike credible. If the authority of *heretics* is of no account, it is because they want power. And 'tis the having power gives authority to the *orthodox*. What then can be depended on for truth from any party among them? Certainly an impartial man cannot expect it more on one side than another: therefore the evidence of one party is equal to the evidence of another with him that is of neither: which sufficiently destroys all authority of christian tradition, and leaves us to the guidance of reason only; especially if we farther consider, that those writings now esteemed apocryphal have been received as true by some christian sects; and those that we esteem true, have been deemed apocryphal. And in ancient churches the true and spurious have been read together: so that originally they may have been alike authentic, for aught any one

now living can determine to the contrary : for the same authority has been attributed to the spurious as to the genuine, by one church or another *.

With what justice then can it be affirmed that *the authenticity of St. Paul's writings cannot be doubted without overturning all rules by which the authority and genuineness of any writings can be proved and confirmed*, when their own inconsistencies, contradictions, and absurdities, to those that carefully search, will be found to be their own refutation. Nothing is more necessary than positive assertion where plain proof is wanting ; but nothing looks worse in a disputant. The greatest adversary to truth is usurped authority ; and this is to all my adversaries their best defence : without these pretensions they can do nothing ; and with it they can do nothing that is right.

V. *The testimony of ancient christians concerning Paul and the scriptures.*

The Acts of the apostles which the *Ebionites* or *Nazarenes* had, recorded among other things, that
 ' Paul was originally a Heathen, that he came to
 ' *Jerusalem*, staid there for some time, and had a
 ' mind to marry the high priest's daughter, on the
 ' account of which he became a *profelyte*, and was
 ' circumcised ; but that afterwards, not obtaining
 ' the young woman he was angry, and wrote
 ' against circumcision, against the sabbath, and
 ' against keeping the law.' You have been already informed, *Theophilus*, that the *Nazarenes* were the first common name for christians ; *Paul* you know is called the ring-leader of the sect of the

* The *Roman* church allow that all the *Greek* copies that now are, are basely corrupted, and therefore pretend that their vulgar *Latin* is the only true. See the Preface to the *Rhemish Testament*.

the *Nazarenes*, and *Epiphanius*, who informs us with what I last quoted, says, that the christians took this name to themselves from *Jesus of Nazareth*. The name of *Ebionites*, or *Beggars*, was given them by their enemies, by way of contempt. And we are told that *the disciples were first called christians at Antioch*. If authority is to be fetched from antiquity, this I suppose of *Epiphanius* has as good a claim to it as any christian tradition.

* One *Fauslus* a *Manichean* writes concerning the gospels, ‘ that they were wrote a long time after the apostles by *certain obscure persons*, who, ‘ left no credit should be given to the stories they ‘ told, of what they *could* not know, prefixed to ‘ their writings the names of the apostles, which ‘ are so full of *mistakes*, of *contradictory relations* ‘ and opinions that they are neither coherent with ‘ themselves nor consistent with one another *.’ And a little after he accuses his adversaries whom *power had made orthodox* thus, ‘ Many things were ‘ foisted by your ancestors into the scriptures of ‘ our Lord, which tho’ marked with his name, ‘ agree not with his faith. And no wonder since ‘ *we have frequently proved* these things were neither ‘ written by himself, nor his apostles; but several matters after their decease were picked ‘ up from stories and flying reports, by I know ‘ not what set of half Jews, and these not agreeing among themselves, who nevertheless publishing them under the names of the apostles of ‘ our Lord, or of those that succeeded them, ‘ have feigned their own lies and errors to be ‘ written according to them.’ † *Celsus* exclaims against the too great liberty which the christians took

* Augustin contra Faust. l. 32, 33.

† Origen contra Celsus, l. 2.

took, as if they were drunk of altering their original gospel several times, that so they might retract and deny those matters which had been urged against them.

VI. *Of the fathers of the church.*

All the authority we can have of the authenticity of the christian traditions is from the fathers; and of their understanding it is certain, they judged of what was right or wrong, as it suited with, or was opposite to their party; ‘each espousing those scriptures as canonical in which their peculiar tenets were to be found; the rest they termed apocryphal, or deutro-canonical.’ As for the testimony of the fathers, ‘all know who are ever so little acquainted with their writings that they are not to be credited in the relation, scarce of any one single matter of fact, for the many negligencies, impertinencies and falsehoods that are found in them; eat up as they were with the grossest superstitions’.——*Papias*, the tutor of *Irenæus* was (as *Eusebius* says) a man of weak judgment and a fabulous author, and one who led many into error, and particularly his pupil *Irenæus* a simple and credulous man, who is the first ecclesiastical writer of note. No wonder the followers of an erroneous guide are led into errors.

To be particular about the fathers, their ambition, insolence, avarice, ignorance, faction, sedition, persecution of each other, cruelty, murders, lies and forgeries, and other flagrant vices would be endless; yet these are the men whose honesty we are to depend upon for conveying to us *the oracles of truth* *. ‘Are we to learn our religion from those who wanted charity? or our charity and meekness?’

‘from

* *Gordon.*

' men who were perpetually quarrelling with and
 ' cursing each other? No people upon earth ever dif-
 ' fered more, nor proceeded with greater fury and
 ' bitterness in their differences. They were constant-
 ' ly quarrelling about the smallest as well as the
 ' greatest points; and for the smallest as well as the
 ' greatest they damned one another.—Does their
 ' fainting villains and assassins, as sometimes they
 ' did, entitle them to the character and reverence
 ' of *Saints*? Does their eternal contention and
 ' contradiction qualify them for the center of
 ' unity? Is their turbulent spirit and their wild
 ' want of common sense, their ravenous avarice
 ' and flaming ambition, their fury and fighting,
 ' their frequent *change of opinion*, their apostacy and
 ' murders; are all these, or any of them proper
 ' guides of God's people? and that these marks
 ' belong to many of the fathers, and all of
 ' them to some, is too manifest.' Another au-
 ' thor * observes that ' the fathers too, in almost all
 ' traditions follow one another, like so many geese
 ' in a train, having neither the honesty nor abilities
 ' to look carefully into things, or to consider the
 ' nature of that evidence by which only they ought
 ' to have been governed in relation to sacred things.'
 —' In a word a man might fill volumes with
 ' the bare recital only, and that from the very best
 ' authorities, of the impieties and senseless vanities
 ' of the fathers; but indeed ecclesiastical history
 ' has done it already to our hands, being itself
 ' but a compendium of their vices.'——Else-
 ' where the same author reasons thus, ' Though 'tis
 ' fit we should give our assent sometimes to truths,
 ' upon the bare testimony of others, yet this assent
 ' will be stronger or weaker as the testimony is more
 ' or

* *Evans.*

or less reasonable.—Testimony, before it can be-
 come the object of a reasonable assent, must be at-
 tended with these two circumstances, credibility
 of *persons*, and credibility of *things*; for by these
 we are to judge of all history. For instance, if
 what is related as fact, be agreeable to reason and
 experience, and we know the relators to be men
 of good sense and great fidelity, then we have the
 highest external evidence of the truth. But if
 we have the relation of a fact supposed to have
 been done hundreds of years before our time,
 and cannot come at the characters of the first re-
 lators, the evidence is very much decreased; but
 if the characters of the intermediate relators are
 well known, and we have reason to believe from
 their compositions, or otherwise, that they were
 both *weak and enthusiastical, self-interested and*
designing knaves, easily imposed on themselves, and
disposed to deceive others, then the relation de-
 serves no credit. And such a set of men I take
 the fathers, or heads of parties to have been, al-
 most to a man, during the four first centuries, and
 some time after, injudicious in all they relate,
 taken up with every idle report, unfaithful, igno-
 rant of true religion, bigots, knavish in all fa-
 vourite points of divinity, silly reasoners, be-
 trayers of true christianity, Platonists. This all
 men see, or may see, if they will acquaint them-
 selves with their writings; and that instead of
 establishing holy scripture with their testimonies,
 they have rendered it the most precarious thing
 in the world.' Therefore the truth of sacred
 writings must be sought for by their own *internal*
evidence.

VII. *Of the authenticity of the christian tradition, and of Robinson Crusoe.*

They that can take for granted that the books of the New Testament must needs have been genuine and could not possibly be corrupted, may as well take for granted, that *transubstantiation* and *forgiveness of sins by a priest*, must have been a doctrine originally from heaven, and could not possibly otherwise be received in the church; because we cannot fix the precise time, and manner, when, where, and how the impositions begun, and were carried on. The church who has a piercing eye to her own advantage, taking what care she could to conceal those things.

Before *printing* was found out and practised, it was much more easy to impose on the world than now; notwithstanding which, many new falsehoods are invented, and pass for truth, at least with *a party*; for there is a willingness in partial men to believe whatever tends to promote their sect or faction (*a*).

'Tis

(*a*) The holy *Roman* church knew that when her holy secrets came to be public, they would be despised as not able to stand a rational scrutiny. And therefore tho' she could not prevent what has happened, she ever has, and yet does take all possible care, how, where, when, and to whom the privilege of reading the scriptures is allowed, for nothing vexes the old lady more than that her secret debaucheries be publickly talked of by those that have examined her facts; for by her lies and impositions she has debauched the common sense of mankind. She never permitted the scriptures to be read in the common tongue, by persons of common understanding, but only by such faithful sons as she can confide in, such as are fit to carry on her cheat, or by some devout religious persons, with reverence, secrecy and silence, such as, if I may be allowed to speak in the *mahometan* phrase, have had their senses ravished away by the Holy Ghost; or in *St. Paul's*, by such as know not whether they are in the body natural, or out of it, but know themselves to be in the body spiritual; that is, in the body of the church,

'Tis confessed by Mr. *Dodwell*, that the books of the New Testament did not *publicly* exist 'till at least *one hundred years* after Christ. And if they had no public existence 'till then, how can it be proved they had any *private* one before. And afterwards they were to be found only in the hands of ecclesiastics, 'till the *third* or *fourth* century, men who were more subtil than simple; more romantic inventors than righteous enquirers; and they that were simple, were more credulous than wise. Here was time enough for the work of fraud and imposture. And when christians came to be invested with power by *Constantine*, they established what they thought fit.

What authority have we, *Theophilus*, for the truth of the scriptures, but the scriptures themselves? Can any history prove itself? Were not the christian writers in the early ages of christianity notorious for lies and forgeries? for fathering spurious pieces on *Jesus Christ* and his *apostles*, and successors? Have not later christians thrown out a multitude of books for apocryphal, which the earlier christians believed and read in their churches? There is a fine catalogue of them in *Toland's Amyntor*. Among the books anciently received by christians, some are as foolish as others are romantic, *viz. The Pastor of Hermas, the gospel of the infancy of Jesus, The gospel of Nicodemus,* to

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which

church, such as have express licence to read the scriptures by their priests and confessors, that are humble enough to be stupid, devout dunghil souls that presume not to be wise above what is permitted; never presuming to contend, controul, or talk of their own sense of scripture, or have any, having laid it all down at the threshold of the holy church. The scripture being as St. *Ambrose* calls it *liber sacerdotalis*, the book of priests. It is the church's tree of knowledge, that is by a *Romish* interdiction not to be touched in common, on pain of death and damnation.

which may be added, the unintelligible *Revelations* of some saints, particularly that fathered on St. J—— the D—— may be compared for truth, but not for wit, with *Don Quixotte de la Mancha* or *Don Quexedo's visions of hell*. If believers in the infancy of christianity believed such romance, what reason have we to believe *them*, if reason should guide us? If reason is *not* to be our guide, how came we to be wiser than they? or how can we know in what respects they were right, when they were wrong in so many?

If such authority is wanting to the *gospels* themselves, as ought to be given to establish *their* veracity unquestionable, as certainly it is; I cannot see how St. *Paul's epistles* can be more authentic than *these*, unless *the servant is above his lord*: therefore the christian tradition is the least of all histories to be regarded for genuine and uncorrupted truth.

It is no wonder if this *honourable author*, who is an elegant writer and subtil reasoner, but a *superficial* enquirer, could gloss over St. *Paul* in so shining a manner, who was so fam'd an apostle, that the rest are confessed to be all blockheads and fools to him. The men I contend with are men of parts and learning, I scorn to attack a fool; but it is not my learning or parts that gives me the victory, but the *truth* appears so evidently on *my side*, that it requires little of either in me to display and vindicate it. 'Tis no wonder if these gentlemen can defend what *custom* has established, when even I taught by them, and therefore a novice to these masters of art, can give such reasons to prove *Robinson Cruso*, a *true history*, as they themselves, by their own arguments might not be able to disprove, if they did not know it to be otherwise.

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The reasons that may be given to render *Robinson Crusoe* a true history are these, the writer appears to be neither an *impostor* nor an *enthusiast* from any part of the story; and to have had no design to pervert the reason of mankind, or impose on men's understandings; or to *propagate a new religion* in the world, in order to make himself *head of a sect*. It contains no *contradictions* or *absurdities*; nothing *impossible*, *improbable* or romantic: when, where, by whom, or in what language it was first written, is better known than the books of the New Testament. The genuineness and authority of it was never questioned, nor denied. No book was ever wrote to *disprove* it, tho' this history came forth at a time when every thing that has but the least appearance of falshood is opposed: It did not first appear *scarce* and hard to be found, nor sleep an age or two in *bugger-mugger*; nor come forth by degrees in a few written copies, but several hundreds of printed copies were brought forth at once from the original. It contains nothing but what tends to the benefit of virtue and religion; and the reality of the history is believed by many. Lastly, if any party of men could find their account in espousing it as truth and fact, it may grow into authority *two or three hundred years* hence. Thus by a superficial knowledge of things, and taking them upon trust, what may not be plausible and credible to those that are more inclined to believe than examine?

VIII. *That the intrinsic nature of christian writings best shew their original.*

If there be no rule in the nature of the thing, for judging what writings ought to be received or rejected, then an *implicit faith in the authority of tradition*,

dition, is the rule and foundation of the christian religion. And since there is scarce a darker in the world, how does the genuineness and authenticity of those writings appear? Therefore proving facts by the book, which must be taken for granted to be true, do not prove the truth of those facts, no more than they prove the truth of the doctrines therein contained, if there are circumstances of suspicion in one, or reason is against the other, however the one may be set forth, or the other defended.

I have shewn, *Theophilus*, that there have been those who certainly were more capable of knowing the original of these books, than any man *now* can be who have accused the whole of *falsification*; tho' we have been robbed of their proofs, they have left us just suspicions for doubting. And if the whole be suspected, how can it prove the truth of its parts? or if some parts are proved erroneous, what dependence can be on the rest? No doubt but if the whole be true, every part is; but that being the point in question cannot be its own proof. I make no doubt of proving part to be wrong, if *inconsistencies*, *contradictions* and *absurdities* can prove it; which will be sufficient to demonstrate that it is not to be *all* taken for granted; and that therefore all reasoning from such false foundation, must be false of consequence. I think it is our *duty* to search after, discover and receive the truth; unless it be our duty not to see *inconsistencies*, *contradictions* and *absurdities*, when they appear before us. We cannot give equal credit to writings abounding with these, when we know them; as to what is void of such confusion—We may be deceived for want of knowledge; but when the nature of things are known, we no longer hesitate about them. *The understanding of man is the candle of the Lord* in him, and we are commanded not to *bide* or *smother* it,
but

but to let it appear *that all who approach thereto may see the light*, that it may *shine before men to the glory of God*.* We have hitherto been examining into the opinions of others, and the foundation of *their* opinions, but if we look carefully into the nature of the foundation itself, we shall be able to form a true judgment by infallible rules, not depending on uncertain tradition from *others*, but on certain knowledge of our own.

A man tells me a story, of the truth of which I am wholly ignorant, one part of it is found by examination not true; it may then be a question if any part is true, especially that which cannot be examined, nor produce any proof; at least it may be impossible to distinguish the truth of facts from falshood, if artfully told, and mixed. Enquiry is commendable among wise men: for 'tis a mark of folly to suffer oneself to be deceived, and a mark of wisdom to find out deceit. Those that had the telling their own stories as they pleased to their own advantage, are not to be implicitly believed by lovers of truth; especially when the story-tellers by their pretensions to truth, require an implicit faith. These generally mix some true history with their *mendacia sacra*; the one is told with seeming simplicity, and the other is tinged with *boliness* to make the whole go down together, without separating the mixture and examining the compound. The accounts in which errors appear, are not to be credited as human testimony, much less as divine.

Therefore I pass on from examining the whole in the gross, or one authority by another, to look into its *own intrinsic truth and harmony*, maugre all authority but that of reason and the nature of things, which are eternal and invincible; and I doubt not but undeniably to prove, as the *wise Celsus* did,
that

* Mat. v. 14, 15, 16.

that the christian traditions destroy their own authority.

Before I descend to particulars, I shall lay before you, *Theophilus*, the whole scope and drift of the authors design; which after quotations from *the Acts of the apostles* concerning the manner of St. Paul's conversion, and others from the *epistles*, he lays down in one paragraph the following plan of his argument.

IX. *The observator's plan and argument shewn.*

St. Paul's advocate says, ' Now it must of necessity be, that the person attesting these things of himself, and of whom they are related in so authentic a manner, either was an *impostor*, who said what he knew to be false, with an intent to deceive, or he was an *enthusiast*, who by the force of an overheated imagination imposed on himself, or he was deceived by the *fraud of others*; and all that he said must be imputed to the power of that deceit; or what he declared to be the cause of his conversion, and to have happened in consequence of it, did all really happen; and therefore the christian religion is a divine revelation.'

It should have been added, *or we are deceived by some unknown writer concerning St. Paul, and by epistles ascribed to him which he never wrote*: This objection was suffocated in its birth, which should have been principally answered; but the impossibility of doing it, made it necessary to be taken for granted; that *the authenticity of St. Paul's writings cannot be doubted without overturning all rules by which the authority and genuineness of other writings can be proved and confirmed*. But I have made the contrary evidently appear; and this might pass alone for a sufficient answer to the book. However, to do it *invincibly*, I shall shew, that supposing all these writings genuine, they do not carry in them
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sufficient evidence of truth to confirm this honourable author's reasoning, but themselves bewray that cause he has so well defended, and by impartial scrutiny, the defence will disappear, like imaginary castles in the air.

He attempts to prove that ' St. *Paul* could not be an *impostor*, because as he argues, he was disinterested respecting wealth, reputation and power, that he resigned for the sake of christianity his fortune, credit and religion; that he had acquired the contempt and vengeance of the more wealthy, powerful and reputable party, by deserting them; that the morals he taught all tended to peace and obedience; that what he did was not to gratify any irregular passion; that the consequence of embracing christianity was the suffering persecution; that the glory he sought could not be that of being the *author* of the christian religion; that he had no confederacy with the apostles, none with the men that journeyed with him, none with *Ananias*. That he encountered the policy and power of the magistrate, the interest, credit, and craft of priests, the prejudice and passions of the people, the wisdom and pride of the philosophers; that he was no enthusiast, because not inclined to *melancholly*, nor *credulity*, nor vanity or *self-conceit*, nor was he *ignorant* or imposed on, and *miracles* attended his conversion and mission.' therefore the author concludes thus,

' I shall then take it for granted that he was not deceived by the *fraud of others*, and that what he said of himself cannot be imputed to the power of that deceit no more than to wilful imposture, or enthusiasm: and then it follows, that what he related to be the cause of his conversion, and to

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‘ have happened in consequence of it, did all really
 ‘ happen ; and therefore the christian religion is a
 ‘ divine revelation.’

Though the *Gentleman* takes the *whole* for granted, and so argues from every particular as true ; yet I persuade myself he must have found it very difficult to have worked up every thing in *St. Paul's* favour as he has done ; for he must needs know that *Paul* was not always *punctual to truth*. When I have delivered my thoughts on this subject, I will make no conclusion that our great apostle of the *Gentiles* was either an *enthusiast* or an impostor ; but shall leave you, *Theophilus*, to make what conclusions you please, who have often drawn more just consequences from what I have said, than I cared to mention. Refulgent truth carries its own conviction with it. For my part, I should not have scrutinized his character if it had not been represented with a false glare ; nor have thought him an impostor if the contrary had not been endeavoured to be proved : for it is seldom things are questioned 'till examined.

X. *Some flighty considerations, and of St. Paul's flight into heaven.*

You know, Sir, my natural temper, which I must be indulged in. You have often compared me to a man who being about to leap, frisks it a little beforehand, to try the pliability of his joints, and the elasticity of his nerves, which however displeasing it was to you at first, is now a matter of diversion, and something of this seems to me as necessary in dry reasoning, as the entertainments at a play between the acts.

This *Gentleman* little thinks he is perverting the words of Christ, and overturning the foundation of the
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the church while he endeavours to *defend* both ; for Christ said unto St. *Peter*, * *upon thee will I build my church* ; but this author builds it on St. *Paul* ; Now since the *old* foundation is forsaken, we are to examine the strength and security of the *new*. For now good christians being reduced by the persecutions of reason, are willing to lay hold on any thing to save their rich church and their poor souls, in equal danger ; for if they fall upon the rock of reason, their hold is *broken*, and if this rock fall on the church *it will grind it to powder*. But now their hold being broken, and the *old* foundations shaken ; (for if they were not, what need they seek a *new* ;) they stick to the skirts of St. *Paul*, and in his sanctuary they seek refuge from threatening death, and their expected dissolution.

Since then the church is brought to hang on this *single thread*, it is no hard matter to cut it in two, were it lawful to be done : but this thread of fate by the law of custom will preserve it ; for the same arguments that would prove a man *now living* to be an impostor or an enthusiast, cannot prove a man that lived 1700 years ago and upwards to be one ; and the arguments that would be formidable when applied to *Whitfield*, *Westley*, or any other person among us, lose all their force when applied to the apostle *Paul* ; otherwise it would not be impossible to prove the latter person belonged to one of the former orders.

I do not doubt but Mr. *Whitfield's* moral character is as good as St. *Paul's*, who never persecuted the church, or withstood the bishop of it to his face ; yet I do not think his, or any other man's moral character, in this age, would save him from being nominated in the list of *impostors*, or

* Mat xvi. 18.

enthusiasts, if he should write, or say, that * *he knew a man in Christ that some time ago was caught up into the third heaven, and heard unutterable words, such as are not lawful for any man to utter.* — If they could not be uttered what need has he to plead the unlawfulness of doing it? there is no fear of his breaking the law by doing what he could not do. But why did they in heaven, in St. Paul's hearing, speak that which was not lawful for him to utter on earth? and what could they talk there which is unlawful to utter here? 'Tis strange, and certainly needless, that any law should be made on earth to cut off news from heaven; or an intercourse from thence! I fancy it to be something like the voice that spoke to Paul going to *Damascus*, which, though 'tis said the men that journied with him heard, they were by them unspeakable words; because 'tis said they *heard them not*. Do angels never blush at talking before men what is *not lawful for a man to utter*? If they never blush at what they say, I think *this saint* should at what he said. Should a modern saint make the foregoing declaration, and at the same time confess this same person to be *himself*; and own that where he then was, he could not tell; whether *a great way off from himself*, or *beside himself*, what should we think of him? and that † *lest he should be exalted above measure, through the abundance of revelations, there was given unto him a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of satan to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure.* Which brought him down from his elevated state with his legs prone to the ground. For this thing ‡ *he besought the lord thrice, that it might depart from him.* Wonderful things are spoken of the heavenly powers! What more wonderful than that

* 2 Cor. xii 4.

† Ib. ver. 7.

‡ Ib. v. 8.

that heaven made him haughty but it was the devil that humbled him. If such a man was among us, should we not say he was an *enthusiast*, if he said as he meant, or an *impostor* if he did not. For a man to pretend to lose himself in heaven and find himself with the devil, to be lost in revelations and found in the mystery of darkness; this we should say was an evident mark of enthusiasm, or there are no marks of it in the world. But if he pretended this to *exalt his spiritual authority*, we should think him an impostor. His being accounted a *saint* would not be able to save him from this sentence. I say thus it would be, if such a man was among us *now*; but if this be applied to any holy person that once belonged to the holy land, the censure would certainly be condemned. Therefore if this be referred to any primitive saint there, it quite alters the case. So one man raises himself to dignity by the same way others are raised to disgrace pendent on the tripple tree. 'Tis well therefore our arguments in *this* age and country cannot reach *St. Paul*; he is *three stories higher* than man's reason can ascend, and mounted so far out of sight of it, that only *Satan* himself, or his messenger, could find him out. The messenger's master found out *Paul's* master in the wilderness, and now *Satan's* servant found out *Christ's* servant, and brought him out of a wilderness, in which he had lost himself. If the same battering rams of reason could shake the fortrefs of *St. Paul*, as would bring to the earth and shatter in pieces the *castles in the air* erected and elevated by a *modern saint*, I need not proceed on any other particulars to answer my honourable friend; but according to my promise, *Theophilus*, I make no application, being unwilling to shoot the game, when all the pleasure lies in hunting.

XI. *Of the blessed zeal of St. Paul's cursing spirit.*

What is gospel-zeal in St. Paul, would be an enthusiastic flash in a *modern saint*, if that holy apostle had not happily led and sanctified the way, as he has done, which the church has paved. What he has said, and through vehemence repeated, shews us beyond all contradiction of any dissenting teacher, that this man who * *was not a whit behind the chiefest apostle*, and yet the chief of sinners †, (the chiefest signal of humility in himself, and greatest of all complements to his brethren) who was so greatly dignified with such distinguishing virtues, who was *highly* in the favour of heaven to be so *exalted* and *mighty* in the *power of Christ*; I say it shews by his flaming zeal, that this high and mighty saint was a *high churchman*, or a *Dutchman*; for high and mighty he was in the *spirit*, however low and mean he was in his *person*, or poor and distressed in *state*.

To the *Galatians* he writes thus, † *I marvel that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another gospel! which is not another! but there are some that trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed* (a). To be sure this expression was inspired by heaven, for

* 2 Cor. xi. 5. † 1 Tim. i. 15. ‡ Gal. i. 6, 7, 8, 9.

(a) St. *Jerome* from this place endeavours to prove that the zeal of churchmen ought to be great towards all heretics and their doctrines, that they should anathematize them, let them be ever so dear to them. In which case, says our holy doctor, I would not spare my own parents.

for heaven is in the expression. He was warm, true; but then it was true warmth, that is, he was hot; but then he was no *Laodicean*, a generation of men that were neither cold nor hot, mild, moderate men fit to be *spued out of the mouth* of Christ, which is his church. He breathed fire, true; but then it was the nature of the gospel so to do. It came * *to send fire on the earth*, and it was *already kindled*; and *the zeal of the Lord's house*, the *Lord Jesus's house eat him up*. He cursed the angel that should dare to preach a gospel doctrine different from what he had preached; but then it was on *Christ's* and the *gospel's* account. † *If a man come unto Christ and hate not father and mother, wife, brethren, sisters, friends, and his own life for Christ's sake and the gospel's, he cannot be his disciple*. And surely there is not an *angel in heaven* so nearly related to us as *these* are, or as our selves are related to our own lives. Now this having been proved to be a true gospel-spirit, cannot be the spirit of enthusiasm. To think otherwise, is not to have an evangelic taste. And it is a shrewd sign of an infidel age of a *wicked and adulterous generation*, to believe an *angel from heaven*, rather than a *minister of the gospel!* and indeed if such an one has the power of ‡ *remitting and retaining to men their sins*, who of the congregation dare disbelieve his *parson* for his soul? for he that has courage enough to *curse an angel from heaven* for contradicting him, would thunder upon a poor soul that was under his spiritual authority the terrible wrath of an angry God, and the eternal torments of relentless vengeance.

Indeed I cannot help thinking however this sentence may be condemned by infidels, or may be
lampooned

* Luke xii. 4, 9.

† Ib. xiv. 26.

‡ John xx. 23.

lampooned by the unrighteous, it was an evident demonstration, that bishop *Paul* was a very good *high-churchman*; this being an excellent subject for an argument against toleration: for this great apostle would not tolerate an *angel from heaven* that preached another gospel than he preached, or give *another sense* to his gospel than himself gave, for he owns, it was *not another gospel* that he was so much concerned about, but a different explanation that perverted his meaning or preaching, which obliged him to unsheath the apostolical sword of the spirit. Therefore *no toleration* ought to be allowed *dissenters*, if we follow the blessed example of this great apostle, though their ministers should be *angels from heaven*. Ah! *Theophilus*, how many good churchmen and others that have a *zeal* for the gospel mourn *inwardly* these wicked, free-thinking days, and pant after such gospel times, when the devils scoured off wherever its ministers came; and all that were enemies to their blessed power, were cursed devils, and when *angels* themselves, should they dare to be disobedient to them, were threatened with church anathema's.

We have been shewn already that *Paul* was no enthusiast by this expression, but an orthodox, gospel-faint; and in like manner it can be no proof of imposture; for the *diction* or malediction of the speech shewed the fervour and sincerity of his heart. And why should not a bishop's malediction as much dreaded as his benediction is desired? St. *Paul* was determined never to *alter* his opinion, right or wrong, nor to suffer any others to alter the principles he had taught them, as much as lay in his power; and that they should be curs'd if they did: which is a true high church spirit. And as I think it will be granted, that no man would be

be fool enough to utter such an expression without the utmost sincerity; it argues undeniably that it was not the speech of an impostor (unless it was an enthusiastical one.) Indeed if a modern saint, or methodist, should bid his hearers, or readers, curse the angel that contradicts his preachments, we should think the cool air was best for him, opening a vein, an emetic of hellebore, shaving his head, spring-water and a cooling regimen might be of service; but 'tis my opinion that he ought by no means to be forbid preaching *ex tempore*, but rather be excited to that exercise 'till he is faint with sweat, for it prodigiously helps those fiery spirits to evaporate.

What he writes to the *Romans* is ushered in with a *very solemn affirmation*, and not without reason, for it needs it. As when I was young, the stories of spirits and witches, which I heard, were generally introduced with attestations of the truth lest they should be disbelieved; for no man would be such a fool alone as to believe what no body else does, nor willing to assert what no body is willing to believe. *I say the truth in Christ*, (says this apostle) **I lie not, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart; for I could wish myself accursed from Christ, for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.* We seldom hear a man say, he does not lie, unless he is very apt to lie; and then generally he lies most; and he that will lie seriously and strenuously, will swear to it, when he thinks he cannot be believed without. And because the Holy Ghost is the spirit of truth, he has been called upon to witness the greatest lies in the world. To be *accursed from Christ* is to be one of those to whom *Christ*

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* Rom. ix. 1. 2, 3.

shall say, * *Go ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.* Could Paul wish to be damned that his brethren might be saved? If he was sincere, it could be only to be damned for a little while, that is to go to a gentle purgatory; otherwise such an expression seems to suit the pen of one who thinks to be *accursed from Christ*, is a very light matter. Whether this be the sign of imposture in a professed believer, do you, *Theophilus*, judge. But if I am able to understand it in any other sense at all, I think, for the salvation of the *Jews*, he wishes the same sentence on himself which he pronounces as penance against the fornicator †; *to deliver such an one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.* This is a kind of *spiritual amputation*, to damn the flesh to save the spirit; or to save half, and damn half; when the whole cannot be saved, to save a remnant. And to be sure 'tis better to go into heaven halt, or maimed; limping, or squinting, than to have the whole body cast into hell-fire. No doubt but it must be a mortification to such a person in heaven to see other people have flesh upon their bones there, but Satan has devoured his, and left him a walking skeleton! such a one I fancy must make but an odd figure in heaven. If St. Paul may be believed that he *had great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart*, then it has no meaning any more than that it is the effect or proof of a very melancholly disposition; and this is one of those foils, as my honourable author says, enthusiasm sprouts from. But the principal source of enthusiasm I attribute to the irregular circulation of the animal fluids, now rapid, now languid; the ebbs and floods of joy and sorrow; and an unequal tide of

* Mat. xxv. 41.

† 1 Cor. v. 12, 3, 4.

of the passions, which sometimes roll with a rapid torrent, and sometimes seem to stagnate. When such a mind has religion for its chief object, it produces enthusiasm.

XII. *The character of St. Paul by his Writings.*

That my adversaries may have nothing to reply, I agree to reason with them on their own foundation. Indulge me therefore with the same freedom in doing it, *Theophilus*, as yourself would take, if your soul was in my soul's stead, and was conducted by the same reason. You, Sir, to whom I have oft exposed the naked sentiments of my heart, will pardon the weakness that may attend the best intended and well meant performance of a friend, that has no design to *deceive*, nor to *be deceived*.

Let *St. Paul's* character be wrought up with ever so much sacred art, it is unluckily the only cause of exposing it the more; not that his character would signify any thing, but as the illustration of truth itself is made to stand or fall with it.

Certainly *St. Paul*, if we are to believe the writings which are received for his, and the history of him, was as strange a heterogeneous mixture of stuff, as odd a compound of flesh and *spirit*, as e'er was jumbled together in human chaos. There were *two men*, in this one man *Paul*, the old man, and the new man; the man of righteousness, and the man of sin; he had *two bodies*, a natural body and a spiritual body, the body of sin and death, and the body of life and righteousness; he had in himself *two laws* that governed him; the law of sin, and the law of righteousness; the law of the mind, and the law of the flesh. These two persons, the carnal person and the spiritual person compounded, made a third person, the human, or the human

person was something else distinct from both ; like the alchemists *salt, sulphur, and mercury*, of which they say, all bodies are compounded and reduceable to ; the spiritual person danced him up into the *third heavens*, the carnal and sensual person brought him down to the *devil*, who buffeted him, and pricked him with a thorn. Never was poor wretch so tossed in a blanket as this poor faint was between these two ; and each of these three persons could talk by himself. The carnal person says, (a) *In me, that is, in my flesh dwelleth no good thing.* And (b) *I am carnal sold under sin.* The human person says (c) *If I do the things I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.* And (d) *Now I speak not the Lord again,* (e) *Say I these things as a man, and saith not the law the same also ?* The spiritual person says, (f) *I live, yet not I, but it is Christ that liveth in me, and the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God :* and again, (g) *For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* (h) *The spirit of Christ hath made me free from the body of sin and death.* Now, (i) sin predominates and he groans under bondage, anon grace is more abounding than sin, and he triumphs in freedom. (k) *At this time he keeps his body in subjection lest he be cast away.* At another time (l) *he is persuaded that no power can separate him from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.* Now (m) *he withstands Peter and the other apostles to the face,* for temporizing ; at other times, (n) *he is all things to all men, that by all means he might gain some.*

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(a) Rom. vii. 18.

(b) *Ib.* ver. 14.

(c) *Ib.* ver. 20.

(d) 1 Cor. vii. 12.

(e) 1 Cor. ix. 8.

(f) Gal. ii. 20.

(g) Phil. i. 21.

(h) Rom. viii. 2.

(i) Rom. vii. 24.

(k) 1 Cor. ix. 27.

(l) Rom. viii. 35, 36, 37, 38, 39.

(m) Gal. ii. 11, 12, 13, 14, 15.

(n) 1 Cor. ix. 19, to

He declares to the Galatians (o) that if they are circumcised Christ shall profit them nothing; he tells the Romans (p), circumcision verily profiteth if thou keep the law. He informs the Corinthians, (q) that circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing. Just now (r) he wishes himself accursed from Christ for his brethren the Israelites; that they might believe and be saved; faith being made the condition of man's salvation; and says, (s) because of unbelief they were broken off. By and by he tells us (t), all Israel shall be saved: and that (u) God has concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all: and that (v) Christ is the Saviour of all men, especially those that believe; therefore also of them that believe not. One while (y) the elected remnant only shall be saved, and the rest are blinded. At another time, (z) the grace of God that brings salvation, has appeared to all men; and (a) God will have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. Here he declares (b) God will render to every man according to his works; (c) there he assures us that salvation is not acquired by works, lest any man should boast. He bids (d) work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; and for a reason why this should be done, he weakens the force of his precept, by saying, for it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of his own good pleasure. Now he maintains (e) that the doers of the law shall be justified; and by and by declares (f) by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified; and therefore concludes a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of
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- (o) Gal. v. 2. (p) Rom. ii. 25. (q) 1 Cor. vii. 19.
 (r) Rom. ix. 3. (s) Ib. xi. 20. (t) Ib. xi. 26.
 (u) Ib. 32. (v) 1 Tim. iv. 10. (y) Rom. xi. 7.
 (z) Titus ii. 11. (a) 1 Tim. ii. 4. (b) Rom. ii. 6.
 (c) Ephes. i. 9. (d) Phil. ii. 12, 13 (e) Rom. ii. 13.
 (f) Rom. iii. 20, 28.

the law : and then asks the question, as if he knew not what he had said, (e) *Do we then thro' faith make void the law?* Yes sure. And yet he says, *God forbid, yea we establish the law.* How can that be? certainly the law is made void, with respect to *justification*, and not established. But such is his reasoning, which is contrary to reason. I believe this may be found to be a general rule, and a true test of enthusiasm. *An enthusiast cannot reason well; and he that reasons well cannot be an enthusiast.* I do not add, *upon right principles*, because that depends upon knowledge. It would be too tedious here to recount the variety of temper and of art that abounds in all his epistles, equal to the variety of matters contained therein; of complaining and boasting, threatening and soothing, insulting and coaxing, triumphing and begging, jeering and irony, his exaltations and dejections; always contented and ever craving; now the highest saint, and anon the greatest sinner. His doctrine and practice was like his temper; he was *all things to all men*, that scarce any man knew what to make of him; and so diversified are the modes of his expression, that sometimes no man can be certain what he means, or drives at. Certainly *Theophilus* he was the oddest apostle of them all; *being born out of due time*, and so made in a very odd manner.

XIII. *Whether falling from grace or predestination was St. Paul's doctrine.*

(f) The Gentleman's citing 1 Cor. ix. 27. *I keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest by any means when I have preached to others, I myself should be cast away*; and his arguing rationally thereon

(e) Rom. iii. 31.

(f) This which the Gentleman has thrown into a note, I have made observations on in the text.

thereon against all other doctrines that contradict it, as not being taught by *St. Paul*, is no argument that *St. Paul* reasoned in the same manner; or could reason so well. Unless this reasoning can blot out every sentence of *Paul's* writing that militates therewith, it is of no force. This *saint* had too much *heat* to reason coolly, and too great a croud of tumultuous ideas to range them in good discipline, as the incoherence of his writings, sudden change of subjects, and darkness of expression shew. He was too full of *allusions*, types and figures to consider rightly of realities. *Elimas's* reasoning set him a raving (g); objections to his doctrines sets him upon exclamation, and calling names (b). Ask him why God is represented as finding fault, if nothing resisted his will, and there was no fault but what was of his own making? and he answers foreign to the matter, *who art thou O! man that repliest against God?* When he treats of the *resurrection*, (i) ask *with what bodies men arise?* And he cries, *thou fool. that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die.* But this is answering like a fool, for if the seeds that are sown die; they are never quickened, or bring forth. To exalt folly above wisdom, (k) he brings in *the foolishness of God*: and argues most foolishly (l), that *because the world by wisdom knew not God, therefore God had chosen the foolish things of the world to confound and destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.* If man's wisdom is too short to know God, can folly reach him! If wisdom is an attribute of Deity, can he despise his own attributed? or does he love wisdom in himself.

and

(g) Acts xiii. 10. (b) Rom. ix. 19, 20.

(i) 1 Cor. xv. 35, 36. (k) 1 Cor. 1, 25.

(l) 1b. ver. 19, 21, 27.

and folly in man? Idle and preposterous! Whatever St. Paul meant, one would think he wanted wisdom by this expression, or despised it to please fools.

That St. Paul's *keeping under his body, and bringing it into subjection, lest when he had preached the gospel of salvation to others, himself should be cast away*; does militate against the doctrine of absolute *predestination*; there is no question, if taken in the common and obvious sense: Yet whether this may not be explained in favour of that doctrine, is a question; and whether it is capable of blotting out all other expressions which insinuate that doctrine is another question; but whether he never contradicted himself is no question at all.

First, As before St. Paul drops this expression he shews, that *he was made all things to all men, for the gospel's sake*; therefore (m) *he became weak to those that are weak, to gain the weak*, that the weak brother might not perish, through his acting according to knowledge (as in the case of eating meats offered to idols) so this may be understood to be spoken to those weak believers, that were to be fed with milk and not with strong meat; as children are deceived to make them take their necessary physic. If this be expedient, sometimes for the bodies health, why not for sick souls. He told them there was the prize of salvation to be run for, and he gives this start, to set them all a running, and this spur to excite them to continue the race. But did *keeping under his body* prevent him from being a *cast-away*? certainly not at all, unless it was *the body of sin*. Will starving the body, or mortifying it, nourish and sanctify the soul, preposterous superstition! He intimates that

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(m) 1 Cor. i. 22.

he was not at an *uncertainty* about the matter ; for the foregoing words, to these under examination are, *I therefore so run not as uncertainly, so fight I not as one that beats the air ; but I keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means when I have preached the gospel to others, I myself should (seem to you to) be a cast-away.* If such *ekings* out of sense, and sometimes *takings* away, and *alterations*, are not allowed, neither the *precepts* nor *principles* in the scriptures will suit any one sect of believers in the world that ever were, or will be, without evident inconsistencies and absurdities, and sometimes downright *contradictions* ; but with these helps, it will suit them all, and serve any christian sect whatever.

2dly, Whether this text is capable of blotting out all the ninth chapter to the *Romans*, and all other expressions which manifestly favour St. Paul's doctrine of predestination, is another question. For 'tis impossible that those whom God purposes to save by his grace can fall away or fail of salvation, if (b) men are not justified by the law of works, but by the law of faith ; if (c) God imputes righteousness without works ; if (d) the purpose of God according to election stands, not of works, but of him that calleth ; if (e) a remnant shall be saved according to the election of grace ; if (f) by grace men are saved through faith, and that not of themselves but of the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast ; if (g) the saints are saved and called with a holy calling, not according to their works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given in Christ Jesus before the world began ; if (h) the kindness and

F love

(b) Rom. iii. 27. (c) Ib iv. 6, 23, 24. (d) Ib. ix. 11.
 (e) Ib. xi. 5, 6. (f) Ephes. ii. 8, 9. (g) 2 Tim. i 9
 (h) Titus iii. 4, 5, 6, 7.

love of God towards man appeared, not by works of righteousness that they have done; but according to his mercy he saves them, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, who are justified by grace; if it be (i) God that worketh in the saints to will and to do of his own good pleasure; if it be (k) not in him that willeth, nor in him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy; if (l) he hath delivered the saints while on earth from the power of darkness, and translated them into the kingdom of his dear son; if (m) all things work together for good to them that love God who are called according to his purpose; if whom he foreknew he predestinated to call, justify, and glorify; if (n) none can lay any thing to the charge of God's elect; if (o) God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardneth; if (p) God hath chosen the saints in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy, and predestinate them to the adoption of children; if they have redemption and forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ according to the riches of his grace; if God predestinates, and works all things according to the purpose of his own will, and (q) justifies freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ, and such like. What need a believer then to fear being a cast-away, any more than that God's purpose and power can be defeated? And if these sentences do not shew the meaning of St. Paul in the sense they are here delivered, it is so very like it, if he be to be understood by his words, that nothing can be more so. If it be an error, 'tis evidently St. Paul leads those that follow him into it, and is as evidently the consequence of following principles

(i) Phil. ii. 13. (k) Rom. ix. 16. (l) Col. i. 13.
 (m) Rom. viii. 28, 29. (n) Ib. ver. 33. (o) Ibid. ix. 18.
 (p) Ephes. i. 4, 5, 7, 11. (q) Rom. iii. 24, 25.

principles for truth upon trust, or authority in the room of reason.

XIV. *Of Saul's Disinterestedness and secret Call to Christianity.*

Our honourable author seems to believe that *Saul* in turning Christian was disinterested, and had no worldly views. But he and I don't see things in the same light. He considers him as a gentleman and a scholar as himself is, and that he demean'd himself to keep company with fishermen. A scholar he might be to the other disciples indeed, but I consider him as he was, a person brought up to labour. He was by occupation a *tent maker*, a proper person to be employed by poor fishermen: for who so fit to live in tents, as those that cannot afford to build or hire houses? It does not appear that *Saul* was a man of wealth, or that he had any fortune to trust to, but that of his head and hands. His instructor in Jewish Learning was *Gamaliel*; but *Saul* was not *Gamaliel*. His master brought honour to him; I don't read he brought any honour to his master. He was brought up to labour, but labour was not what he cared for; he had a working head, not a working hand. Therefore 'tis likely in order to live an easier life than that of tent-making, he hired himself to the high priest to be an informer against the Christians. At length considering what a hazard he run in prosecuting them; for they were not Quakers, as *Matthias's* ear was a proof, and the revenge taken against *Judas* (by God knows who) might be a warning to him, that one time or another he might be paid for his pains; so that probably he might not run greater hazards if he became of the party he prosecuted; and in being one, what advantages he

might expect among them, his learning, art and endeavour employed in their favour, might make him the head of their party, their high priest; the meanest of whom got something out of the public stock for labouring in the word and doctrine, and the apostles made a living of it, for they could not after their making a bank, *leave the word of God to serve tables*, consequently not to serve fish for tables as formerly. *The believers brought all their money, and laid it down at the apostles feet*, and received out of the common Stock according to the discretion of them and the church; whereby they were now become a society that took care of their poor and their priests, and *Peter* could procure an *angel* to free himself from prison upon occasion, consequently *Paul* might get a good living among them, with respect and authority; for he was not void of ambition whatever his advocates may think, as will plainly appear: and 'tis better to an ambitious mind, to be a King among beggars, than a beggar among kings.

Whether some of those that had the discerning of spirits among the disciples did not see *through* him? whether the call to his conversion was from *without*, or *within*? whether the apostles that had power to work miracles, did nothing towards his conversion? are secrets unrevealed in the mysteries of providence, where we must leave them, and judge of *Paul* by the information we have of the *Paulites*. If the call was wholly from *within*, the great difficulty to him was to be a free and accepted Mason in the society at first. To say it might have been done better any other way, if it had been in the choice of men, is pretending to judge better of things at a distance than near. All the circumstances and motives are not made known
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to us, and is therefore judging in the dark. Could *man* chuse a better way for himself than he ascribes to the *Lord*? Therefore I judge in that case, the method which was practised was the best.

There is no doubt at all but the conversion of one adversary to the faith by virtue of a miracle, whether it was real or pretended, if it was so neatly perform'd, as not to be seen through by the vulgar, was a powerful argument to them, and the best that could be to support their faith in miracles, and the faith of doctrines founded thereon, and bring them over to it. And I am apt to think the christian priests then, as well as now, would be very glad to buy a miracle at almost any price out of the public stock, to triumph over unbelievers. We see in our days bribes will work miracles in the *state*, and why not in the *church*?

He who was so full of himself could see no reason to doubt of the acceptance of his labours in their service, after they had accepted him, if he determined to be a preacher, and to continue among them. His having been their persecutor, when once he was received, would redound to their credit, and among them to his advantage; besides, by having been of the persecuting side he could fathom the power of the Jew rulers, and the disposition of the *Roman* governors.

Saul knew the disciples made great pretensions to miracles, visions, and revelations; therefore that was the best door to get in at, which way would add to the credit of those things, best please the disciples, and best silence his adversaries; therefore he was by this means the more eagerly received and regarded, and he could not afterwards recede therefrom without being notorious for imposture, and abhorred by all parties; this he must needs foresee, and therefore knew the miraculous conversion being declared, and himself baptized, the
Christians

Christians might assure themselves of the reality of his intentions.

XV. *Of the Morality of St. Paul and other believing Saints.*

The morality or immorality of a man's conduct proves nothing with regard to the truth or falshood of his doctrines. Those that have been the authors and promoters of the most false religions, have taught and practised morality as much as others. Whatever religion does not maintain that, cannot be maintained. No body would chuse Christianity for the *morals* of the Christians. Moral virtue merely, seldom or ever produced persecutions: for *who will harm you if you be followers of that which is good?* said Paul himself. It is notions and factions different from the establishment, that those in authority will not bear, which raises persecutions or opposition; not mere personal private morality. The *saints* called all their sufferings afflictions if by the course of nature; persecutions, if from men; though the one was the common casualties of life, and the other what their own indiscreet zeal brought on themselves. Sufferings are common to man, but if a *saint* suffers, though perhaps justly or foolishly, he disturbs all heaven and earth as much as he can with his prayers, cries, and clamours; he calls down vengeance from above. *How long, Lord, how long will thou not avenge the blood of thy saints!* He construes all accidents that befall his adversaries to be the *just judgments of God*: and thinks it a *righteous thing with God to render tribulation to those that trouble them*. They think it righteous to return *double punishment* in vengeance for what they have received. *In the cup she hath filled to you, fill to her double*, is the precept pleaded. No revenge is too great

great for a *saint* ; therefore to satisfy their implacable temper, eternal burnings, and everlasting torments have been invented. If the Jews were persuaded to turn *Christians* for the sake of the moral doctrines of Christianity, they were much in the wrong of it, for *the moral precepts of the law are better than the precepts of the gospel*: therefore the gospel was not advanced merely for the sake of its moral doctrines. Whatever Jew professes the gospel with an entire conviction of its being a divine revelation as taught by *Paul*, must give up the law of *Moses* as such, unless he can believe that God can contradict himself, by altering and annulling his laws, like man. For how can *one* divine revelation set aside another, when the first was declar'd to be *an everlasting law and an everlasting Priesthood*? but the *gospel* according to the author to the *Hebrews*, changes both. If *Paul* by his doctrine and conduct shewed such a zeal as made his followers of *all men* *the most miserable*, if he was without an entire conviction that this latter revelation was divine, * *must have been mad, and worse than mad, the most hardened villain that ever breathed*: and if the consequence to be drawn from this is, that therefore he acted with judgment and honesty, and that therefore the Christian religion is pure, and founded on right principles, I leave you, *Theophilus*, or the author himself to judge, whether this is not building the *truth* of the Christian religion on the honesty or truth of a man that no man knows any thing of?

* Obs. p. 32.

XVI. *Of Saul's Love to the Priesthood, and Disagreement with Priests.*

Saul seems to have had in him the natural spirit of a *riest*; for because he was not qualified to sacrifice beasts to maintain the priesthood, he had a priestly zeal to sacrifice men and women for its support. He could not be a priest among the Jews, as not being of the tribe of *Levi*; and yet the desire of priesthood seems strongly to have run in his mind, though the incapacity of becoming one run in his blood, not being capable of exercising that function which was by *Moses's* law an hereditary qualification. If he would have married the high priest's daughter, he certainly would have been as near related to the priesthood as he could. It looks as though he endeavoured to curry favour with the high priest, that he procured warrants from him to persecute the priest's adversaries. A man of his extraordinary passions must have loved very fiercely, if he loved really; and if disappointed with any manner of contempt by the damsel's father, as disdainng to marry her to a tent-maker, must have been stung with very keen resentment; and the more so, since he endeavoured to make himself worthy of her by his service to oblige the high priest, and exalt the honour of priesthood, by humbling and harrassing its enemies; or rather those they were enemies to, than those that were enemies to them. Besides, there is a strong probability that he was disappointed in love, in that he never married afterwards; or else he was no man; because he taught for doctrine, that *it was good for a man not to touch a woman.*

His turbulent temper appears always to have carried him to extremes, therefore it was, that he set
all

all places in an uproar wherever he came; and acted with as much madness against the priests as he had acted for them. With what contempt does he treat the high priest when he was to plead his cause before him? (though indeed he deserved it,) yet scarce any man but himself would have said, *God shall smite thee, thou whited wall.* When he was reproved for *reviling God's high priest*, as he is called, he endeavoured to excuse himself by saying, what I believe was false, *I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest.*

If upon disgust to the priests, he had a mind to oppose them, what way could he more effectually take to do them a displeasure than espousing the cause of Christianity? Not that Christianity is destructive to priesthood, but that sort of priesthood was destructive to the other. Or how is it improbable at least that he might not be treated in such manner by the high priest, as he thought his merit deserved; (for priests are a lofty sort of gentry) which his high spirit not deigning to bear, and stifling his resentment then, might, by his ruminating on, kindle it the hotter. And when his spirit took a different turn from one thing to another, he valued himself as much afterwards for suffering the persecution he could not avoid, (for he endeavoured to avoid all he could) as he had done before for being a persecutor: for we see in many places he makes a merit of it, and never fails to mention it to the Christians, because in both cases, or on each side, he expected the applause that fann'd his ambition.

XVII. *Of St. Paul's love of power and authority.*

Superiority and love of power was no small ingredient in the composition of *Paul's* temper, he

affects humility to raise himself, and boasts of his sufferings to exalt himself. When he would have the *Corinthians* honour him as their spiritual father, he sets forth their reverential duty, and his merits to that dignity. * *Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.* This dignity was enhanced by sufferings; *I think, says he, that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death; for we are made a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men.* We bear the burden and heat of the day. And tauntingly upbraids those that thought well of themselves, and had too mean an opinion of their teachers, who merited honour by their sufferings and labours. (b) *We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even to this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place.* How should they, when they lived by rambling, and fared as travellers do? (c) *And labour, working with our hands, (when they could not avoid it, or thought it proper to do so.) Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we intreat.* (Wonderfully pious!) *We are made as the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things unto this day.* None complain more of being meanly used, than those that are most proud. And when religion is in the case, pride lurks under great pretensions to humility. Profession is the *mask* of religion. Great profession of piety and humility oft shew a want of it. I call to mind I have somewhere read of *Diogenes* when he went to visit *Plato*, treading on his carpet, said, *I trample on the pride of*

* 1 Cor. iv. 1.

(b) V. 9.

(c) V. 12, 13.

of Plato. *With greater pride, Diogenes, answered Plato. St. Paul proceeds, I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. For though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Yet we are commanded to call no man father upon earth but God* in spiritual matters. I suppose, however, he sets up himself as a leading father. Wherefore (to apply) I beseech you be ye followers of me.* This is a stride to reverence. Look on me as your spiritual father, and do as I teach you. *For this cause I sent unto you, Timotheus, who is my well-beloved son and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church. Timotheus, an easy pliable creature, who would do any thing that his father Paul desired, even to the suffering himself to be circumcised to please him. My ways, and as I teach, and † my gospel, seem plainly to denote he taught somewhat peculiar to himself. Observe next the display of his humility. Now some are puffed up as though I would not come to you; but I will come to you shortly if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them that are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. What will you? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?* If the word of reason and the power of arbitrary authority are intended by these words to be set in competition, the softest explanation of mine would be thought too severe. Therefore, *Theophilus, I leave you to explain it for your self.*

At another time, when he would exalt himself to the loftiest apostolical seat, he does it by shewing

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* Mat. xxiii. 9.

† Rom. xvi. 25.

how he merited it by sitting in the *lowest*. The pride of his *humility* is glaring. When he says, *I (a) suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest of the apostles. For though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge.* Consequently, the conceit of his own *knowledge* had rendered him a little unpolite. After bouncing, and boasting, and pleading his will and pleasure to boast, he sums up his sufferings as what gave him that right. The reason of doing this appears soon after; it was because he wanted praise. *(b) For I ought (says he) to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest of the apostles, though I be nothing.* A very pretty compliment on them, that he himself was as good as the best; and the best was good for nothing. So if we may join parts that are distinct, he humbly supposes to the *Corinthians*, *he was not behind the very chiefest of the apostles*; but in writing to the *Ephesians*, he calls himself *less than the least of all saints.* *There is many a true word spoke in jest*; but by this it appears that *Paul* was no saint, neither were any of the apostles. What think you, *Theophilus*, is this spiritual pride, or sanctified humility?

Over the *Corinthians* how does he flourish the pastoral rod of his apostolical authority? *(c) I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not unto Corinth.* This I think is as good as swearing, that he came among them to brandish his power, and expects them to regard it. *For this end also did I write that I might know the proof of you, whether you be obedient in all things.* Elsewhere he tells them, *(d) I told you before, and foretell you as if I was present with you the second time; and being absent now I write to them which heretofore have sinned,*
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(a) 2 Cor. xi. 5.
(d) Ib. xiii. 2.

(b) Ib. xii. 11.

(c) Ib. i. 23.

and to all other, (sinned or not sinned) that if I come again I will not spare; and a little after, Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me. One would imagine by such language he was already clothed with the purple and the mitre.

With what authority he writes to them concerning their going to law? * *Dare any of you having a matter against another go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?* And with what a blast of wind does he swell their vanity as well as his own? *Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels! how much more things that pertain to this life?* Pretty fellows indeed to judge angels! when they never could agree together in their judgment of what was right or wrong; but were ever dividing and subdividing into sects, schisms, heresies, and factions.

XVIII. Of St. Paul's conduct in propagating the Gospel.

When St. Paul's temper was turned against the Jewish priests, the persecutions of the Jews on one side, from whom he could never again hope for favour, with the affections, honours, and advantage of the Christians on the other, kept him steady to that party, over whom he presided as supreme in all churches of his own planting among the Gentiles; where he generally brought his spiritual wares to a good temporal market; and used all arts to bring them in: for this reason *he became all things to all men* †; and preached his gospel *privately* where he

* 1 Cor. vi. 1, 2.

† Ib. ix. 22.

he had access, to those that were of reputation (a), lest he should run in vain; and being indeed crafty (b), he caught them with guile. He had always his milk for babes (c), and meat for strong men, cooked up according to every one's palate, and found his account in it.

Peter went so far as to eat with the believing Gentiles who were profelytes of the gate, not for setting aside the *Mosaic* law; but Paul was the first that maintained there was no occasion for the believing Gentiles to be circumcised, and keep the law of Moses; and procured a decree from a council of the apostles for that liberty or indulgence to the Gentile believers. In which point he was indefatigably zealous; for he knew, that granting the ritual law extended to the Gentiles, it must be necessary to the Jews; and if the continuance of it was necessary, there must be also a continuance of the priesthood; and that would abolish his own right to it, who was a priest by nature, though not by lineal descent from *Levi*. Therefore he declared, that the gospel made a change (d) both of the priesthood and the law; and wisely set aside the Levitical law and priesthood; which being a great charge and slavery to the people to maintain, it was always disliked by many; and now they were better enabled to declare against it, being under the government of the *Romans*. This likewise tended to reconcile the Gentiles to christianity, made a wide rent from the Jewish religion, and set it on a basis distinct from both Jew and Gentile; which rendered it the more conspicuous, and was the occasion of its not being swallowed up by either. Thus he modelled Christianity, and was therefore, properly speaking, the author

(a) Gal. ii. 2.
(d) Heb. vii. 12.

(b) 2 Cor. xii. 16.

(c) 1 Cor. iii. 2.

author of a new religion : which he could only take the advantage to do, under another name, to which many through the love of novelty, and (as it then appeared) of liberty, became profelytes. Probably the stories of the miracles and visions of its professors might draw in some. The keeping their ministry was by free gift without compulsion as yet, (though it had not then power to be otherwise) and therefore seemed agreeable; and the terms of acceptance were easy to them that could believe, or could pretend they believed: the main article or sum of it was declared to be this, * *That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.* This new religion was likewise charitable to the poor, which made it appear kind and acceptable to many, and their public worship seems to have been managed in the manner the Quakers now is. Many christian sects have no doubt improved and mended it; for nothing is perfect at first: but the *Roman* church particularly hath gone from bad to worse, and added corruption to corruption: thus being compleat in every thing vile, have compleated the vilest church on earth.

The apostle *Paul* being a Jew by religion, and a *Roman* by birth, could talk both languages; and being also born in a *Grecian* city, might have some knowledge of the *Greek*: therefore he was better qualified than the other apostles, because *he spoke with tongues* † *more than they all*; so he was fit by this means to preach among the Gentiles, which the others were not; and with the liberty of a

Roman

* Rom. x. 9, 10.

† 1 Cor. xiv. 18.

Roman for his protection, he made his peregrinations in the countries about, in *Asia*, *Greece*, and *Rome*; by which means his doctrine became public to those parts that were under the subjection of the *Romans*. There is therefore no reason to believe *the gift of tongues* was any thing more than preaching and praying *ex tempore*; but this there is no doubt they did, as they made great pretensions to the spirit.

XIX. *Of Dreams, Visions, and Inspirations.*

Nothing is more easy than to pretend to see visions, and dream dreams. Who can detect the falshood of such pretenders? When lies are told in favour of a party, and espoused by them, what stories may not receive the currency of truth with such? If *Whitfield*, or the *Westleys*, or any other enthusiast, was to say *Christ* appeared to him, we should laugh at it; and 'tis likely none but his own followers would believe him. I mention *these men* particularly, as being in my opinion the most likely persons to see visions, as they are the most notorious enthusiasts of the age among us; yet what *believer* can argue against the possibility of it? or can give any reason why *Christ* might not as well appear to either of these saints as to *St. Paul*. Had any of these ever pretended or affirmed such a thing, I would fain know (allowing the one to be true) how is it possible for us to disprove the other? or what proof can be given of it? Did not *John Reeves* and *Lodovic Muggleton* found their imposture on such pretension? and may not any other be founded on the same? Suppose *Saul's* vision was true, and theirs not; and theirs true, and his not; or both true, or both false; who by the circumstances can determine it? The authority of numbers

on one side against a few on the other, will always carry the point in favour of the strongest party. If it be said that Christ appeared to *Saul* in company, and he is said to appear to *Reeves* alone, we have none of the company's word for it; only somebody for *Saul*, we know not who. We have in *St. Paul's* favour, what? a bad relation of a dark relator; on this is erected a blind faith. This is all the proof we have of the matter, that it was fact; and that *Paul* was not an impostor, nor an enthusiast; and that therefore the truth and brightness of revelation is well founded. But if what has the sanction of truth by a multitude, is no more than taken for granted by the multitude, where is the proof of it? *Mahomet* might be esteemed an impostor at first; but is he thought so now, where his religion reigns, and his laws are obeyed? No certainly; custom alters the face and fashion of things, and length of time, in many cases, lays truth and falsehood on a level. When things cannot be easily enquired into, they pass for truth with the careless and indolent. Thus all imposture, when aided by power, gains ground in the world, in a long tract of revolving years, when the proofs of the imposture are borne down, and by force obliterated as much as force can do on rational minds: and the torrent runs strong to bear *him* down who strives against the torrent. Error, when it becomes habitual, is as pleasing as truth; as vicious habits when indulged in opposition to their contrary laudable virtues, seem quite as agreeable, because established by habitude.

It appears therefore impossible to know truth by the credit given to inspiration only. No art was ever better calculated to deceive than inspiration. The religion founded on nature don't require it;

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but all others do. As natural religion is not capable of deception, so it cannot use those means that are. True religion is all of a piece: it is plain and true throughout, and cannot deceive, being founded on the reason and nature of things. This is the only true basis of true religion. What then, *Theophilus*, are all other foundations and religions? Can the religion of nature be built on any thing but nature? Can the laws of God be less evident than nature's laws? Can the truths of God be discoverable by any thing less plain and certain than these, or can any inspiration from him be less general than that of natural inspiration? What is called supernatural, seems to me to be artificial. Where there is no possibility of deceit, there can be no possibility of imposition. Certainly the greatest plainness is most necessary in all the laws of God. Those which cannot be found out nor tried by human reason, cannot be his laws; because those laws cannot be a fit guide to the human mind that are no light to the mind. Whatever hides itself from honest scrutiny, teaches us to beware of imposture: therefore whatever cannot be examined, for that reason alone ought to be rejected, or the credit of it to be esteemed a matter of indifference. For truth will bear examination, and courts it; but imposture flies and fears it; and therefore shrouds itself in visions and inspirations. These things therefore require the nicest search, and strictest enquiry.

When *error* chances to bewray itself ever so little, it endeavours to plaster and dawb the matter up; because by a little light, many things are discovered to the jealous and enquiring eye. It is like a clue that leads you on, *Theophilus*, to the better understanding other things unthought of before. If an apparent falsity be discovered in any

one particular, that can by close examination be found out, there is good reason to be jealous of *more* that cannot be explored; for lyes lie close; and deceivers only discover themselves by inadvertent or accidental blunders. The Holy Ghost is pretended to as a cover for all holy lyes to usher them into the world, and defend them afterwards; 'tis made the parent and nurse of error and imposture: they do wisely then to prevent a detection of these holy frauds, to call it sinning against the Holy Ghost, and the most damnable of all sins. Tho' if there be any blaspheming or sinning against the Holy Ghost, it must be when men lay their lyes to the Holy Spirit's charge. Let those that believe this to be a dreadful sin, beware of committing it; yet I am apt to think it is very often very ignorantly done, because men are more apt to believe than doubt; and the Holy Ghost is not well known: for he appears so secret among us, that 'tis as hard to distinguish him from the man that appears for him, or in whom he is supposed to appear, as to know whether there be any Holy Ghost, now he has left off working miracles; or, as to know whether his seat be the third step below the father, or equal with him.

Let us neither be diverted nor terrified from enquiry; but begin, and proceed with that spirit of boldness which truth naturally gives. After these general remarks, I proceed to examine and consider the truth of those traditions of this *Saint* which are handed down to us, and generally believed without any particular examination.

XX. *Of the Voice that spoke to (a) Saul, which was heard and not heard.*

A notorious contradiction appears at first view, upon comparing the relation of *Saul's* conversion as told by the historian, and what the same blundering historian tells us *Paul* said of himself. As the history-writer delivers it, (b) *The men that journeyed with Saul stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.* But *Saul*, or *Paul*, himself says, (c) *They that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid, but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.* How comes it about think you, *Theophilus*, that these relations are not alike? Are we to attribute these blunders to the Holy Ghost? A man that don't know whether there is any Holy Ghost or no, might, methinks, tell a story twice alike. *Paul's* secretary says, the companions that journeyed with him *heard the voice*: but *Paul* himself, by the confession of the same historian, tells us, that they *heard not the voice.* The best way I can think to reconcile it is, that *Saul's* companions (being absent) heard not the voice; but when they were present, they heard the voice, that is, the report of it, all that was to be heard; and there is some reason for this too; for apparitions and visions are modest things, and never care to appear before folk. Besides, we find the men that were with him never minded it; for it don't appear they were converted, the voice spoke only to *Paul*, not to them; therefore how should they hear it? Or they might hear *Saul* talk to, and answer himself; so they heard the voice that spoke, all the voice there was to hear, but they heard not the voice of him that

(a) He was called *Saul* before, and *Paul* after his conversion.
 (b) Acts ix. 7. (c) Ib. xxii. 9.

that spake to *Saul*: how should they? for the voice spake *in him*, and *Saul* heard it with his *inward* ears. He that hears a spirit speak, must have spiritual ears; but as for the men that journeyed with *Saul*, it may be their ears were made *dull of bearing*, lest they should bear and be converted, or the voice might syringe *Saul's* ears, and stop theirs, as well as the light seal up *his* eyes; or perhaps they heard a rumbling like a voice; but whether it was human, or heavenly, or that of low thunder, they distinguished not: and so the learned expositors and paraphrasers agree, they heard the sound, but not the words; they heard they knew not what; that is, they heard the voice, and not the voice; for the sacred writers were no impostures; they wrote what they believed, and believed only what they knew to be true; they could not be imposed upon, nor had they any design to impose on others.

XXI. *How the men that journeyed with Saul stood still, and fell down.*

The historian says, (a) *The men that journeyed with Saul stood speechless*: but St. Paul himself, in telling the story, says, (b) *And when we were all fallen to the earth*. One would wonder in reading this, what was become of the Holy Ghost; whether it had forsaken the writer or translator: and *which way went the spirit from one to speak to the other?* If they stood, how did they fall to the earth? unless they stood some time to consider whether they should fall or no, and then fell by consent, without speaking a word. If this be an error only in the expression, made by the translators, then our book is not the word of God in *English*, whatever it be in the *Greek*. But this matter is not clearly made out

(a) Acts ix. 7.

(b) Ib. xxvi. 14.

out ; for that story which acquaints us that the men stood still, only mentions that *Saul* arose from the earth. If they had all fallen, and not got up again, *Saul* had wanted leading-strings. *St. Paul*, in telling the story at another time, says, (a) *And I fell to the ground* ; not agreeing with what he says elsewhere, *when we were all fallen to the earth* ; and so leaves us *all a-ground*. But how should he see what the others did ? for he fell not till the light came, and then he became blind.

XXII. *How the light shone round about Saul only, and the men also.*

We are also left in darkness about the light ; for the historian says, (b) *As Saul journeyed he came near unto Damascus, and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven*. As *St. Paul* relates the matter, (c) *About noon suddenly there shone a great light round about me*. But at another time, as he tells the story to *Arippa*, (d) *At mid-day, O king, I saw in the way a light from heav'n above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me, and them which journeyed with me*. It will be said, here is no contradiction. In the first account *St. Paul* only is spoken of ; afterwards, he speaks of *himself and them that were with him*. I grant it ; but if it was not necessary to mention what evidence these companions of his had of the matter, why does *St. Paul* in his first relation of it only barely say, *The men that were with me saw indeed the light* ? for one may see a body of light at a great distance from it. But if the same light, which was above the brightness of the sun, shone round them all, how comes it to pass that they who journeyed with *Saul* were

(a) Acts xxii. 7.
(a) Ib. xxvi. 13.

(b) Ib. ix. 3.

(c) Ib. xxii. 6.

were not made blind as well as *Saul* was. But to single one man out from a company for salvation, and to let the rest go on and be damn'd, may be consistent with the doctrine of peculiar and personal election, but shews a peculiar spirit of partiality. If *Saul* was converted by a miracle, it's a miracle his comrades were not converted too ; or if they were, that we are not acquainted with it. And if sinners are wrought upon by irresistible grace, or supernatural power, where is man's free-will. And why don't free grace convert all, if free-will is deficient ? All power is God's ; therefore what he wills, nothing can resist.

XXIII. *How the words which the vision spake, are reported different at different times.*

The words which in the vision were spoke to *Saul* in one relation of it, are not the same that are said to be spoken in another. The historian says, (a) *And Paul trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.* 'Tis to the same import, chap. xxii. 10. But before king *Agrippa* nothing of this is mentioned ; but a different account is given by *St. Paul*, thus : (b) *And I said, who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. 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, delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God ; that they may receive*

(a) Acts ix. 6.

(b) Ib. xxvi. 15, 16, 17, 18.

receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith that is in me. If the words spoken to *Saul* were only heard by him, it was in his power to make, or vary them as he pleased. The *manner*, and the *message* of this vision is very unaccountable. To strike *Saul* down and *blind*, and command him to *rise*, and go to others to *open their eyes!* sure this was an odd way to it; to turn *him from light to darkness*, and send him to the Gentiles, to turn *them from darkness to light!* If this be the Lord's doing, it is wonderful in our eyes!

XXIV. *That neither Saul nor his company were on horseback.*

It is rather to pull down the pride of those that have set their hero on horseback, that I remark this, than to pull down *Saul* from his horse. The historian says, that the men who journeyed with *Saul* stood speechless; and when he arose from the earth, * *they led him by the hand.* It seems to me therefore that they walked it on foot, though the *honourable gentleman*, and some others, that are for exalting this apostle, have set him on horseback; I don't think the business would pay horse-hire: if it could, times were finely mended with the Jews, whose kings and priests, when they ruled over other nations, rode on asses; and now they were subject to another nation, to afford their servants horses, and pay them wages for harrassing beggars, is a fine amendment indeed.

XXV. *Of Saul's practising severe penance.*

When Saul was come to Damascus, he was there three days without sight, and did neither eat nor drink,

* Acts ix. 8. xx. 11. xxii. 11.

drink, as we are told, and might perhaps be true. Whether he lost his stomach, occasioned by being frightened out of his sins on the road, or by losing his sight; as if the last great light he saw was to be his last light. But if he believed the vision, this could not be the case; for how could he restore sight to other blind eyes, unless it was restored to his? It would be quite out of the way to suppose, that in journeying a flash of lightning with thunder struck him to the ground, and so affected his nerves, that it brought on him a fever, which destroyed his stomach, and a delirium, in which he so strongly fancied all these things were done and said, that he was subject to paroxysms of a fever on the spirits, or a spiritual fever, all his life after; for nothing like this is mention'd in the history. To insinuate this, would be making myself too much like those that insinuate what there is no warrant for in the text, in order to justify it. But though suppositions with them may pass for truths, truth can support me, or be supported by me, without chimera's. I therefore think it better to deny the truth of the whole story, than account for it in such a manner, though 'tis not impossible nor absolutely improbable; but this I declare, to shew myself a generous adversary to *natural* infidels in favour of *biblical* infidels. *Natural infidels* are all those that deny the sufficiency of the light of nature in favour of supernatural light. *Biblical infidels* are all those that believe no stories or doctrines supernatural, though held forth in the Bible. All men that believe differently, are infidels to one another. So they that call others infidels are infidels themselves.

This prodigious fasting then seems to have been a fit of severe penance; for behold he prays, said the Lord of him to *Ananias*. This was certainly

overlook'd by our honourable author, who says, * *Though he was full of remorse for his former ignorant persecution of the church of Christ, we read of no gloomy penances, no extravagant mortifications, such as the Bramims, the Jaagues, the Monks of la Trape, and other melancholy enthusiasts inflict on themselves.* Surely not eating or drinking for three days was a gloomy penance, and an extravagant mortification, unless he lost his stomach by the fright, as I mention'd before, or he was stomachful.

XXVI. *Of the blundering miracles, or miraculous blunders performed at Saul's conversion.*

One who reads the story of *Saul's* conversion, would think the Lord work'd miracles merely for the sake of working miracles; for some of them seem rash and wrong; and then one or two more miracles are wrought to set the bad effects of the former to rights. *Saul* having been made dark by a bright miracle, and blinded by the Lord, that he might see it was the Lord's doings; three miracles more are performed to recover his sight, to rectify the bad effects of the first.

First, Christ goes himself to *Ananias*, leaving his seat at the right hand of the father in the mansions of bliss; he appears to him in a vision, to send him to *Saul*, (for now *Christ* is only to be seen visionally) and gives him particular directions to the street, the very house, and his landlord's name where he lodged. † *The Lord said to him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Strait, and enquire in the house of Judas for one Saul of Tarsus.* Now 'tis strange to me, that the Lord *Jesus*, who is attended by not less than twelve legions of angels, could not or would not trust one of them on the errand,

* Obs. p. 71.

† Acts ix. 11.

errand, but went himself to carry a message fit to be sent by a porter. If he *humbled himself* before, by *taking on him the form of a servant, and made himself once of no reputation*; I see no reason why he should do it again, now he was in a state of exaltation and glory. If it was not *Christ* that appeared to *Ananias*, but some spiritual being, or idea of him, how easily may one be bubbled or deceived by these spiritual beings or ideas.

Second, The voice of the vision adds, *For behold he prayeth, and hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias, coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight*. One would wonder he did not pray before! or if he did, that he was not heard before the third day! for by this time he must needs pray very weakly. The vision, that this vision said, *Saul saw, Saul never own'd*; therefore this relation of a vision in a vision is to be questioned. Besides, what need was there that *Saul* should see *Ananias* in a vision, giving him sight, before he saw him do it in reality, but to multiply visions to no purpose? for sure *Saul* could believe *Ananias* gave him sight when he heard him speak, and saw him and the light that removed the darkness. These dark and visionary stories seem to be works of supererogation, as well as of *supernaturalization*.

Third, *Ananias* went his way, entered the house, put his hands on him, and said, *Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales; and he received sight forthwith. Ananias sibs*; for how did the *Lord Jesus* appear to *Saul* by the way? The only thing that is said to appear

to *Saul* was a *great light*, that's all he saw; for as soon as the light came, it struck him down, and blind; therefore *then* he could see nothing; and when he got up, he opened his eyes, and *saw no man*; he could not see at all, not so much as the road at noon-day: therefore *Saul* saw *not Jesus* by the way; though 'tis said, * *Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way.* It seems as if *Ananias* and *Barnabas* were privy to *Saul's* vision, and knew more of it than *Saul* did; which looks suspicious that they were deep in the secret: but this *honourable gentleman* assures me they were not; and, as I think, he knows no more than I do of the matter: I believe him not *less* than the gospel itself; I fear to affront believers by saying *more*; besides, I am not used to sacrifice the truth by flattery: and if I attempt to imitate *St. Ananias*, *St. Barnabas*, or *St. Paul*, I shall not be look'd on by those that read me as a *Saint* of that class.

As for the *scales that fell from his eyes*, I suppose they might have been preserved in the holy *Roman church* as a sacred relict, and proof against *biblical infidelity*; but that they would have made all those blind that could see them. I don't read that which converted *Saul* had power to convert any of his comrades; and 'tis very remarkable that those who were not made blind could not believe; and that the way to *walk by faith* is *not to walk by sight*.

It may be objected, that *Saul* saw *Jesus* by the way, because he, in telling us who saw *Christ* after his resurrection, says, *Last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born of due time.* I answer, that *Saul* saw *Christ* by the way is not confessed by these words, which do not signify he saw him any more than

once,

* Acts ix. 27.

once, and that he says, * *was in the temple as he was praying, and in a trance*, and then perhaps it was that he thought 500 brethren saw him too, because perhaps there might be 500 there. By the account St. Paul gives of his own conversion, to the *Galatians*, *Christ appeared to him inwardly; when it pleased God to reveal his son in me*, and many of St. Paul's apes have therefore thought they have had *Christ in them also*.

XXVII. Of Paul's being guilty of perjury.

St. Paul to persuade the *Galatians* † that the gospel he taught, was all by divine inspiration, writes thus, *When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his son in me, that I might preach him among the Heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood, neither went I up to Jerusalem to them that were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days: but other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother. Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God I lye not.* Now though he swears that he does not lye, I believe before God that he swears to a lye, and that there is no dependance for truth in these sacred stories. He adds, *Afterwards I came into the Regions of Syria, and Cilicia, and was unknown by face unto the churches of Judea, which were in Christ: but they had heard only, that he which persecuted us in times past, now preacheth the faith which he once destroyed: and they glorified God in me.*

If other accounts of christian history are true, this of his going into *Arabia*, and not seeing the
apostles

* Acts xxii, 17, 18.

† Gal. i. 15, &c.

apostles is false. The ix. xxii. and xxvi. chapters of the *Acts* tell us of his conversion; and where he went afterwards. In ch. ix. 19, &c. after Saul had received his sight 'tis said, *He was certain days with the disciples that were at Damascus, therefore that he immediately after conferred not with flesh and blood is not true.* The historian goes on, *and straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said, is not this he that destroyed them that called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither with that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? And Saul increased the more in strength and confounded the Jews that dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. And after many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him. But this laying in wait was known of Saul, and they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night and let him down by the wall in a basket; 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. 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 spoke to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus, in the name of Jesus, and he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.* Therefore it is not true what he swears to, that he saw none of the apostles but Peter and James at Jerusalem. For the historian adds, *and he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians; but they went about to slay him; which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Cesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.*

It is necessary to make this long quotation for the sake of the whole connection, that you may see *Theophilus*, how it agrees with what he writes to the *Galatians*, and swears to the truth of: and that there is not the least reason to believe, according to this historian, he was absent *three years* in *Arabia*, between the time of his going from *Damascus* to *Jerusalem*; for had it been so, the disciples at *Jerusalem* must long before that time have known he had been an accepted disciple at *Damascus*, and that he had preached *Jesus* there; and not so long after have been afraid of him as not a disciple, and needed *Barnabas's* information of it, then, or his recommendation to them. Therefore it appears he went directly to *Jerusalem* from *Damascus*, and there was received by, and had the conversation of the apostles. But supposing contrary to all this, that he had been before in *Arabia*, still what *St. Paul* swears to is false, or the history of him is false; that *he came afterward, to Jerusalem, to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days, without seeing any other apostle but James.* Which story, as it is in itself very unlikely that he should be at *Jerusalem* with *Peter* fifteen days, and see none but him and *James*, so it is contrary to the historian, who says, *he assayed to join himself to the disciples, and when they being ignorant of what had happened, feared to receive him as a member, he was recommended to them by Barnabas, and he was then coming in, and going out with the disciples at Jerusalem, and there preached Christ openly, and boldly.* Yet this Saint contradicts all these things, tells them another story, and swears to it, *before God that he lies not*; but if what he swears to is true, the historian's account is opposite to truth: and yet these contradictions are called *the oracles of sacred truth,*

truth, and the word of God. But is not this blaspheming the word of God, and belying things true and sacred to call them so? He who swears to a lie, does not by swearing make it true, nor can he be the more believed for so doing, when the truth is proved to be directly contrary to what he affirms. The nature of things cannot be altered by their names, nor facts by false testimonies.

But I have not done yet, I have more witnesses to produce against *St. Paul's* affidavit, more *christian evidence* attesting to *St. Paul's* words, before a court of judicature, against *St. Paul's* words to the *Galatians*—Before King *Agrippa* and *Bernice, Festus*, the chief captains and principal men of the city of *Cesarea, Paul*, after declaring to them the manner of his conversion proceeds thus. *Whereupon, O! King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance: For these reasons the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.* You see, *Theophilus*, that this apostle preached first by his own confession at *Damascus*, and at *Jerusalem*, before he went to the *Gentiles*, if this *christian historian* be true. Had it been otherwise, would he not have said rather, that he shewed first to them at *Damascus*, and *Arabia*, then at *Jerusalem*, and throughout all the coasts of *Judea*, that they should repent, &c. Now what credit ought to be given to a man that contradicts himself, and swears to the truth of a contradiction? In all the account of his peregrination in the *Acts of the apostles*, (or rather the *acts of the apostle Paul*) I do not find he went at all into *Arabia*, nor does it appear he was ever there, unless he was in the desert of *Arabia* when Satan buffet-

feted

feted him, for a little before the devil served him in a very rude manner, he knew not where he was; and probably he might be in *Arabia* in a vision. It was to be sure the abundance of visions and revelations that made him abundantly forgetful. And some I fear will say that the buffetings of Satan had beat all truth out of his head. God forgive those that are so uncharitable to so *true a saint*, and make them see the truth. Far be it from me, *Theophilus*, to say these things made him an enthusiast, but too much supernatural grace destroys the natural man. As the light that surrounded him in his travels to *Damascus*, being greater than that of the sun, put out his bodily sight, so it would any man's in the world, unless prevented by a miraculous power. But these things made our poor brother *Paul's* head weak; for when the nerves of the human frame are too much stretched by the heavenly powers, they must needs afterwards suffer a more than common relaxation, and debility, not recoverable by their natural elastic force; or their being always upon the stretch caused him to be always equally as positive when he was wrong as right, if he was ever right.

XXVIII. *Of Saints who were by practice sinners, and Paul one of them.*

Every man has his natural vice or infirmity, and some are addicted to more than one. I do not say that *Saul* was among other human frailties addicted to lying, but sometimes very much to forget himself, and make very unhappy mistakes. But the saints have their failings, and the mercies of redeeming grace redeems them from the *guilt*, but not the *soil* of sin, which is all covered over with the *white Robes of Christ's righteousness*, were it not

for this, which alone makes them to differ, we should see no difference between saints and sinners; and might imagine that those saints who wash their robes in blood, are bloody saints; not understanding how red blood washes white: This is a mystery to crimson sinners. But the sins of saints create in them humility, which is the first mark of saving grace: so the Lord lets his beloved fall, to make them sensible he does not hold them: therefore the lies of believers are justified, but the truths of unbelievers are condemned. 'Tis certain one would more softly pass over the failings of the saints, or believers, as well as they would conceal their own knowing human nature, but that the believers so wickedly defend the greatest vices of biblical saints, when plastered over with a pretence of sanctity, or commission from God; and so unmercifully condemn them for infidels who contend for truth only, and represent them as contenders for vice and immorality. Since therefore these narrow-soul'd monopolizers of righteousness, will *lye*; it becomes those that love truth to speak it, which it is plain the greatest believers have the least regard to. Lies have been always practised for the sake of christianity and the good of the church: whether it be agreeable to the revealed will of the gospel, or not. And truth has been always persecuted where faith has been propagated, and established with rigor. Faith is always taken on trust; truth is found by distrust and enquiry.

I do not call *Paul* a *deceiver*, but to be believed he sometimes solemnly affirms he does not *lye*; which thing alone is sufficient to dispose one to fear he was addicted to *lying* and deceit. It is certain he did not always speak truth, but sometimes endeavoured to *deceive* others; therefore if the christian

stian religion stands on this bottom, it stands on a very deceitful one.

For before the chief captain, chief priests, and council at *Jerusalem*, when *Paul* was to plead for himself,* and perceived that one part of the multitude were *Sadducees*, and the other *Pharisees*, he cried out in the council, men and brethren, I am a *Pharisee*, the son of a *Pharisee*, of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. Though this was a crafty stratagem to deliver himself from the high priest's examination, and so it did; yet he asserted two falsehoods, first, that he was a *Pharisee*; and secondly, that for the hope of the resurrection he was called in question: which shews he did not so much regard the clearing of truth, as the clearing of himself. But it may be, the pale-faced high-priest, who looked like the image of death, might terrify him; and by the burly burly at court he might be hurried out of his senses, and forget himself and the matter of his accusation; and that he had owned that he was a christian to the multitude but the day before. Did those Jews that knew *Paul* (think you *Theophilus*) believe this was the conduct of an enthusiast, or an impostor? Now let some modern saint, or believer daub over the sins of the antient saints, and palliate or justify those vices in them, or in themselves, that they righteously condemn in others, according to their wonted and abundant grace, and gracious partiality.

XXIX. *Of Paul's working a miracle at Lystra, and the Lystrans treatment of him.*

Though the foregoing accounts shew that *Paul* sometimes affirmed what was not true, and that

* Acts xxiii. 6.

with a design to deceive others, and must have done so in his extravagant flights aforementioned, unless he was himself deceived, or beside himself; yet I do not say he was an impostor. But it is very much to be feared, the *Iconiums* thought him such a *Lystra* *, or their conduct is not to be accounted for; first to esteem him as a god for working a miracle; and not long after, to stone him, and leave him for dead. There was a cripple whom Paul perceived had faith to be healed, that is, he was in the secret. If he had not been in the secret of faith he could not have been cured. What is this but † *an apt disposition in the person on whom the miracle is wrought*, as the Gentleman calls it; though he says, ‡ *no such dispositions were to be found in the Gentiles, and as at Lystra the heathens were not led into the secret of the means of working miracles, they imputed it to their gods*. Here we find that such a disposition was found among the Gentiles; and as we are told, God does not save us whether we will or no; so this shews that God does not work miracles on us, whether we will or no. We must come into the *disposition* or *secret of the means* to have them wrought. This almost leads us into *the secret of the means of working miracles*, which they that are not led into, may impute to their gods. Those that wrought miracles as they could not always work them, nor upon all occasions, so they were forced to work them when they could, when a proper opportunity offered, or not at all. This seems to have been the case at *Lystra*, otherwise the people should have been first informed by wisdom, before they had been amused by strange power, that they might have known the end and design of the

* Acts xiv. 8, &c. † Obs. p. 57. ‡ Ib. p. 59.

the miracle ; they should first have delivered their gospel-message, opened people's understandings, let them know from what God they came, and upon what errand, that the God *Jesus* had desired the honour of their worship, and to that end was willing to oblige them by doing some singular favour to display his power, that they were required to pull down their old gods and put up a new one, or whatever their message was ; and then produced their credentials in confirmation of it. But not doing this, *Paul* and *Barnabas* confirmed the people in their old idolatry. I suppose the cripple had not patience to wait, and they feared if they did not cure him quickly, he would cure himself; the consequence of which might be the crippling them, if *the means* of working the miracle had been exposed. They not rightly preparing the people for the end of the miracle, the people had no notion of the coming of any new god ; or that any such had been *born* lately ; therefore they thought their old gods were come again to pay them a visit, and hoped by their readiness to honour them, they would do more miracles among them. When they saw the cripple leap up and walk, at the command of *Paul* ; *they lift up their voices saying the gods are come down in the likeness of men.* They took *Barnabas* to be *Jupiter*, being, I suppose, the more personable man, and *Paul* to be *Mercury*, being the best prater, and *the priests of Jupiter brought oxen and garlands, and would have done sacrifice unto them, and scarce could they restrain the people from doing it, by declaring they were not gods.* The very next thing we read is, that *there came thither certain Jews from Antioch, and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he*

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had been dead. Howbeit, 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. Here was a miracle performed in vain, by not going the right way to work. 'Tis easier to make a mob stare and gape, admire and adore, than understand. Paul had power to work a miracle, to make a cripple dance, but not to preserve himself from being stoned. So devout a people could never have been persuaded by the Jews from other parts to stone one whom they took to be a god, and would have worshipped, for miraculously healing a cripple; unless these Jews persuaded them it was the work of *imposture*. When there is reason to suspect false dealing in pretensions to miracles, the honour men had for the pretender is turned into contempt; and the more devotion their credulity raised, the greater they think is their disgrace for their folly; and consequently the greater will their resentment be to the impostor that occasioned it. The next day, instead of staying to work any more miracles there, he and Barnabas thought it best, as bruised as he was, to march off.

XXX. Of Paul's contest with Elymas, and making him blind.

In the isle of *Paphos* they found one *Barjesus* with the deputy of the country, a Jew, whom they call a *false prophet* and a *sorcerer*, who a little after is called *Elymas*, and said to be a *sorcerer* only by the interpretation of his name, who endeavoured to prevent the deputy from becoming a christian convert. For this reason, to prove that reproach and slander is common to saints, Paul fixing his eyes on him, that is plucking up a bold assurance, and staring him out of countenance, said, O full of
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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? And so, that he might see they were the right ways of the Lord, he made him *blind*: for a season it is said, but how long that season lasted is not said; so a man may be made blind by throwing sand or dust in his eyes. In what manner it was done, or if true, I know not; but if *Elymas* reasoned well, why did *Paul* rave? if he reasoned ill, why did he make his body blind, instead of enlightening his understanding? why did he take away his sight to make him see the truth? *Elymas* could not be full of *all* mischief, for *Paul* was full of some, in making him blind; which if true, I believe was done by some other power than that of words: for I cannot think the wise God lent his power to *Paul* to execute as his passions pleased. *Elymas* might by some accident lose his sight for some time, and those that were willing to make a miracle of it, ascribed it to *Paul's* doing; but he darkened his eyes instead of illuminating his mind, as this story tells us. And indeed *Paul* could work any miracle but that. Is this *turning men from darkness to light*? Is it not plain that *Elymas* was too hard for *Paul* in argument, that he set him a raving, not a reasoning. But reasoning was not *Paul's* talent, he was too hot to reason coolly, and had too many starts and emotions to proceed regularly; he appears for the most part to be plunged in too much puzzle and obscurity, to judge deliberately, and deliver himself clearly.

XXXI. *Of Paul's expulsion at Antioch and Iconium, and his falling out with Barnabas.*

What is the reason that at *Antioch*, the place of their flourishing most, * *the devout and honourable*

women

* Acts xiii. 50.

women, and the chief men of the city were against these holy men, *Paul* and *Barnabas*, and expelled them out of their coasts. This was not done by ruffians, and a rascally mob; nor could these prevail on persons of such character to do it. All the reason given for it is, that the Jews stirred them up to it. This dust is cast in our eyes, to prevent our seeing the truth. I imagine that *Barnabas* got little credit by being *Paul's* companion, and sometimes suffered on his account. It could not be the preaching of morality that stirred all places up against him, wherever he went, and so often oblig'd him to shift quarters. It was not morality that brought him so often into the pickle of persecution; for neither the precepts of the gospel nor the practice of christians have any thing super-excellent in them. In most places that *Paul* went to, disturbances rose about him, as if his turbulent spirit, which he had before his conversion, still remained; for the people seemed principally to aim at getting rid of him, and having so done were contented.

If signs and wonders were done by *Paul* and *Barnabas* at *Iconium*, as we read, how came there to be * an assault made both of the Gentiles and also of the Jews with their rulers to use them despitefully, and to stone them; which to avoid, they fled to *Lystra*, and *Derbe*. Their power of working miracles never stood them in any stead for their defence when they wanted it most, so gypsies pretend to tell strangers their fortune, but know not their own. They were always safest when they run for it, and chose rather to trust to a natural conveyance of their persons, than to a super-natural power for their preservation. By what they knew they had done, they knew what they had to do; and generally made off in time.

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* Acts xiv. 5, 6.

At *Antioch*, *Paul* and *Barnabas* who had long traded apostolically in partnership, notwithstanding they were possessed of the peaceable spirit of the Holy Ghost, fell into such bitter contention, that *Paul* parted from *Barnabas*, who had brought him into favour with the apostles, and credit with the christians, and set up for himself. The occasion was frivolous enough whether they should take *John Mark*, or *Silas* to wait on them; this shews us of what furious bitter spirits the propagators of christianity were, that the most trifling differences rent them into irreconcilable schisms. But *Paul*, who would give place to no man, took *Silas*, and left *Barnabas* to take *Mark*; of whom we hear no more. The writer being *Silas*, or one of *Paul's* party, who after this, and not before, when he writes of *Paul* and himself, writes in the first person plural, *we* and *us*, and could not be *Luke* the evangelist, as it is pretended, because his last account of Christ's ascension, and that in the *Acts* do not agree; as is observed in the Resurrection considered*.

'Tis insinuated that these writings contain the truth of facts, because they bewray the weakness of the writers, or persons written of. Is it any wonder that men who are not wise, discover their want of wisdom? or that men who would be cunning in every thing, are out in many things? No doubt but they tell such circumstances they could not well avoid; and with design to tell those things in such manner as might cover their own faults, as well as they could. And to be sure, there was no *imposture* in the case; because they were not weak enough to confess it; for as they confessed other weakness, they would no doubt have simply or honestly confessed *that* too, had they been guilty of it!

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XXXII.

* Page 48.

XXXII. Of Paul's circumcising Timothy.

St. Paul at *Lystra*, or *Derbe* circumcises *Timothy*, because *the Jews in those quarters knew his father was a Greek*, notwithstanding he delivered at the same time, to the several churches in the cities he passed through, the decrees of the apostles and elders at *Jerusalem*, which he and *Barnabas* had procured, that the gentile converts were not required to be circumcised, nor to keep the law of *Moses* only * to abstain from eating meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication; and notwithstanding the same Paul testified to the † *Galatians*, that if ye be circumcised Christ shall profit you nothing, that every man who is circumcised, is a debtor to do the whole law, that Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by law, are fallen from grace. Yet this temporizing apostle was willing at that time rather to please the *Jews*, and that Christ should profit *Timothy* nothing, than that the *Jews* in those parts should not profit Paul. Ah! poor *Timothy*, thy soul and body were at thy father Paul's disposal, but thou wast cut off from Christ for Christ's servant's sake, and he could graft thee in again, for Paul could do all things through Christ that strengthened him, and say them too. If it was a point that concerned man's salvation, which it must have been if Paul declared the truth, that if you be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. How could he dare to circumcise *Timothy*? for either this was a lying declaration, or the circumcising *Timothy* was an action that gave his doctrine the lie: It must have been false and deceitful one way or another. It may be I shall be told that the words mean, whoso dependeth on circumcision and the

* Acts xv. 29. † Gal. v. 2, 3, 4.

the law for justification, could not be justified by Christ. But then why did *Paul* do that he declared against? why countenance that superstition and false faith which deprived men of the benefit of Christ? Is not this compounding with error and plaistering the believers up with deceit. If he had declared it an indifferent thing, it had not deserved this censure.

XXXIII. *Of Paul's spirit. vision, and devil.*

* *After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bythinia, but the Spirit suffered them not. I wonder how it hindered them, and what spirit it was; for St. Paul was no enthusiast. And Paul and Silas passing by Mysia, came to Troas, and a vision appeared to Saul in the night; there stood a man of Macedonia and prayed him, saying, come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go over into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel unto them. A spirit hinders their going one way, and a vision directs them another, and yet St. Paul was no enthusiast, nor did he act the impostor, to ape the enthusiast: To the Thessalonians he writes, † we endeavoured more abundantly to see you with great desire; therefore we would have come unto you, but Satan hindered us. What were they obliged to ask Satan's leave? or were they under the dominion of Satan? Paul was not a match for Satan, but the devil's power ‡ was too hard for him, whom he defies to encounter; how could he then turn men from the power of Satan to God, when himself was turned by Satan from seeing the Thessalonians, and from the service of the gospel among them, tho'*

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* Acts. xvi 7, 8, 9, 10. † 1 Theff. ii. 17. 18.

‡ 2 Cor. iv. 4.

he endeavoured more abundantly to do it with great desire. But in this age, we don't understand what a spirit, or a vision, or Satan is.

XXXIV. Of Paul's delivering the fortune-telling maid of the devil.

At Philippi in Macedonia, * it came to pass (say they) as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her master much gain by soothsaying; the same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. 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. This shews that Paul was a spiritual man-midwife. If this was a good spirit, as, if it spoke truth one would take it to be; if it directed the people to Paul, and Paul to Christ, it was a kind of preaching the gospel; and if that be good, why did St. Paul cast it out, or stifle it? If it was an evil spirit, was not Satan's kingdom divided against itself, and he necessitated to set up the power of Christ to the destruction of his own, and preach himself out of the world? why then was he silenced? I shall be answered perhaps, that the devil was crafty, he preached up the faithful only that he might expel them and the faith together. Alas! the poor saints were always too weak for the strong man armed, for they never scuffled with him, but he buffeted them, and they came off with the worst of it. They had always the worst fortune when they had the fortune to work miracles. This damsel brought her master much gain by soothsaying. But tho' it was a
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* Acts xvi. 16, 17. 18.

hireling spirit in other cases, it was to be sure none in this, for the history does not say she was hired for so much a-day to preach up *Paul* and his companions; only that *she followed them and cried, These are the servants of the most high God, that shew unto us the way of salvation.* The gospel spirit is a disinterested spirit, even in the devil himself! We are not to conceive that this sooth-saying spirit, was hired to be silent when commanded, nor that the maid was silent when she received no more hire: but whatever was the cause, when the maid was mute the maid's master brok silence, and sung another tune; the devil's master grew more troublesome than the devil: for when her master saw that the hope of their gains was gone, *they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the market-place, unto the rulers, and brought them to the magistrates, and raised the multitude against them.* What the maid's master said, we are not told, yet as we do not read, that they laid *bribery* and *corruption* to their charge, there is no proof of it. The magistrates and multitude thought them guilty of something; for they caused them to be beat, and put in prison, but they got their liberty, being *Romans*, upon condition they would walk off; for *they desired them to depart out of the city*, and so were content to get rid of them. These *saints* would never let the *devil* alone, though he seemed *almost a christian*, and preached the gospel. How haps it, some may say, there are no such devils now? Alack and a well-a-day! there's many a devil preaches the gospel now, but they are not pointed at, nor disturbed, and so the gospel and their interest agree very well together; for the devil is only a roaring lion when he is disturbed, and raises persecutions when he is persecuted. Let him alone in his *den* and his *living*, and he's quiet enough;

enough; for to be sure the *devil* is not without passion, being contrary to God who has none. *When the sons of God met together in old time, * Satan came also among them, and he will be among the saints, let them do what they will, and that they know; for his pride sometimes induces him to keep good company. If they would let him quite alone, so as to regard him no more than if he was not, he would not be; but would certainly die of a consumption, as the witches have done, since annulling the act of parliament against witchcraft; for he is never more alive, than when he is most opposed.*

XXXV. *Of Paul's expulsion from Thessalonica and Berea, and quitting Athens.*

Reports fled from town to town after *Paul* and his attendants wherever they came; so that they could not abide long in a place. They passed thro' † *Amphipolis* and *Apollonia*, and came to *Thessalonica*; there in a short time *all the city was set in an uproar. Jason's house was assaulted, where the saints lodg'd, and the saints were sought for, the people and the rulers were troubled, and having taken security of Jason, &c. they let them go. And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night. Why, what was the accusation? What! why they had turned the world upside down wherever they went, by saying there was another king, one Jesus, whom they knew nothing of, nor believed, or feared, that's all the reason the history gives.*

From *Thessalonica*, they go to *Berea*; they had not been long there before *Satan* heard of them, and found them out; the Jews of *Thessalonica* followed them, and stirred up the people to drive them

* Job. i. 6. † Acts xvii. 1.

them away. The saints were innocent, for here's nothing laid to their charge. *Then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were by sea, but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.* Paul was the principal person whom uproar followed. Paul was conducted to *Athens*, there he (an unknown man) begun to talk of an unknown God, and while he spoke philosophically they gave attention, but when he dropt the philosopher, the philosophers dropt him, as soon as he begun to tell them what unknown God he meant, the man God Christ Jesus, they called him a setter forth of strange gods; they burlesqued his doctrine and called him a babler, as if he prated more than reasoned; 'tis no wonder if he a despiser of wisdom, attempting to philosophize, could not hold it, that not being his talent, he could not reconcile their philosophy (of which he had some smattering) with the unknown God he held forth to them; they were too inquisitive, a disposition always destructive to faith: so he left them, to seek a people more prone to believe, and of less curious enquiry; for there he made no great hand of it, that was no place for him to stay in.

XXXVI. *Of Paul's working at his trade, his humility and disinterestedness.*

From * *Athens*, our travelling apostle goes to *Corinth*, where falling in with brethren of the same trade, he so far mortified himself as to work with them, of which humility he boasts not a little in an epistle to those people; wherein he tells them, that † *those who preach the gospel ought to live of the gospel; but, says he, I have used none of these things, neither have I written these things, that it should*
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* Acts xviii.

† 1 Cor. ix. 14, 15.

be so done unto me ; for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void. If he could not live without glorying or boasting, where was the wonderful humility of his working, when he did it on purpose to boast of. At another time he says, * *What is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches, except it be, that I myself was not burdensome to you? forgive me this wrong.* Taunting humility! *Behold the third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be burdensome to you; for I seek not yours but you.* He knew if the latter be found, the former follows. Tho' he boasted of working, which by the way is a sign he work'd but seldom, yet he did not live altogether by his work. He insults them on this head. † *Have I committed an offence in debasing myself that you might be exalted; because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely? I robbed other churches taking wages of them to do you service; and when I was present with you and wanted, I was chargeable to no man; for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied; and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so will I keep myself.* As the truth of Christ is in me, no man shall stop me of this boasting in the regions of Achaia. This shews how much it was his humility that made him work, and not his proud stomach to boast of it afterwards; and that there was no policy in it, but all was simple honesty, as he seems willing to have it understood. ‡ *I did not burden you, but being crafty, I caught you with guile:* meaning ironically with honest labour and inoffensive simplicity. Notwithstanding all his boasted labour, his work did not maintain him, for upbraiding them with neglect

* 2 Cor. xii. 13. † Ib. xi. 7, 8, 9. ‡ Ib. ver. 16

lect he says, * *I am glad of the coming of Stephanus and Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for that which was lacking on your part, they have supplied.*

If he had no pay at *Corinth*, no priest can plead a right to it better than he does ; and 'tis likely he wrought at his trade that he might do it the more freely, that they might make him the larger purse next time. He is an admirable and an artful *beggar*, as may be seen in the viii. and ix. chapters of his second epistle to the *Corinthians* ; to which I refer you, *Theophilus*, at your leisure, and to *Philippians* iv. 10. to the end. To the *Romans* he writes, † *It hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints that are at Jerusalem* ; and that it was their duty so to do. *It hath pleased them verily, and their debtors they are, for if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in carnal things.* He recommends to the *Corinthians* || also the example of the *Macedonians* ; others he directs, ‡ *Let him that is taught in the word communicate to him that teaches in all good things.* ** *If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we shall reap your carnal things? as they that minister about holy things live thereby, so they that preach the gospel, should live of the gospel.* Such like doctrines and precepts he delivers, whereby 'tis evident, that if he was not paid for his spiritual wares, he reckoned them in his debt; and that he did not take up preaching to labour at his trade, but expected to live by preaching, and found it no doubt a more profitable occupation than tent-making; and more fit for his arrogant

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* 1 Cor. xvi. 17. † Rom. xv. 26, 27. || 2 Cor. viii. 9. ‡ Gal. vi. 6. ** 1 Cor. ix, 11, 13, 14.

and rambling disposition. And it seems to me he had some crumbs of comfort from them before he sent his *second epistle*, what else mean these words? * *You also helping together by prayer for us, that the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons, thanks may be given by many on our behalf.*

He laboured also at *Theſſalonica*, where he ſtaid but three weeks, to teach them what they ought to do for him. † *Your ſelves know how you ought to follow us, for we behaved not diſorderly among you, neither did we eat any man's bread for nought, but wrought with labour and travel night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you. Not becauſe we have not power, but to make ourſelves an example unto you to follow us, &c.* But if he did work among them, he ſeems not to have ſent *Timotheus* of a fool's errand; for it does not ſeem that he came back empty handed. ‖ *When I could no longer forbear (Paul tells them) I ſent to know your faith, leſt by ſome means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain. But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, &c. we were comforted, &c.* and he had ſupplies ſent him while he was there from *Philippi*, for he tells them that in *Theſſalonica* you ſent once and again to my neceſſity. So that if he found occaſion to boaſt, he could find little occaſion to grumble; for though the workman is worthy of his hire, if he labours honeſtly and does his work well, yet it ſeems in this caſe that thoſe who never hired him, paid him wages; or his caſe had been a poor caſe.

XXXVII.

* 2 Cor. i. 11.

‖ 1 Theſ. iii. 5, 6, 7.

† 2 Theſ. iii. 7, 8, 9, 10.

XXXVII. *Of the miracles Paul wrought at Corinth.*

As to miracles St. Paul tells the **Corinthians* concerning himself, *truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs and wonders, and mighty deeds; but these were performed in them, not without them, for he threatens, + If I come again I will not spare, since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you.* If the miracles done by him were outward, visible, or known; why did some of them seek a proof of his mission? what other proof would or could they have? and why does he write thus, but to chide them out of countenance in doing it? If they sought a proof, what signs and wonders had he done? Was not this reprimand to make them ashamed of demanding such proofs as could not be given? Surely it was a proof of his power to do wonders, if many of them believed without any proof! towards such, *his power was not weak, but mighty in them;* and that to them was proof enough. We read not of any miracle he did at *Corinth*, by his historian, *Acts xviii.* tho' he staid there a year and six months, and longer, only that he had an *encouraging vision* in the night. If there had been any greater miracle done worth notice, I suppose it would have been taken notice of, but when the historian works no miracles, the epistolary writer does; what is wanting in deeds, is made up in words. Perhaps had he wrought any miracles there, he had not staid so long, for miracles never answered their end, nor were ever attended with reasonable success.—If ever God wrought any miracles to mend mankind, he has as much reason to repent his mending works, as ever he did his creating works*|| in making man.

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XXXVIII.

* 2 Cor. xii. 12.

† Ib. xiii. 2, 3.

|| Gen. vi. 6.

XXXVIII. *Of the Holy Ghost.*

Let me, *Theophilus*, just step aside to pay my respects to the Holy Ghost, and I shall come to miracles again by and by. At *Ephesus*, *Paul* found certain disciples that had not yet found the Holy Ghost, they were so wholly unacquainted with him, that they had not heard whether such a Being had existence, they confessed *they knew not whether there was any Holy Ghost*; but *Paul* had him in his hands, therefore, when he laid his hands on these ghostless believers, they were electrified by the holy fire, or the Holy Ghost dropt into their heads, and sat upon their tongues, so that *they spake with tongues and prophesied*; that is, they spake the mysteries of the spirit, for the tongue of the Holy Ghost is prophecy. They had, besides their own tongue or dialect, which was common, and intelligible, this, which was uncommon to those that spake, and unintelligible to those that heard; so they spake with *tongues* and prophesied.

The Holy Ghost was according to the new manifestation of it, a *bodily being* (a) which could appear in one or many distinct bodies, at one and the same time. At *Pentecost* it came *like the rushing of a mighty wind*, and appeared on the head of each speaker *like a fiery cloven tongue*. I wonder these ignorant believers had never heard of it; it is a
sign

(a) It is the Spirit of a body no doubt, according to the *Roman* clergy; for they tell us, that *whosoever are sent by the church, are sent by the Holy Ghost*. Annot. on the New Testament of *Rhemes*, p. 116. So that the Holy Ghost is nothing but the Spirit of holy mother church; and therefore, p. 158, The spiritual man is he that judgeth and discerneth by the spirit of the church, the truth of such things as the carnal man cannot attain unto: and the carnal, or sensual man, is he that measureth heavenly mysteries by natural reason, human prudence, and external sense.

sign that this wind made no great *rustling* without doors, and though it blows where it lists, it did not list to blow in every ones ears ; believers who were the next door neighbours to them that had the spirit, knew nothing of it ; It descended in a bodily shape like a dove on the head of Jesus when he was baptiz'd, which none but *John* the baptist saw, though many people came to his baptism. There is not a word of the Holy Ghost in all the Old Testament: there is mention made of the Holy Spirit, as a nature, or quality, but not of the Holy Ghost, as a bodily thing. The first account we have of it was when the angel *Gabriel* came a courting of *Mary* by proxy for the Holy Ghost, he tells her * *the holy Ghost should come upon her and over-shadow her ; therefore the holy thing that should be born of her should be called the Son of God*, and therefore that which was said to be conceived in her was of the Holy Ghost. And since the Holy Ghost made so free with man's nature, I think we may make a little free with his ; for if a king so far demeans himself to go a begging, sure a beggar may then converse freely with a king : excuse therefore, *Theophilus* my freedom with this human Holy Ghost. It was a new thing never made common 'till Jesus was glorified, and sent by him on the apostles as his deputy ; and though more dreadful judgments are denounced against those that speak lightly of it, than those that blaspheme God himself, yet I find no where in scripture that this Holy Ghost is a God ; if any, it is an inferior deity, a kind of divine *Mercury*, I suppose substituted by christians instead of the heathen one ; for when they threw the Pagan gods out of heaven and made devils of them all, they filled up the vacant seats in heaven with gods of their own making :

* Luke i. 13.

making : And this, for aught I know, may be the true meaning of *Lucifer*, *Satan*, or the *Dragon* and his angels warring in heaven, and being in heavenly battle vanquished, and thrown over the battlements into the bottomless pit. If so, what *Christ* says; *I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven* must mean that he saw it in the spirit of prophecy ; and it must be in this sense only that the gospel has conquered *Satan* and routed the devil and his angels ; and their falling from heaven then, means from the places of worship, and the veneration paid them by men ; and being cast into hell, is into contempt and obscurity. But as for the other sort of devil, *sin*, orthodox christianity has used it with great compassion, as a tender mother, not overlaid and stifled it, like a negligent and careless nurse. These two sisters *sin* and *folly* never had a better friend in the world than faith ; and therefore their children are the chosen ; for *Christ* came into the world to save sinners, of whom, says our bouncing apostle, *I am chief*. And he says, *God hath chosen the foolish things of this world, &c.* of whom believers are the chief ; for *by the foolishness of preaching*, 'tis said, *he saves them that believe*.

You may think, *Theophilus*, I have lost sight of the Holy Ghost, because I am entertaining myself with *Faith*, but I cannot look upon the child without having the parent in my eye. This bodily Holy Ghost is said to dwell in *Jesus* more eminently than in any other person, and therefore it is called the spirit of *Christ*, and is said to dwell also in those that are *Christ's*, and so *Christ* is said to dwell in them ; which seems to be the unravelling the spiritual mystery of christianity. But this dwelling is only by faith, and is only known by faith ; therefore those that have not this faith, know not whether

ther there is any Holy Ghost, and take it to be only chimera.

For my own part I don't know if there be any Holy Ghost, or what is meant by it, and imagine now I never had it, though once I thought I had been plunged in it, and not merely sprinkled ; if ever I was baptized with this holy water, it has been long ago all dried up ; but if ever I drank of it, I have it still, because I never thirst for it ; for it is said *he that drinketh of this water shall never thirst* ; but those that fancy they every now and then drink of it, are always as thirsty as if they drank of the salt sea : therefore 'tis a riddle to me what this fountain of living water is ; for they that have faith cannot want it, and they that have no faith never desire any. You see believers did not know their want of the Holy Ghost 'till it was put into their heads.

Since the Holy Ghost is by free gift, and cannot be bought or sold ; for when *Simon Magus* would have bought some of it, *Peter* said to him, *thy money perish with thee, because thou thinkest the gift of God can be bought with money*. And yet spiritual merchandize has been in the church ! Now, *Theophilus*, methinks I see the reason *why*, and the time *when* the Holy Ghost and the power of working miracles forsook the church ; it was as soon as the church was guilty of spiritual traffic and *simony*, and that's almost as soon as it was a church ; *St. Paul* thought it reasonable to take carnal things for spiritual ; bartering goods for goods is to the same effect as selling for ready money. I own that where there is not payment in money, barter seems fair ; unless it be fairer to sell faith upon credit, and so barter faith for faith, which has a just semblance of value for value. But there is another way the
Holy

Holy Ghost may be lost, and that is when a man or church is so profane as to barter it away for reason and common sense. Then, O ! then, go faith and the Holy Ghost together ! This is selling ones birth-right for a mess of carnal pottage ! These are spiritual *Edomites* ! But the resigning all human qualifications at the footstool of faith and the Holy Ghost, *to desire to know nothing but Christ, and him crucified*, with this humble apostle, is to be a spiritual *Israelite* ; but I am of a more aspiring mind, desiring to know Christ, and him glorified ; for if he is only to be known crucified, not risen again, and ascended into glory, *your faith is vain*, Theophilus, *and you are yet in your sins*.

XXXIX. Of Paul's *miraculous handkerchiefs and aprons*.

We are told that at *Ephesus*, *special miracles were wrought by the hands of Paul* ; which is not to be wondered at, as he had got the Holy Ghost in his hands ; and that *from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them* (a) Here we have the *means of working miracles*, but such *means* as shew the story of them to be a thumper. Some virtue else seems requisite besides the aprons, handkerchiefs, or napkins to be wrapt up in, or go along with them : something then they carried off from *Paul's* body. I want to know how long these aprons, or handkerchiefs must have been with holy *Paul*, to be thus impregnated with this healing quality ? and how

(a) *St. Chrysostom* (tom v. contra *Gentiles*, in vita *Babylæ*) sheweth in a whole book to that purpose against the *Pagans*, that by the like virtue of other saints, their relicts have done like wonders, not only in their life-time, but after their death. This also he insinuates by the shrine of *St. Babylas*. All *Romish* antiquity is pregnant of such romantic testimonies ; contrary to the nature of God, of man, of things, and of common-sense.

How long the diseased wore them before they were cured? Where they applied them? and how? Whether this wonder-working saint gave them away at his own charge, or at the charge of the church? How many he might carry about him on such an occasion? Whether he had always this power, or only at certain times? Whether a handkerchief or an apron could cure more than one? Whether if handed about by many people, it might not lose its salubric virtue by the way, before it reached the sick it might be designed for? Whether they received it mediately, or immediately from *Paul's* body? Whether it cured instantly, or in time? Whether *Paul's* body was any thing more liable to disease for parting with so much medicinal power? Whether he received them from the sick, and returned them back again? How long the holy effluvia abode on the apron or handkerchief? What operation it had on the sick? Whether a pure quality could lodge with dirt, excrement and corruption? Whether the physical property contained in these aprons and handkerchiefs remained after an emunction, or resisted sweat, or could stand a lather? Whether if the diseased lost the handkerchief or apron, there was not danger of the disease returning? Since here is no mention made of the Holy Ghost, I will not suppose any part of *that* was wrapt up in them, or stuck to them. Alas I am at a loss, in all these cases and many more, to understand the nature of the thing. Well, what we cannot conceive, we must believe! O holy mother church! how sacred are thy relicts!

XL. *Of certain quack-conjurers and the devil.*

At *Ephesus* the quack miracle-mongers were snapt. I will tell you the story *verbatim*, *Theophilus*;

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for

for 'tis pity any of it should be lost. The historian writes, * *Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits in the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, we adjure you by Jesus, whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Seva a Jew, chief of the priests which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was, leapt on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them; so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.* These new conjurers are said to be vagabond Jews, and yet seven sons of a high Priest, which don't tally, however it is no doubt as true as the rest of the story. They are called *exorcists*; if so, they were very young unskilful practitioners in the art; and therefore I suppose them to be boys at play, being all brothers; and that they were going to act a comedy in order to burlesque *St. Paul*, which turned out an unexpected sort of a tragedy to them, but a christian farce. The boys perhaps found a boor to begin to practise on, that had odd fits, whom they expected some game with. I find the man would not be made their laughing stock, he handled them roughly, and tore all the cloaths off their backs; but I suppose they did not all stay to be stript; I warrant you there was a little skirmish for some time; seven to one is odds, and seven is a holy number too; I wish we had more particulars of it. Thus it turns out, supposing the devil had no hand in it; but now put the case he acted a part, let's see how it will come forth then? The ignorant poor rogues did not call over the evil spirits perhaps by their proper names, nor had led them into the secret of their design, and be-

* Acts xix. 13, 14, 15, 16.

besides the evil spirits knew by their manner of address, these were not the right folk that belonged to Paul and Jesus: *We adjure you*, say they, *by Jesus whom Paul preacheth*, the devil knew by that, they were no preachers of Jesus, and consequently might be impostors; and so rousing up his brimstone courage, he prov'd them to be. He answers, *Jesus I know, and Paul I know*. How came this evil spirit so well acquainted with those good persons? *What communion has light with darkness; or he that believes with an infidel; or the saints with Satan? But who are ye?* It is strange too the devil knew not his own folk, and should tare his own people in pieces! This is Satan divided against Satan, the devil grown mad! the old man pulling down his own house on his own head! if the evil spirit had not got into a sturdy raw-bon'd fellow, he could never have play'd his part so well. These ignorant bunglers had not led the evil spirit into the secret of their design, therefore the devil had a mind to spoil the sport of those that were not rightly initiated. 'Twas enough to startle the devil to come upon him all at once, without any suitable warning, *We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth*. Names enough to frighten the devil! and but that he smelt a rat, or rather the rat devil smelt a trap; and therefore for the preservation of his own liberty, he had a mind to contest the point and put his power to the proof. The devil was disposed to have a trial of skill for it, or as it were a trial at law, and the devil defendant won the cause, nonsuited the plaintiff's party, made them pay costs, and kept possession of the premises. These young attorneys in the spiritual court attempted to plead the plaintiff's cause without fee, but Satan knew such practice would ruin the law, and make the gospel vile, or perhaps he had no

great regard for law or gospel, but lookt upon these young bravo's as a parcel of *Wapping* solicitors; and was determined not to be made a fool of by those that understood neither law nor gospel; resolv'd to spoil their trade of devil-catching in time, and not permit any interlopers. For if the evil spirits suffered themselves to be imposed on by every one that pleased to use the name of *Jesus* and *Paul* they might not in time find a body to put their heads in, nor be able to sleep in a whole skin; therefore they wisely cramp't these pretenders in their beginning, that they might stand upon record for an example to others; for Satan knew the *saints* would pen it down, as their own advantage, against invaders not commissioned by proper authority, tho' it really turns out to the devil's advantage. Here one of *Paul's handkerchiefs*, or the *shadow of Peter* * was wanting. It seems the devils had been greatly disturbed, and their power weakened in the time of *Jesus Christ*, he having given universal toleration to all that would annoy him, and beat him out of his intrenchments; and all his strong holds: but after his death the enemy recovered his spirit, and feared none but the *Holy Ghost*; having no potent adversary in the world but him; he knew *Paul* was not of that tolerating spirit that his master was, but like holy mother-church, and high churchmen, that would not have dissenters cast out the devil, but had rather the devil should cast out dissenters; and that men go not to heaven at all, than not go their way: being willing to side with the devil for their own advantage. And indeed all the apostles were greater friends to Satan than their master was; they in his time † met with men *that cast out devils in the name of Christ,*
and

* Acts v. 15, 16. † Mark ix. 38, 39.

and forbid them so to do; because they followed not them, the disciples were for conformity. But Jesus Christ allowed of non-conformity to those that did not formally follow him, for when they told this story to their master, they received a check for checking others, forbid them not, said he, for there is no person who does a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. So Christ we see granted a universal toleration; and there is nothing can more recommend Christ to infidels than such a spirit, for they are dear lovers of religious liberty, and therefore the truest protestants, as they most sincerely protest against that church which is itself in bondage, and the greatest promoter of slavery in the world; making slaves of the souls of men.

They early begun the tyranny and craft of book-burning. *Many also of them that used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men, and they counted the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver (a).* Resolved at all events, that none should have to do with the devil but themselves. Thus they have endeavoured to stifle all evidence against their own fraud, under pretence of preventing the frauds of others*.

XLI. *Of miracles ascribed to Paul which were none, and of his peregrination to Rome.*

Dancing after this apostle has almost tired me, *Theophilus*, therefore I hasten to a conclusion. Go-
ing

* Acts xix. 19.

(a) All heretical books are by this example consigned to the flames, by mother-church, and have been so in all ages. The christian emperors, *Constantine, Valentinian, Theodosius, Martian, Justinian* made penal laws for the burning or defacing them, to prevent their being read. So terrible is heterodoxy and unbelief, that the best way of answering it, has always been by fire, which destroys all *reason*, that more *accursed thing* to the *Spiritual Israelites* than *Achan's* wedge of gold and *Babylonish* garment was to the *Carnal Israelites*.

ing from thence thro' several places, he came to *Troas*. The christian church then often met in an upper room, though now they have got down into the first floor with great Pagan pomp, and are as strongly intrenched as the strong holds of Satan. However, then in this high church they could afford a great many lights. There was one *Eutichus*, a youth, sat in the window, a drowsy hearer, and *Paul* being a long-winded preacher, *Eutichus* dropt out of the window; the fall stunned him, so that the people below thought he was dead; but *Paul* went down and embracing him found him alive, and said, *trouble not yourselves for life is in him*. At length he came to himself: and this is set down by *Paul's* champion for a miracle: and so is that of his shaking a viper off his hand without swooning, * tho' it never bit him; who also says that *Paul* *always preached Jesus Christ and not himself*; but I think in many of his epistles he *preaches himself*, especially at † *Miletus*, if ever any man did. But notwithstanding the commendation *St. Paul* gives himself, I have already proved that all things which he said are not true. Then he tackt about to *Jerusalem*, there he prevaricated in his conduct, and *in order to gain the Jews he became a Jew*, tho' he had preach'd and practis'd Gentilism among the Gentiles; which piece of hypocrisy had like to have cost him his life. What the Jews thought of him on this account I leave you, *Thcophilus*, to judge for yourself. They dealt a little more sourly with him than the Gentiles did; for by their means he was brought many times to the bar, and imprison'd, and could not get clear, but by appealing to *Cæsar*. Thro' many troublesome travels and voyages, he arrived at *Rome*; where he enjoyed free toleration for preaching
in

* Acts xxviii 3, 4, 5. † Ib. xx. 17, &c.

in a hired house of his own, for two whole years. How long he lived beyond that time? what became of him afterwards? when or where, or how he died? they that would know, may go to *Rome* and enquire; and there they'll be told as much truth about him, as he told about himself. And as *Rome* appears to us to be the last place he was at, he was doubtless *bishop at Rome*, and left his spirit to the church behind him, tho' the church *lyes*, as it has ever done, in saying *Rome was Peter's see*; but they have *room* enough to lye there as they please, so they do but lye within the pale of the church.

XLII. *Recapitulatory Considerations.*

Upon examination it appears, that the history of *St. Paul* wants both the authority of good testimony and reason to make it pass current with those that see for themselves. What is fit to be generally esteemed true history, should have the general esteem of mankind as such; and not that of bigotted believers only. Facts that will not bear examination ought no more to pass current, than coin that will not bear the proof. Little truth is to be given to those stories, that are taken upon trust by those that have not the spirit of discernment. That story which wants the probability of truth, cannot prove the probability of another story, or of a doctrine equally improbable. If different parties on one side, give each other the lye; who that is of neither party, can believe any of them? What foundation have the moderns to new stamp the face of authority on ancient writings, which the ancients themselves rejected? If we had *Roman* history, which had been condemned by *Romans*, we should scarce think it worthy the credit of *Britons*. Why must we confide in those that have handed stories down
down

down to us, who in their own time were not to be believed for their knavery? When stories look more like romance than truth, where is the crime for taking them for what they appear to be? or where is the wisdom or virtue of receiving them as truth? what can better discover the true value of things, than their own intrinsic worth; and how can a true estimate be known without it? Can there be a greater mark of madness, infatuation or delusion, than for a man to glory of seeing or hearing what he can give no account of, and when at the same time he owns, that he knew not whether he had his senses? Or what can be a greater mark of deceit and vanity, than to boast of extraordinary romantic favours, to be esteemed an extraordinary great man? Is it a sign of a man's meekness, or humility, or of his being possessed with a blessed spirit, that would curse an angel from heaven who dared to contradict what he asserted? Is he implicitly to be believed without contradiction, who has the spirit of it both in words and works? how great does his faith appear to have been, who owned he *stood by faith*, and yet was *in danger of falling*? How does his disinterestedness for lucrative gain appear, who leaves a poor honest laborious trade, for a more gainful and easy occupation; and priest-like, insists on *their* payment, as his dues, who never hired him? And how does his humility appear, who leaves an humble employ to make himself head of a sect? Is he to be praised for his holiness, whose whole life is a scene of contradiction? The giddy headed man that changes from one sort of superstition to another, tho' he may be called a convert, is not the better man. If the same turbulent temper appear as before, the man is not more holy by his conversion. If he have not the same power as before, he can't do

do the same things, and then the conversion is not in the man, but in his circumstances. He that is of a restless disposition, will disturb others of their rest as much as he has power to do it. He that will dissemble and lie, and deceive, and curse, and swear, and forswear, may be esteemed a very pious *saint*, but is a very immoral man. Who and what is an enthusiast, if he that is conducted by dreams, visions and inspirations, by a spirit and by Satan, is not? and if stories that contradict themselves are true, what are false? If men will strive to make contradictions look like truth, by wire-drawing them to a seeming reconciliation; what will they not say to gain a point; what iniquities will they not palliate, what bad cause will they not plead to make their own good? Can the indiscreet stories of miracles pass for the works of the God of wisdom? Is it consistent with his conduct to interfere in a wonderful manner to make reasonable men wonder he should so interfere, working miracles oftentimes to no purpose, and sometimes one miracle to cure the defects of another? So miserable are the stories of miracles, that as they reflect on the wisdom of God, so they as stupidly represent the workers of them miserable, and those that are invested with such mighty power, notorious examples of imperfection and weakness. Whatever wonders they are reported to have done abroad to others, they did nothing wonderful at home for themselves; but all their miracles rather tended to make them marks of misery. Now and then we are entertained with the relation of mischievous miracles, to shew us how the workers of them went about doing good! Whatever Holy Ghost is in the heads of those that pretend to possess him, their hearts are full of feuds and factions; as it was in the beginning, so it is now, and ever will

will be enthusiasts, without end. *Amen.* 'Tis not the pretending to the perfection or direction of an imbodied God, can remove or conceal the imperfections of a man. Exorcisms, conjurations and witchcraft are deeds of darkness; the stories of them only shew the ignorance of the age in which these things were pretended to be done; whereby we may know how easily people were imposed on, and need not wonder at the great success of the conjuring clergy. But the christians, good men, had no hand in these cheats! They indeed were said to *turn the world upside down*, but then it is to be supposed, that was because the world was the wrong side upwards before, and the people were so obstinate they would not let the saints set it in the right position; who came to mend the world: so the world did every thing evil to, or wrong by them, rather than permit them to set the world right. But the working of miracles ceased after the apostles time, because when their master saw that power in the hands of fools, he took it away to prevent their doing more mischief with it than good. And now seeing we have no miracles given to guide us, we are not to be guided by them, but by what we have, that is, by the *reason* God has given us; it having been found by experience, that ignorance and miracles are miserable informers and reformers of a misinformed world: and no wonder, for would it not vex a good being to see miracles carried about in handkerchiefs, and aprons full of miracles handed about, by which means they might be prostituted to vile uses, and be applied to the cure of mangy dogs and measly swine; actions forbidden in the gospel, *Give not that which is holy to dogs, neither cast your pearls before swine.* 'Twas proper therefore a stop should be put to such male-practice, which

which is doubtless sacrilege ; and 'tis now proper we should have no miracles. From the recital of the words and works ascribed to our hero saint, by his followers and advocates, it appears how much they turn out to the advantage of his character, and clear up the evidence, credit, purity, excellency, and truth of the christian revelation. Now let us compare this divine light (as it is called by divines) with the natural light of human reason, and see which is most properly *the light of the world*, and I have done, *Theophilus*, for this time.

XLIII. *Of reason and revelation.*

This honourable author says, that in *Deism it self, the most simple of all religious opinions, are several difficulties for which human reason can but ill account ; which may therefore not improperly be stiled articles of faith.* He may stile them as he pleases, but a *deist* is not bound to any articles of faith of another man's making ; he is to believe only what appears right to his *own* reason. And he is not to be saved by his belief, if it be really right ; nor to be damn'd, if he unluckily believe what is wrong. He only subscribes in his own judgment to this article, That he must account for things in the best manner his reason is able to do ; and where that fails, acknowledge his weakness in things unnecessary to be known, or above his capacity to know ; and not expect to comprehend all nature : nor reject what truths he can comprehend for those he cannot ; nor is he to receive *any* thing for truth because he cannot conceive *every* truth. And if revelation be subject to the same casualties, or consequences that reason is, 'tis *not better* ; if it inform us no clearer, 'tis *as dark* ; if it be as liable to be misunderstood, 'tis *as dim* ; if it don't open our understandings, so

as to make us argue more clearly, and on a better foundation, 'tis not a greater light. How is it then given to enlighten the dimness of our reason? If it need reason's assistance to explain it, 'tis weaker; if it confound our reason, 'tis worse; if it have not plainly the advantage of reason when compared with that alone, 'tis not a greater light; or if reason have the advantage of revelation when so compared, revelation is a less light. If we can know nothing truly by revelation without reason, revelation is no true light at all. If we keep men of the best sense and learning in constant pay to explain and defend revelation, and yet they can do neither, when opposed to reason only: what sort of a light is it? If the expounders cannot agree amongst themselves in essentials not depending on reason, or know what the essentials are; how essential is it? If they cannot display their boasted revelation to be glorious in itself, worthy of God, entirely true, perfectly plain and easy to be understood, intrinsically pure, just, consistent and harmonious, that the doctrines and precepts it contains, all naturally tend to make men wiser, better, happier; it seems to want the proofs of a divine original: and if it has not done so, it seems to have been given in vain; and so not the revelation of perfect wisdom. And if proper proofs are wanting of its being so, all that enquire and judge for themselves, and that are capable of judging of the reason and fitness of things, will conclude it to be no extraordinary light; and that nothing more is necessary to direct the faith and practice of men than adhering in judgment to *reason only*, freed from all enthusiasm and imposture, and in practice to *virtue alone*, freed from all superstition.

In all countries and among all religions, there will be always some enquirers, free-thinkers, philosophers and deists, but credulity and enthusiasm are such strong ingredients in the composition of human nature, that they will never be all such. Rational principles suit reasonable men only. The majority of every nation will always be of that church which is propagated by education, and established by law and custom: therefore the craftsmen need be in no fear of their great *Diana*. Any religion, in any country that teaches good morals, if practised with a good heart, will make a good man; which neither enthusiastic faith, nor superstitious worship among them all will do; and there is little faith or worship in the world, to which enthusiasm and superstition are not joined: therefore those christians of the most moral and rational parties among us, are as fit, by their *rationality*, (not by their *revelation*,) to direct men in their duty and behaviour as any other that I know of in the world, with this difference, that while we enjoy the greatest freedom in the world, our constitution is in that respect the best in the world, And all reasonable men agree that *Virtue* is of the utmost benefit to mankind, and that the right understanding of it is the path to peace, freedom, and happiness.

THE
P R E F A C E,
BY WAY OF
P O S T S C R I P T.

R E A D E R,

THIS epistle to thee follows in natural order, being almost always written last, tho' standing first; I write as thou readest, for my own satisfaction, to find out what is faultless, or to find fault; to inform, and to be informed; for the rocks that others have split on, are the landmarks we ought to beware of. To know if a man be truly wise, we should enquire what follies he has been guilty of; or if honest, what knavery; or if holy, examine his conduct; this is more or less needful, as it is of more or less consequence. The more any thing is exposed, it will be examined the more. This is the present case respecting *St. Paul*; the honourable author of *The observations on his conversion and apostleship*, has elevated his character, and made the superstructure of christianity depend upon it, and has indeed acquired by it as much glory

glory as the nature of the subject permits, nor do I envy his fame. But unless things as they are represented, are to be implicitly received, it can be no error to examine into errors for the truth's sake; and since *the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but spiritual*, let who will attack me with my own weapons, I beg no quarter; for begging quarter is craving indulgence in error, which let the strongest reasons detect and destroy. The strength that is not tried is not known. Let men rouse themselves, and not imagine that security lies in indolence. I thought myself well-acquainted with the apostle *Paul* before this examination, but must own, I was not half so well as since; for in examining the history of him, more light sprung up than I expected. The fruits of my labour, *Reader*, are presented to thy view, with scripture uncorrupted by explanation in the front, that at one view the whole account of *St. Paul's* conversion may be seen, to save thy trouble in often seeking the text in different places. I have only transposed one verse, as you will see was necessary to do, and that it has not altered the sense.

If christianity is not essentially enthusiasm, wherein does the essence of christianity consist? Or wherein is the distinction between that, and the religion of nature? If christianity be only natural religion, why does it not naturally appear to be so; and why do christians contend with those that would have it so? But if christianity has not its foundation in nature, is it not enthusiasm? For what is enthusiasm but the belief and practice of such things as are supernatural? and what are things supernatural but such as are not in nature, or do not spring from nature, nor are taught by reason; If christianity be purely natural and rational, what need had man to
be

be taught it by supernatural means; for nature is unchangeable, and at all times manifest to those that have industry enough to seek what she informs, courage sufficient to call in question popular errors, and natural abilities to distinguish the true light of nature from ungrounded hypotheses, gilded deceit and false pretensions. These things were never past seeing by some in every age and place, tho' seldom safe to discover. To free men therefore from the danger of speaking truth, is to be a greater redeemer than divulging truth to men. If christianity teaches to believe and act things contrary to nature, is it not enthusiasm? The basis of the christian religion consists in believing Christ rose from the dead; (*for if Christ is not risen, your faith is vain.*) Is not to believe him risen from the dead, to believe an action that is contrary to nature? Is not the Trinity a doctrine contrary to reason and nature? And to believe that any man who was ever born, was *the only begotten son of God*, by his spirit's *overshadowing a woman*; that God can be man, or man God, that *all power is committed to Jesus Christ, in heaven and in earth*; (*for 'tis contrary to reason and nature, to believe that the Father hath divested himself of all power, and given it to the Son; or that the Father and the Son are one.*) What is it less to believe that the sacrifice of Christ should atone for the sins of men; that 'tis impossible for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven, therefore to get there they must part with all they have; that it is adviseable men should make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake; that we should hate our nearest and dearest relations and friends and our own lives for Christ's sake and the gospel's; that we should love our enemies; that we should depend on God, and take no thought
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for the morrow ; and such like, which seem to me to be the distinguishing essentials of christianity, and inseparable from enthusiasm, because the belief and practice of such things are contrary to reason and nature. If these are not the laws of christianity, nor enthusiasm, I wish they were better distinguished.

The reflexions I have cast on faith, is to be understood of traditionary, unexamined, superstitious, enthusiastical and erroneous faith, substituted for righteousness ; not of that faith in God, which is productive of good works, of the faith which works by love. All the faith in God that is necessary, is to have that faith in God which is necessary for our obedience, and all the obedience required of us, is to love God and our neighbour ; for in this is comprehended the whole law of God ; and to love God is to love those properties or attributes we believe to be in God, or to love the laws of God, that is, such laws as tend to the good of man, which are fit for man to believe and practice, *viz.* the belief of things naturally reasonable, and the requirings of a reasonable nature. This is true faith and obedience : for we know nothing of God, but by faith, the knowledge of God being a philosophical and speculative consideration ; therefore every man is to believe for himself, according to the light and judgment God has given him : for an adequate notion of God is inscrutable to all mortals. In things concerning only God and man, man is accountable only to God. *What hast thou to do to judge of another's servant ? to his own master he standeth or falleth.* And as for things concerning man and man, this rule is given us, *Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets, Mat. ii. 12.*

That is, this is all that God by revelation requires : this is the sum and substance of all religion. This comprehends all the Law of God by his prophets ; this answers all their ends and aims, but they that have other ends have intermixt other things with it, and made it miraculous and mysterious, that they might amuse and deceive.

By what has been said it appears, that true religion is not built upon fables, nor upon *Paul* or *Peter*, nor on what this or that man says or pretends ; but on the nature and necessity of things, on obedience to God, according to men's faith in him as their reason directs them ; and in obedience to man, as the law of man, and in man, directs to man's reasonable obedience, in things not appertaining to God ; thus every man will serve *God* in sincerity, and *man* with honesty, and religion will not be a cloak for knavery and inhumanity. 'Tis not what *Peter* or what *Paul* says, or what is said of them, that affects the foundation of true religion ; but 'tis what the nature of things require or forbid, that are justly commanded or prohibited. Whatever may be proved true concerning *St. Paul*, does not at all concern the truth of religion, whether he was a wise man or an enthusiast, an honest man or an impostor ; but the religion of him that stands on *St. Paul* must fall with him. Divinity, law, and physic, are only rightly founded on the nature, reason and circumstances of things, all besides is enthusiasm, tyranny and imposture.

If I have uttered the plain truth, pardon me ; if not, make me to know my error, and I am, reader,

Your most-humble Servant,

M. P.

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