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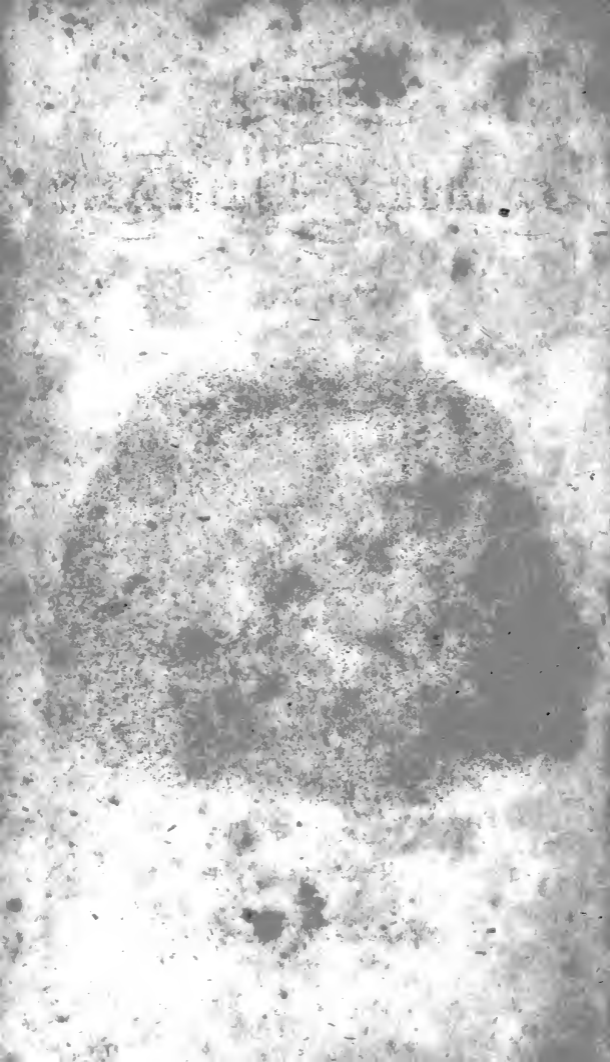
M. J. Williams

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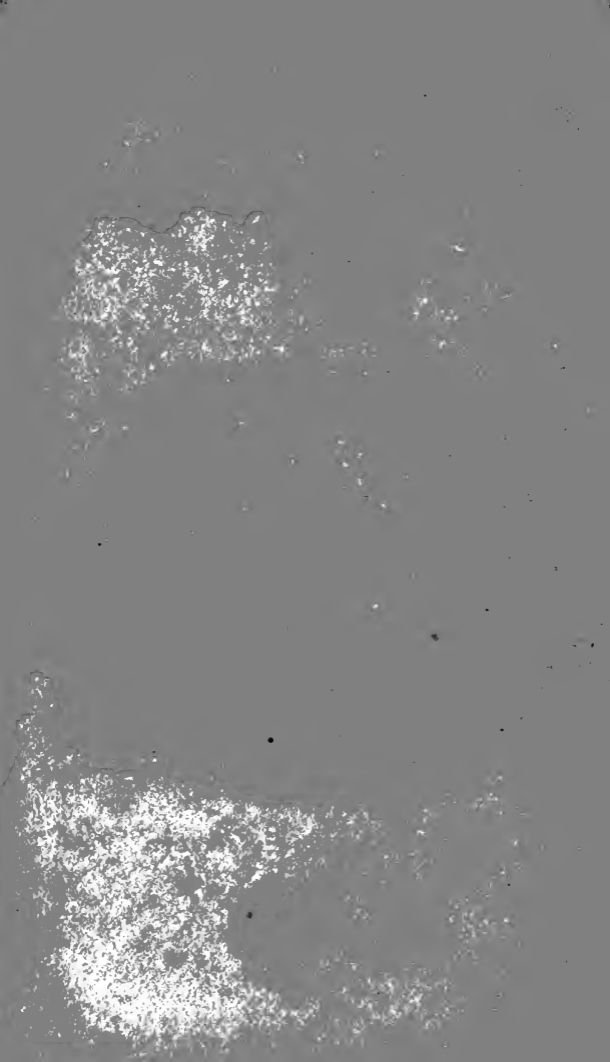
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**INFIDELITY:**

COMPRISING

**JENYNS' INTERNAL EVIDENCE,**

**LESLIE'S METHOD,**

**LYTTELTON'S CONVERSION OF PAUL,**

**WATSON'S REPLY TO GIBBON AND PAINE,**

A NOTICE OF

**HUME ON MIRACLES,**

AND AN

**EXTRACT FROM WEST ON THE RESURRECTION**

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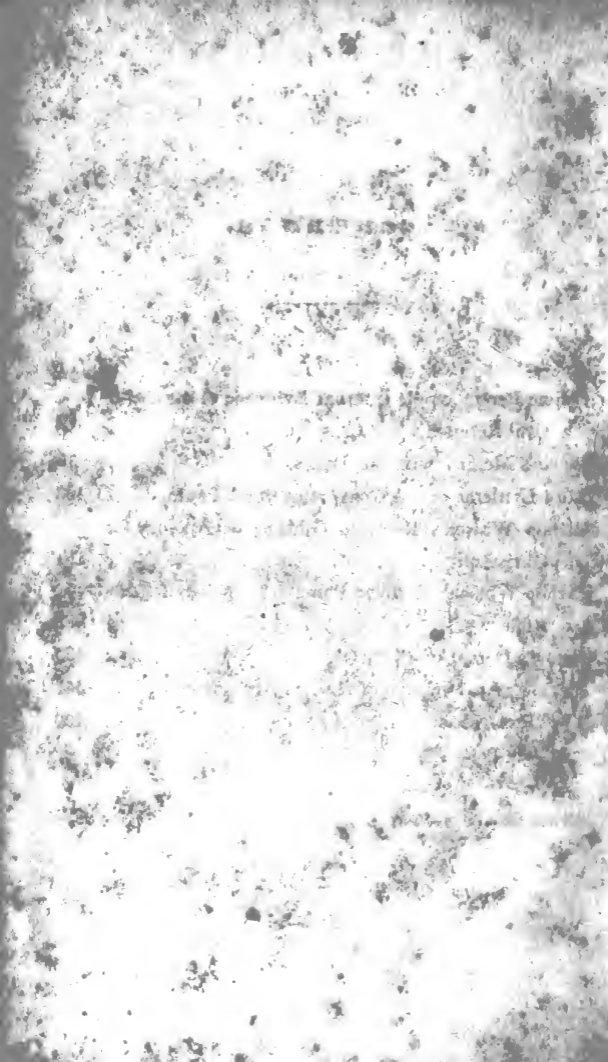
*M.D. Williams,*

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A VIEW  
OF THE  
INTERNAL EVIDENCE  
OF THE  
CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

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BY SOAME JENYNS, Esq.

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Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."—Acts, 26 : 28.

Of the following treatise, Dr. PALEY says, in his incomparable work on the Evidences of Christianity, "I should willingly, if the limits and nature of my work admitted of it, transcribe into this chapter the whole of what has been said upon the morality of the Gospel by the author of '*A View of the Internal Evidence of Christianity*;' because it perfectly agrees with my own opinion, and because it is impossible to say the same things so well."

The Rev. Dr. Alexander says he "has often heard it asserted, and never contradicted, that the late PATRICK HENRY, the celebrated orator of Virginia and of the American Revolution, had been in early life skeptical, but was fully satisfied of the truth of the Christian religion by the perusal of this little treatise of SOAME JENYNS."

In the present edition a few passages, not essential to the argument, have been omitted.

## INTERNAL EVIDENCE.

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MOST of the writers who have undertaken to prove the Divine origin of the Christian religion, have had recourse to arguments drawn from these three heads: The *prophecies* still extant in the Old Testament, the *miracles* recorded in the New, of the *internal evidence* arising from that excellence, and those clear marks of supernatural interposition which are so conspicuous in the religion itself. The two former have been sufficiently explained and enforced by the ablest pens; but the last, which seems to carry with it the greatest degree of conviction, has never, I think, been considered with that attention which it deserves.

I mean not here to depreciate the proofs arising from either prophecies, or miracles; they both have, or ought to have their proper weight. Prophecies are permanent miracles, whose authority is sufficiently confirmed by their completion, and are therefore solid proofs of their supernatural origin of a religion whose truth they were intended to testify. Such are those to be found in various parts of the Scriptures relative to the coming of the Messiah, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the unexampled state in which the Jews have ever since continued: all so circumstan-

tially descriptive of the events, that they seem rather histories of past, than predictions of future transactions; and whoever will seriously consider the immense distance of time between some of them and the events which they foretell, the uninterrupted chain by which they are connected for many thousand years, how exactly they correspond with those events, and how totally unapplicable they are to all others in the history of mankind: I say, whoever considers these circumstances, he will scarcely be persuaded to believe that they can be the productions of preceding artifice, or posterior application; or be able to entertain the least doubt of their being derived from supernatural inspiration. The miracles recorded in the New Testament to have been performed by Christ and his apostles, were certainly convincing proofs of their Divine commission to those who saw them; and as they were seen by such numbers, and are as well attested as other historical facts; and, above all, as they were wrought on so great and so wonderful an occasion, they must still be admitted as incontrovertible evidence.

To prove the truth of the Christian religion, I prefer, however, to begin by showing the internal marks of Divinity which are stamped upon it; because on this the credibility of the prophecies and miracles in a great measure depends: for if we have once reason to be convinced that this religion is derived from a supernatural origin, prophecies and miracles will become so far from being incredible, that it will be highly probable that a supernatural revelation should be foretold and enforced by supernatural means.



What pure Christianity is, divested of all its ornaments, appendages, and corruption, I pretend not now to say ; but what it is not, I will venture to affirm, which is, that it is not the offspring of fraud or fiction. Such, on a superficial view, I know it may appear to a man of good sense, whose sense has been altogether employed on other subjects ; but if any one will give himself the trouble to examine it with accuracy and candor, he will plainly see, that however fraud and fiction may have grown up with it, yet it never could have been grafted on the same stock nor planted by the same hand.

To ascertain the true system and genuine doctrines of this religion, after the controversies of above seventeen centuries, and to remove all the rubbish which artifice and ignorance have been heaping upon it during all that time, would indeed be an arduous task, which I shall by no means undertake ; but to show that it cannot possibly be derived from human wisdom, or human imposture, is a work, I think, attended with no great difficulty, and requiring no extraordinary abilities ; and therefore I shall attempt that, and that alone, by stating and then explaining the following plain and undeniable propositions.

FIRST, *that there is now extant a book entitled the New Testament.*

SECONDLY, *that from this book may be extracted a system of religion entirely new, both with regard to the object and the doctrines, not only infinitely superior to, but unlike, every thing which had ever before entered into the mind of man.*

THIRDLY, *that from this book may likewise be collected a system of Ethics, in which every moral*

*precept, founded on reason, is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection than in any other of the wisest philosophers of preceding ages; every moral precept founded on false principles is totally omitted, and many new precepts added, peculiarly corresponding with the new object of this religion.*

LASTLY, *that such a system of religion and morality could not possibly have been the work of any man, or set of men; much less of those obscure, ignorant, and illiterate persons, who actually did discover, and publish it to the world; and that, therefore, it must undoubtedly have been effected by the interposition of Divine power; that is, that it must derive its origin from God.*

#### PROPOSITION I.

Very little need be said to establish my first proposition, which is singly this:—*That there is now extant a book entitled the New Testament; that is, there is a collection of writings, distinguished by that denomination, containing four historical accounts of the birth, life, actions, discourses, and death of an extraordinary person named Jesus Christ, who was born in the reign of Augustus Cæsar, preached a new religion throughout the country of Judea, and was put to a cruel and ignominious death in the reign of Tiberius. Also one other historical account of the travels, transactions, and orations of some plain and illiterate men, known by the title of his apostles, whom he commissioned to propagate his religion after his death; which he foretold them he must suffer in confirmation of its truth. To these are added several*

epistolary writings, addressed by these persons to their fellow-laborers in this work, or to the several churches or societies of Christians which they had established in the several cities through which they had passed.

It would not be difficult to prove that these books were written soon after those extraordinary events, which are the subjects of them, as we find them quoted and referred to by an uninterrupted succession of writers from those to the present time: nor would it be less easy to show that the truth of all those events, miracles only excepted, can no more be reasonably questioned than the truth of any other facts recorded in any history whatever; and there can be no more reason to doubt that there existed such a person as Jesus Christ, speaking, acting, and suffering in such a manner as is there described, than that there were such men as Tiberius, Herod, or Pontius Pilate, his contemporaries; or to suspect that Peter, Paul, and James were not the authors of those epistles to which their names are affixed, than that Cicero and Pliny did not write those which are ascribed to them. It might also be made to appear, that these books, having been written by various persons at different times, and in distant places, could not possibly have been the work of a single impostor, nor of a fraudulent combination, being all stamped with the same marks of a uniform originality in their very frame and composition.

But all these circumstances I shall pass over unobserved, as they do not fall in with the course of my argument, nor are necessary for the support of it. Whether these books were written by the authors whose names are prefixed to them; whether they have been

enlarged, diminished, or any way corrupted by the artifice or ignorance of translators or transcribers; whether in the historical parts the writers were instructed by a perpetual, a partial, or by any inspiration at all; whether in the religious and moral parts they received their doctrines from a divine influence, or from the instructions and conversation of their Master; whether in their facts or sentiments there is always the most exact agreement, or whether in both they sometimes differ from each other; whether they are in any case mistaken, or always infallible, or ever pretended to be so, I shall not here dispute: let the deist avail himself of all these doubts and difficulties, and decide them in conformity to his own opinions. I shall not now contend, because they affect not my argument; all that I assert is a plain fact, which cannot be denied, that such writings do now exist.

#### PROPOSITION II.

My second proposition is not quite so simple, but, I think, not less undeniable than the former, and is this: *That from this book may be extracted a system of religion entirely new, both with regard to the object and the doctrines; not only infinitely superior to, but totally unlike every thing which had ever before entered into the mind of man.* I say extracted, because all the doctrines of this religion having been delivered at various times, and on various occasions, and here only historically recorded, no regular system of theology is here to be found; and better perhaps, it had been, if less labor had been employed by the learned to bend and twist these divine materials into the po-

lished forms of human systems. Why their great author chose not to leave any such behind him, we know not, but it might possibly be because he knew that the imperfection of man was incapable of receiving such a system, and that we are more properly and more safely conducted by the distant and scattered rays, than by the too powerful sunshine of divine illumination. "If I have told you earthly things," says he, "and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?" John, 3 : 12. That is, if my instructions concerning your behavior in the present, as relative to a future life, are so difficult to be understood that you can scarcely believe me, how shall you believe me if I endeavor to explain to you the nature of celestial beings, the designs of Providence, and the mysteries of his dispensation? subjects which you have neither ideas to comprehend, nor language to express.

First, then, the *object* of this religion is *entirely new*, and is this; to prepare us by a state of probation for the kingdom of heaven. This is every where professed by Christ and his apostles to be the chief end of the Christian's life; the crown for which he is to contend, the goal to which he is to run, the harvest which is to repay all his labors. Yet, previous to their preaching, no such prize was ever hung out to mankind, nor any means prescribed for the attainment of it.

It is indeed true, that some of the philosophers of antiquity entertained notions of a future state, but mixed with much doubt and uncertainty. Their legislators also endeavored to infuse into the minds of the people a belief of rewards and punishments after death; but by this they only intended to give a sanction to

their laws, and to enforce the practice of virtue for the benefit of mankind in the present life. This alone seems to have been their end, and a meritorious end it was; but Christianity not only operates more effectually to this end, but has a nobler design in view, which is by a proper education here to render us fit members of a celestial society hereafter.

In all former religions, the good of the present life was the first object; in the Christian, it is but the second; in those, men were incited to promote that good by the hopes of a future reward; in this, the practice of virtue is enjoined in order to qualify them for that reward. There is great difference, I apprehend, in these two plans: that is, in adhering to virtue from its present utility in expectation of future happiness, and living in such a manner as to qualify us for the acceptance and enjoyment of that happiness; and the conduct and dispositions of those who act on these different principles must be no less different. On the first, the constant practice of justice, temperance, and sobriety, will be sufficient; but on the latter, we must add to these an habitual piety, faith, resignation, and contempt of the world. The first may make us very good citizens, but will never produce a tolerable Christian. Hence it is that Christianity insists more strongly than any preceding institution, religious or moral, on *purity of heart*, and a benevolent disposition, because these are absolutely necessary to its great end; but in those whose recommendations of virtue regard the present life only, and whose promised rewards in another were low and sensual, no preparatory qualifications were requisite to enable men to practice the one, or to enjoy the other; and therefore, we see this

object is peculiar to this religion; and with it, was entirely new.

But although this object, and the principle on which it is founded, were new, and perhaps undiscoverable by reason, yet when discovered, they are so consonant to it that we cannot but readily assent to them. For the truth of this principle, that the present life is a state of probation and education to prepare us for another, is confirmed by every thing which we see around us: it is the only key which can open to us the designs of Providence in the economy of human affairs, the only clue which can guide us through that pathless wilderness, and the only plan on which this world could possibly have been formed, or on which the history of it can be comprehended or explained. It could never have been formed on a plan of happiness, because it is every where overspread with innumerable miseries; nor of misery, because it is interspersed with many enjoyments. It could not have been constituted for a scene of wisdom and virtue, because the history of mankind is little more than a detail of their follies and wickedness; nor of vice, because that is no plan at all, being destructive of all existence, and consequently of its own. But on this system, all that we here meet with may be easily accounted for; for this mixture of happiness and misery, of virtue and vice, necessarily results from a state of probation and education; as probation implies trials, sufferings, and a capacity of offending, and education a propriety of chastisement for those offences.

In the next place, the *doctrines* of this religion are equally new with the object; and contain ideas of God, and of man, of the present, and of a future life

and of the relations which all these bear to each other, totally unheard of, and quite dissimilar from any which had ever been thought on previous to its publication. No other ever drew so just a portrait of the worthlessness of this world, and all its pursuits, nor exhibited such distinct, lively, and exquisite pictures of the joys of another; of the resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, and the triumphs of the righteous in that tremendous day, "when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality." 1 Cor. 15: 53. No other has ever represented the Supreme Being in the character of three persons united in one God. No other has attempted to reconcile those seeming contradictory, but both true propositions, the contingency of future events, and the foreknowledge of God, or the freewill of the creature with the overruling grace of the Creator. No other has so fully declared the necessity of wickedness and punishment, yet so effectually instructed individuals to resist the one, and to escape the other; no other has ever pretended to give any account of the depravity of man, or to point out any remedy for it; no other has ventured to declare the unpardonable nature of sin without the influence of a mediatorial interposition, and a vicarious atonement from the sufferings of a Superior Being.\* Whether these wonderful doc-

\* That Christ suffered and died, as an atonement for the sins of mankind, is a doctrine so constantly and so stongly enforced through every part of the New Testament, that whoever will seriously peruse those writings, and deny that it is there, may, with as much reason and truth, after reading the works of Thucydides and Livy, assert, that in them no mention is made of any facts relative to the histories of Greece and Rome.



trines are worthy of our belief, must depend on the opinion which we entertain of the authority of those who published them to the world; but certain it is, that they are all so far removed from every track of the human imagination, that it seems equally impossible that they should ever have been derived from the knowledge, or the artifice of man.

Some indeed there are, who, by perverting the established signification of words, (which they call explaining,) have ventured to expunge all these doctrines out of the Scriptures, for no other reason than that they are not able to comprehend them; and argue thus: The Scriptures are the word of God; in his word no propositions contradictory to reason can have a place; these propositions are contradictory to reason, and therefore they are not there. But if these bold asserters would claim any regard, they should reverse their argument and say: These doctrines make a part, and a material part of the Scriptures; they are contradictory to reason; no propositions contrary to reason can be a part of the word of God; and therefore, neither the Scriptures, nor the pretended revelation contained in them, can be derived from him. This would be an argument worthy of rational and candid deists, and demand a respectful attention; but when men pretend to disprove *facts* by reasoning, they have no right to expect an answer.

And here I cannot omit observing, that the *personal character of the author* of this religion is no less new and extraordinary than the religion itself: "who spake as never man spake," (John 7: 49,) and lived as never man lived. In proof of this, I do not mean to allege that he was born of a virgin, that he fasted

forty days, that he performed a variety of miracles, and that after being buried three days, he rose from the dead ; because these accounts will have but little effect on the minds of unbelievers, who, if they believe not the religion, will give no credit to the relation of these facts ; but I will prove it from facts which cannot be disputed. For instance, he is the only founder of a religion, in the history of mankind, which is *totally unconnected with all human policy and government, and therefore totally unconducive to any worldly purpose whatever.* All others, Mahomet, Numa, and even Moses himself, blended their religious institutions with their civil, and by them obtained dominion over their respective people ; but Christ neither aimed at, nor would accept of any such power : he rejected every object which all other men pursue, and made choice of all those which others fly from, and are afraid of : he refused power, riches, honors, and pleasures, and courted poverty, ignominy, tortures, and death. Many have been the enthusiasts and imposters who have endeavored to impose on the world pretended revelation ; and some of them, from pride, obstinacy, or principle, have gone so far as to lay down their lives rather than retract ; but I defy history to show one who ever made his own sufferings and death a necessary part of his original plan, and essential to his mission. This Christ actually did ; he foresaw, foretold, declared their necessity, and voluntarily endured them. If we seriously contemplate the Divine lessons, the perfect precepts, the beautiful discourses, and the consistent conduct of this wonderful person, we cannot possibly imagine that he could have been either an idiot or a madman ;

and yet, if he was not what he pretended to be, he can be considered in no other light ; and even under this character he would deserve some attention, because of so sublime and rational an insanity there is no other instance in the history of mankind.

If any one can doubt of the superior excellence of this religion above all which preceded it, let him but peruse with attention those *unparalleled writings* in which it is transmitted to the present times, and compare them with the most celebrated productions of the pagan world ; and if he is not sensible of their superior beauty, simplicity, and originality, I will venture to pronounce, that he is as deficient in taste as in faith, and that he is as bad a critic as a Christian. In what school of ancient philosophy can he find a lesson of morality so perfect as Christ's sermon on the mount ? From which of them can he collect an address to the Deity so concise, and yet so comprehensive, so expressive of all that we want, and all that we could deprecate, as that short prayer which he formed for, and recommended to his disciples ? From the works of what sage of antiquity can he produce so pathetic a recommendation of benevolence to the distressed, and enforced by such assurances of a reward, as in those words of Christ, "Come, ye blessed of my Father ! inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world : for I was a hungered, and ye gave me meat ; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink ; I was a stranger, and ye took me in ; I was naked, and ye clothed me ; I was sick, and ye visited me ; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee a hungered, and fed thee, or thirsty and gave thee drink ?

when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in, or naked and clothed thee? or when saw we thee sick and in prison, and came unto thee? Then shall he answer and say unto them, Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as you have done it to the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Matt. 25 : 34. Where is there so just, and so elegant a reproof of eagerness and anxiety in worldly pursuits, closed with so forcible an exhortation to confidence in the goodness of our Creator, as in these words : " Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Consider the lillies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" Matt. 6 : 26-28. By which of their most celebrated poets are the joys reserved for the righteous in a future state so sublimely described, as by this short declaration, that they are superior to all description : " Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." 1 Cor. 2 : 9. Where, amidst the dark clouds of pagan philosophy, can he show us such a clear prospect of a future state, the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the dead, and the general judgment, as in St. Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians? Or from whence can he produce such cogent exhortations to the practice of every virtue, such ardent incitements to piety

and devotion, and such assistances to attain them, as those which are to be met with throughout every page of these inimitable writings? To quote all the passages in them, relative to these subjects, would be almost to transcribe the whole. It is sufficient to observe, that they are every where stamped with such apparent marks of supernatural assistance, as render them indisputably superior to, and totally unlike all human compositions whatever; and this superiority and dissimilarity is still more strongly marked by one remarkable circumstance peculiar to themselves, which is, that whilst the moral parts, being of the most general use, are intelligible to the meanest capacities, the learned and inquisitive, throughout all ages, perpetually find in them inexhaustible discoveries concerning the nature, attributes, and dispensations of providence.

To say the truth, before the appearance of Christianity there existed nothing like religion on the face of the earth, the Jewish only excepted: all other nations were immersed in the grossest idolatry, which had little or no connection with morality, except to corrupt it by the infamous examples of their own imaginary deities. They all worshiped a multiplicity of gods and demons, whose favor they courted by impious, obscene, and ridiculous ceremonies, and whose anger they endeavored to appease by the most abominable cruelties. In the politest ages of the politest nations in the world, at a time when Greece and Rome had carried the arts of oratory, poetry, history, architecture, and sculpture to the highest perfection, and made no inconsiderable advances in those of mathematics, natural, and even moral philosophy—in reli-

gious knowledge they had made none at all—a strong presumption, that the noblest efforts of the mind of man, unassisted by revelation, were unequal to the task. Some few, indeed, of their philosophers were wise enough to reject these general absurdities, and dared to attempt a loftier flight. Plato introduced many sublime ideas of nature, and its first cause, and of the immortality of the soul, which being above his own and all human discovery, he probably acquired from the books of Moses, or the conversation of some Jewish rabbies, which he might have met with in Egypt, where he resided, and studied for several years. From him Aristotle, and from both, Cicero and some few others, drew most amazing stores of philosophical science, and carried their researches into divine truths as far as human genius alone could penetrate. But these were bright constellations, which appeared singly in several centuries, and even these, with all this knowledge, were very deficient in true theology. From the visible works of the creation they traced the being and principal attributes of the Creator; but the relation which his being and attributes bear to man they little understood; of piety and devotion they had scarce any sense, nor could they form any mode of worship worthy of the purity and perfection of the divine nature. They occasionally flung out many elegant encomiums on the native beauty and excellence of virtue; but they founded it not on the commands of God, nor connected it with a holy life, nor hung out the happiness of heaven as its reward, or its object. They sometimes talked of virtue carrying men to heaven, and placing them amongst the gods; but by this virtue they meant only the invention of arts, or feats of arms;

for with them heaven was open only to legislators and conquerors, the civilizers or destroyers of mankind. This was, then, the summit of religion in the most polished nations in the world; and even this was confined to a few philosophers, prodigies of genius and literature, who were little attended to, and less understood by the generality of mankind in their own countries; whilst all the rest were involved in one common cloud of ignorance and superstition.

At this time Christianity broke forth from the east like a rising sun, and dispelled this universal darkness, which obscured every part of the globe, and even at this day prevails in all those remote regions to which its salutary influence has not as yet extended. From all those which it has reached, it has, notwithstanding its corruptions, banished all those enormities, and introduced a more rational devotion, and pure morals: it has taught men the unity and attributes of the Supreme Being, the remission of sins, the resurrection of the dead, life everlasting, and the kingdom of heaven; doctrines as inconceivable to the wisest of mankind antecedent to its appearance, as the Newtonian system is at this day to the most ignorant tribes of savages in the wilds of America; doctrines which human reason never could have discovered; but which, when discovered, coincide with, and are confirmed by it; and which, though beyond the reach of all the learning and penetration of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, are now clearly laid open to the eye of every peasant and mechanic with the Bible in his hand. These are all plain facts, too glaring to be contradicted; and therefore, whatever we may think of the authority of these books, the relations which

they contain, or the inspiration of their authors—of these facts, no man, who has eyes to read, or ears to hear, can entertain a doubt; because there are the books, and in them is this religion.

### PROPOSITION III.

My third proposition is this: that from this book, called the New Testament, *may be collected a system of ethics, in which every moral precept, founded on reason, is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection than in any other of the ancient philosophers of preceding ages; every moral precept, founded on false principles, is entirely omitted, and many new precepts added, peculiarly corresponding with the new object of this religion.*

By a moral precept founded on reason, I mean all those which enforce the practice of such duties as reason informs us must improve our nature, and conduce to the happiness of mankind: such are piety to God, benevolence to man, justice, charity, temperance, and sobriety, with all those which prohibit the commission of the contrary vices, all which debase our natures, and, by mutual injuries, introduce universal disorder, and consequently universal misery. By precepts founded on false principles, I mean those which recommend fictitious virtues, productive of none of these salutary effects, and therefore, however celebrated and admired, are in fact no virtues at all; such are valor, patriotism, and friendship.

That virtues of the first kind are carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection by the Christian religion than by any other, it is here unnecessary to



prove, because this is a truth which has been frequently demonstrated by her friends, and never once denied by the most determined of her adversaries ; but it will be proper to show, that those of the latter sort are MOST JUDICIOUSLY OMITTED ; because they have really no intrinsic merit in them, and are totally incompatible with the genius and spirit of this institution.

*Valor*, for instance, or active courage, is for the most part constitutional, and therefore can have no more claim to moral merit than wit, beauty, health, strength, or any other endowment of the mind or body ; and so far is it from producing any salutary effects by introducing peace, order, or happiness in society, that it is the usual perpetrator of all the violences which, from retaliated injuries, distract the world with bloodshed and devastation. It is the engine by which the strong are enabled to plunder the weak, the proud to trample upon the humble, and the guilty to oppress the innocent ; it is the chief instrument which ambition employs in her unjust pursuits of wealth and power, and is therefore so much extolled by her votaries : it was indeed congenial with the religion of pagans, whose gods were, for the most part, made out of deceased heroes, exalted to heaven as a reward for the mischiefs which they had perpetrated upon earth ; and therefore, with them this was the first of virtues, and had even engrossed that denomination to itself. But whatever merit it may have assumed among pagans, with Christians it can pretend to none, and few or none are the occasions in which they are permitted to exert it. They are so far from being allowed to inflict evil, that they are forbid even to resist it ; they are so far from being encouraged to revenge in

juries, that one of their first duties is to forgive them; so far from being incited to destroy their enemies, that they are commanded to love them, and serve them to the utmost of their power. If Christian nations therefore were nations of Christians, all war would be impossible and unknown amongst them, and valor could be neither of use or estimation, and therefore could never have a place in the catalogue of Christian virtues, being irreconcilable with all its precepts. I object not to the praise and honors bestowed on the valiant: they are the least tribute which can be paid them by those who enjoy safety and affluence by the intervention of their dangers and sufferings: I assert only, that active courage can never be a Christian virtue, because a Christian can have nothing to do with it. Passive courage is indeed frequently and properly inculcated by this meek and suffering religion, under the titles of patience and resignation: a real and substantial virtue this, and a direct contrast to the former; for passive courage arises from the noblest dispositions of the human mind, from a contempt of misfortunes, pain, and death, and a confidence in the protection of the Almighty: active from the meanest; from passion, vanity, and self-dependence. Passive courage is derived from a zeal for truth, and a perseverance in duty; active is the offspring of pride and revenge, and the parent of cruelty and injustice; in short, passive courage is the resolution of a philosopher; active, the ferocity of a savage. Nor is this more incompatible with the precepts, than with the object of this religion, which is the attainment of the kingdom of heaven; for valor is not that sort of violence by which that kingdom is

to be taken ; nor are the turbulent spirits of heroes and conquerors admissible into those regions of peace, subordination, and tranquility.

*Patriotism*, also, that celebrated virtue, so much practised in ancient, and so much professed in modern times ; that virtue which so long preserved the liberties of Greece, and exalted Rome to the empire of the world ; this celebrated virtue, I say, must also be excluded, because it not only falls short of, but directly counteracts the extensive benevolence of this religion. A Christian is of no country, he is a citizen of the world ; and his neighbors and countrymen are the inhabitants of the remotest regions, whenever their distresses demand his friendly assistance. Christianity commands us to love all mankind ; patriotism to oppress all other countries to advance the imaginary prosperity of our own. Christianity enjoins us to imitate the universal benevolence of our Creator, who pours forth his blessings on every nation upon earth ; patriotism to copy the mean partiality of an English parish officer, who thinks injustice and cruelty meritorious whenever they promote the interests of his own inconsiderable village. This has ever been a favorite virtue with mankind, because it conceals self-interest under the mask of public spirit, not only from others, but even from themselves, and gives a license to inflict wrongs and injuries, not only with impunity, but with applause ; but it is so diametrically opposite to the great characteristic of this institution, that it never could have been admitted into the list of Christian virtues.

*Friendship*, likewise, although more congenial to the principles of Christianity, arising from more ten-

der and amiable dispositions, could never gain admittance amongst her benevolent precepts for the same reason—because it is too narrow and confined, and appropriates that benevolence to a single object which is here commanded to be extended over all. Where friendships arise from similarity of sentiments and disinterested affections, they are advantageous, agreeable, and innocent, but have little pretensions to merit; for it is justly observed, “If ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.” Luke 6 : 32. But if they are formed from alliances in parties, factions, and interests, or from a participation of vices, the usual parents of what are called friendships among mankind, they are then both mischievous and criminal, and consequently forbidden; but in their utmost purity they deserve no commendation from this religion.

To the judicious omission of these false virtues we may add that remarkable silence which the Christian legislator every where preserves on subjects, esteemed by all others of the highest importance, *Civil Government*, *National Policy*, and the *Rights of War and Peace*. Of these he has not taken the least notice, probably for this plain reason, because it would have been impossible to have formed any explicit regulations concerning them, which must not have been inconsistent with the purity of his religion, or with the practical observance of such imperfect creatures as men, ruling over and contending with each other. For instance, had he absolutely forbid all resistance to the reigning powers, he had constituted a plan of despotism, and made men slaves; had he allowed it he must have authorized disobedience, and made them

rebels ; had he, in direct terms, prohibited all war, he must have left his followers for ever an easy prey to every infidel invader ; had he permitted it, he must have licensed all that rapine and murder with which it is unavoidably attended.

Let us now examine what are those NEW PRECEPTS in this religion peculiarly corresponding with the new object of it : that is, preparing us for the kingdom of heaven. Of these, the chief are poorness of spirit, forgiveness of injuries, and charity to all men ; to these we may add renerance, faith, self-abasement, and a detachment from the world, all moral duties peculiar to this religion, and absolutely necessary to the attainment of its end.

“ Blessed are the *poor in spirit*, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew, 5 : 3. By which, poorness of spirit is to be understood a disposition of mind meek, humble, submissive to power, void of ambition, patient of injuries, and free from all resentment. This was so new, and so opposite to the ideas of all Pagan moralists, that they thought this temper of mind a criminal and contemptible meanness, which must induce men to sacrifice the glory of their country and their honor to a shameful pusillanimity ; and such it appears to almost all who are called Christians, even at this day, who not only reject it in practice, but disavow it in principle, notwithstanding this explicit declaration of their Master. We see them revenging the smallest affronts by premeditated murder, as individuals, on principles of honor ; and, in their national capacities, destroying each other with fire and sword for the low considerations of commercial interests, the balance of

rival powers, or the ambition of princes. We see them with their last breath animating each other to a savage revenge, and, in the agonies of death, plunging with feeble arms their daggers into the hearts of their opponents; and, what is still worse, we hear all these barbarisms celebrated by historians, flattered by poets, applauded in theatres, approved in senates, and even sanctified in pulpits. But universal practice cannot alter the nature of things, nor universal error change the nature of truth. Pride was not made for men, but humility, meekness, and resignation; that is, poorness of spirit was made for man, and properly belongs to his dependent and precarious situation, and is the only disposition of mind which can enable him to enjoy ease and quiet here and happiness hereafter. Yet was this important precept entirely unknown until it was promulgated by him who said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven: Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein." Mark, 10 : 14.

Another precept equally new, and no less excellent, is *forgiveness of injuries*. "Ye have heard," says Christ, "thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, love your enemies; bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you." Matthew, 5 : 43. This was a lesson so new, and so utterly unknown till taught by his doctrines, and enforced by his example, that the wisest moralists of the wisest nations and ages represented the desire of revenge as a mark of a noble mind, and the accomplishment of it as one of the chief felicities

attendant on a fortunate man. But how much more magnanimous, how much more beneficial to mankind is forgiveness! It is more *magnanimous*, because every generous and exalted disposition of the human mind is requisite to the practice of it, for these alone can enable us to bear the wrongs and insults of wickedness and folly with patience, and to look down on the perpetrators of them with pity, rather than indignation; these alone can teach us that such are but a part of those sufferings allotted to us in this state of probation; and to know, that to overcome evil with good, is the most glorious of all victories. It is the most *beneficial*, because this amiable conduct alone can put an end to an eternal succession of injuries and retaliations; for every retaliation becomes a new injury, and requires another act of revenge for satisfaction. But would we observe this salutary precept, to love our enemies, and do good to those who despitefully use us, this obstinate benevolence would at last conquer the most inveterate hearts, and we should have no enemies to forgive. How much more exalted a character therefore is a Christian martyr, suffering with resignation, and praying for the guilty, than that of a Pagan hero, breathing revenge, and destroying the innocent? Yet noble and useful as this virtue is, before the appearance of this religion it was not only unpractised, but decried in principle, as mean and ignominious, though so obvious a remedy for most of the miseries of this life, and so necessary a qualification for the happiness of another.

A third precept, first noticed and first enjoined by this institution, is *charity to all men*. What this is, we may best learn from the admirable description

painted in the following words: "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in truth; beareth all things; believeth all things; hopeth all things; endureth all things." 1 Cor. 13: 4. Here we have an accurate delineation of this bright constellation of all virtues, which consists not, as many imagine, in the building of monasteries, endowment of hospitals, or the distribution of alms, but in such an amiable disposition of mind as exercises itself every hour in acts of kindness, patience, complacency, and benevolence to all around us, and which alone is able to promote happiness in the present life, or render us capable of receiving it in another: and yet this is totally new, and so it is declared to be by the author of it: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another; by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." John 13: 34. This benevolent disposition is made the great characteristic of a Christian, the test of his obedience, and the mark by which he is to be distinguished. This love for each other is that charity just now described, and contains all those qualities which are there attributed to it: humility, patience, meekness, and beneficence; without which we must live in perpetual discord, and consequently cannot pay obedience to his commandment by loving one another: a commandment so sublime, so rational, and so beneficial, so wisely calculated to correct the depravity, diminish the wickedness, and abate the



miseries of human nature, that, did we universally comply with it, we should soon be relieved from all the inquietudes arising from our own unruly passions, anger, envy, revenge, malice, and ambition, as well as from all those injuries to which we are perpetually exposed from the indulgence of the same passions in others. It would also preserve our minds in such a state of tranquility, and so prepare them for the kingdom of heaven, that we should slide out of a life of peace, love, and benevolence, into that celestial society, by an almost imperceptible transition. Yet was this commandment entirely new, when given by him, who so entitles it, and has made it the capital duty of his religion, because the most indispensably necessary to the attainment of its great object, the kingdom of heaven; into which, if proud, turbulent, and vindictive spirits were permitted to enter, they must unavoidably destroy the happiness of that state, by the operations of the same passions and vices by which they disturb the present; and therefore all such must be eternally excluded, not only as a punishment, but also from incapacity.

*Repentance*, by this, we plainly see, is another new moral duty strenuously insisted on by this religion, and by no other, because absolutely necessary to the accomplishment of its end; for this alone can purge us from those transgressions from which we cannot be totally exempted in this state of trial and temptation, and purify us from that depravity in our nature which renders us incapable of attaining this end. Hence, also, we may learn that no repentance can remove this incapacity, but such as entirely changes the nature and disposition of the offender, which, in the

language of Scripture, is called "being born again." Mere contrition for past crimes, and even the pardon of them, cannot effect this, unless it operates to this entire conversion or new birth, as it is properly and emphatically named; for sorrow can no more purify a mind corrupted by a long continuance in vicious habits, than it can restore health to a body distempered by a long course of vice and intemperance. Hence, also, every one who is in the least acquainted with himself, may judge of the reasonableness of the hope that is in him, and of his situation in a future state, by that of his present. If he feels in himself a temper proud, turbulent, vindictive, and malevolent, and a violent attachment to the pleasures or business of the world, he may be assured that he must be excluded from the kingdom of heaven; not only because his conduct can have no such reward, but because, if admitted, he would find there no objects satisfactory to his passions, inclinations, and pursuits; and therefore could only disturb the happiness of others, without enjoying any share of it himself.

*Faith* is another moral duty enjoined by this institution, of a species so new, that the philosophers of antiquity had no word expressive of this idea, nor any such idea to be expressed; for the word *πιστις*, or *fides*, which we translate faith, was never used by any Pagan writer in a sense the least similar to that to which it is applied in the New Testament, where in general it signifies an humble, teachable, and candid disposition, a trust in God, and confidence in his promises. When applied particularly to Christianity, it means no more than a belief of this single proposition, that Christ was the Son of God; that is, in the lan-

guage of those writings, the Messiah, who was foretold by the prophets, and expected by the Jews ; who was sent by God into the world to preach righteousness, judgment, and everlasting life, and to die as an atonement for the sins of mankind. This was all that Christ required to be believed by those who were willing to become his disciples : he who does not believe this, is not a Christian ; and he who does, believes the whole that is essential to his profession, and all that is properly comprehended under the name of faith. This unfortunate word has indeed been so tortured and so misapplied to mean every absurdity which artifice could impose upon ignorance, that it has lost all pretensions to the title of virtue ; but if brought back to the simplicity of its original signification, it well deserves that name, because it usually arises from the most amiable dispositions, and is always a direct contrast to pride, obstinacy, and self-conceit. If taken in the extensive sense of an assent to the evidence of things not seen, it comprehends the existence of a God, and a future state, and is therefore not only itself a moral virtue, but the source from whence all others must proceed ; for on the belief of these all religion and morality must entirely depend. It cannot be altogether void of moral excellence, (as some represent it,) because it is in a degree voluntary ; for daily experience shows us, that men not only pretend to, but actually do believe, and disbelieve almost any propositions which best suit their interests or inclinations, and unfeignedly change their sincere opinions with their situations and circumstances. For we have power over the mind's eye, as well as over the body's to shut it against the strongest rays of truth and reli-

gion, whenever they become painful to us; and to open it again to the faint glimmerings of scepticism and infidelity, when we "love darkness rather than light, because our deeds are evil." John 3 : 19. And this, I think, sufficiently refutes all objections to the moral nature of faith, drawn from the supposition of its being quite involuntary, and necessarily dependent on the degree of evidence which is offered to our understandings.

*Self-abasement* is another moral duty inculcated by this religion only; which requires us to impute even our own virtues to the grace and favor of our Creator, and to acknowledge that we can do nothing good by our own powers, unless assisted by his overruling influence. This doctrine seems at first sight to infringe on our free-will, and to deprive us of all merit; but, on a closer examination, the truth of it may be demonstrated both by reason and experience, and that in fact it does not impair the one, or depreciate the other; and that it is productive of so much humility, resignation, and dependence on God, that it justly claims a place amongst the most illustrious moral virtues. Yet was this duty utterly repugnant to the proud and self-sufficient principles of the ancient philosophers, as well as modern deists; and therefore, before the publication of the Gospel, totally unknown and uncomprehended.

*Detachment from the world* is another moral virtue constituted by this religion alone; so new, that even at this day few of its professors can be persuaded that it is required, or that it is any virtue at all. By this detachment from the world, is not to be understood a seclusion from society, abstraction from all business, or retirement to a gloomy cloister. Industry and labor

cheerfulness and hospitality, are frequently recommended ; nor is the acquisition of wealth and honors prohibited, if they can be obtained by honest means and a moderate degree of attention and care ; but such an unremitted anxiety and perpetual application as engross our whole time and thoughts, are forbid, because they are incompatible with the spirit of this religion, and must utterly disqualify us for the attainment of its great end. We toil on in the vain pursuits and frivolous occupations of the world, die in our harness, and then expect, if no gigantic crime stands in the way, to step immediately into the kingdom of heaven : but this is impossible ! for without a previous detachment from the business of this world, we cannot be prepared for the happiness of another. Yet this could make no part of the morality of pagans, because their virtues were altogether connected with this business, and consisted chiefly in conducting it with honor to themselves and benefit to the public. But Christianity has a nobler object in view, which, if not attended to, must be lost for ever. This object is that celestial mansion of which we should never lose sight, and to which we should be ever advancing during our journey through life ; but this by no means precludes us from performing the business, or enjoying the amusements of travelers, provided they detain us not too long, nor lead us too far out of our way.

It cannot be denied, that the great Author of the Christian institution first and singly ventured to oppose all the chief principles of pagan virtue, and to introduce a religion directly opposite to those erroneous, though long-established opinions, both in its duties and in its object. The most celebrated virtues

of the ancients were high spirit, intrepid courage, and implacable resentment.

*Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer*, [turbulent, irascible, implacable, virulent,] was the portrait of the most illustrious hero, drawn by one of the first poets of antiquity. To all these admired qualities, those of a true Christian are an exact contrast; for this religion constantly enjoins poorness of spirit, meekness, patience, and forgiveness of injuries. "But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil; but whoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Matt. 5 : 39. The favorite characters among the pagans were, the turbulent, ambitious, and intrepid, who, through toils and dangers, acquired wealth, and spent it in luxury, magnificence, and corruption; but both these are equally adverse to the Christian system, which forbids all extraordinary efforts to obtain wealth, care to secure, or thought concerning the enjoyment of it. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth," &c. "Take no thought, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed? for after all these things do the Gentiles seek." Matt. 6 : 31. The chief object of the pagans was immortal fame; for this their poets sang, their heroes fought, and their patriots died; and this was hung out by their philosophers and legislators as the great incitement to all noble and virtuous deeds. But what says the Christian legislator to his disciples on this subject? "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and shall say all manner of evil against you *falsely* for my sake; rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven." Matt. 5 : 11. So widely different is the genius of the pagan and Christian morality, that

I will venture to affirm, that the most celebrated virtues of the former are not less opposite to the spirit, or inconsistent with the end of the latter, than even their most infamous vices; and that a Brutus, wrenching vengeance out of his hands to whom alone it belongs, by murdering the oppressor of his country; or a Cato, murdering himself from an impatience of control, leaves the world as unqualified for, and inadmissible into the kingdom of heaven, as even a Messalina, or a Heliogabalus, with all their profligacy about them.

Nothing, I believe, has so much contributed to corrupt the true spirit of the Christian institution, as that partiality which we contract from our earliest education for the manners of pagan antiquity: from whence we learn to adopt every moral idea which is repugnant to it; to applaud false virtues, which that disavows; to be guided by laws of honor, which that abhors; to imitate characters, which that detests; and to behold heroes, patriots, conquerors, and suicides with admiration, whose conduct that utterly condemns. From a coalition of these opposite principles, was generated that monstrous system of cruelty and benevolence, of barbarism and civility, of rapine and justice, of fighting and devotion, of revenge and generosity, which harassed the world for several centuries with crusades, holy wars, knight-errantry, and single combats; and even still retains influence enough, under the name of honor, to defeat the most beneficent ends of this holy institution. I mean not by this to pass any censure on the principles of valor, patriotism, or honor: they may be useful, and perhaps necessary, in the commerce and business of the present turbulent and imperfect state; and these who are actuated by them

may be virtuous, honest, and even religious men: all that I assert is, that they cannot be Christians. A Christian may be overpowered by passions and temptations, and his actions may contradict his principles; but a man, whose ruling principle is honor, however virtuous he may be, cannot be a Christian, because he erects a standard of duty, and deliberately adheres to it, diametrically opposite to the whole tenor of that religion.

The contrast between the Christian, and all other institutions, religious or moral, previous to its appearance, is sufficiently evident; and surely the superiority of the former is as little to be disputed, unless any one shall undertake to prove that humility, patience, forgiveness, and benevolence are less amiable, and less beneficial qualities than pride, turbulence, revenge, and malignity: that the contempt of riches is less noble than their acquisition by fraud and villainy, or the distribution of them to the poor less commendable than avarice or profusion; or that a real immortality in the kingdom of heaven is an object less exalted, less rational, and less worthy of pursuit, than an imaginary immortality in the applause of men: that worthless tribute, which the folly of one part of mankind pays to the wickedness of the other; a tribute which a wise man ought always to despise, because a good man can scarce ever obtain.

### CONCLUSION.

If I mistake not, I have now fully established the truth of my three propositions:—



First, That there is now extant a book entitled the New Testament.

Secondly, That from this book may be extracted a system of religion entirely new; both in its object, and its doctrines; not only superior to, but totally unlike every thing which had ever before entered into the mind of man.

Thirdly, That from this book may likewise be collected a system of ethics, in which every moral precept, founded on reason, is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection than in any other of the wisest philosophers of preceding ages; every moral precept, founded on false principles, totally omitted; and many new precepts added, peculiarly corresponding with the new object of this religion.

Every one of these propositions, I am persuaded, is incontrovertibly true; and if true, this short but certain conclusion must inevitably follow; *that such a system of religion and morality could not possibly have been the work of any man, or set of men, much less of those obscure, ignorant, and illiterate persons who actually did discover and publish it to the world; and that therefore it must have been effected by the supernatural interposition of Divine power and wisdom; that is, that it must derive its origin from God.*

This argument seems to me little short of demonstration, and is indeed founded on the very same reasoning by which the material world is proved to be the work of his invisible hand. We view with admiration the heavens and the earth, and all therein contained; we contemplate with amazement the minute bodies of animals too small for perception, and the immense

planetary orbs too vast for imagination. We are certain that these cannot be the works of man; and therefore we conclude, with reason, that they must be the productions of an omnipotent Creator. In the same manner we see here a scheme of religion and morality unlike and superior to all ideas of the human mind, equally impossible to have been discovered by the knowledge, as invented by the artifice of man; and therefore by the very same mode of reasoning, and with the same justice, we conclude, that it must derive its origin from the same omnipotent and omniscient Being.

Nor was the *propagation* of this religion less extraordinary than the religion itself, or less above the reach of all human power, than the discovery of it was above that of all human understanding. It is well known, that in the course of a very few years it was spread over all the principal parts of Asia and of Europe, and this by the ministry only of an inconsiderable number of the most inconsiderable persons; that at this time Paganism was in the highest repute, believed universally by the vulgar, and patronized by the great; that the wisest men of the wisest nations assisted at its sacrifices, and consulted its oracles on the most important occasions. Whether these were the tricks of the priests or of the devil, is of no consequence, as they were both equally unlikely to be converted, or overcome: the fact is certain, that, on the preaching of a few fishermen, their altars were deserted, and their deities were dumb. This miracle they undoubtedly performed, whatever we may think of the rest; and this is surely sufficient to prove the authority of their commission; and to convince us, that ne-

ther their undertaking nor the execution of it could possibly be their own.

How much this Divine institution has been corrupted, or how soon these corruptions began; how far it has been discolored by the false notions of illiterate ages, or blended with fictions by pious frauds; or how early these notions and fictions were introduced, it may be difficult now precisely to ascertain; but surely, no man, who seriously considers the excellence and novelty of its doctrines, the manner in which it was at first propagated through the world, the persons who achieved that wonderful work, and the originality of those writings in which it is still recorded, can possibly believe that it could ever have been the production of imposture or chance; or that from an imposture the most wicked and blasphemous, (for if an imposture, such it is,) all the religion and virtue now existing on earth can derive their source.

But, notwithstanding what has been here urged, if any man can believe that, at a time when the literature of Greece and Rome, then in their meridian lustre, were insufficient for the task, the son of a carpenter, with twelve of the humblest and most illiterate men, his associates, unassisted by any supernatural power, should be able to discover or invent a system of theology the most sublime, and of ethics the most perfect, which had escaped the penetration and learning of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero; and that from this system, by their own sagacity, they had excluded every false virtue, though universally admired, and admitted every true virtue, though despised and ridiculed by all the rest of the world;—if any one can believe that these men could become impostors, for no

other purpose than the propagation of truth, villains for no end but to teach honesty, and martyrs, without the least prospect of honor or advantage; or that, if all this should have been possible, these few inconsiderable persons should have been able, in the course of a few years, to have spread this their religion over most parts of the then known world, in opposition to the interests, pleasures, ambition, prejudices, and even reason of mankind; to have triumphed over the power of princes, the intrigues of states, the force of custom, the blindness of zeal, the influence of priests, the arguments of orators, and the philosophy of the world, without any supernatural assistance;—if any one can believe all these miraculous events, contradictory to the experience of the powers and dispositions of human nature, he must be possessed of much more faith than is necessary to make him a Christian, and remain an unbeliever from mere credulity.

But should these credulous infidels, after all, be in the right, and this pretended revelation be all a fable, from believing it what harm could ensue? Would it render princes more tyrannical, or subjects more ungovernable? the rich more insolent, or the poor more disorderly? Would it make worse parents or children, husbands or wives, masters or servants, friends or neighbors? Or would it not make men more virtuous, and consequently more happy in every situation? It could not be criminal; it could not be detrimental. It could not be *criminal*, because it cannot be a crime to assent to such an evidence as has been able to convince the best and wisest of mankind; by which, if false, Providence must have permitted men to deceive each other for the most beneficial ends, and which,

therefore, it would be surely more meritorious to believe from a disposition of faith and charity, which believeth all things, than to reject, with scorn, from obstinacy and self-conceit. It cannot be *detrimental*, because, if Christianity is a fable, it is a fable the belief of which is the only principle which can retain men in a steady and uniform course of virtue, piety, and devotion ; or can support them in the hour of distress, of sickness, and of death. Whatever might be the operations of true deism on the minds of Pagan philosophers, that can now avail us nothing ; for that light which once lightened them, is now absorbed in the brighter illumination of the Gospel : we can now form no rational system of deism but what must be borrowed from that source ; and, as far as it reaches towards perfection, must be exactly the same ; and therefore, if we will not accept of Christianity, we have no religion at all. Accordingly, we see that those who fly from this, scarce ever stop at deism, but hasten on with alacrity to a total rejection of all religious and moral principles whatever.

If I have here demonstrated the divine origin of the Christian religion by an argument which cannot be confuted, no others, however plausible or numerous, founded on probabilities, doubts, and conjectures, can ever disprove it ; because if it is once shown to be true, it cannot be false. But as many arguments of this kind have bewildered some candid and ingenuous minds, I shall here bestow a few lines on those which have the most weight, in order to wipe out, or at least to diminish, their perplexing influence.

But here I must previously observe, that the most

insurmountable, as well as the most usual obstacle to our belief, arises from our passions, appetites, and interests ; for faith being an act of the will as much as of the understanding, we oftener *disbelieve for want of inclination* than want of evidence. The first step towards thinking this revelation true, is our hope that it is so ; for whenever we much wish any proposition to be true, we are not far from believing it. It is certainly for the interest of all good men that its authority should be well founded, and still more beneficial to the bad, if ever they intend to be better, because it is the only system, either of reason or religion, which can give them any assurance of pardon. The punishment of vice is a debt due to justice, which cannot be remitted without compensation. Repentance can be no compensation ; it may change a wicked man's disposition, and prevent his offending for the future, but can lay no claim to pardon for what is past. If any one, by profligacy and extravagance, contracts a debt, repentance may make him wiser and hinder him from running into farther distresses, but can never pay off his old bonds, for which he must be ever accountable, unless they are discharged by himself, or some other in his stead. This very discharge Christianity alone holds forth on our repentance, and, if true, will certainly perform ; the truth of it, therefore must ardently be wished for by all, except the wicked, who are determined neither to repent nor reform. It is well worth every man's while, who either is, or intends to be virtuous, to believe Christianity if he can, because he will find it the surest preservative against all vicious habits and their attendant evils ; the best resource under distresses and disappointments, ill-

health and ill-fortune ; and the firmest basis on which contemplation can rest ; and without some, the human mind is never perfectly at ease. But if any one is attached to a favorite pleasure, or eagerly engaged in worldly pursuits, incompatible with the precepts of this religion, and he believes it, he must either relinquish those pursuits with uneasiness, or persist in them with remorse and dissatisfaction, and therefore must commence unbeliever in his own defence. With such I shall not dispute, nor pretend to persuade men by arguments to make themselves miserable ; but to those who, not afraid that this religion may be true, are really affected by such objections, I will offer the following answers, which, though short, will, I doubt not, be sufficient to show them their weakness and futility.

In the first place, then, some have been so bold as to strike at the root of all revelation from God, by asserting that it is *incredible*, because *unnecessary*, and unnecessary because the *reason* which he has bestowed on mankind is *sufficiently able to discover all the religious and moral duties* which he requires of them, if they would but attend to her precepts, and be guided by her friendly admonitions. Mankind have undoubtedly, at various times, from the remotest ages, received so much knowledge by divine communications, and have ever been so much inclined to impute it all to their own sufficiency, that it is now difficult to determine what human reason, unassisted, can effect. But to form a true judgment on this subject, let us turn our eyes to those remote regions of the globe to which this supernatural assistance has never yet extended, and we shall there see men endued with sense and reason, not inferior to our own, so far from

being capable of forming systems of religion and morality, that they are at this day totally unable to make a nail or a hatchet; from whence we may surely be convinced that reason alone is so far from being sufficient to offer to mankind a perfect religion, that it has never yet been able to lead them to any degree of culture or civilization whatever. These have uniformly flowed from that great fountain of divine communication opened in the East, in the earliest ages, and thence been gradually diffused in salubrious streams throughout the various regions of the earth. Their rise and progress, by surveying the history of the world, may easily be traced backwards to their source; and wherever these have not as yet been able to penetrate, we there find the human species not only void of all true religious and moral sentiments, but not the least emerged from their original ignorance and barbarity; which seems a demonstration, that although human reason is capable of progression in science, yet the first foundations must be laid by supernatural instructions; for surely no other probable cause can be assigned why any one part of mankind should have made such an amazing progress in religious, moral, metaphysical, and philosophical inquiries; such wonderful improvements in policy, legislation, commerce, and manufactures; while the other part, formed with the same natural capacities, and divided only by seas and mountains, should remain, during the same number of ages, in a state little superior to brutes, without government, without laws or letters, and even without clothes and habitations; murdering each other to satiate their revenge, and devouring each other to appease their hunger. I say no cause can be assigned for this amazing difference, except that the



first have received information from those divine communications recorded in the Scriptures, and the latter have never yet been favored with such assistance. This remarkable contrast seems an unanswerable, though, perhaps, a new proof of the necessity of revelation, and a solid refutation of all arguments against it, drawn from the sufficiency of human reason. And as reason, in her natural state, is thus incapable of making any progress in knowledge, so when furnished with materials by supernatural aid, if left to the guidance of her own wild imaginations, she falls into more numerous and more gross errors than her own native ignorance could ever have suggested. There is then no absurdity so extravagant which she is not ready to adopt; she has persuaded some that there is no God; others, that there can be no future state; she has taught some that there is no difference between vice and virtue, and that to cut a man's throat, and to relieve his necessities, are actions equally meritorious; she has convinced many that they have no free will, in opposition to their own experience; some, that there can be no such thing as soul or spirit, contrary to their own perceptions; and others, no such thing as matter or body, in contradiction to their senses. By analyzing all things, she can show that there is nothing in any thing; by perpetual sifting, she can reduce all existence to the invisible dust of scepticism; and, by recurring to first principles, prove, to the satisfaction of her followers, that there are no principles at all. How far such a guide is to be depended on, in the important concerns of religion and morals, I leave to the judgment of every considerate man to determine. This is certain, that human reason, in its highest state of

cultivation amongst the philosophers of Greece and Rome, was never able to form a religion comparable to Christianity ; nor have all those sources of moral virtue, such as truth, beauty, and the fitness of things, which modern philosophers have endeavored to substitute in its stead, ever been effectual to produce good men ; and have themselves often been the productions of some of the worst.

Others there are, who allow that a revelation from God may be both necessary and credible, but alledge, that the Scriptures, that is the books of the Old and New Testament, cannot be that revelation ; because in them are to be found *errors and inconsistencies*, fabulous stories, false facts, and false philosophy, which can never be derived from the fountain of all wisdom and truth. To this I reply, that the Scriptures are the history of a revelation from God : the revelation itself is derived from God ; the history of it is the production of men, and therefore the truth of it is not in the least affected by their fallibility, but depends on the internal evidence of its own supernatural excellence. If, in these books, such a religion as has been here described actually exists, no seeming, or even real defects found in them can disprove the Divine origin of this religion, or invalidate my argument. Let us, for instance, grant that the Mosaic history of the creation was founded on the erroneous but popular principles of those early ages, who imagined the earth to be a vast plain, and the celestial bodies no more than luminaries hung up in the concave firmament to enlighten it ; will it from thence follow, that Moses could not be a proper instrument, in the hands of Providence, to impart to the Jews a

Divine law, because he was not inspired with a foreknowledge of the Copernican and Newtonian systems? or that Christ must be an impostor, because Moses was not an astronomer? Let us also suppose that the accounts of Christ's temptation in the wilderness, the devil's taking refuge in the herd of swine, with several other narrations in the New Testament, frequently ridiculed by unbelievers, were all but stories accommodated to the ignorance and superstitions of the times and countries in which they were written, would this impeach the excellence of the Christian religion, or the authority of its founder? The sacred writers were undoubtedly directed by supernatural influence in all things necessary to the great work which they were appointed to perform. At particular times, and on particular occasions, they were enabled to utter prophecies, to speak languages, and to work miracles; but in the science of history, geography, astronomy, and philosophy, they appear to have been no better instructed than others. They related facts like honest men; they recorded the divine lessons of their master with the utmost fidelity; and apparent discrepancies prove only that they did not act or write in a combination to deceive, but do not in the least impeach the truth of the revelation which they published; which depends not on any external evidence whatever. For I will venture to affirm, that if any one could prove, what is impossible to be proved, because it is not true, that there are errors in geography, chronology, and philosophy, in every page of the Bible, that the prophecies therein delivered are all but fortunate guesses, or artful applications, and the miracles there recorded no better than legendary

tales; if one could show that these books were never written by their pretended authors, but were posterior impositions on illiterate and credulous ages; all these wonderful discoveries would prove no more than this, that God, for reasons to us unknown, had thought proper to permit a revelation, by him communicated to mankind, to be mixed with their ignorance, and corrupted by their frauds from its earliest infancy, in the same manner in which he has visibly permitted it to be mixed and corrupted from that period to the present hour. If, in these books, a religion superior to all human imagination actually exists, it is of no consequence, to the proof of its Divine origin, by what means it was there introduced, or with what human errors and imperfections it is blended. A diamond, though found in a bed of mud, is still a diamond; nor can the dirt, which surrounds it, depreciate its value or destroy its lustre.

To some speculative and refined observers, it has appeared incredible that a wise and benevolent Creator should have constituted *a world upon one plan, and a religion for it on another*; that is, that he should have revealed a religion to mankind which not only contradicts the principal passions and inclinations which he has implanted in their natures, but is incompatible with the whole economy of that world which he has created, and in which he has thought proper to place them. "This, (say they,) with regard to Christianity, is apparently the case: the love of power, riches, honor, and fame, are the great incitements to generous and magnanimous actions; yet by this institution are all these depreciated and discouraged. Government is essential to the nature of man, and cannot

be managed without certain degrees of violence, corruption, and imposition; yet are all these strictly forbid. Nations cannot subsist without wars, nor war be carried on without rapine, desolation, and murder; yet are these prohibited under the severest threats. The non-resistance of evil must subject individuals to continual oppression, and leave nations a defenceless prey to their enemies; yet is this recommended. Perpetual patience under insults and injuries must every day provoke new insults and new injuries; yet is this enjoined. A neglect of all we eat and drink and wear, must put an end to all commerce, manufactures, and industry; yet is this required. In short, were these precepts universally obeyed, the disposition of all human affairs must be entirely changed, and the business of the world, constituted as it now is, could not go on." To all this I answer, that such indeed is the Christian revelation, though some of its advocates may perhaps be unwilling to own it, and such it is constantly declared to be by him who gave it, as well as by those who published it under his immediate direction: to these he says, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." John 15: 19. To the Jews he declares, "ye are of this world; I am not of this world." John 8: 23. St. Paul writes to the Romans, "Be not conformed to this world," Rom. 12: 2; and to the Corinthians, "We speak not the wisdom of this world." Cor. 2: 6. St. James says, "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the

enemy of God." James, 4: 4. This irreconcilable disagreement between Christianity and the world is announced in numberless other places in the New Testament, and indeed by the whole tenor of those writings. These are plain declarations, which in spite of all the evasions of those good managers, who choose to take a little of this world in their way to heaven, stand fixed and immovable against all their arguments drawn from public benefit and pretended necessity, and must ever forbid any reconciliation between the pursuits of this world and the Christian institution: but they, who reject it on this account, enter not into the sublime spirit of this religion, which is not a code of precise laws designed for the well ordering of society, adapted to the ends of worldly convenience, and amenable to the tribunal of human prudence; but a Divine lesson of purity and perfection, so far superior to the low considerations of conquest, government, and commerce, that it takes no more notice of them than of the battles of game-cocks, the policy of bees, or the industry of ants. They recollect not what is the first and principal object of this institution; that it is not, as has been often repeated, to make us happy, or even virtuous in the present life, for the sake of augmenting our happiness here, but to conduct us through a state of dangers and sufferings, of sin and temptation, in such a manner as to qualify us for the enjoyment of happiness hereafter. All other institutions of religion and morals were made for the world, but the characteristic of this is to be against it; and therefore the merits of Christian doctrines are not to be weighed in the scales of public utility, like those of moral precepts, because worldly uti-

ity is not their end. If Christ and his apostles had pretended that the religion which they preached would advance the power, wealth, and prosperity of nations, or of men, they would have deserved but little credit; but they constantly profess the contrary, and every where declare, that their religion is adverse to the world, and all its pursuits. Christ says, speaking of his disciples, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." John, 17 : 16. It can therefore be no imputation on this religion, or on any of its precepts, that they tend not to an end which their author professedly disclaims: nor can it surely be deemed a defect, that it is adverse to the vain pursuits of this world; for so are reason, wisdom and experience; they all teach us the same lesson, they all demonstrate to us every day, that these are begun on false hopes, carried on with disquietude, and end in disappointment. This professed incompatibility with the little, wretched, and iniquitous business of the world, is therefore so far from being a defect in this religion, that, was there no other proof of its divine origin, this alone, I think, would be abundantly sufficient. The great plan and benevolent design of this dispensation is plainly this: to enlighten the minds, purify the religion, and amend the morals of mankind in general, and to select those of them who believe in its divine author and obey his commands, to be successively transplanted into the kingdom of heaven: which gracious offer is impartially tendered to all, who by faith in him, perseverance in meekness, patience, piety, charity, and a detachment from the world, are willing to qualify themselves for this holy and happy society. Was this universally accepted, and did every man observe strict-

ly every precept of the Gospel, the face of human affairs and the economy of the world would indeed be greatly changed; but surely they would be changed for the better; and we should enjoy much more happiness, even here, than at present: for we must not forget, that evils are by it forbid, as well as resistance; injuries, as well as revenge; all unwillingness to diffuse the enjoyments of life, as well as solicitude to acquire them; all obstacles to ambition, as well as ambition itself; and therefore all contentions for power and interest would be at an end; and the world would go on much more happily than it now does. But this universal acceptance of such an offer was not expected from so depraved and imperfect a creature as man: it was foreknown and foretold by him who made it, that few, very few, would accept it on these terms. He says, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Matt. 7: 14. Accordingly, we see that very few are prevailed on by the hope of future happiness to relinquish the pursuit of present pleasures or interests; and therefore, these pursuits are little interrupted by the secession of so inconsiderable a number. As the natural world subsists by the struggles of the same elements, so does the moral by the contentions of the same passions, as from the beginning. The generality of mankind are actuated by the same motives; fight, scuffle, and scramble for power, riches, and pleasures, with the same eagerness; all occupations and professions are exercised with the same alacrity; and there are soldiers, lawyers, statesmen, patriots, and politicians, just as if Christianity had never existed. Thus, we see this wonderful dispensation has answered all



the purposes for which it was intended: it has enlightened the minds, purified the religion, and amended the morals of mankind; and, without subverting the constitution, policy, or business of the world, opened a gate, though a strait one, through which all, who are wise enough to choose it, and are fitted for it, may find an entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

Others have said, that if this revelation had really been from God, his infinite power and goodness could never have suffered it to have been so soon *perverted from its original purity*, to have continued in a state of corruption through the course of so many ages, and at last to have proved so ineffectual to the reformation of mankind. To these I answer, that all this, on examination, must be expected to result from the nature of all revelations communicated to so imperfect a creature as man, and from circumstances peculiar to the rise and progress of the Christian in particular; for when this was first preached to the Gentile nations, though they were not able to withstand the force of its evidence, and therefore received it, yet they could not be prevailed on to relinquish their old superstitions, and former opinions, but chose rather to incorporate them with it; by which means it was necessarily mixed with their ignorance, and their learning; by both which it was equally injured. The people defaced its worship by blending it with their idolatrous ceremonies, and the philosophers corrupted its doctrines by weaving them up with the notions of the Gnostics, Mystics, and Manichæans, the prevailing systems of those times. By degrees its irresistible excellence gained over princes, potentates, and conquerors to its interests, and it was supported by their

patronage, but that patronage soon engaged it in their policies and contests, and destroyed that excellence by which it had been acquired. At length the meek and humble professors of the Gospel enslaved these princes and conquered these conquerors, their patrons, and erected for themselves [in the Papal church] such a stupendous fabric of wealth and power as the world had never seen. They then propagated their religion by the same methods by which it had been persecuted; nations were converted by fire and sword, and the vanquished were baptized with daggers at their throats. All these events we see proceed from a chain of causes and consequences, which could not have been broken without changing the established course of things by a constant series of miracles, or a total alteration of human nature. Whilst that continues as it is, the purest religion must be corrupted by a conjunction with power and riches; and it will also then appear to be much more corrupted than it really is, because many are inclined to think that every deviation from its primitive state is a corruption. Christianity was at first preached by the poor and mean, in holes and caverns, under the iron rod of persecution; and therefore many absurdly conclude, that any degree of wealth or power in its ministers, or of magnificence in its worship, are corruptions inconsistent with the genuine simplicity of its original state: they are offended, that modern bishops should possess titles, palaces, revenues, and coaches, when it is notorious, that their predecessors, the apostles, were despised wanderers, without houses or money, and walked on foot. The apostles indeed lived in a state of poverty and persecution attendant on their particular situation, and the work which

they had undertaken ; but this was no part of their religion, and it can be no more incumbent on their successors to imitate their poverty and meanness, than to be whipped, imprisoned, and put to death, in compliance with their example. These are all but the suggestions of envy and malevolence, but no objections to these favorable alterations in Christianity and its professors ; which, if not abused to the purposes of tyranny and superstition, are in fact no more than the necessary and proper effects of its more prosperous situation. When a poor man grows rich, or a servant becomes a master, they should take care that their exaltation prompts them not to be unjust or insolent ; but surely it is not requisite or right, that their behavior and mode of living should be exactly the same, when their situation is altered. How far this institution has been effectual to the reformation of mankind, it is not easy now to ascertain, because the enormities which prevailed before the appearance of it are by time so far removed from our sight that they are scarcely visible ; but those of the most gigantic size still remain in the records of history, as monuments of the rest. Wars in those ages were carried on with a ferocity and cruelty unknown to the present : whole cities and nations were extirpated by fire and sword ; and thousands of the vanquished were crucified and impaled for having endeavored only to defend themselves and their country. The lives of new-born infants were then entirely at the disposal of their parents, who were at liberty to bring them up, or expose them to perish by cold and hunger, or to be devoured by birds and beasts ; and this was frequently practised without punishment, and even without censure. Gla-

diators were employed by hundreds to cut one another to pieces in public theatres for the diversion of the most polite assemblies ; and though these combatants at first consisted of criminals only, by degrees men of the highest rank, and even ladies of the most illustrious families, enrolled themselves in this honorable list. On many occasions human sacrifices were ordained ; and at the funerals of rich and eminent persons, great numbers of the slaves were murdered as victims pleasing to their departed spirits. The most infamous obscenities were made part of their religious worship, and the most unnatural lusts publicly avowed and celebrated by their most admired poets. At the approach of Christianity all these horrid abominations vanished ; and amongst those who first embraced it, scarce a single vice was to be found. To such an amazing degree of piety, charity, temperance, patience, and resignation were the primitive converts exalted, that they seem literally to have been regenerated, and purified from all the imperfections of human nature ; and to have pursued such a constant and uniform course of devotion, innocence, and virtue, as in the present times it is almost as difficult for us to conceive as to imitate. If it is asked, why should not the belief of the same religion now produce the same effects ? the answer is short, because to so great an extent it is not believed. The most sovereign medicine can perform no cure, if the patient will not be persuaded to take it. Yet, notwithstanding all impediments, it has certainly done a great deal towards diminishing the vices, and correcting the dispositions of mankind ; and was it universally adopted in belief and practice, would totally eradicate both sin and punishment.

Objections have likewise been raised to the Divine authority of this religion from the *incredibility of some of its doctrines*, particularly of those concerning the Trinity, and atonement for sin by the sufferings and death of Christ; the one contradicting all the principles of human reason, and the other all our ideas of Divine justice. To these objections I shall only say, that no arguments, founded on principles which we cannot comprehend, can possibly disprove a proposition already proved on principles which we do understand; and, therefore, that on this subject they ought not to be attended to. That three Beings should be one Being, is a proposition which apparently contradicts reason, that is, *our* reason; but it does not from thence follow, that it cannot be true; for there are many propositions which are above our reason, and yet are demonstrably true. One is the very first principle of all religion, the being of a God; for that any thing should exist without a cause, or that any thing should be the cause of its own existence, are propositions equally contradictory to our reason; yet one of them must be true, or nothing could ever have existed. In like manner the overruling grace of the Creator, and the free-will of his creatures, his certain foreknowledge of future events, and the uncertain contingency of those events, are to our apprehensions absolute contradictions to each other; and yet the truth of every one of these is demonstrable from Scripture, reason, and experience. All these difficulties arise from our imagining that the mode of existence of all beings must be similar to our own; that is, that they must all exist in time and space; and hence proceeds our embarrassment on this subject. We know that no

two beings, with whose mode of existence we are acquainted, can exist in the same point of time, in the same point of space, and that therefore they cannot be one; but how far beings, whose mode of existence bears no relation to time or space, may be united, we cannot comprehend; and therefore the possibility of such a union we cannot positively deny. In like manner our reason informs us, that the punishment of the innocent, instead of the guilty, is diametrically opposite to justice, rectitude, and all pretensions to utility; but we should also remember, that the short line of our reason cannot reach to the bottom of this question: it cannot inform us by what means either guilt or punishment ever gained a place in the works of a Creator infinitely good and powerful, whose goodness must have induced him, and whose power must have enabled him to exclude them. It cannot assure us, that some sufferings of individuals are not necessary to the happiness and well-being of the whole. It cannot convince us, that they do not actually arise from this necessity, or that for this cause they may not be required of us, or that they may not be borne by one being for another; and therefore, if voluntarily offered, be justly accepted from the innocent instead of the guilty. Of all these circumstances we are totally ignorant; nor can our reason afford us any information, and therefore, we are not able to assert that this measure is contrary to justice, or void of utility. For, unless we could first resolve that great question, *whence came evil?* we can decide nothing on the dispensations of Providence; because they must necessarily be connected with that undiscoverable principle; and, as we know not the root of the disease, we cannot judge of what

is, or is not, a proper and effectual remedy. It is remarkable, that, notwithstanding all the seeming absurdities of this doctrine, there is one circumstance much in its favor; which is, that it has been universally adopted in all ages, as far as history can carry us back in our inquiries to the earliest times; in which we find all nations, civilized and barbarous, however differing in all other religious opinions, agreeing alone in the expediency of appeasing their offended deities by sacrifices, that is, by the vicarious sufferings of men or other animals. These notions could never have been derived from reason, because it directly contradicts it; nor from ignorance, because ignorance could never have contrived so unaccountable an expedient, nor have been uniform in all ages and countries in any opinion whatsoever; nor from the artifice of kings or priests, in order to acquire dominion over the people, because it seems not adapted to this end; and we find it implanted in the minds of the most remote savages at this day discovered, who have neither kings nor priests, artifice nor dominion amongst them. It must, therefore, be derived from natural instinct, or supernatural revelation, both which are equally the operations of Divine power.

It may be further urged, that however true these doctrines may be, yet it must be inconsistent with the justice and goodness of the Creator to require from his creatures the belief of propositions which contradict, or are above the reach of that reason which he has thought proper to bestow upon them. To this I answer, that genuine Christianity requires no such belief. It has discovered to us many important truths, with which we were before entirely unacquainted;

and amongst them are these, that three Beings are someway united in the Divine essence, and that God will accept of the sufferings of Christ as an atonement for the sins of mankind. These, considered as declarations of facts only, neither contradict, nor are above the reach of human reason. The first is a proposition as plain as that three equilateral lines compose one triangle; the other is as intelligible as that one man should discharge the debts of another. In what manner this union is formed, or why God accepts these vicarious sufferings, or to what purposes they may be subservient, it informs us not, because no information could enable us to comprehend these mysteries; and therefore it does not require that we should know or receive them. The truth of these doctrines must rest entirely on the authority of those who taught them; but then we should reflect, that those were the same persons who taught us a system of religion more sublime, and of ethics more perfect, than any which our faculties were ever able to discover; but which, when discovered, are exactly consonant to our reason; and that, therefore, we should not hastily reject those informations which they have vouchsafed to give us, of which our reason is not a competent judge. If an able mathematician proves to us the truth of several propositions, by demonstrations which we understand, we hesitate not on his authority to assent to others, the process of whose proofs we are not able to follow; why, therefore, should we refuse that credit to Christ and his apostles which we think reasonable to give to one another?

Many have objected to the whole scheme of this revelation as partial, *fluctuating*, *indeterminate*, *un-*



*just*, and unworthy of an omniscient and omnipotent author, who cannot be supposed to have favored particular persons, countries, and times, with this Divine communication, while others, no less meritorious, have been altogether excluded from its benefits; nor to have changed and counteracted his own designs; that is, to have formed mankind able and disposed to render themselves miserable by their own wickedness, and then to have contrived so strange an expedient to restore them to that happiness which they need never have been permitted to forfeit; and this to be brought about by the unnecessary interposition of a mediator. To all this I shall only say, that however unaccountable this may appear to us, who see but as small a part of the Christian as of the universal plan of creation, they are both, in regard to all these circumstances, exactly analogous to each other. In all the dispensations of Providence, with which we are acquainted, benefits are distributed in a similar manner; health and strength, sense and science, wealth and power, are all bestowed on individuals and communities, in different degrees and at different times. The whole economy of this world consists of evils and remedies; and these, for the most part, administered by the instrumentality of intermediate agents. God has permitted us to plunge ourselves into poverty, distress, and misery, by our own vices, and has afforded us the advice, instructions, and examples of others, to deter or extricate us from these calamities. He has formed us subject to innumerable diseases, and he has bestowed on us a variety of remedies. He has made us liable to hunger, thirst, and nakedness, and he supplies us with food, drink and clothing, usually by the administration of

others. He has created poisons, and he has provided antidotes. He has ordained the winter's cold to cure the pestilential heats of the summer, and the summer's sunshine to dry up the inundations of the winter. Why the constitution of nature is so formed, why all the visible dispensations of Providence are such, and why such is the Christian dispensation also, we know not, nor have faculties to comprehend. God might certainly have made the material world a system of perfect beauty and regularity, without evils, and without remedies; and the Christian dispensation a scheme only of moral virtue, productive of happiness, without the intervention of any atonement or mediation. He might have exempted our bodies from all diseases, and our minds from all depravity; and we should then have stood in no need of medicines to restore us to health, or expedients to reconcile us to his favor. It seems, indeed, to our ignorance, that this would have been more consistent with justice and reason; but his infinite wisdom has decided in another manner, and formed the systems, both of nature and Christianity, on other principles, and these so exactly similar, that we have cause to conclude that they both must proceed from the same source of Divine power and wisdom, however inconsistent with our reason they may appear. Reason is undoubtedly our surest guide in all matters which lie within the narrow circle of her intelligence. On the subject of revelation, her province is only to examine into its authority; and when that is once proved, she has no more to do but to acquiesce in its doctrines; and, therefore, is never so ill employed as when she pretends to accommodate them to her own ideas of rectitude and truth. "God,"

says this self-sufficient teacher, "is perfectly wise, just, and good;" and what is the inference? "That all his dispensations must be conformable to *our notions* of perfect wisdom, justice, and goodness." But it should first be proved that man is as perfect and as wise as his Creator, or this consequence will by no means follow; but rather the reverse, that is, that the dispensations of a perfect and all-wise Being must probably appear unreasonable, and perhaps unjust, to a being imperfect and ignorant; and, therefore, their seeming impossibility may be a mark of their truth, and, in some measure, justify that pious rant of a mad enthusiast, "Credo, quia impossibile." [I believe it, because it is impossible.] Nor is it the least surprising that we are not able to understand the spiritual dispensations of the Almighty, when his material works are to us no less incomprehensible. Our reason can afford us no insight into those great properties of matter, gravitation, attraction, elasticity, and electricity, nor even into the essence of matter itself. Can reason teach us how the sun's luminous orb can fill a circle, whose diameter contains many millions of miles, with a constant inundation of successive rays during thousands of years, without any perceivable diminution of that body from whence they are continually poured, or any augmentation of those bodies on which they fall, and by which they are constantly absorbed? Can reason tell us how those rays, darted with a velocity greater than that of a cannon ball, can strike the tenderest organs of the human frame without inflicting any degree of pain, or by what means this percussion only can convey the forms of distant objects to an immaterial mind? or how any union can be formed

between material and immaterial essences? or how the wounds of the body can give pain to the soul; or the anxiety of the soul can emaciate and destroy the body? That all these things are so, we have visible and indisputable demonstration; but how can they be so, is to us as incomprehensible as the most abstruse mysteries of revelation can possibly be. In short, we see so small a part of the great whole; we know so little of the relation which the present life bears to pre-existent and future states; we conceive so little of the nature of God, and his attributes, or mode of existence; we can comprehend so little of the material, and so much less of the moral plan on which the universe is constituted, or on what principle it proceeds, that, if a revelation from such a Being, on such subjects, was in every part familiar to our understandings, and consonant to our reason, we should have great cause to suspect its Divine authority; and therefore, had this revelation been less incomprehensible, it would certainly have been more incredible.

But I shall not enter farther into the consideration of these abstruse and difficult speculations, because the discussion of them would render this short essay too tedious and laborious a task for the perusal of them for whom it was principally intended; which are all those busy or idle persons, whose time and thoughts are wholly engrossed by the pursuits of business or pleasure, ambition or luxury; who know nothing of this religion, except what they have accidentally picked up by desultory conversation or superficial reading, and have thence determined with themselves, that a pretended revelation, founded on so strange and improbable a story, so contradictory to

reason, so adverse to the world and all its occupations, so incredible in its doctrines, and in its precepts so impracticable, can be nothing more than the imposition of priestcraft upon ignorant and illiterate ages, and artfully continued as an engine well adapted to awe and govern the superstitious vulgar. To talk to such about the Christian religion is to converse with the deaf concerning music, or with the blind on the beauties of painting. They want all ideas relative to the subject, and, therefore, can never be made to comprehend it. To enable them to do this, their minds must be formed for these conceptions by contemplation, retirement, and abstraction from business and dissipation; by ill-health, disappointments, and distresses; and possibly by Divine interposition, or by enthusiasm, which is usually mistaken for it. Without some of these preparatory aids, together with a competent degree of learning and application, it is impossible that they can think or know, understand or believe, any thing about it. If they profess to believe, they deceive others; if they fancy that they believe they deceive themselves. I am ready to acknowledge, that these gentlemen, (though endued with good understandings,) which have been entirely devoted to the business or amusements of the world, must be expected to pass no other judgment, and to revolt from the history and doctrines of this religion. "The preaching Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness," (1 Cor. 1: 23;) and so it must appear to all who, like them, judge from established prejudices, false learning, and superficial knowledge; for those who fail to follow the chain of its prophecy, to see the beauty

and justness of its moral precepts, and to enter into the wonders of its dispensations, will probably form no other idea of this revelation but that of a confused rhapsody of fictions and absurdities.

If it is asked, Was Christianity then intended only for learned divines and profound philosophers? I answer, No. It was at first preached by the illiterate, and received by the ignorant; and to such are the practical, which are the most necessary parts of it, sufficiently intelligible; but many proofs of its authority are drawn from other parts, of a speculative nature, opening to our inquiries inexhaustible discoveries concerning the nature, attributes, and dispensations of God, which cannot be understood without some learning, and much attention. From these the generality of mankind must necessarily be excluded; and must, therefore, in respect to them, trust to others for the grounds of their belief. And hence, perhaps, it is, that faith, or easiness of belief, is so frequently and so strongly recommended in the Gospel; because, if men require proofs of which they themselves are incapable, and those who have no knowledge on this important subject will not place some confidence in those who have, the illiterate and unattentive must ever continue in a state of unbelief. But then all such should remember, that in all sciences, even in the mathematics themselves, there are many propositions which, on a cursory view, appear to the most acute understandings, uninstructed in that science, to be impossible to be true, which yet, on a closer examination, are found to be truths capable of the strictest demonstration; and that, therefore, in disquisitions on which we cannot determine without much learned investigation, reason,

uninformed, is by no means to be depended on; and from hence they ought surely to conclude that it may be at least as possible for them to be mistaken in disbelieving this revelation, who know nothing of the matter, as for those great masters of reason and erudition, Grotius, Bacon, Newton, Boyle, Locke, Addison, and Lyttelton, to be deceived in their belief; a belief to which they firmly adhered after the most diligent and learned researchers into the authenticity of its records, the completion of the prophecies, the sublimity of its doctrines, the purity of its precepts, and the arguments of its adversaries; a belief which they have testified to the world by their writings, without any other motive than their regard for truth, and the benefit of mankind. Should the few foregoing pages add but one mite to the treasures with which these learned writers have enriched the world; if they should be so fortunate as to persuade any of these minute philosophers to place some confidence in these great opinions, and to distrust their own; if they should convince them that, notwithstanding all unfavorable appearances, Christianity may not be altogether artifice and error; if they should prevail on them to examine it with some attention; or, if that is too much trouble, not to reject it without any examination at all, the purpose of this little work will be sufficiently answered. Had the arguments herein used, and the new hints here flung out, been more largely discussed, it might easily have been extended to a more considerable bulk; but then the busy would not have had leisure, nor the idle inclination to have read it. Should it ever have the honor to be admitted into such good company, they will immediately, I know, determine

that it must be the work of some enthusiast or fanatic, some beggar, or some madman. I shall, therefore, beg leave to assure them, that the author is very far removed from all these characters. That he once, perhaps, believed as little as themselves, but having some leisure and more curiosity, he employed them both in resolving a question which seemed to him of some importance—whether Christianity was really an imposture, founded on an absurd, incredible, and obsolete fable, as many suppose it—or whether it is, what it pretends to be, a revelation communicated to mankind by the interposition of supernatural power. On a candid inquiry, he soon found that the first was an absolute impossibility, and that its pretensions to the latter were founded on the most solid grounds. In the farther pursuit of his examination, he perceived, at every step, new lights arising, and some of the brightest from parts of it the most obscure, but productive of the clearest proofs, because equally beyond the power of human artifice to invent, and human reason to discover. These arguments, which have convinced him of the divine origin of this religion, he has here put together in as clear and concise a manner as he was able, thinking they might have the same effect upon others; and being of opinion, that if there were a few more true Christians in the world, it would be beneficial to themselves, and by no means detrimental to the public.

**THE END.**



A

**SHORT AND EASY METHOD**

WITH

**T H E D E I S T S .**

IN A LETTER TO A FRIEND.

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BY REV. CHARLES LESLIE, M. A.

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Re-written and condensed in a more modern style

It has been said of this brief and triumphant argument of Leslie, that it is "the standing reproach of Deism;" no serious reply to it having been even *attempted*.

## METHOD WITH DEISTS.

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DEAR SIR,—You are desirous, you inform me, to receive from me some one topic of reason, which shall demonstrate the truth of the Christian religion, and at the same time distinguish it from the impostures of Mahomet, and the heathen deities: that our Deists may be brought to this test, and be obliged either to renounce their reason and the common reason of mankind, or to admit the clear proof, from reason, of the revelation of Christ; which must be such a proof as no impostor can pretend to, otherwise it will not prove Christianity not to be an imposture. And you cannot but imagine, you add, that there must be such a proof, because every truth is in itself one: and therefore one reason for it, if it be a true reason, must be sufficient and, if sufficient, better than many: because multiplicity creates confusion, especially in weak judgments.

Sir, you have imposed a hard task upon me: I wish I could perform it. For, though every truth be one, yet our sight is so feeble that we cannot always come to it directly, but by many inferences and laying of things together. But, I think, that in the case before us, there is such a proof as you desire, and I will set it down as shortly and as plainly as I can.

I suppose, then, that the truth of the Christian doctrines will be sufficiently evinced, if the matters of

fact recorded of Christ in the Gospels are proved to be true; for his miracles, if true, establish the truth of what he delivered. The same may be said with regard to Moses. If he led the children of Israel through the Red Sea, and did such other wonderful things as are recorded of him in the book of Exodus, it must necessarily follow that he was sent by God: these being the strongest evidences we can require, and which every Deist will confess he would admit, if he himself had witnessed their performance. So that the stress of this cause will depend upon the proof of these matters of fact.

With a view, therefore, to this proof, I shall proceed,

I. To lay down such marks, as to the truth of matters of fact in general, that, where they all meet, such matters of fact cannot be false: and,

II. To show that they all do meet in the matters of fact of Moses and of Christ; and do not meet in those reported of Mahomet and of the heathen deities, nor can possibly meet in any imposture whatsoever:

I. The marks are these:

1. That the fact be such as men's *outward senses* can judge of:

2. That it be performed *publicly*, in the presence of witnesses:

3. That there be *public monuments and actions* kept up in memory of it; and,

4. That such monuments and actions shall be established, and commence, *at the time of the fact*.

The two first of these marks make it impossible for any false fact to be imposed upon men at the time when it was said to be done, because every man's

senses would contradict it. For example: Suppose I should pretend that yesterday I divided the Thames in the presence of all the people of London, and led the whole city over to Southwark on dry land, the waters standing like walls on each side:—it would be morally impossible for me to convince the people of London that this was true; when every man, woman, and child, could contradict me, and affirm that they had not seen the Thames so divided, nor been led over to Southwark on dry land. I take it then for granted, (and I apprehend with the allowance of all the Deists in the world,) that no such imposition could be put upon mankind at the time when such matter of fact was said to be done.

“But,” it may be urged, “the fact might be invented when the men of that generation in which it was said to be done were all past and gone; and the credulity of after ages might be induced to believe that things had been performed in earlier times, which had not!”

From this the two latter marks secure us, as much as the two first in the former case. For whenever such a fact was invented, if it were stated that not only public monuments of it remained, but likewise that public actions or observances had been kept up in memory of it ever since, the deceit must be detected by no such monuments appearing, and by the experience of every man, woman, and child, who must know that they had performed no such actions and practiced no such observances. For example: Suppose I should now fabricate a story of something done a thousand years ago; I might perhaps get a few persons to believe me; but if I were farther to add, that from that

day to this, every man, at the age of twelve years, had a joint of his little finger cut off in memory of it, and that of course every man then living actually wanted a joint of that finger, and vouched this institution in confirmation of its truth: it would be morally impossible for me to gain credit in such a case, because every man then living would contradict me, as to the circumstance of cutting off a joint of the finger; and that, being an essential part of my original matter of fact, must prove the whole to be false.

II. Let us now come to the second point, and show that all these marks do meet in the matters of fact of Moses, and of Christ; and do not meet in those reported of Mahomet, and of the heathen deities, nor can possibly meet in any imposture whatsoever.

As to Moses, he, I take it for granted, could not have persuaded six hundred thousand men that he had brought them out of Egypt by the Red Sea, fed them forty years with miraculous manna, &c. if it had not been true: because the senses of every man who was then alive would have contradicted him. So that here are the two first marks.

For the same reason, it would have been equally impossible for him to have made them receive his five books as true, which related all these things as done before their eyes, if they had not been so done. Observe how positively he speaks to them. "And know you this day, for I speak not with your children, which have not known, and which have not seen the chastisement of the Lord your God, his greatness, his mighty hand, and his stretched-out arm, and his miracles—but your eyes have seen all the great acts of the Lord which he did." Deut. 11 : 2-7. Hence we must

admit it to be impossible that these books, if written by Moses in support of an imposture, could have been put upon the people who were alive at the time when such things were said to be done.

“But they might have been written,” it may be urged, “in some age after Moses, and published as his !”

To this I reply, that, if it were so, it was impossible they should have been received as such ; because they speak of themselves as delivered by Moses, and kept in the ark from his time ; (Deut. 31 : 24–26,) and state that a copy of them was likewise deposited in the hands of the king, “that he might learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them.” Deut. 17 : 19. Here these books expressly represent themselves as being not only the civil history, but also the established municipal law of the Jews, binding the king as well as the people. In whatever age, therefore, after Moses, they might have been forged, it was impossible they should have gained any credit ; because they could not then have been found either in the ark, or with the king, or any where else : and, when they were first published, every body must know that they had never heard of them before.

And they could still less receive them as their book of statutes, and the standing law of the land, by which they had all along been governed. Could any man, at this day, invent a set of acts of parliament for England, and make it pass upon the nation as the only book of statutes which they had ever known ? As impossible was it for these books, if written in any age after Moses, to have been received for what they de-

clare themselves to be; that is, the municipal law of the *Jews*; and for any man to have persuaded that people that they had owned them as their code of statutes from the time of Moses, that is, before they had ever heard of them! Nay, more: they must instantly have forgotten their former laws, if they could receive these books as such; and as such only could they receive them, because such they vouched themselves to be. Let me ask the Deists but one short question: "Was a book of sham laws ever palmed upon any nation since the world began?" If not, with what face can they say this of the law books of the *Jews*? Why will they affirm that of them, which they admit never to have happened in any other instance?

But they must be still more unreasonable. For the books of Moses have an ampler demonstration of their truth than even other law books have; as they not only contain the laws themselves, but give an historical account of their institution and regular fulfillment: of the passover, for instance, in memory of their supernatural protection upon the slaying of the first-born of Egypt; the dedication of the first-born of Israel, both of man and beast; the preservation of Aaron's Rod which budded, of the pot of Manna, and of the Brazen Serpent, which remained till the days of Hezekiah. 2 Kings, 18 : 4, &c. And, besides these memorials of particular occurrences, there were other solemn observances, in general memory of their deliverance out of Egypt, &c. as their annual expiations, their new moons, their Sabbaths, and their ordinary sacrifices; so that there were yearly, monthly, weekly, and daily recognitions of these things. The same books likewise farther inform us, that the tribe of Levi



were appointed and consecrated by God as his ministers, by whom alone these institutions were to be celebrated; that it was death for any others to approach the altar; that their high-priest wore a brilliant mitre and magnificent robes, with the miraculous Urim and Thummim in his breast-plate; that at his word all the people were to go out, and to come in; that these *Levites* were also their judges, even in all civil causes, and that it was death to resist their sentence. Deut. 17 : 8-13; 1 Chron. 23 : 4.

Hence, too, in whatever age after Moses they might have been forged, it was impossible they should have gained any credit : unless indeed the fabricators could have made the whole nation believe, *in spite of their invariable experience to the contrary*, that they had received these books long before, from their fathers; had been taught them when they were children, and had taught them to their own children; that they had been circumcised themselves, had circumcised their families, and uniformly observed their whole minute detail of sacrifices and ceremonies; that they had never eaten any swine's flesh or other prohibited meats; that they had a splendid tabernacle, with a regular priesthood to administer in it, confined to one particular tribe, and a superintendent high-priest, whose death alone could deliver those that had fled to the cities of refuge; that these priests were their ordinary judges, even in civil matters, &c. But this would surely have been impossible, if none of these things had been practiced; and it would consequently have been impossible to circulate, as true, a set of books which affirmed that they had practiced them, and upon that practice rested their own pretensions to acceptance. So that here are the two latter marks.

“But,” to advance to the utmost degree of supposition, it may be urged, “these things might have been practiced prior to this alledged forgery; and those books only deceived the nation, by making them believe that they were practiced in memory of such and such occurrences as were then invented!”

In this hypothesis, however groundless, the same impossibilities press upon our notice as before. For it implies that the Jews had previously kept these observances in memory of nothing, or without knowing why they kept them; whereas, in all their particulars, they strikingly express their original: as the Passover, instituted in memory of God's passing over the children of the Israelites, when he slew the first-born of Egypt, &c.

Let us admit, however contrary both to probability and to matter of fact, that they did not know why they kept these observances; yet, was it possible to persuade them that they were kept in memory of something which they had never heard of before? For example: Suppose I should now forge some romantic story of strange things done a long while ago; and, in confirmation of this, should endeavor to convince the Christian world that they had regularly, from that period to this, kept holy the first day of the week, in memory of such or such a man: a Cæsar, or a Mahomed: and had all been baptized in his name, and sworn by it upon the very book which I had then fabricated, and which of course they had never seen before in their public courts of judicature; that this book likewise contained their laws, civil and ecclesiastical, which they had ever since his time acknowledged, and no other:—I ask any Deist, whether he thinks it pos-

sible that such a cheat could be received as the Gospel of Christians, or not? The same reason holds with regard to the books of Moses, and must hold with regard to every book which contains matters of fact accompanied by the abovementioned four marks. For these marks, together, secure mankind from imposition, with regard to any false fact, as well in after ages, as at the time when it was said to be done.

Let me produce, as another and a familiar illustration, the *Stonehenge* of *Salisbury Plain*. Almost every body has seen or heard of it; and yet nobody knows by whom, or in memory of what, it was set up.

Now, suppose I should write a book to-morrow, and state in it that these huge stones were erected by a Cæsar or a Mahomed, in memory of such and such of their actions; and should farther add, that this book was written at the time when those actions were performed, and by the doers themselves, or by eye witnesses; and had been constantly received as true, and quoted by authors of the greatest credit in regular succession ever since; that it was well known in England, and even enjoined by Act of Parliament to be taught our children; and that we accordingly did teach it our children, and had been taught it ourselves when we were children; would this, I demand of any Deist, pass current in England? Or, rather, should not I, or any other person who might insist upon its reception, instead of being believed, be considered insane?

Let us compare, then, this rude structure with the *Stonehenge*, as I may call it, or "twelve stones" set up at *Gilgal*. Joshua, 4 : 6. It is there said that the reason why they were set up was, that when the children of the Jews, in after-ages, should ask their meaning,

it should be told them. Ch. 4 : 20—22. And the thing, in memory of which they were set up, the passage over Jordan, was such as could not possibly have been imposed upon that people at the time when it was said to be done: it was not less miraculous, and from the previous notice, preparations, and other striking circumstances of its performance, (3 : 5, 15,) still more unassailable by the petty cavils of infidel sophistry, than their passage through the Red Sea.

Now, to form our argument, let us suppose that there never was any such thing as that passage over Jordan; that these stones at Gilgal had been set up on some unknown occasion; and that some designing man, in an after-age, invented this book of Joshua, affirmed that it was written at the time of that imaginary event by Joshua himself, and adduced this pile of stones as a testimony of its truth; would not every body say to him, "We know this pile very well, but we never before heard of this reason for it, nor of this book of Joshua. Where has it lain concealed all this while? And where and how came you, after so long a period, to find it? Besides, it informs us that this passage over Jordan was solemnly directed to be taught our children from age to age; and, to that end, that they were always to be instructed in the meaning of this particular monument: but we were never taught it ourselves, when we were children, nor did we ever teach it to our children. And it is in the highest degree improbable that such an emphatic ordinance should have been forgotten during the continuance of so remarkable a pile of stones, set up expressly for the purpose of preserving its remembrance."

If, then, for these reasons, no such fabrication could

be put upon us, as to the stones in *Salisbury Plain*, how much less could it succeed as to the stonage at *Gilgal*? If, where we are ignorant of the true origin of a mere naked monument, such a sham origin cannot be imposed, how much less practicable would it be to impose upon us in actions and observances which we celebrate in memory of what we actually know; to make us forget what we have regularly commemorated; and to persuade us that we have constantly kept such and such institutions, with reference to something which we never heard of before; that is, that we knew something before we knew it! And, if we find it thus impossible to practice deceit, even in cases which have not the above four marks, how much more impossible must it be that any deceit should be practiced in cases in which all these four marks meet?

In the matters of fact of Christ likewise, as well as in those of Moses, these four marks are to be found. The reasoning, indeed, which has been already advanced with respect to the Old Testament, is generally applicable to the New. The miracles of Christ, like those of Moses, were such as men's *outward senses* could judge of; and were performed *publicly*, in the presence of those to whom the history of them, contained in the Gospel, was addressed. And it is related, that "about three thousand" at one time, (Acts, 2: 41,) and about "five thousand" at another, (4: 4,) were converted in consequence of what they themselves saw and heard, in matters where it was impossible that they should have been deceived. Here, therefore, were the two first marks.

And, with regard to the two latter, Baptism and the

Lord's Supper were instituted as memorials of certain things, not in after ages, but *at the time* when these things were said to be done; and have been strictly observed, *from that time to this*, without interruption. Christ himself also ordained Apostles, &c. to preach and administer his ordinances, and to govern his church "even unto the end of the world." Now, the Christian ministry is as notorious a matter of fact among us as the setting apart of the tribe of Levi was among the Jews; and as the era and object of their appointment are part of the Gospel-narrative, if that narrative had been a fiction of some subsequent age, at the time of its fabrication no such order of men could have been found, which would have effectually given the lie to the whole story. And the truth of the matters of fact of Christ, being no otherwise asserted than as there were at the time (whenever the Deist will suppose the Gospel to have been fabricated) public ordinances, and a public ministry of his institution to dispense them, and it being impossible, upon this hypothesis, that there could be any such things then in existence, we must admit it to be equally impossible that the forgery should have been successful. Hence, it was as impossible to deceive mankind, in respect to these matters of fact, by inventing them in after ages, as at the time when they were said to be done.

The matters of fact reported of Mahomed and of the heathen deities, do all want some of these four marks by which the certainty of facts is established. Mahomed himself, as he tells us in his Koran, (6, &c.) pretended to no miracles; and those which are commonly related of him pass, even among his followers,

for ridiculous legends, and as such are rejected by their scholars and philosophers. They have not either of the two first marks; for his converse with the moon, his night-journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, and thence to heaven, &c. were not performed before any witnesses, nor was the tour indeed of a nature to admit human attestation: and to the two latter they do not even affect to advance any claim.

The same may be affirmed, with little variation, of the stories of the heathen deities: of Mercury's stealing sheep, Jupiter's transforming himself into a bull, &c. besides the absurdity of such degrading and profligate adventures. And, accordingly we find that the more enlightened Pagans themselves considered them as fables involving a mystical meaning, of which several of their writers have endeavored to give us the explication. It is true, these gods had their priests, their feasts, their games, and other public ceremonies; but all these want the fourth mark, of commencing *at the time* when the things which they commemorate were said to have been done. Hence they cannot secure mankind, in subsequent ages, from imposture, as they furnish no internal means of detection, at the period of the forgery. The *Bacchanalia*, for example, and other heathen festivals, were established long after the events to which they refer; and the priests of Juno, Mars, &c. were not ordained by those imaginary deities, but appointed by others in some after age, and are therefore no evidence to the truth of their preternatural achievements.

To apply what has been said:

We may challenge all the Deists in the world to

show any fabulous action accompanied by these four marks. The thing is impossible. The histories of the Old and New Testament never could have been received, if they had not been true; because the priest-hoods of Levi and of Christ, the observance of the Sabbath, the Passover and Circumcision, and the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, &c. are there represented as descending uninterruptedly from the times of their respective institution. And it would have been as impossible to persuade men in after ages that they had been circumcised or baptized, and celebrated Passovers, Sabbaths, and other ordinances, under the ministration of a certain order of priests, if they had done none of those things, as to make them believe at the time, without any real foundation, that they had gone through seas on dry land, seen the dead raised, &c. But, without such a persuasion, it was impossible that either the Law or the Gospel could have been received. And the truth of the matters of fact of each being no otherwise asserted than as such public ceremonies had been previously practiced, their certainty is established upon the FULL CONVICTION OF THE SENSES OF MANKIND.

I do not say that every thing which wants these four marks is false; but that every thing which has them all, must be true.

I can have no doubt that there was such a man as Julius Cæsar, that he conquered at Pharsalia, and was killed in the Senate-house, though neither his actions nor his assassination be commemorated by any public observances. But this shows that the matters of fact of Moses and of Christ have come down to us better certified than any other whatsoever. And yet



our Deists, who would consider any one as hopelessly irrational that should offer to deny the existence of Cæsar, value themselves as the only men of profound sense and judgment, for ridiculing the histories of Moses and of Christ, though guarded by infallible marks, which that of Cæsar wants.

Besides, the nature of the subject would of itself lead to a more minute examination of the one than of the other: for of what consequence is it to me, or to the world, whether there ever was such a man as Cæsar, whether he conquered at Pharsalia, and was killed in the Senate-house, or not? But our eternal welfare is concerned in the truth of what is recorded in the Scriptures; whence they would naturally be more narrowly scrutinized, when proposed for acceptance.

How unreasonable, then, is it to reject matters of fact so important, so sifted, and so attested; and yet to think it absurd, even to madness, to deny other matters of fact—which have not the thousandth part of their evidence—have had comparatively little investigation—and are of no consequence at all!

*I deny that such a man as Cæsar ever existed, & I deny that Moses ever existed. I deny that Jesus ever existed. I deny that the Bible is the word of God.*

To the preceding four marks, which are common to the matters of fact of Moses and of Christ, I subjoin four additional marks; the three last of which, no matter of fact, how true soever, either has had, or can have, except that of Christ.

This will obviously appear, if it be considered,

5. That the book which relates the facts, *contains*

*likewise the laws* of the people to whom it belongs.

6. That Christ was previously announced, for that very period, by a long train of *prophecies*; and,

7. Still more peculiarly prefigured by *types*, both of a circumstantial and personal nature, from the earliest ages; and,

8. That the facts of Christianity are such as to make it impossible for either their relaters or hearers to believe them, if false, without supposing a *universal deception of the senses of mankind*.

The *fifth mark*, which has been subordinately discussed above, in such a manner as to supersede the necessity of dwelling upon it here, renders it impossible for any one to have imposed such a book upon any people. For example: Suppose I should forge a code of laws for Great Britain, and publish it next term; could I hope to persuade the judges, lawyers, and people, that this was their genuine statute-book, by which all their causes had been determined in the public courts for so many centuries past! Before they could be brought to this, they must totally forget their established laws, which they had so laboriously committed to memory, and so familiarly quoted in every day's practice; and believe that this new book, which they had never seen before, was that old book which had been pleaded so long in Westminster-Hall, which has been so often printed, and of which the originals are now so carefully preserved in the Tower.

This applies strongly to the books of Moses, in which, not only the history of the *Jews*, but likewise their whole law, secular and ecclesiastical, was contained. And though, from the early extension and destined universality of the Christian system, it could

not, without unnecessary confusion, furnish a uniform civil code to all its various followers, who were already under the government of laws in some degree adapted to their respective climates and characters, yet was it intended as the spiritual guide of the new church. And in this respect, this mark is still stronger with regard to the Gospel than even to the books of Moses; inasmuch as it is easier (however hard) to imagine the substitution of an entire statute-book in one particular nation, than that all the nations of *Christendom* should have unanimously conspired in the forgery. But, without such a conspiracy, such a forgery could never have succeeded, as the Gospel universally formed a regular part of their daily public offices.

But I hasten to the *sixth mark*, namely, *Prophecy*.

The great fact of Christ's coming was previously announced to the *Jews*, in the Old Testament, "by all the holy Prophets which have been since the world began." Luke, 1: 70.

The first promise upon the subject was made to Adam, immediately after the fall. Gen. 3: 15. Compare Col. 2: 15, and Hebrews, 2: 14.

He was again repeatedly promised to Abraham, (Gen. 12: 3. 18: 18, and 22: 18, Gal. 3: 16,) to Issac, (Gen. 26: 4,) and to Jacob, Gen. 28: 14.

Jacob expressly prophesied of him, under the appellation of "Shiloh," or *Him that was to be sent*, Gen. 49: 10. Balaam also, with the voice of inspiration, pronounced him "the Star of Jacob, and the Sceptre of Israel." Numb. 24: 17. Moses spake of him as One "greater than himself." Deut. 18: 15, 18, 19;

Acts, 3: 22. And Daniel hailed his arrival, under the name of "Messiah the Prince." Chap. 9: 25.

It was foretold that he should be born of a virgin, (Isa. 7: 14,) in the city of *Bethlehem*, (Micah, 5: 2,) of the seed of Jesse; (Isa. 11: 1, 10;) that he should lead a life of poverty and suffering, (Psalm, 22,) inflicted upon him, "not for himself," (Dan. 9: 26,) but for the sins of others; (Isa. 53;) and, after a short confinement in the grave, should rise again; (Psalm, 16: 10. Acts, 2: 27, 31, and 13: 35—37;) that he "should sit upon the throne of David for ever," and be called "the mighty God," (Isa. 9: 6, 7,) "the Lord our Righteousness;" (Jer. 33: 16;) "Immanuel, that is, God with us;" (Isa. 7: 14; Matt. 1: 23;) and by David himself, whose son he was according to the flesh, "Lord." Psalm, 110: 1, applied to Christ by himself, Matt. 22: 44, and by Peter, Acts, 2: 34.

The time of his incarnation was to be, before "the Sceptre should depart from *Judah*," (Gen. 49: 10,) during the continuance of the second Temple, (Hag. 2: 7, 9,) and within seventy weeks, or 490 days, that is, according to the constant interpretation of prophecy, 490 years from its erection, Dan. 9: 24.

From these, and many other predictions, the coming of Christ was at all times the general expectation of the *Jews*; and fully matured at the time of his actual advent, as may be inferred from the number of false Messiahs who appeared about that period.

That he was likewise the expectation of the *Gentiles*, (in conformity to the prophecies of Gen. 49: 10, and Hag. 2: 7, where the terms "People," and "Nations," denote the Heathen world,) is evinced by the coming of the wise men from the East, &c. a story

which would of course have been contradicted by some of the individuals so disgracefully concerned in it, if the fact of their arrival, and the consequent massacre of the infants in and about Bethlehem, had not been fresh in every one's memory: by them, for instance, who afterward suborned false witnesses against Christ, and gave large money to the soldiers to conceal, if possible, the event of his resurrection; or them who, in still later days, every where zealously "spake against" the tenets and practices of his rising church.

All over the East, indeed, there was a general tradition, that *about that time a king of the Jews would be born, who should govern the whole earth.* This prevailed so strongly at Rome, a few months before the birth of Augustus, that the Senate made a decree to expose all the children born that year; but the execution of it was eluded by a trick of some of the senators, who, from the pregnancy of their wives, were led to hope that they might be the fathers of the promised Prince. Its currency is also recorded with a remarkable identity of phrase by the pens of Suetonius and Tacitus. Now, that in this there was no collusion between the *Chaldeans, Romans, and Jews*, is sufficiently proved by the desperate methods suggested, or carried into effect, for its discomfiture. Nor, in fact, is it practicable for whole nations of contemporary (and still less, if possible, for those of successive) generations to concert a story perfectly harmonious in all its minute accompaniments of time, place, manner, and other circumstances.

In addition to the above general predictions of the coming, life, death, and resurrection of Christ, there

are others which foretell still more strikingly several particular incidents of the Gospel narrative; instances unparalleled in the whole range of history, and which could have been foreseen by God alone. They were certainly not foreseen by the human agents concerned in their execution, or they would never have contributed to the fulfillment of prophecies referred even by themselves to the Messiah, and therefore verifying the divine mission of Him whom they crucified as an impostor.

Observe, then, how literally many of these predictions were fulfilled. For example: read Psalm 69 : 21, "They gave me gall to eat, and vinegar to drink;" and compare Matt. 27 : 34, "*They gave him vinegar to drink, mingled with gall.*" Again, it is said, Psalm 22 : 16-18, "They pierced my hands and my feet. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture;"\* as if it had been written *after*

\* The soldiers did not tear his coat, because it was *without seam, woven from the top throughout*; and therefore they cast lots for it. But this was to human view entirely accidental. With the passage in the Psalms, as *Romans*, they were not likely to be acquainted. The same remark applies to the next instance, from Zechariah.

And here it may be suggested, (in reply to those who insidiously magnify "the power of chance, the ingenuity of accommodation, and the industry of research," as chiefly supporting the credit of obscure prophecy,) that greater plainness would have enabled wicked men, as free agents, to prevent its accomplishment, when obviously directed against themselves. The *Jews*, not understanding what Christ meant by his "lifting up," (John, 8 : 28 ; 12 : 32, 33,) and not knowing that he had foretold his crucifixion to his apostles, (Matt. 20 : 19.) instead of finally stoning him—the death appointed by their law (Levit. 24 : 16) for blasphemy, (Matt. 26 : 65,) more than once me-

John, 19 : 23, 24. It is predicted, likewise, Zech. 12 : 10, "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced;" and we are told, John, 19 : 34, that "*one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side.*"

Compare also Psalm 22 : 7, 8, "All they that see me laugh me to scorn : they shoot out their lips and shake their heads, saying, He trusted in God that he would deliver him ; let him deliver him if he will have him," with Matt. 27 : 39, 41, 43, "*And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests, mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He trusted in God : let him deliver him now, if he will have him ; for he said, I am the Son of God.*" His very price, and the mode of laying out the money, previously specified, (Zech. 11 : 13,) are historically stated by Matthew, in perfect correspondence with the prophet ; chap. 27 : 6, 7. And his riding into Jerusalem upon an ass, predicted, Zech. 9 : 9, (and referred by one of the most learned of the *Jewish* Rabbies to the Messiah,) is recorded by the same inspired historian, chap. 21 : 5. Lastly, it was foretold, that "he should make his grave with the wicked, and

nanced against the Savior, (John, 8 : 59 ; 10 : 33,) and actually inflicted upon Stephen (Acts, 7 : 58,) for that offence—unconsciously delivered him to the predicted *Roman* cross. Again ; the piercing of his side was no part of the Roman sentence, but merely to ascertain his being dead previously to taking him down from the cross ; "that the body might not remain there on the Sabbath day," which commenced that evening a few hours after the crucifixion. From his early *giving up the ghost*, however, it was not necessary that "a bone of him should be broken," (Exod. 12 : 46 ; Numb. 9 : 12 ; Psalm 34 : 20,) like those of the two thieves, his fellow-sufferers. John, 19 : 32-36.

with the rich in his death;" (Isa. 53 : 9;) or, as Dr. Lowth translates the passage, "his grave was appointed with the wicked, but with the rich man was his tomb;" which prediction was precisely verified by the very improbable incidents of his being crucified *between two thieves*, (Matt. 27 : 38,) and afterwards *laid in the tomb of the rich man of Arimathea*. Ib. 57, 60.

Thus do the prophecies of the Old Testament, without variation or ambiguity, refer to the person and character of Christ. His own predictions in the New, demand a few brief observations.

Those relating to the destruction of *Jerusalem*, which specified that it should be "laid even with the ground," and "not one stone be left upon another," (Luke, 9 : 44,) "before that generation passed," (Matt. 24 : 34,) were fulfilled in a most surprisingly literal manner, the very foundations of the temple being ploughed up by Turnus Rufus. In another remarkable prophecy he announced the many false Messiahs that should come after him, and the ruin in which their followers should be involved. Matt. 24 : 24-26. That great numbers actually assumed that holy character before the final fall of the city, and led the people into the wilderness to their destruction, we learn from Josephus. Antiq. Jud. 18 : 12; 20 : 6; and B. J. 8 : 31. Nay, such was their wretched infatuation, that under this delusion they rejected the offers of Titus, who courted them to peace. Id. B. J. 7 : 12.

It will be sufficient barely to mention his foretelling the dispersion of that unhappy nation, and the triumph of his Gospel over the *gates of hell*, under every possible disadvantage—himself low and despised, his im-



mediate associates only twelve, and those illiterate and unpolished; and his adversaries the allied powers, prejudices, habits, interests, and appetites of mankind.

But the *seventh mark* is still more peculiar, if possible, to Christ, than even that of Prophecy. For whatever may be weakly pretended with regard to the oracular predictions of *Delphi* or *Dodona*, the heathens never affected to prefigure any future event by *types*, or resemblances of the fact, consisting of analogies either in individuals, or in sensible institutions directed to be continued, till the antitype itself should make its appearance.

These types, in the instance of Christ, were of a two-fold nature, *circumstantial* and *personal*.

Of the *former* kind (not to notice the general rite of sacrifice) may be produced as examples:

1. The *Passover*, appointed in memory of that great night when the Destroying Angel, who slew all "the first-born of *Egypt*," passed over those houses upon whose door-posts the blood of the Paschal Lamb was sprinkled; and directed to be eaten with what the Apostle (1 Cor. 5 : 7, 8) calls "the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

2. The *annual expiation*, in two respects: first, as the High Priest entered into the Holy of Holies (representing heaven, Exod. 25 : 40; Heb. 9 : 24) with the blood of the sacrifice, whose body was burnt without the camp, "wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate;" (Heb. 13 : 12;) and "after he had offered one sacrifice for sin, for ever sat down at the right hand of God;" (10 : 12;) and secondly, as "all the

iniquity of the children of Israel was put upon the head" of the Scape Goat. Lev. 16 : 21.

3. The *brazen serpent*, by looking up to which the people were cured of the stings of the fiery serpents; and whose "lifting up" was, by Christ himself, interpreted as emblematical of his being lifted up on the cross. John 3 : 14.

4. The *manna*, which represented "the bread of life that came down from heaven." John, 6 : 31--35.

5. The *rock*, whence the waters flowed, to supply drink in the wilderness; "and that rock was Christ" 1 Cor. 10 : 4.

6. The *Sabbath*, "a shadow of Christ," (Col 2 : 16, 17;) and, as a figure of his eternal rest, denominated "a sign of the perpetual covenant." Exod. 31. 16, 17. Ezek. 20 : 12, 20. And, lastly, to omit others,

The *temple*, where alone the shadowy sacrifices were to be offered, because Christ, "the body," was to be offered there himself.

Of *personal* types, likewise, I shall confine myself to such as are so considered in the New Testament.

1. *Adam*, between whom and Christ a striking series of relations is remarked. Rom. 5 : 12--21, and 1 Cor. 15 : 45--49

2. *Noah*, who was "saved by water; the like figure whereunto, even baptism, doth now save us, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." 1 Peter, 3 : 20, 21.

3. *Melchisedec*, king of Salem, who was made "like unto the Son of God, a priest continually." Heb. 7 : 3

4. *Abraham*, "the heir of the world," (Rom. 4 : 13,) "in whom all the nations of the earth are blest." Gen. 18 : 18.

5. *Isaac*, in his birth and intended sacrifice, whence also his father received him in a figure, (Heb. 11 : 19,) that is, of the resurrection of Christ. He too was the promised seed (Gen. 21 : 12, and Gal. 3 : 16) in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. Gen. 22 : 18.

6. *Jacob*, in his vision of the ladder, (Gen. 28 : 12, and John, 1 : 51,) and his wrestling with the angel; whence he, and after him the church, obtained the name of Israel. Gen. 32 : 28, and Matt. 11 : 21. The *Gentile* world also, like Jacob, gained the blessing and heirship from their elder brethren, the Jews.

7. *Moses*, (Deut. 18 : 18, and John, 1 : 45,) in redeeming the children of Israel out of Egypt.

8. *Joshua*, called also Jesus, (Heb. 4 : 8,) in acquiring for them the possession of the Holy Land, and as Lieutenant to the "Captain of the host of the Lord." Josh. 5 : 14.

9. *David*, (Psalm 16 : 10, and Acts, 2 : 25—35,) upon whose throne Christ is said to sit, (Isai. 9 : 7,) and by whose name he is frequently designated (Hos. 3 : 5, &c.) in his pastoral, regal, and prophetic capacity.

10. *Jonah*, in his dark imprisonment of three days, applied by Christ to himself. Matt. 12 : 40.

The *eighth mark* is, that the facts of Christianity are such as to make it impossible for either the relaters or the hearers to believe them, if false, without supposing *a universal deception of the senses of mankind*.

For they were related by the doers, or by eye-witnesses, to those who themselves likewise either were, or might have been present, and undoubtedly

knew many that were present at their performance. To this circumstance, indeed, both Christ and his apostles often appeal. And they were of such a nature as wholly to exclude every chance of imposition. What juggler could have given sight to him "that was born blind," have fed five thousand hungry guests with "five loaves and two fishes;" or have raised one, who had been "four days buried," from his grave.

When, then, we add to this, that none of the *Jewish* or *Roman* persecutors of Christianity, to whom its first teachers frequently referred as witnesses of those facts, ever ventured to deny them; that no apostate disciple, under the fear of punishment, or the hope of reward, not even the artful and accomplished Julian himself, ever pretended to detect them: that neither learning nor ingenuity, in the long lapse of so many years, has been able to show their falsehood: though, for the first three centuries after their promulgation, the civil government strongly stimulated hostile inquiry: and that their original relaters, after lives of unintermitted hardship, joyfully incurred death in defence of their truth—We cannot imagine the possibility of a more perfect or abundant demonstration.

It now rests with the Deists, if they would vindicate their claim to the self-bestowed title of "*men of reason*," to adduce some matters of fact of former ages, which they allow to be true, possessing evidence superior, or even similar, to those of Christ. This, however, it must at the same time be observed, would be far from proving the matters of fact respecting Christ to be false; but certainly without this, they

cannot reasonably assert that their own facts alone, so much less powerfully attested, are true.

Let them produce their Cæsar, or Mahomed,

1. Performing a fact, of which men's *outward senses* can judge;

2. *Publicly*, in the presence of witnesses;

3. In memory of which *public monuments and actions* are kept up;

4. Instituted and commencing *at the time of the fact*;

5. Recorded likewise in a set of books, addressed to the identical people before whom it was performed, and containing their *whole code of civil and ecclesiastical laws*;

6. As the work of one previously announced for that very period by a long train of *prophecies*;

7. And still more peculiarly prefigured by *types*, both of a circumstantial and personal nature, from the earliest ages; and,

8. Of such a character as made it impossible for either the relaters or hearers to believe it, if false, without supposing a *universal deception of the senses of mankind*.

Farther; let them display, in its *professed eye-witnesses*, similar *proofs of veracity*, in some *doctrines* founded upon it, and *unaided by force or intrigue*, a like *triumph* over the *prejudices* and *passions* of mankind: among its *believers*, equal *skill* and equal *diligence* in *scrutinizing* its evidences, OR LET THEM SUBMIT TO THE IRRESISTIBLE CERTAINTY OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

And now, reader, *solemnly consider* what that religion *is*, the truth of which is proved by so many

decisive marks. It is a declared revelation from God ; pronounces all men guilty in his sight ; proclaims pardon, as his free gift through the meritorious righteousness, sacrifice, and intercession of his only Son, to all who trust alone in his mercy and grace cordially repenting and forsaking their sins ; requires fervent love, ardent zeal, and cordial submission toward himself, and the highest degree of personal purity and temperance, with rectitude and benevolence toward others ; and offers the aid of the Holy Spirit for these purposes, to all who sincerely ask it. *Consider*, this religion is the *only true* one, and while it promises peace on earth and eternal happiness to all who *do* receive and obey it, it denounces everlasting destruction against all who *do not*. It is in vain for you to admit its truth, unless you receive it as *your* confidence, and obey it as *your* rule. Study, then, embrace it *for yourself* : and may the God of love and peace be with you.

**THE END.**

LORD LYTTELTON

ON

THE CONVERSION

OF

ST. PAUL.

IN A LETTER

TO GILBERT WEST, Esq.

**" It is stated by Rev. T. T. Biddolph, that Lord Lyttelton and his friend, Gilbert West, Esq. both men of acknowledged talents, had imbibed the principles of Infidelity from a superficial view of the Scriptures. Fully persuaded that the Bible was an imposture, they were determined to expose the cheat. Lord Lyttelton chose the Conversion of Paul, and Mr. West the Resurrection of Christ for the subject of hostile criticism. Both sat down to their respective tasks full of prejudice; but the result of their separate attempts was, that they were both converted by their efforts to overthrow the truth of Christianity. They came together, not as they expected, to exult over an imposture exposed to ridicule, but to lament over their own folly, and to felicitate each other on their joint conviction that the Bible was the word of God. Their able inquiries have furnished two of the most valuable treatises in favor of revelation, one entitled ' Observations on the Conversion of St. Paul,' and the other ' Observations on the Resurrection of Christ.' "**



## CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL.

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SIR,—In a late conversation we had upon the subject of the Christian religion, I told you, that besides all the proofs of it which may be drawn from the prophecies of the Old Testament, from the necessary connection it has with the whole system of the Jewish religion, from the miracles of Christ, and from the evidence given of his resurrection by all the other apostles, I thought the conversion and the apostleship of St. Paul alone, duly considered, was of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a Divine revelation.

As you seemed to think that so compendious a proof might be of use to convince those unbelievers that will not attend to a longer series of arguments, I have thrown together the reasons upon which I support that proposition.

In the 26th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, written by a cotemporary author, and a companion of St. Paul in preaching the Gospel, (as appears by the book itself, chap. 20 : 6, 13, 14. chap. 27 : 1, &c.) St. Paul is said to have given, himself, this account of his conversion and preaching, to king Agrippa and Festus the Roman governor. “My manner of life from my youth, which was, at the first, among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews, which knew me from

the beginning, (if they would testify,) that after the straitest sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God unto our fathers: unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come; for which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. 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. Whereupon, as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, 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 which journeyed with me. 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. And I said, who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, stand upon thy feet; for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister, and a witness both of those 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 I

now 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 forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision: but showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which Moses and the prophets did say should come: That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light to the people, and to the Gentiles. And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul thou art beside thyself: much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely; for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds." In another chapter of the same book, he gives in substance the same account to the Jews, adding these further

particulars : “ 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. 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. And one Ananias, a devout man, according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews that dwelt there, came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, brother Saul, receive thy sight : and the same hour I looked upon him. And he said, the God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldst know his will, and see that just One, and shouldst hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men, of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou ? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Acts, 22 : 10—16.

In the 9th chapter of the same book, the author of it relates the same story with some other circumstances not mentioned in these accounts ; as, that Saul in a vision saw Ananias before he came to him, coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. And that when Ananias had spoken to him, immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales. Acts, 9 : 12, 18.

And agreeably to all these accounts, St. Paul thus speaks of himself in the epistles he wrote to the several churches he planted ; the authenticity of which cannot be doubted without overturning all rules by which the authority and genuineness of any writings can be proved or confirmed.

To the Galatians he says, “ I certify you, brethren,

that the Gospel which was preached by me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it; and profited in the Jews' religion above many of mine equals in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the tradition of my fathers. But 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," &c. Gal. 1 : 11—16.

To the Philippians he says, "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more : circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews. As touching the law, a Pharisee ; concerning zeal, persecuting the church ; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." Phil. 3 : 4—8.

And in his epistle to Timothy he writes thus : "I thank Jesus Christ our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious ; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." 1 Tim. 1 : 12, 13.

In other epistles he calls himself "*an apostle by*

*the will of God, by the commandment of God our Savior, and Lord Jesus Christ; and an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead."* 2 Cor. 1 : 1; Col. 1 : 1; 1 Tim. 1 : 1; Gal. 1 : 1. All which implies some miraculous call that made him an apostle. And to the Corinthians he says, after enumerating many appearances of Jesus after his resurrection, "and last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." 1 Cor. 15 : 8.

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 over-heated 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 have been 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.

### I. Paul not an Impostor.

Now, that he was not an impostor, who said what he knew to be false, with an intent to deceive, I shall endeavor to prove, by showing that he could have no rational *motives* to undertake such an imposture, nor could have possibly carried it on with any *success* by the means we know he employed.

First, then, the INDUCEMENT to such an imposture must have been one of these two: either the hope of

*advancing himself* by it in his temporal interest, credit, or power; or the *gratification of some of his passions* under the authority of it, and by the means it afforded.

Now, these were the circumstances in which St. Paul declared his conversion to the faith of Christ Jesus: that Jesus who called himself the Messiah, and Son of God—notwithstanding the innocence and holiness of his life; notwithstanding the miracles by which he attested his mission—had been crucified by the Jews as an impostor and blasphemer, which crucifixion not only must, humanly speaking, have intimidated others from following him, or espousing his doctrines, but served to confirm the Jews in their opinion that he could not be their promised Messiah, who, according to all their prejudices, was not to suffer in any manner, but to reign triumphant for ever here upon earth. His apostles, indeed, though at first they appeared to be terrified by the death of their Master, and disappointed in all their hopes, yet had surprisingly recovered their spirits again, and publicly taught in his name, declaring him to be risen from the grave, and confirming that miracle by many they worked, or pretended to work, themselves. But the chief priests and rulers among the Jews were so far from being converted, either by their words or their works, that they had began a severe persecution against them, put some to death, imprisoned others, and were going on with implacable rage against the whole sect. In all these severities St. Paul concurred, being himself a Pharisee, *bred up at the feet of Gamaliel*, Acts, 7 : 9, 22, 23, one of the chief of that sect. Nor was he content. in the heat of his zeal, with persecuting the Christians

who were at Jerusalem, but *breathing out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest 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 to Jerusalem.* Acts, 9 : 1, 2. His request was complied with, *and he went to Damascus with authority and commission from the high priest.* Acts, 26 : 12. At this instant of time, and under these circumstances, did he become a disciple of Christ. What could be his motive to take such a part? Was it the hope of increasing his wealth? The certain consequence of his taking that part was not only the loss of all that he had, but of all hopes of acquiring more. Those whom he left were the disposers of wealth, of dignity, of power, in Judea; those whom he went to, were indigent men, oppressed and kept down from all means of improving their fortunes. They, among them, who had more than the rest, shared what they had with their brethren; but with this assistance the whole community was hardly supplied with the necessaries of life. And even in churches he afterwards planted himself, which were much more wealthy than that of Jerusalem, so far was St. Paul from availing himself of their charity, or the veneration they had for him, in order to draw that wealth to himself, that he often refused to take any part of it for the necessaries of life.

Thus he tells the Corinthians: "Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst; and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place, and labor, working with our own hands." 1 Cor. 15 : 8.

In another epistle he writes to them, "Behold the



third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be burthensome to you, for I seek not yours, but you; for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children." 2 Cor. 12: 14.

To the Thessalonians he says, "As we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the Gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness; nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ. For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travail: for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable to any of you, we preached unto you the Gospel of God." And again in another letter to them he repeats the same testimony of his disinterestedness: "Neither did we eat any man's bread for naught, but wrought with labor and travail day and night, that we might not be chargeable to any of you." 2 Thess. 3: 8. And when he took his farewell of the church of Ephesus, to whom he foretold that they should see him no more, he gives this testimony of himself, and appeals to them for the truth of it: "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, you yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me." Acts, 20: 33, 34. It is then evident, both from the state of the church, when St. Paul first came into it, and from his behavior afterwards, that he had no thoughts of increasing his wealth by becoming a Christian; whereas, by continuing to be their enemy, he had almost certain hopes of making his fortune by the favor of those who

were at the head of the Jewish state, to whom nothing could more recommend him than the zeal that he showed in that persecution. As to credit or reputation, that too lay all on the side he forsook. The sect he embraced was under the greatest and most universal contempt of any then in the world. The chiefs and leaders of it were men of the lowest birth, education, and rank. They had no one advantage of parts, or learning, or other human endowments to recommend them. The doctrines they taught were contrary to those which they who were accounted the wisest and most knowing of their nation professed. The wonderful works that they did were either imputed to magic or to imposture. The very author and head of their faith had been condemned as a criminal, and died on the cross between two thieves. Could the disciple of Gamaliel think he should gain any credit or reputation by becoming a teacher in a college of fishermen? Could he flatter himself that either in or out of Judea the doctrines he taught could do him any honor? No; he knew very well that the preaching Christ crucified *was a stumbling-block to the Jews, and to the Greeks foolishness.* 1 Cor. 1: 23. He afterwards found by experience, that in all parts of the world, contempt was the portion of whoever engaged in preaching a mystery so unpalatable to the world to all its passions and pleasures, and so irreconcilable to the pride of human reason. *We are made* (says he to the Corinthians) *as the filth of the world, the off-scouring of all things unto this day.* 1 Cor. 4: 13. Yet he went on as zealously as he set out, and *was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.* Certainly then, the desire of glory, the ambition of

*making to himself a great name*, was not his motive to embrace Christianity. Was it then the love of power? Power! over whom? over a flock of sheep driven to the slaughter, whose shepherd himself had been murdered a little before! All he could hope from that power was to be marked out in a particular manner for the same knife which he had seen so bloodily drawn against them. Could he expect more mercy from the chief priests and the rulers than they had shown to Jesus himself? Would not their anger be probably fiercer against the deserter and betrayer of their cause, than against any other of the apostles? Was power over so mean and despised a set of men worth encountering so much danger? But still it may be said, there are some natures so fond of power that they will court it at any risk, and be pleased with it even over the meanest. Let us see then what power St. Paul assumed over the Christians. Did he pretend to any superiority over the other apostles? No; he declared himself *the least of them*, and *less than the least of all saints*. Ephes. 3: 8, 1 Cor. 15: 9. Even in the churches he planted himself, he never pretended to any primacy or power above the other apostles; nor would he be regarded any otherwise by them, than as the instrument to them of the grace of God, and preacher of the Gospel, not as the head of a sect. To the Corinthians he writes in these words: —“Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” 1 Cor. 1: 12, 17. And in another place, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as

the Lord gave to every man?" 1 Cor. 3: 5. "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves *your servants* for Jesus' sake." 2 Cor. 4: 5.

All the authority he exercised over them was purely of a spiritual nature, tending to their instruction and edification, without any mixture of that civil dominion in which alone an impostor can find his account. Such was the dominion acquired and exercised through the pretence of Divine inspiration, by many ancient legislators, by Minos, Rhadamanthus, Triptolemus, Lycurgus, Numa, Zaleucus, Zoroaster, Xamolxis; nay, even by Pythagoras, who joined legislation to his philosophy, and, like the others, pretended to miracles and revelations from God, to give a more venerable sanction to the laws he prescribed. Such, in latter times, was attained by Odin among the Goths, by Mohammed among the Arabians, by Mango Copac among the Peruvians, by the Sofi family among the Persians, and that of the Xeriffs among the Moors. To such a dominion did also aspire the many false Messiahs among the Jews. In short, a spiritual authority was only desired as a foundation for temporal power, or as the support of it, by all these pretenders to Divine inspiration, and others whom history mentions in different ages and countries to have used the same arts. But St. Paul innovated nothing in government or civil affairs; he meddled not with legislation; he formed no commonwealths; he raised no seditions; he affected no temporal power. Obedience to their rulers (Romans, 13) was the doctrine he taught to the churches he planted; and what he taught he practiced himself: nor did he use any of those soothing arts by which ambitious

and cunning men recommend themselves to the favor of those whom they endeavor to subject to their power. Whatever was wrong in the disciples under his care he freely reprov'd, as it became a teacher from God, of which numberless instances are to be found in all his epistles. And he was as careful of them when he had left them, as while he resided among them, which an impostor would hardly have been, whose ends were centered all in himself. This is the manner in which he writes to the Philippians: "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Phil. 2 : 12. And a little after he adds the cause why he interested himself so much in their conduct, "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither labored in vain. Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all." Phil. 2 : 15-17. Are those the words of an impostor, desiring nothing but temporal power? No; they are evidently written by one who looked beyond the bounds of this life. But it may be said that he affected at least an absolute spiritual power over the churches he formed. I answer, *he preached Christ Jesus, and not himself*. Christ was the *head*, he only the *minister*; and for such only he gave himself to them. He called those who assisted him in preaching the Gospel, his *fellow laborers* and *fellow-servants*.

So far was he from taking any advantage of a higher education, superior learning, and more use of the world, to claim to himself any supremacy above the other apostles, that he made light of all these attainments, and declared *that he came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, but determined to know nothing among those he converted save Jesus Christ and him crucified.* And the reason he gave for it was, *that their faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.* 1 Cor. 2 : 1, 2-5. Now this conduct put him quite on a level with the other apostles, who knew Jesus Christ as well as he, and had the power of God going along with their preaching in an equal degree of virtue and grace. But an impostor, whose aim had been power, would have acted a contrary part; he would have availed himself of all those advantages, he would have extolled them as highly as possible, he would have set up himself by virtue of them as head of that sect to which he acceded, or at least of the proselytes made by himself. This is no more than what was done by every philosopher who formed a school; much more was it natural in one who propagated a new religion.

We see that the Bishops of Rome have claimed to themselves a primacy, or rather a monarchy over the whole Christian church. If St. Paul had been actuated by the same lust of dominion, it was much easier for him to have succeeded in such an attempt. It was much easier to make himself head of a few poor mechanics and fishermen, whose superior he had always been in the eyes of the world, than for the bishops of Rome to reduce those of Ravenna or Milan, and other great metropolitans, to their obedience. Besides the op-

position they met with from such potent antagonists, they were obliged to support their pretensions in direct contradiction to those very Scriptures which they were forced to ground them upon, and to the indisputable practice of the whole Christian church for many centuries. These were such difficulties as required the utmost abilities and skill to surmount. But the first preachers of the Gospel had easier means to corrupt a faith not yet fully known, and which in many places could only be known by what they severally published themselves. It was necessary, indeed, while they continued together, and taught the same people, that they should agree, otherwise the credit of their sect would have been overthrown; but when they separated, and formed different churches in distant countries, the same necessity no longer remained.

It was in the power of St. Paul to model most of the churches he formed, so as to favor his own ambition; for he preached the Gospel in parts of the world where no other apostles had been, *where Christ was not named* till he brought the knowledge of him, avoiding *to build upon another man's foundation*. Rom. 15: 20. Now had he been an impostor, would he have confined himself to just the same Gospel as was delivered by the other apostles, where he had such a latitude to preach what he pleased without contradiction? Would he not have twisted and warped the doctrines of Christ to his own ends, to the particular use and expediency of his own followers, and to the peculiar support and increase of his own power? That this was not done by St. Paul, or by any other of the apostles in so many various parts of the world as they traveled into, and in churches absolutely under their own direction; that

the Gospel preached by them all should be one and the same, the doctrines agreeing in every particular, without any one of them attributing more to himself than he did to the others, or establishing anything even in point of order or discipline different from the rest, or more advantageous to his own interest, credit or power, is a most strong and convincing proof of their not being impostors, but acting entirely by Divine inspiration.

If any one imagines that he sees any difference between the doctrines of St. James and St. Paul concerning justification by faith or by works, let him read Mr. Locke's excellent comment upon the epistles of the latter; or let him only consider these words in the first epistle to the Corinthians, chap. 9 : 27. *But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast away.*

If St. Paul had believed or taught that faith without works was sufficient to save a disciple of Christ, to what purpose did he *keep under his body*, since his salvation was not to depend upon *that* being subjected to the power of his reason, but merely upon the *faith* he professed? His *faith* was firm, and so strongly founded upon the most certain conviction, that he had no reason to doubt its continuance; how could he then think it possible, that while he retained that *saving faith*, he might nevertheless *be a cast away*? Or if he had supposed that his *election* and *calling* was of such a nature, as that it irresistibly impelled him to good, and restrained him from evil, how could he express any fear, lest the lusts of his body should prevent his salvation? Can such an apprehension be



made to agree with the notions of absolute predestination, ascribed by some to St. Paul? He could have no doubt that the grace of God had been given to him in the most extraordinary manner; yet we see that he thought his election was not so certain but that he might fall from it again through the natural prevalence of bodily appetites, if not duly restrained by his own voluntary care. This single passage is a full answer, out of the mouth of St. Paul himself, to all the mistakes that have been made of his meaning in some obscure expressions concerning grace, election, and justification.

If, then, it appears that St. Paul had nothing to gain by taking this part, let us consider, on the other hand, WHAT HE GAVE UP and WHAT HE HAD REASON TO FEAR. He gave up a fortune, which he was then in a fair way of advancing: he gave up that reputation which he had acquired by the labors and studies of his whole life, and by a behavior which had been blameless, *touching the righteousness which is in the law*. Phil. 3: 6. He gave up his friends, his relations, and family, from whom he estranged and banished himself for life, he gave up that religion *which he had profited in, above many his equals in his own nation, and those traditions of his fathers, which he had been more exceedingly zealous of*. Gal. 1: 14. How hard this sacrifice was to a man of his warm temper, and above all men, to a Jew, is worth consideration. That nation is known to have been more tenacious of their religious opinions than any other upon the face of the earth. The strictest and proudest sect among them was that of the Pharisees, under whose discipline St. Paul was bred.

The departing, therefore, so suddenly from their favorite tenets, renouncing their pride, and from their disciple becoming their adversary, was a most difficult effort for one to make so nursed up in the esteem of them, and whose early prejudices were so strongly confirmed by all the power of habit, all the authority of example, and all the allurements of honor and interest. These were the sacrifices he had to make in becoming a Christian; let us now see what inconveniences he had to fear: the implacable vengeance of those he deserted; that sort of contempt which is hardest to bear, the contempt of those whose good opinion he had most eagerly sought, and all those other complicated evils which he describes in his second Epistle to the Corinthians, chap. 11. Evils, the least of which were enough to have frightened any impostor even from the most hopeful and profitable cheat. But where the advantage proposed bears no proportion to the dangers incurred, or the mischiefs endured, he must be absolutely out of his senses who will either engage in an imposture, or, being engaged, persevere.

Upon the whole, then, I think I have proved that the desire of wealth, or fame, or of power, could be no motive to make St. Paul a convert to Christ; but that, on the contrary, he must have been checked by that desire, as well as by the just apprehension of many inevitable and insupportable evils, from taking a part so contradictory to his past life, to all the principles he had imbibed, and all the habits he had contracted.

It only remains to be inquired, whether the GRATIFICATION OF ANY OTHER PASSION under the authority of

that religion, or by the means it afforded, could be his inducement. That there have been some impostors, who have pretended to revelations from God, merely to give loose to irregular passions, and set themselves free from all restraints of government, law, or morality, both ancient and modern history shows. But the doctrine preached by St. Paul is absolutely contrary to all such designs. His writings\* breathe nothing but the strictest morality, obedience to magistrates, order, and government, with the utmost abhorrence of all licentiousness, idleness, or loose behavior under the cloak of religion. We no where read in his works, that saints are above moral ordinances; that dominion or property is founded in grace; that there is no difference in moral actions; that any impulses of the mind are to direct us against the light of our reason, and the laws of nature; or any of those wicked tenets, from which the peace of society has been disturbed, and the rules of morality have been broken by men pretending to act under the sanction of a divine revelation. Nor does any part of his life, either before or after his conversion to Christianity, bear any mark of a libertine disposition. As among the Jews, so among the Christians, his conversion and manners were blameless. Hear the appeal that he makes to the Thesalonians upon his doctrine and behavior among them: "Our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily, and justly, and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe."† And to the Co-

\* See particularly Rom. 11 and 13, and Col. 3.

† Thess. 2: 10. If St. Paul had held any secret doctrines, or *esoteric*, (as the philosophers called them,) we should have pro-

rinthians he says, *we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man.* 2 Cor. 7 : 2. See also 1 · 12, and 4 : 2.

It was not, then, the desire of gratifying any irregular passion, that could induce St. Paul to turn Christian, any more than the hope of advancing himself either in wealth, or reputation, or power. But still it is possible, some men may say, (and I would leave no imaginable objection unanswered,) that though St. Paul could have no selfish or interested view in undertaking such an imposture, yet, for the sake of its moral doctrines, he might be inclined to support the Christian faith, and make USE OF SOME PIOUS FRAUDS to advance a religion which, though erroneous and false in its theological tenets, and in the fact upon which it is grounded, was, in its precepts and influence, beneficial to mankind.

Now, admit that some good men in the heathen world have both pretended to divine revelations, and introduced or supported religions they knew to be false, under a notion of public utility. But besides that, this practice was built upon maxims disclaimed by the

bably found them in the letters he wrote to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, his bosom friends and disciples. But both the theological and moral doctrines are exactly the same in *them*, as those he wrote to the churches. A very strong presumptive proof of his being no impostor! Surely, had he been one, he would have given some hints in these private letters of the cheat they were carrying on, and some secret directions to turn it to some worldly purposes of one kind or another. But no such thing is to be found in any one of them. The same disinterested, holy, and divine spirit breathes in all these, as in the other more public epistles.

Jews, (who, looking upon truth, not utility, to be the basis of their religion, abhorred all such frauds, and thought them injurious to the honor of God,) the circumstances they acted in were different from those of St. Paul.

The first reformers of savage, uncivilized nations, had no other way to tame those barbarous people, and to bring them to submit to order and government, but by the reverence which they acquired from this pretence. The fraud was therefore alike beneficial both to the deceiver and the deceived. And in all other instances which can be given of good men acting this part, they not only did it to serve good ends, but were secure of its doing no harm. Thus, when Lycurgus persuaded the Spartans, or Numa the Romans, that the laws of the one were inspired by Apollo, or those of the other by Egeria; when they taught their people to put great faith in oracles, or in augury, no temporal mischief, either to them or their people, could attend the reception of that belief. It drew on no persecutions, no enmity with the world. But at that time, when St. Paul undertook the preaching of the Gospel, to persuade any man to be a Christian, was to persuade him to expose himself to all the calamities human nature could suffer. This St. Paul knew; this he not only expected, but warned those he taught to look for it too. 1 Thess. 3 : 4; 2 Cor. 6 : 4, 5; Eph. 6 : 10-16; Phil. 1 : 28-30. The only support that he had himself, or gave to them, was, "That if they *suffered* with Christ, they should be also glorified *together*." And that "he reckoned that the sufferings of the present time were not worthy to be compared *with that glory*." Rom. 8 : 17, 18. So likewise he writes to the

Thessalonians: "We ourselves glory in you, in the churches of God, for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure; which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, *for which also ye suffer*. Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense (or repay) tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled, rest with us, *when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, &c.*" 2 Thess. 1 : 4-7. And to the Corinthians he says, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." How much reason he had to say this, the hatred, the contempt, the torments, the deaths endured by the Christians in that age, and long afterwards, abundantly prove. Whoever professed the Gospel under these circumstances, without an entire conviction of its being a divine revelation, must have been mad; and if he made others profess it by fraud or deceit, he must have been worse than mad; he must have been the most hardened villain that ever breathed. Could any man, who had in his nature the least spark of humanity, subject his fellow-creatures to so many miseries; or could one that had in his mind the least ray of reason, expose himself to share them with those he deceived, in order to advance a religion which he knew to be false, merely for the sake of its moral doctrines? Such an extravagance is too absurd to be supposed; and I dwell too long on a notion that, upon a little reflection, confutes itself.

I would only add to the other proofs I have given, that St. Paul could have no rational motive to become a disciple of Christ unless he sincerely believed in

him, this observation: that whereas it may be objected to the other apostles, by those who are resolved not to credit their testimony, that having been deeply engaged with Jesus during his life, they were obliged to continue the same professions after his death, for the *support of their own credit*, and from having gone too far to go back: this can by no means be said of St. Paul. On the contrary, whatever force there may be in that way of reasoning, it all tends to convince us that St. Paul must have naturally continued a Jew, and an enemy of Christ Jesus. If they were engaged on one side, he was as strongly engaged on the other; if shame withheld them from changing sides, much more ought it to have stopped him, who being of a higher education and rank in life a great deal than they, had more credit to lose, and must be supposed to have been vastly more sensible to that sort of shame. The only difference was, that they, by quitting their master after his death, might have preserved themselves; whereas he, by quitting the Jews, and taking up the cross of Christ, certainly brought on his own destruction.

As, therefore, no rational motive appears for St. Paul's embracing the faith of Christ, without having been really convinced of the truth of it; but, on the contrary, every thing concurred to deter him from acting that part; one might very justly conclude, that when a man of his understanding embraced that faith, he was in reality convinced of the truth of it; and that, by consequence, he was not an impostor, who said what he knew to be false with an intent to deceive.

But that no shadow of doubt may remain upon the impossibility of his having been such an impostor;

that it may not be said, "The minds of men are sometimes so capricious that they will act without any rational motives, they know not why, and so perhaps might St. Paul:" I shall next endeavor to prove, that if he had been so unaccountably wild and absurd as to undertake an imposture so unprofitable and dangerous both to himself and those he deceived by it, he COULD NOT POSSIBLY HAVE CARRIED IT ON WITH ANY SUCCESS by the means that we know he employed.

First, then, let me observe, that if his conversion, and the part that he acted in consequence of it, was an imposture, it was such an imposture as *could not be carried on by one man alone*. The faith he professed, and which he became an apostle of, was not his invention. He was not the author or beginner of it, and therefore it was not in his power to draw the doctrines of it out of his own imagination. With Jesus, who was the Author and Head of it, he had never had any communication before his death, nor with his apostles after his death, except as their persecutor. As he took on himself the office and character of an apostle, it was absolutely necessary for him to have a precise and perfect knowledge of all the facts contained in the Gospel, several of which had only passed between Jesus himself and his twelve apostles, and others more privately still, so that they could be known but to very few, being not yet made public by any writings; otherwise he would have exposed himself to ridicule among those who preached that Gospel with more knowledge than he; and as the testimony they bore would have been different in point of fact, and many of their doctrines and interpretations of Scripture repugnant to his, from their entire disagreement with those Jewish



opinions in which he was bred up; either they must have been forced to ruin his credit, or he would have ruined theirs. Some general notices he might have gained of these matters from the Christians he persecuted, but not exact or extensive enough to qualify him for an apostle, whom the least error, in these points, would have disgraced, and who must have been ruined by it in all his pretensions to that inspiration from whence the apostolical authority was chiefly derived.

It was, therefore, impossible for him to act this part but in confederacy, at least, with the apostles. Such a confederacy was still more necessary for him, as the undertaking to preach the Gospel did not only require an exact and particular knowledge of all it contained, but an apparent power of working miracles; for to such a power all the apostles appealed in proof of their mission, and of the doctrines they preached. He was, therefore, to learn of them by what secret arts they so imposed on the senses of men, if this power was a cheat. But how could he gain these men to become his confederates? Was it by furiously persecuting them and their brethren, as we find that he did, to the very moment of his conversion? Would they venture to trust their capital enemy with all the secrets of their imposture, with those upon which all their hopes and credit depended? Would they put it in his power to take away not only their lives, but the honor of their sect, which they preferred to their lives, by so ill-placed a confidence? Would men, so secret as not to be drawn by the most severe persecutions to say one word which could convict them of being impostors, confess themselves such to their persecutor, in hopes of his being their accomplice? This is still more impossi-

ble than that he should attempt to engage in their fraud without their consent and assistance.

We must suppose then, that, till he came to Damascus, he had no communication with the apostles, acted in no concert with them, and learnt nothing from them, except the doctrines which they had publicly taught to all the world. When he came there he told the Jews, to whom he brought letters from the high priest and the synagogue against the Christians, of his having seen in the way a great light from heaven, and heard Jesus Christ reproaching him with his persecution, and commanding him to go into the city, where it should be told him what he was to do. But to account for his choosing this method of declaring himself a convert to Christ, we must suppose, that all those who were with him, when he pretended he had this vision, were his accomplices; otherwise the story he told could have gained no belief, being contradicted by them whose testimony was necessary to vouch for the truth of it. And yet how can we suppose that all these men should be willing to join in this imposture? They were, probably, officers of justice, or soldiers, who had been employed often before in executing the orders of the high priest and the rulers against the Christians. Or, if they were chosen particularly for this expedition, they must have been chosen by them as men they could trust for their zeal in that cause. What should induce them to the betraying of that business they were employed in? Does it even appear that they had any connection with the man they so lied for, before or after this time, or any reward from him for it? This is, therefore, a difficulty in the first outset of this imposture not to be overcome.

But, farther : he was to be instructed by one at Damascus. That instructor, therefore, must have been his accomplice, though they appeared to be absolute strangers to one another ; and though he was a man of an excellent character, *who had a good report of all the Jews that dwelt at Damascus*, and so was very unlikely to have engaged in such an imposture. Notwithstanding these improbabilities, this man, I say, must have been his confidant and accomplice in carrying on this fraud, and the whole matter must have been previously agreed on between them. But, here again the same objection occurs : how could this man venture to act such a dangerous part, without the consent of the other disciples, especially of the apostles, or by what means could he obtain their consent ? And how absurdly did they contrive their business, to make the conversion of Saul the effect of a miracle, which all those who were with him must certify did never happen ! How much easier would it have been to have made him be present at some pretended miracle wrought by the disciples, or by Ananias himself, when none were ab! discover the fraud, and have imputed his conversion to that, or to the arguments used by some of his prisoners whom he might have discoursed with, and questioned about their faith, and the grounds of it, in order to color his intended conversion !

As this was the safest, so it was the most natural method of bringing about such a change, instead of ascribing it to an event which lay so open to detection. For, to use the words of St. Paul to Agrippa, *this thing was not done in a corner*, Acts, 26, but in the eye of the world, and subject immediately to the examination of those who would be the most strict in

searching into the truth of it, the Jews at Damascus. Had they been able to bring any shadow of proof to convict him of fraud in this affair, his whole scheme of imposture must have been nipt in the bud. Nor were they, at Jerusalem, whose commission he bore, less concerned to discover so provoking a cheat. But we find that, many years afterwards, when they had all the time and means they could desire to make the strictest inquiry, he was bold enough to appeal to Agrippa, in the presence of Festus, Acts, 26, upon his knowledge of the truth of his story; who did not contradict him, though he had certainly heard all that the Jews could allege against the credit of it in any particular—a very remarkable proof, both of the notoriety of the fact, and the integrity of the man, who, with so fearless a confidence, could call upon a *king* to give testimony for him, even while he was sitting in judgment upon him.

But to return to Ananias. Is it not strange, if this story had been an imposture, and he had been joined with Paul in carrying it on, that, after their meeting at Damascus, we never should hear of their consorting together, or acting in concert; or that the former drew any benefit from the friendship of the latter, when he became so considerable among the Christians? Did Ananias engage and continue in such a dangerous fraud without any hopes or desire of private advantage? Or was it safe for Paul to shake him off, and risk his resentment? There is, I think, no other way to get over this difficulty but by supposing that Ananias happened to die soon after the other's conversion. Let us, then, take that for granted, without any authority either of history or tradition, and let us see in what

manner this wondrous imposture was carried on by Paul himself. His first care ought to have been to get himself owned and received as an apostle by the apostles. Till this was done, the bottom he stood upon was very narrow, nor could he have any probable means of supporting himself in any esteem or credit among the disciples. Intruders into impostures run double risks; they are in danger of being detected, not only by those upon whom they attempt to practice their cheats, but also by those whose society they force themselves into, who must always be jealous of such an intrusion, and much more from one who had always before behaved as their enemy. Therefore, to gain the apostles, and bring them to admit him into a participation of all their mysteries, all their designs, and all their authority, was absolutely necessary at this time to Paul. The least delay was of dangerous consequence, and might expose him to such inconveniences as he never afterwards could overcome. But, instead of attending to this necessity, he went into Arabia, and then returned again to Damascus; nor did he go to Jerusalem till three years were past Gal. 1: 17, 18.

Now, this conduct may be accounted for, if it be true that (as he declares in his Epistle to the Galatians) "he neither received the Gospel of any man, neither was he taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." 1: 12. Under such a Master, and with the assistance of his divine power, he might go on boldly without any human associates; but an impostor so left to himself, so deprived of all help, all support, all recommendation, could not have succeeded.

Further: We find that, at Antioch, he was not afraid *to withstand Peter to his face, and even to reprove*

him before all the disciples, because he was to be blamed. Gal. 2 : 11-14. If he was an impostor, how could he venture so to offend that apostle, whom it so highly concerned him to agree with and please? Accomplices in a fraud are obliged to show greater regard to each other ; such freedom belongs to truth alone.

But let us consider what DIFFICULTIES HE HAD TO ENCOUNTER AMONG THE GENTILES themselves, in the enterprise he undertook of going to them, making himself their apostle, and converting them to the religion of Christ. As this undertaking was the distinguishing part of his apostolical functions, that which, in the language of his epistles, he was particularly *called to* ; or which, to speak like an unbeliever, he chose and assigned to himself ; it deserves a particular consideration. But I shall only touch the principal points of it as concisely as I can, because you have in a great measure exhausted the subject in your late excellent book on the resurrection, where you discourse with such strength of reason and eloquence upon the difficulties that opposed the propagation of the Christian religion in all parts of the world.

Now, in this enterprise St. Paul was to contend, 1. With the policy and power of the magistrate. 2. With the interest, credit, and craft of the priests. 3. With the prejudice and passions of the people. 4. With the wisdom and pride of the philosophers.

That in all heathen countries the established religion was interwoven with their civil constitution, and supported by the magistrate as an essential part of the government, whoever has any acquaintance with antiquity cannot but know. They tolerated, indeed,

many different worships, (though not with so entire a latitude as some people suppose,) as they suffered men to discourse very freely concerning religion, provided they would submit to an exterior conformity with established rites; nay, according to the genius of paganism, which allowed an intercommunity of worship, they in most places admitted, without any great difficulty, new gods and new rites; but they no where endured any attempt to overturn the established religion, or any direct opposition made to it, esteeming that an unpardonable offence, not to the gods alone, but to the state. This was so universal a notion, and so constant a maxim of heathen policy, that when the Christian religion set itself up in opposition to all other religions, admitted no intercommunity with them, but declared that the gods of the Gentiles *were not to be worshiped*, nor any society suffered between them and *the only true God*; when this new doctrine began to be propagated, and made such a progress as to fall under the notice of the magistrate, the civil power was every where armed with all its terrors against it. When, therefore, St. Paul undertook the conversion of the Gentiles, he knew very well that the most severe persecutions must be the consequence of any success in his design.

2. This danger was rendered more certain by the opposition he was to expect from the *interest, credit, and craft of the priests*. How gainful a trade they, with all their inferior dependants, made of those superstitions which he proposed to destroy; how much credit they had with the people, as well as the state, by the means of them; and how much craft they employed in carrying on their impostures, all history

shows. St. Paul could not doubt that all these men would exert their utmost abilities to stop the spreading of the doctrines he preached—doctrines which struck at the root of their power and gain, and were much more terrible to them than those of the most atheistical sect of philosophers ; because the latter contented themselves with denying their principles, but at the same time declared for supporting their practices, as useful cheats, or at least acquiesced in them as establishments authorized by the sanction of law. Whatever, therefore, their cunning could do to support their own worship, whatever aid they could draw from the magistrate, whatever zeal they could raise in the people, St. Paul was to contend with, unsupported by any human assistance. And

3. This he was to do in direct opposition to all the *prejudices and passions of the people*.

Now, had he confined his preaching to Judea alone. this difficulty would not have occurred in near so great a degree. The people were there so moved with the miracles the apostles had wrought, as well as by the memory of those done by Jesus, that, in spite of their rulers, they began to be favorably disposed towards them ; and we even find that the high-priest, and the council, had more than once been withheld from treating the apostles with so much severity as they desired to do, *for fear of the people*. Acts, 4 : 21, and 5 : 26. But in the people among the Gentiles no such dispositions could be expected : their prejudices were violent, not only in favor of their own superstitions, but in a particular manner against any doctrines taught by a Jew. As from their aversion to all idolatry, and irreconcilable separation from all other religions, the



Jews were accused of hating mankind, so were they hated by all other nations; nor were they hated alone, but despised. To what a degree that contempt was carried, appears as well by the mention made of them in heathen authors, as by the complaints Josephus makes of the unreasonableness and injustice of it in his apology. What authority then could St. Paul flatter himself that his preaching would carry along with it, among people to whom he was at once both the object of national hatred, and national scorn? But besides this popular prejudice against a Jew, the doctrines he taught were such as shocked all their most ingrafted religious opinions. They agreed to no principles of which he could avail himself to procure their assent to the other parts of the Gospel he preached. To convert the Jews to Christ Jesus, he was able to argue from their own Scriptures, upon the authority of books which they owned to contain divine revelations, and from which he could clearly convince them that Jesus was *the very Christ*. Acts, 9 : 22. But all these ideas were new to the Gentiles; they expected no Christ, they allowed no such Scriptures, they were to be taught the Old Testament as well as the New. How was this to be done by a man not even authorized by his own nation; opposed by those who were greatest, and thought wisest, among them; either quite single, or on'y attended by one or two more under the same disadvantages, and even of less consideration than he?

The light of nature, indeed, without express revelations, might have conducted the Gentiles to the knowledge of one God, the Creator of all things; and to that light St. Paul might appeal, as we find that he did; Acts 14: 17; 17: 27, 28. But clear as it was

they had almost put it out by their superstitions, *having changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things, and serving the creature more than the Creator.* Rom. 1: 23, 25. And to this idolatry they were strongly attached, not by their prejudices alone, but by their passions, which were flattered and gratified in it, as they believed that their deities would be rendered propitious, not by virtue and holiness, but by offerings, and incense, and outward rites; rites which dazzled their senses by magnificent shows, and allured them by pleasures often of a very impure and immoral nature. Instead of all this, the Gospel proposed to them no other terms of acceptance with God but a worship of him *in spirit and in truth*, sincere repentance, and perfect submission to the Divine laws, the strictest purity of life and manners, and the renouncing of all those lusts in which they had formerly walked. How unpalatable a doctrine was this to men so given up to the power of those lusts, as the whole heathen world was at that time! If their philosophers could be brought to approve it, there could be no hope that the people would relish it, or exchange the ease and indulgence which those religions in which they were bred allowed to their appetites, for one so harsh and severe. But might not St. Paul, in order to gain them, relax that severity? He might have done so, no doubt, and probably would, if he had been an impostor; but it appears by all his epistles, that he preached it as purely, and enjoined it as strongly, as Jesus himself.

But supposing they might be persuaded to quit

their habitual sensuality for the purity of the Gospel, and to forsake their idolatries, which St. Paul reckons amongst the works of the flesh, Gal. 5: 19, 20 for spiritual worship of the *one invisible God*, how were they disposed to receive the doctrine of the salvation of man by the cross of Jesus Christ? Could they who were bred in notions so contrary to that *great mystery*, to that *hidden wisdom of God, which none of the princes of this world knew*, 1 Cor. 2: 7, 8, incline to receive it against the instructions of all their teachers, and the example of all their superiors? Could they, whose gods had almost all been powerful kings, and mighty conquerors—they, who at that very time paid Divine honors to the emperors of Rome, whose only title to deification was the imperial power—could they, I say, reconcile their ideas to a *crucified Son of God*, to a *Redeemer of mankind on the cross*? Would they look there for him *who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature; by whom and for whom were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalties, or powers*? Col. 1: 15, 16. No, most surely the *natural man* (to speak in the words of St. Paul, 1 Cor. 2: 14) *received not these things, for they are foolishness to him; neither could he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*. I may therefore conclude, that in the enterprise of converting the Gentiles, St. Paul was to contend not only with the policy and power of the magistrates, and with the interest, credit, and craft of the priests, but also with the prejudices and passions of the people.

4. I am next to show that he was to expect no less

opposition from the *wisdom and pride of the philosophers*. And though some may imagine, that men who pretended to be raised and refined above vulgar prejudices and vulgar passions, would have been helpful to him in his design, it will be found upon examination, that instead of assisting or befriending the Gospel, they were its worst and most irreconcilable enemies. For they had prejudices of their own still more repugnant to the doctrines of Christ than those of the vulgar, more deeply rooted, and more obstinately fixed in their minds. The wisdom upon which they valued themselves chiefly consisted in vain metaphysical speculations, in logical subtleties, in endless disputes, in high-flown conceits of the perfection and self-sufficiency of human wisdom, in dogmatical positiveness about doubtful opinions, or sceptical doubts about the most clear and certain truths. It must appear at first sight, that nothing could be more contradictory to the first principles of the Christian religion than those of the atheistical, or sceptical sects, which at that time prevailed very much both among the Greeks and the Romans; nor shall we find that the theistical were much less at enmity with it, when we consider the doctrines they held upon the nature of God and the soul.

But I will not enlarge on a subject which the most learned Mr. *Warburton* handled so well. Div. Leg. 1: 3. If it were necessary to enter particularly into this argument, I could easily prove that there was not one of all the different philosophical sects then upon earth, not even the Platonics themselves, who are thought to favor it most, that did not maintain some opinions fundamentally contrary to those of the Gos

pel. And in this they all agreed, to explode as most unphilosophical, and contrary to every notion that any among them maintained, that great article of the Christian religion, upon which the foundations of it are laid, and without which St. Paul declares to his proselytes, *their faith would be vain*; 1 Cor. 15: 17, 20; the resurrection of the dead with their bodies, of which resurrection Christ was the first-born. Col. 1: 18. Besides the contrariety of their tenets to those of the Gospel, the pride that was common to all the philosophers, was of itself an almost invincible obstacle against the admission of the evangelical doctrines calculated to humble that pride, and teach them, that *professing themselves to be wise, they became fools*. Rom. 1: 22. This pride was no less intractable, no less averse to the instructions of Christ, or of his apostles, than that of the Scribes and Pharisees. St. Paul was therefore to contend, in his enterprise of converting the Gentiles, with all the opposition that could be made to it by all the different sects of philosophers. And how formidable an opposition this was, let those consider who are acquainted from history with the great credit those sects had obtained at that time in the world; a credit even superior to that of the priests. Whoever pretended to learning or virtue was their disciple; the greatest magistrates, generals, kings, ranged themselves under their discipline, were trained up in their schools, and professed the opinions they taught.

All these sects made it a maxim not to disturb the popular worship, or established religion; but under those limitations they taught very freely whatever they pleased; and no religious opinions were more

warmly supported than those they delivered were by their followers. The Christian religion at once overturned their several systems, taught a morality more perfect than theirs, and established it upon higher and much stronger foundations; mortified their pride, confounded their learning, discovered their ignorance, ruined their credit. Against such an enemy, what would they not do? Would not they exert the whole power of their rhetoric, the whole art of their logic, their influence over the people, their interest with the great, to discredit a novelty so alarming to them all? If St. Paul had had nothing to trust to but his own natural faculties, his own understanding, knowledge, and eloquence, could he have hoped to be singly a match for all theirs united against him? Could a teacher unheard of before, from an obscure and unlearned part of the world, have withstood the authority of Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Zeno, Arcesilaus, Carneades, and all the great names which held the first rank of human wisdom? He might as well have attempted alone, or with the help of Barnabas, and Silas, and Timotheus, and Titus, to have erected a monarchy upon the ruins of all the several states then in the world, as to have erected Christianity upon the destruction of all the several sects of philosophy which reigned in the minds of the Gentiles, among whom he preached, particularly the Greeks and the Romans.

Having thus proved, as I think, that in the work of converting the Gentiles, St. Paul could have no assistance; but was sure, on the contrary, of the utmost repugnance and opposition to it imaginable from the magistrates, from the priests, from the people, and from the philosophers; it necessarily follows, that to suc-

ceed in that work, he must have called in some extraordinary aid, some stronger power than that of reason and argument. Accordingly, we find, he tells the Corinthians, *that his speech and preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power.* 1 Cor. 2 : 4. And to the Thessalonians he says, *Our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost.* 1 Thess. 1 : 5. It was to the efficacy of the divine power that he ascribed all his success in those countries, and wherever else he planted the Gospel of Christ. If that power really went with him, it would enable him to overcome all those difficulties that obstructed his enterprise ; but *then he was not an impostor.*

Our inquiry, therefore, must be, whether (supposing him to have been an impostor) he could, by **PRETENDING TO MIRACLES**, have overcome all those difficulties, and carried on his work with success ? Now, to give miracles, falsely pretended to, any reputation, two circumstances are principally necessary—*an apt disposition* in those whom they are designed to impose upon, and a *powerful confederacy* to carry on and abet the cheat. Both these circumstances, or at least one of them, have always accompanied all the false miracles, ancient and modern, which have obtained any credit among mankind. To both these was owing the general faith of the heathen world in oracles, auspices, auguries, and other impostures, by which the priests, combined with the magistrates, supported the national worship and deluded a people prepossessed in their favor, and willing to be deceived. Both the same caus-

es likewise co-operate in the belief that is given to Popish miracles among those of their own church. But neither of these assisted St. Paul. What prepossession could there have been in the minds of the Gentiles, either in favor of him or the doctrines he taught? Or, rather, what prepossessions could be stronger than those which they, undoubtedly, had against both? If he had remained in Judea, it might have been suggested by unbelievers, that the Jews were *a credulous people*, apt to seek after miracles, and to afford them an easy belief; and that the fame of those said to be done by Jesus himself, and by his apostles, before Paul declared his conversion, had predisposed their minds, and warmed their imaginations, to the admission of others supposed to be wrought by the same power.

The signal miracle of the apostles speaking with tongues on the day of Pentecost, had made three thousand converts; that of healing the lame man at the gate of the temple, five thousand more. Acts, 2 : 41 ; 4 : 4. Nay, such was the faith of the multitude, that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, *that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them*. Acts, 5 : 15. Here was, therefore, a good foundation laid for Paul to proceed upon in pretending to similar miraculous works; though the priests and the rulers were hardened against them, the people were inclined to give credit to them, and there was reason to hope for success among *them* both at Jerusalem and in all the regions belonging to the Jews. But no such dispositions were to be found in the Gentiles. There was among them no matter prepared for



imposture to work upon, no knowledge of Christ, no thought of his power, or of the power of those who came in his name. Thus, when at Lystra, St. Paul healed the man who was a cripple from his birth, Acts, 14, so far were the people there from supposing that he could be able to do such a thing, *as an apostle of Christ*, or by any virtue derived from him, that they took Paul and Barnabas to be *gods* of their own, come down *in the likeness of men*, and would have sacrificed to them as such.

Now, I ask, did the citizens of Lystra concur in this matter to the deceiving of themselves? Were their imaginations overheated with any conceits of a miraculous power belonging to Paul, which could dispose them to think he worked such a miracle when he did not? As the contrary is evident, so in all other places to which he carried the Gospel, it may be proved to demonstration, that he could find no disposition, no aptness, no bias to aid his imposture, if the miracles, by which he every where confirmed his preaching, had not been true.

On the other hand, let us examine whether, without the advantage of such an assistance, there was any *confederacy* strong enough to impose his false miracles upon the Gentiles, who were both unprepared and undisposed to receive them. The contrary is apparent. He was in no combination with their priests or their magistrates; no *sect* or *party* among them gave him any help; all eyes were open and watchful to detect his impostures; all hands ready to punish him as soon as detected. Had he remained in Judea, he would, at least, have had many confederates, all the apostles, all the disciples of Christ, at that time pretty nume-

rous ; but in preaching to the Gentiles, he was often alone, rarely with more than two or three companions or followers. Was this a confederacy powerful enough to carry on such a cheat, in so many different parts of the world, against the united opposition of the magistrates, priests, philosophers, people, all combined to detect and expose their frauds ?

Let it be also considered, that those upon whom they practiced these arts were not a gross or ignorant people, apt to mistake any uncommon operations of nature, or juggling tricks, for miraculous acts. The churches planted by St. Paul were in the most enlightened parts of the world: among the Greeks of Asia and Europe, among the Romans, in the midst of science, philosophy, freedom of thought, and in an age more inquisitively curious into the powers of nature, and less inclined to credit religious frauds than any before it. Nor were they only the lowest of the people that he converted. Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of Paphos ; Erastus, chamberlain of Corinth ; and Dionysius, the Areopagite, were his proselytes.

Upon the whole, it appears beyond contradiction, that his pretension to miracles was not assisted by the *disposition* of those whom he designed to convert by those means, nor by any powerful *confederacy* to carry on, and abet the cheat, without both which concurring circumstances, or one at least, no such pretension was ever supported with any success.

Both these circumstances concurred even in the late famous miracles supposed to be done at Abbe Paris's tomb. They had not indeed the support of the government, and for that reason appear to deserve more attention than other Popish miracles ; but they

were supported by all the Jansenists, a very powerful and numerous party in France, made up partly of wise and able men, partly of bigots and enthusiasts. All these confederated together to give credit to miracles, said to be worked in behalf of their party ; and those who believed them were strongly disposed to that belief. And yet, with these advantages, how easily were they suppressed ! Only by walling up that part of the church where the tomb of the saint, who was supposed to work them, was placed ! Soon after this was done, a paper was fixed on the wall with this inscription :

De par le roy defense a Dieu  
De faire miracle en ce lieu.

*By command of the king, God is forbidden to work any more miracles here.* The pasquinade was a witty one, but the event turned the point of it against the party by which it was made : for if God had really worked any miracles there, could this absurd prohibition have taken effect ? Would he have suffered his purpose to be defeated by building a wall ? When all the apostles were shut up in prison to hinder their working of miracles, the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, and let them out. Acts, 5 : 16-26. But the power of Abbe Paris could neither throw down the wall that excluded his votaries, nor operate through that impediment. And yet his miracles are often compared with, and opposed by unbelievers to those of Christ and his apostles, which is the reason of my having taken this particular notice of them here. But to go back to the times nearer to St. Paul's.

There is in Lucian an account of a very extraordinary and successful imposture carried on in his days, by one Alexander of Pontus, who introduced a new god into that country, whose prophet he called himself, and in whose name he pretended to miracles, and delivered oracles, by which he acquired great wealth and power. All the arts by which this cheat was managed are laid open by Lucian, and nothing can better point out the difference between imposture and truth, than to observe the different conduct of this man and St. Paul. Alexander made no alteration in the religion established in Pontus before; he only grafted his own upon it; and spared no pains to interest in the success of it the whole *heathen* priesthood, not only in Pontus, but all over the world, sending great numbers of those who came to consult him to other oracles, that were at that time in the highest vogue; by which means he engaged them all to support the reputation of his, and abet his imposture. He spoke with the greatest respect of all the sects of philosophy, except the Epicureans, who from their principles he was sure would deride and oppose his fraud; for though they presumed not to innovate, and overturn established religions, yet they very freely attacked and exposed all innovations that were introduced under the name of religion, and had not the authority of a legal establishment. To get the better of their opposition, as well as that of the Christians, he called in the aid of persecution and force, exciting the people against them, and answering objections with stones

That he might be sure to get money enough, he delivered this oracle in the name of his god: *I command you to grace with gifts my prophet and minister*

*for I have no regard for riches myself, but the greatest for my prophet.* And he shared the gains that he made, which were immense, among an infinite number of associates, and instruments, whom he employed in carrying on and supporting his fraud. When any declared themselves to be his enemies, against whom he durst not proceed by open force, he endeavored to gain them by blandishments; and having got them into his power, to destroy them by secret ways; which arts he practiced against Lucian himself. Others he kept in awe and dependence upon him, by detaining in his own hands the written questions they had proposed to his god upon state affairs; and as these generally came from men of the greatest power and rank, his being possessed of them was of infinite service to him, and made him master of all their credit, and of no little part of their wealth.

He obtained the protection and friendship of Rutilianus, a great Roman general, by flattering him with promises of a very long life, and exaltation to deity after his death; and at last having quite turned his head, enjoined him by an oracle to marry his daughter, whom he pretended to have had by the moon: which command Rutilianus obeyed, and by his alliance secured this impostor from any danger of punishment; the Roman governor of Bithynia and Pontus excusing himself on that account from doing justice upon him, when Lucian and several others offered themselves to be his accusers.

He never quitted that ignorant and barbarous country, which he had made choice of at first as the fittest place to play his tricks in undiscovered; but residing himself among those superstitious and credulous peo-

ple extended his fame to a great distance by the emissaries which he employed all over the world, especially at Rome, who did not pretend themselves to work any miracles, but only promulgated his, and gave him intelligence of all that it was useful for him to know.

These were the methods by which this remarkable fraud was conducted, every one of which is directly opposite to all those used by St. Paul in preaching the Gospel; and yet such methods alone could give success to a cheat of this kind. I will not mention the many debaucheries and wicked enormities committed by this false prophet, under the mask of religion, which is another characteristic difference between him and St. Paul; nor the ambiguous answers, cunning evasions, and juggling artifices which he made use of, in all which it is easy to see the evident marks of an imposture, as well as in the objects he plainly appears to have had in view. That which I chiefly insist upon is, the strong confederacy with which he took care to support his pretension to miraculous powers, and the apt disposition in those he imposed upon to concur and assist in deceiving themselves; advantages entirely wanting to the apostle of Christ.

From all this it may be concluded, that no human means employed by St. Paul, in his design of converting the Gentiles, were, or could be adequate to the great difficulties he had to contend with, or to the success that we know attended his work; and we can in reason ascribe that success to no other cause but the power of God going along with, and aiding his ministry, because no other was equal to the effect.

## II. Paul not an Enthusiast.

Having then shown that St. Paul had *no rational motives* to become an apostle of Christ, without being himself convinced of the truth of that Gospel he preached; and that, had he engaged in such an imposture, without any rational motives, he would have had *no possible means* to carry it on with any success: having also brought reasons of a very strong nature to make it appear that the success he undoubtedly had in preaching the Gospel, was an effect of the divine power attending his ministry, I might rest all my proof of the Christian religion, being a divine revelation, upon the arguments drawn from this head alone. But to consider this subject in all possible lights, I shall pursue the proposition which I set out with, through each of its several parts; and having proved, as I hope, to the conviction of any impartial man, that St. Paul was not an impostor, who said what he knew to be false, with an intent to deceive, I come next to consider whether he was an *enthusiast*, who, by the force of an overheated imagination imposed upon himself.

Now, these are the ingredients of which *enthusiasm* is generally composed: *great heat of temper, melancholy, ignorance, credulity, and vanity, or self-conceit*. That the first of these qualities was in St. Paul, may be concluded from that fervor of zeal with which he acted, both as a Jew and Christian, in maintaining that which he thought to be right; and hence, I suppose, as well as from the impossibility of his having been an impostor, some unbelievers have chosen to consider him as an enthusiast. But this quality alone will not be sufficient to prove him to have been so in

the opinion of any reasonable man. The same temper has been common to others, who undoubtedly were not enthusiasts; to the Gracchi, to Cato, to Brutus, to many more among the best and wisest of men. Nor does it appear that this disposition had such a mastery over the mind of St. Paul that he was not able, at all times, to rule and control it by the dictates of reason. On the contrary, he was so much the master of it, as, in matters of an indifferent nature, to *become all things to all men*; 1 Cor. 9 : 20—22; bending his notions and manners to theirs, so far as his duty to God would permit, with the most pliant condescension; a conduct neither compatible with the stiffness of a bigot, nor the violent impulses of fanatical delusions. His zeal was eager and warm, but tempered with prudence, and even with the civilities and decorums of life, as appears by his behavior to Agrippa, Festus, and Felix; not the blind, inconsiderate, indecent zeal of an enthusiast.

Let us now see if any one of those other qualities which I have laid down, as disposing the mind to enthusiasm, and as being characteristic of it, belong to St. Paul. First, as to *melancholy*, which of all dispositions of body or mind, is most prone to enthusiasm; it neither appears by his writings, nor by any thing told of him in the Acts of the Apostles, nor by any other evidence, that St. Paul was inclined to it more than other men. Though he was full of remorse for his former ignorant persecution of the church of Christ we read of no gloomy penances, no extravagant mortification, such as the Brahmins, the Jaugues, the monks of La Trappe, and other melancholy enthusiasts inflict on themselves. His holiness only consisted



in the simplicity of a good life, and the unwearied performance of those apostolical duties to which he was called. The sufferings he met with on that account, he cheerfully bore, and even rejoiced in them for the love of Jesus Christ; but he brought none on himself; we find, on the contrary, that he pleaded the privilege of a Roman citizen to avoid being whipped. I could mention more instances of his having used the best methods that prudence could suggest, to escape danger, and shun persecution, whenever it could be done without betraying the duty of his office or the honor of God.

A remarkable instance of this appears in his conduct among the Athenians. There was at Athens a law which made it a capital offence to introduce or teach any new gods in their state. Acts, 17, and Josephus cont. Apion. l. 2 : c. 7. • Therefore, when Paul was preaching *Jesus and the resurrection* to the Athenians, some of them carried him before the court of Areopagus, (the ordinary judges of criminal matters, and in a particular manner entrusted with the care of religion,) as having broken this law, and being *a setter forth of strange gods*. Now, in this case, an impostor would have retracted his doctrine to save his life, and an *enthusiast* would have lost his life without trying to save it by innocent means. St. Paul did neither the one nor the other; he availed himself of an altar which he had found in the city, inscribed to *the unknown God*, and pleaded that he did not propose to them the worship of any new God, but only explain to them one whom their government had already received; *whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you*. By this he avoided the

law, and escaped being condemned by the Areopagus, without departing in the least from the truth of the Gospel, or violating the honor of God. An admirable proof, in my opinion, of the good sense with which he acted, and one that shows there was no mixture of fanaticism in his religion.

Compare with this the conduct of Francis of Assisi of Ignatius Loyola, and other enthusiasts sainted by Rome, it will be found the reverse of St Paul's. "*He wished indeed to die and be with Christ;*" but such a wish is no proof of melancholy, or of enthusiasm; it only proves his conviction of the divine truths he preached, and of the happiness laid up for him in those blessed abodes which had been shown to him even in this life. Upon the whole, neither in his actions, nor in the instructions he gave to those under his charge, is there any tincture of melancholy; which yet is so essential a characteristic of enthusiasm, that I have scarce ever heard of any enthusiast, ancient or modern, in whom some very evident marks of it did not appear.

As to *ignorance*, which is another ground of enthusiasm, St. Paul was so far from it, that he appears to have been master not of the Jewish learning alone, but of the Greek. And this is one reason why he is less liable to the imputation of having been an enthusiast than the other apostles, though none of them were such any more than he, as may by other arguments be invincibly proved.

I have mentioned *credulity* as another characteristic and cause of enthusiasm, which, that it was not in St Paul, the history of his life undeniably shows. For on the contrary, he seems to have been slow and hard

of belief in the extremest degree, having paid no regard to all the miracles done by our Savior, the fame of which he could not be a stranger to, as he lived in Jerusalem, nor to that signal one done after his resurrection, and in his name, by Peter and John, upon the lame man at the beautiful gate of the temple; nor to the evidence given in consequence of it by Peter, in presence of the high-priest, the rulers, elders, and scribes, that *Christ was raised from the dead.* Acts, 3. He must also have known that when *all the apostles had been shut up in the common prison, and the high-priest, the council, and all the senate of the children of Israel had sent their officers to bring them before them, the officers came and found them not in prison, but returned and made this report: "The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors, but when we had opened we found no man within."* And that the council was immediately told, *that the men they had put in prison were standing in the temple, and teaching the people. And that being brought from thence before the council, they had spoke these memorable words, "We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God has given to them that obey him."* Acts, 5 : 18-32. All this he resisted, and was consenting to the murder of Stephen, who preached the same thing, and evinced it by miracles. Acts, 8 : 1. So that his mind, far from being

disposed to a credulous faith, or a too easy reception of any miracle worked in proof of the Christian religion, appears to have been barred against it by the most obstinate prejudices, as much as any man's could possibly be; and from hence we may fairly conclude, that nothing less than the irresistible evidence of *his own senses*, clear from all possibility of doubt, could have overcome his unbelief.

*Vanity* or *self-conceit* is another circumstance that, for the most part, prevails in the character of an enthusiast. It leads men of a warm temper, and religious turn, to think themselves worthy of the special regard and extraordinary favors of God; and the breath of that inspiration to which they pretend is often no more than the wind of this vanity, which puffs them up to such extravagant imaginations. This strongly appears in the writings and lives of some enthusiastical heretics; in the mystics, both ancient and modern; in many founders of orders and saints, both male and female, amongst the Papists, in several Protestant sectaries of the last age, and even in some at the present time.\* All the divine communications, illuminations, and ecstasies to which they have pretended, evidently sprung from much self-conceit, working together with the vapors of melancholy upon a warm imagination. And this is one reason, besides the contagious nature of melancholy, or fear, that makes enthusiasm so very catching among weak minds. Such are most strongly

\* See the account of Montanus and his followers, the writings of the counterfeit Dionysius the Areopagite, Santa Theresa, St. Catherine of Sienna, Madame Bourignon, the lives of St. Francis of Assisi, and Ignatius Loyola; see also an account of the lives of George Fox, and of Rice Evans.

disposed to vanity; and when they see others pretend to extraordinary gifts, are apt to flatter themselves that they may partake of them as well as those whose merit they think no more than their own. Vanity, therefore, may justly be deemed a principal source of enthusiasm. But that St. Paul was as free from it as any man, I think may be gathered from all that we see in his writings, or know of his life. Throughout his epistles there is not one word that savors of vanity; nor is any action recorded of him in which the least mark of it appears.

In his epistle to the Ephesians, he calls himself *less than the least of all saints*. Ephes. 3 : 8. And to the Corinthians he says, *he is the least of the apostles, and not meet to be called an apostle, because he had persecuted the church of God*. 1 Cor. 15 : 9. In his epistle to Timothy he says: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, *of whom I am chief*. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe in him to life everlasting." 1 Tim. 1 : 15, 16.

It is true, indeed, that in another epistle he tells the Corinthians *that he was not a whit behind the very chiefest of the apostles*. 2 Cor. 11 : 5. But the occasion which drew from him these words must be considered. A false teacher by faction and calumny had brought his apostleship to be in question among the Corinthians. Against such an attack, not to have asserted his apostolical dignity, would have been a betraying of the office and duty committed to him by God. He was therefore constrained to do himself jus-

tice, and not let down that character, upon the authority of which the whole success and efficacy of his ministry among them depended. But how did he do it? Not with that wantonness which a vain man indulges, when he can get any opportunity of commending himself: not with a pompous detail of all the amazing miracles which he had performed in different parts of the world, though he had so fair an occasion of doing it; but with a modest and simple exposition of his abundant labors and sufferings in preaching the Gospel, and barely reminding them, "that the signs of an apostle had been wrought *among them* in all patience in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." 2 Cor. 12 : 12. Could he say less than this? Is not such boasting *humility itself*? And yet for this he makes many apologies, expressing the greatest uneasiness in being obliged to speak thus of himself, even in his own vindication. 2 Cor. 11 : 1-16; 19-30. When in the same epistle, and for the same purpose, he mentions the vision he had of heaven, how modestly does he do it! Not in his own name, but in the third person, *I knew a man in Christ, &c. caught up into the third heaven.* 2 Cor. 12 : 2. And immediately after he adds, *but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me.* 2 Cor. 12 : 6. How contrary is this to a spirit of vanity! how different from the practice of enthusiastic pretenders to raptures and visions, who never think they can dwell long enough upon those subjects, but fill whole volumes with their accounts of them! Yet St. Paul is not satisfied with this forbearance; he adds the confession of some *infirmity*, which he tells the Corinthians was given to him as an allay, *that he*

*might not be above measure exalted, through the abundance of his revelations.* 2 Cor. 12 : 7. I would also observe, that he says this rapture, or vision of paradise, happened to him above fourteen years before. Now, had it been the effect of a mere enthusiastical fancy, can it be supposed that in so long a period of time he would not have had many more raptures of the same kind? would not his imagination have been perpetually carrying him to heaven, as we find St. Theresa, St. Bridget, and St. Catharine were carried by theirs? And if vanity had been predominant in him, would he have remained fourteen years in absolute silence upon so great a mark of the divine favor? No, we should certainly have seen his epistles filled with nothing else but long accounts of these visions, conferences with angels, with Christ, with God Almighty, mystical unions with God, and all that we read in the works of those sainted enthusiasts, whom I have mentioned before. But he only mentions this vision in answer to the false teacher who had disputed his apostolical power, and comprehends it all in three sentences, with many excuses for being compelled to make any mention of it at all. 2 Cor. 12 : 1-11. Nor does he take any merit to himself, even from the success of those apostolical labors which he principally boasts of in his epistle. For in a former one to the same church he writes thus, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then, neither is he that planteth *any thing*, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase." And in another place of the same epistle he says, "by the grace of

God I am what I am, and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all: *yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*" 1 Cor. 15 : 10.

I think it needless to give more instances of the modesty of St. Paul. Certain I am, not one can be given that bears any color of vanity, or that vanity in particular which so strongly appears in all enthusiasts, of setting their imaginary gifts above those virtues which make the essence of true religion, and the real excellency of a good man, or in the Scripture phrase, of a *saint*. In his first Epistle to the Corinthians he has these words, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." 1 Cor. 13: 2—4. Is this the language of enthusiasm? Did ever enthusiast prefer that universal benevolence which comprehends all moral virtues, and which (as appears by the following verses) is meant by charity here; did ever enthusiast, I say, prefer that benevolence to *faith* and to *miracles*, to those religious opinions which he had embraced, and to those supernatural graces and gifts which he imagined he had acquired, nay even to the merit of martyrdom? Is it not the genius of enthusiasm to set moral virtues infinitely below the merit of faith; and of all moral virtues, to value that least



which is most particularly enforced by St. Paul, a spirit of candor, moderation, and peace? Certainly neither the temper, nor the opinions of a man subject to fanatical delusions, are to be found in this passage; but it may be justly concluded, that he who could esteem the value of charity so much above miraculous gifts, could not have pretended to any such gifts if he had them not in reality.

Since, then, it is manifest from the foregoing examination, that in St. Paul's disposition and character those qualities do not occur which seem to be necessary to form an enthusiast, it must be reasonable to conclude he was none. But allowing, for argument's sake, that all those qualities were to be found in him, or that the heat of his temper alone could be a sufficient foundation to support such a suspicion; I shall endeavor to prove that he COULD NOT HAVE IMPOSED ON HIMSELF by any power of enthusiasm, either in regard to the miracle that caused his conversion, or to the consequential effects of it, or to some other circumstances which he bears testimony to in his epistles.

The power of imagination in enthusiastical minds is no doubt very strong, but it always acts in conformity to the opinions imprinted upon it at the time of its working; and can no more act against them, than a rapid river can carry a boat against the current of its own stream. Now, nothing can be more certain than that when Saul set out for Damascus, with an authority from the chief priests *to bring the Christians which were there, bound to Jerusalem*, Acts, 12: 2, an authority solicited by himself, and granted

to him at his own earnest desire, his mind was strongly possessed with opinions against Christ and his followers. To give those opinions a more active force, his passions at that time concurred, being inflamed in the highest degree by the irritating consciousness of his past conduct towards them, the pride of supporting a part he had voluntarily engaged in, and the credit he found it procured him among the chief priests and rulers, whose commission he bore.

If in such a state and temper of mind, an enthusiastical man had imagined he saw a vision from heaven denouncing the anger of God against the Christians, and commanding him to persecute them without any mercy, it might be accounted for by the natural power of enthusiasm. But that, in the very instant of his being engaged in the fiercest and hottest persecution against them, no circumstance having happened to change his opinions, or alter the bent of his disposition, he should at once imagine himself called by a heavenly vision to be the apostle of Christ, whom but a moment before he deemed an impostor and a blasphemer, that had been justly put to death on the cross, is in itself wholly incredible, and so far from being a probable effect of enthusiasm, that just a contrary effect must have been naturally produced by that cause. The warmth of his temper carried him violently another way; and whatever delusions his imagination could raise to impose on his reason, must have been raised at that time agreeable to the notions imprinted upon it, and by which it was heated to a degree of enthusiasm, not in direct contradiction to all those notions, while they remained in their full force

This is so clear a proposition, that I might rest the whole argument entirely upon it; but still farther to show that this vision could not be a phantom of St. Paul's own creating, I beg leave to observe, that he was not alone when he saw it; there were *many others in company*, whose minds were no better disposed than his to the Christian faith. Could it be possible, that the imaginations of all these men should at the same time be so strangely affected as to make them believe that they saw a *great light shining about them, above the brightness of the sun at noon-day*, and heard the sound of a voice from heaven, though *not the words which it spake*, Acts, 9: 3; 22: 9, when in reality they neither saw nor heard any such thing? Could they be so infatuated with this conceit of their fancy, as to *fall down together with Saul*, and be *speechless through fear*, Acts, 26: 14. 9: 7; when nothing had happened extraordinary either to them or to him? Especially, considering that this apparition did not happen in the night, when the senses are more easily imposed upon, but at mid-day. If a sudden frenzy had seized upon Saul, from any distemper of body or mind, can we suppose his whole company, men of different constitutions and understandings, to have been at once affected in the same manner with him, so that not the distemper alone, but the effects of it should exactly agree? If all had gone mad together, would not the frenzy of some have taken a different turn, and presented to them different objects? This supposition is so contrary to nature and all possibility, that unbelief must find some other solution, or give up the point.

I shall suppose then, in order to try to account for

this vision without a miracle, that as Saul and his company were journeying along in their way to Damascus an extraordinary meteor did really happen, which cast a great light, as some meteors will do, at which they, being affrighted, fell to the ground in the manner related. This might be possible; and fear, grounded on ignorance of such phenomena, might make them imagine it to be a vision of God. Nay, even the voice or sound they heard in the air, might be an explosion attending this meteor; or at least there are those who would rather recur to such a supposition as this, however incredible, than acknowledge the miracle. But how will this account for the distinct words heard by St. Paul, to which he made answer? How will it account for what followed upon it when he came to Damascus, agreeably to the sense of those words which he heard? How came Ananias to go to him there and say, "He was chosen by God to know his will, and see that just One, and hear the voice of his mouth?" Acts, 22: 14. 26: 16. Or why did he propose to him *to be baptized*? What connection was there between the meteor which Saul had seen, and these words of Ananias? Will it be said that Ananias was skilful enough to take advantage of the fright he was in at that appearance, in order to make him a Christian? But could Ananias inspire him with the vision in which he saw him before he came? If that vision was the effect of imagination, how was it verified so exactly in fact? Acts, 9. But allowing that he dreamt by chance of Ananias' coming, and that Ananias came by chance too; or, if you please, that having heard of his dream, he came to take advantage of that

as well as of the meteor which Saul had seen ; will this get over the difficulty ? No, there was more to be done. Saul was struck blind, and had been so for three days. Now, had this blindness been natural from the effects of a meteor or lightning upon him, it would not have been possible for Ananias to heal it, as we find that he did, merely by putting his hands on him and speaking a few words. Acts, 9: 17, 18. 22: 13. This undoubtedly surpassed the power of nature ; and if this was a miracle, it proves the other to have been a miracle too, and a miracle done by the same Jesus Christ. For Ananias, when he healed Saul, spoke to him thus : *Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, has sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.* Acts, 9: 17. And that he saw Christ both now and after this time, appears not only by what he relates, Acts, 27: 17, 18, but by other passages in his epistles. 1 Cor. 9: 1; 15: 8. From him, as he asserts in many places of his epistles, he learned the Gospel by immediate revelation, and by him he was sent to the Gentiles. Acts, 22: 21; 22: 11. Among those Gentiles *from Jerusalem, and round about to Illyricum, he preached the Gospel of Christ, with mighty signs and wonders, wrought by the power of the Spirit of God, to make them obedient to his preaching,* as he himself testifies in his epistle to the Romans; Rom. 15: 19; and of which a particular account is given to us in the Acts of the Apostles; signs and wonders, indeed, above any power of nature to work, or of imposture to counterfeit, or of enthusiasm to imagine. Now, does not such a series of miraculous acts, all conse-

quential and dependent upon the first revelation, put the truth of that revelation beyond all possibility of doubt or deceit? And if he could so have imposed on himself as to think that he worked them when he did not, (which supposition cannot be admitted, if he was not at that time quite out of his senses,) how could so *distempered an enthusiast* make such a progress, as we know that he did, in converting the Gentile world? If the difficulties which have been shown to have obstructed that work, were such as the ablest impostor could not overcome, how much more insurmountable were they to a madman?

It is a much harder task for unbelievers to account for the success of St. Paul, in preaching the Gospel, upon the supposition of his having been an enthusiast, than of his having been an impostor. Neither of these suppositions can ever account for it; but the impossibility is more glaringly strong in this case than in the other. I could enter into a particular examination of all the miracles recorded in the Acts to have been done by St. Paul, and show that they were not of a nature in which enthusiasm, either in him, or the persons he worked them upon, or the spectators, could have any part. I will mention only a few. When he told Elymas the sorcerer, at Paphos, before the Roman deputy, that *the hand of God was upon him, and he should be blind, not seeing the sun for a season; and immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness, and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand*, Acts, 13, had enthusiasm in the doer or sufferer any share in this act? If Paul, as an enthusiast, had thrown out this menace, and the effect had not followed, instead of converting the de-

puty, as we are told that he did, he would have drawn on himself his rage and contempt. But the effect upon Elymas could not be caused by enthusiasm in Paul, much less can it be imputed to an enthusiastic belief in that person himself, of his being struck blind, when he was not, by these words of a man whose preaching he strenuously and bitterly opposed. Nor can we ascribe the conversion of Sergius, which happened upon it, to any enthusiasm. A Roman proconsul was not very likely to be an enthusiast; but, had he been one, he must have been bigoted to his own gods, and so much the less inclined to believe any miraculous power in St. Paul. When, at Troas, a young man named Eutychus, fell down from a high window, while Paul was preaching, and was taken up dead, Acts, 20: 9, could any enthusiasm, either in Paul or the congregation there present, make them believe, that by that apostle's falling upon him, and embracing him, he was restored to life? Or could he who was so restored contribute any thing to himself, by any power of his own imagination? When, in the isle of Melita, where St. Paul was shipwrecked, there came a viper and fastened on his hand, which he shook off, and felt no harm, Acts, 28, was that an effect of enthusiasm? An enthusiast might perhaps have been mad enough to hope for safety against the bite of a viper without any remedy being applied to it; but would that hope have prevented his death? Or were the barbarous islanders, to whom this apostle was an absolute stranger, prepared by enthusiasm to expect and believe that any miracle would be worked to preserve him? On the contrary, when they saw the viper hang to his hand, they said among themselves,

“No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.” I will add no more instances: these are sufficient to show that the miracles told of St. Paul can no more be ascribed to enthusiasm than to imposture.

But moreover, the power of working miracles was not confined to St. Paul; it was also communicated to the churches he planted in different parts of the world. In many parts of his first epistle he tells the Corinthians, 1 Cor. 12 : 4, 5, that they had among them many miraculous graces and gifts, and gives them directions for the more orderly use of them in their assemblies. Now, I ask, whether all that he said upon that head is to be ascribed to enthusiasm? If the Corinthians knew that they had among them no such miraculous powers, they must have regarded the author of that epistle as a man out of his senses, instead of revering him as an apostle of God.

If, for instance, a Quaker should, in a meeting of his own sect, tell all the persons assembled there, that to some among them was given the gift of healing by the Spirit of God, to others the working of other miracles, to others divers kinds of tongues; they would undoubtedly account him a madman, because they pretend to no such gifts. If indeed they were only told by him that they were inspired by the Spirit of God in a certain ineffable manner, which they alone could understand, but which did not discover itself by any outward distinct operations or signs, they might mistake the impulse of enthusiasm for the inspiration of the Holy Ghost; but they could not believe, *against the conviction of their own minds* that they spoke tongues they did not speak, or



healed distempers they did not heal, or worked other miracles when they worked none. If it be said the Corinthians might pretend to these powers, though the Quakers do not, I ask whether, in that pretension, they were impostors, or only enthusiasts? If they were impostors, and St. Paul was also such, how ridiculous was it for him to advise them, in an epistle writ *only to them*, and *for their own use*, not to value themselves too highly upon those gifts, to pray for one rather than another, and prefer charity to them all! Do associates in fraud talk such a language to one another? But if we suppose their pretension to all those gifts was an effect of enthusiasm, let us consider how it was possible that he and they could be so cheated by that enthusiasm, as to imagine they had such powers when they had not.

Suppose that enthusiasm could make a man think that he was able, by a word or a touch, to give sight to the blind, motion to the lame, or life to the dead: would that conceit of his make the blind see, the lame walk, or the dead revive? And if it did not, how could he persist in such an opinion; or, upon his persisting, escape being shut up for a madman? But such a madness could not infect so many at once, as St. Paul supposes at Corinth to have been endowed with the gift of healing or any other miraculous powers. One of the miracles which they pretended to was the speaking of languages they never had learned; and St. Paul says, he possessed this gift *more than they all*. 1 Cor. 14 : 18. If this had been a delusion of fancy, if they had spoke only gibberish, or unmeaning sounds, it would soon have appeared, when they came to make use of it where it was ne-

cessary, viz. in the converting of those who understood not any language they naturally spoke. St. Paul particularly, who traveled so far upon that design, and had such occasion to use it, must soon have discovered that this imaginary gift of the spirit was no gift at all, but a ridiculous instance of frenzy, which had possessed both him and them. But, if those he spoke to in divers tongues understood what he said, and were converted to Christ by that means, how could it be a delusion? Of all the miracles recorded in Scripture, none are more clear from any possible imputation of being the effect of an enthusiastic imagination than this: for how could any man think that he had it, who had it not: or, if he did think so, not be undeceived when he came to put his gift to the proof?

If, then, St. Paul and the church of Corinth were not deceived, in ascribing to themselves this miraculous power, but really had it, there is the strongest reason to think that neither were they deceived in the other powers to which they pretended, as the same Spirit which gave them that equally, could and probably would give them the others to serve the same holy ends for which that was given. And, by consequence, St. Paul was no enthusiast in what he wrote upon that head to the Corinthians, nor in other similar instances where he ascribes to himself, or to the churches he founded, any supernatural graces and gifts. Indeed, they who would impute to imagination effects such as those which St. Paul imputes to the power of God attending his mission, must ascribe to imagination the same omnipotence which he ascribes to God.

### III. Paul not deceived by the fraud of others.

Having thus, I flatter myself, satisfactorily shown that St. Paul could not be an enthusiast, who, by the force of an overheated imagination, imposed on himself, I am next to inquire whether he was deceived by the fraud of others, and whether all that he said of himself can be imputed to the power of that deceit? But I need say little to show the absurdity of this supposition. It was morally impossible for the disciples of Christ to conceive such a thought, as that of turning his persecutor into his apostle, and to do this by a fraud, in the very instant of his greatest fury against them and their Lord. But could they have been so extravagant as to conceive such a thought, it was physically impossible for them to execute it in the manner we find his conversion to have been effected. Could they produce a light in the air, which at mid-day was brighter than that of the sun? Could they make Saul hear words from out of that light, Acts, 22 : 9, which were not heard by the rest of the company? Could they make him blind for three days after that vision, and then make scales fall from off his eyes, and restore him to his sight by a word? Beyond dispute, no fraud could do these things; but much less still could the fraud of others produce those miracles, subsequent to his conversion, in which he was not passive, but active; which he did himself, and appeals to in his epistles as proofs of his divine mission.

## CONCLUSION

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

That this conclusion is fairly and undeniably drawn from the premises, I think must be owned, unless some probable cause can be assigned to account for those facts so authentically related in the Acts of the Apostles, and attested in his epistles by St. Paul himself, other than any of those which I have considered; and this I am confident cannot be done. It must be therefore accounted for by the power of God. That God should work miracles for the establishment of a most holy religion, which from the insuperable difficulties that stood in the way of it, could not have established itself without such assistance, is no way repugnant to human reason: but that without any miracle such things should have happened, as no adequate natural causes can be assigned for, is what human reason cannot believe.

To impute them to magic, or the power of demons, (which was the resource of the heathens and Jews against the notoriety of the miracles performed by Christ and his disciples,) is by no means agreeable to the notions of those who, in this age, disbelieve Chris-

tianity. It will therefore be needless to show the weakness of that supposition : but that supposition itself is no inconsiderable argument of the truth of the facts. Next to the apostles and evangelists, the strongest witnesses of the undeniable force of that truth are Celsus and Julian, and other ancient opponents of the Christian religion, who were obliged to solve what they could not contradict, by such an irrational and absurd imagination.

The dispute was not then between faith and reason, but between religion and superstition. Superstition ascribed to cabalistical names, or magical secrets, such operations as carried along with them evident marks of the divine power : religion ascribed them to God, and reason declared itself on that side of the question. Upon what grounds then can we now overturn that decision ? Upon what grounds can we reject the unquestionable testimony given by St. Paul, that he was called by God to be a disciple and apostle of Christ ? It has been shown, that we cannot impute it either to enthusiasm or fraud : how shall we then resist the conviction of such a proof ? Does the doctrine he preached contain any precepts against the law of morality, that natural law written by God in the hearts of mankind ? If it did, I confess that none of the arguments I have made use of could prove such a doctrine to come from *him*. But this is so far from being the case, that even those who reject Christianity as a divine revelation, acknowledge the morals delivered by Christ and by his apostles to be worthy of God. Is it then on account of the mysteries in the Gospel that the facts are denied, though supported by evidence which in all other cases would be allowed to contain

the clearest conviction, and cannot in this be rejected without reducing the mind to a state of absolute scepticism, and overturning those rules by which we judge of all evidence, and of the truth or credibility of all other facts? But this is plainly to give up the use of our understanding where we are able to use it most properly, in order to apply it to things of which it is not a competent judge. The motives and reasons upon which divine wisdom may think proper to act, as well as the manner in which it acts, must often lie out of the reach of our understanding; but the motives and reasons of human actions, and the manner in which they are performed, are all in the sphere of human knowledge, and upon them we may judge, with a well grounded confidence, when they are fairly proposed to our consideration.

It is incomparably more probable that a revelation from God, concerning the ways of his providence, should contain in it matters above the capacity of our minds to comprehend, than that St. Paul, or indeed any of the other apostles, should have acted, as we know that they did, upon any other foundations than certain knowledge of Christ's being risen from the dead; or should have succeeded in the work they undertook, without the aid of miraculous powers. To the former of these propositions I may give my assent without any direct opposition of reason to my faith; but in admitting the latter, I must believe against all those probabilities that are the rational grounds of assent.

Nor do they who reject the Christian religion because of the difficulties which occur in its mysteries, consider how far that objection will go against other

systems, both of religion and of philosophy, which they themselves profess to admit. There are in *deism* itself, the most simple of all religious opinions, several difficulties, for which human reason can but ill account; which may therefore be not improperly styled *articles of faith*. Such is the origin of evil under the government of an all-good and all-powerful God; a question so hard, that the inability of solving it in a satisfactory manner to their apprehensions, has driven some of the greatest philosophers into the monstrous and senseless opinions of *manicheism* and atheism. Such is the reconciling the prescience of God with the free-will of man, which after much thought on the subject, Mr. Locke fairly confesses he could not do,\* though he acknowledged both; and what Mr. Locke could not do, in reasoning upon subjects of a metaphysical nature, I am apt to think few men, if any, can hope to perform.

Such is also the creation of the world at any supposed time, or the *eternal production* of it from God; it being almost equally hard, according to mere philosophical notions, either to admit that the goodness of God could remain unexerted through all eternity before the time of such a creation, let it be set back ever so far, or to conceive an eternal production, which words so applied, are inconsistent and contradictory terms; the solution commonly given by a comparison to the emanation of light from the sun not being adequate to it, or just; for light is a quality inherent in fire, emanating from it; whereas matter is not a quality inherent in or emanating from the divine essence,

\* See his letter to Mr. Molyneux, p. 509. vol. 3.

but of a different substance and nature; and if not *independent* and *self-existing*, must have been created, by a mere act of the divine will; and, if created, then not eternal, the idea of creation implying a time *when the substance created did not exist*. But if to get rid of this difficulty, we have recourse, as many of the ancient philosophers had, to the *independent existence of matter*, then we must admit *two self-existing principles*, which is quite inconsistent with genuine theism or natural reason. Nay, could *that* be admitted, it would not clear up the doubt, unless we suppose not only the eternal existence of matter, independent of God, but that it was from eternity in the *order and beauty* we see it in now, without any *agency* of the divine power; otherwise the same difficulty will always occur, why it was not before put into that *order and state of perfection*; or how the goodness of God could so long remain in a state of inaction, *unexerted and unemployed*. For were the time of such an exertion of it put back ever so far, if, instead of five or six thousand years, we were to suppose millions of millions of ages to have passed since the world\* was reduced out of a chaos, to an harmonious and regular form, still a whole eternity must have preceded that date, during which the divine attributes did not exert themselves in that beneficent work, so suitable to them, that the conjectures of human reason can find no cause for its being delayed.

\* By the world I do not mean this earth alone, but the whole material universe, with all its inhabitants. Even created spirits fall under the same reasoning; for they must also have had a beginning, and before that beginning an eternity must have preceded.



But because of these difficulties or any other that may occur in the system of deism, no wise man will deny the being of God, or his infinite wisdom, goodness, and power, which are proved by such evidence as carries the clearest and strongest conviction, and cannot be refused without involving the mind in far greater difficulties, even in downright absurdities and impossibilities. The only part, therefore, that can be taken, is to account in the best manner that our weak reason is able to do, for such seeming objections; and where that fails, to acknowledge its weakness, and acquiesce under the certainty that our very imperfect knowledge or judgment cannot be the measure of the divine wisdom, or the universal standard of truth. So likewise it is with respect to the Christian religion. Some difficulties occur in that revelation which human reason can hardly clear; but as the truth of it stands upon evidence so strong and convincing that it cannot be denied without much greater difficulties than those that attend the belief of it, as I have before endeavored to prove, we ought not to reject it upon such objections, however mortifying they may be to our pride. That indeed would have all things made plain to us, but God has thought proper to proportion our knowledge to our wants, not our pride. All that concerns our duty is clear; and as to other points, either of natural or revealed religion, if he has left some obscurities in them, is that any reasonable cause of complaint? Not to rejoice in the benefit of what he has graciously allowed us to know, from a presumptuous disgust at our incapacity of knowing more, is as absurd as it would be to refuse to walk because we cannot fly.

From the arrogant ignorance of metaphysical rea-

sonings, aiming at matters above our knowledge, arose all the speculative impiety, and many of the worst superstitions of the old heathen world, before the Gospel was preached to bring men back again to the primitive faith; and from the same source have since flowed some of the greatest corruptions of the evangelical truth, and the most inveterate prejudices against it; an effect just as natural as for our eyes to grow weak, and even blind, by being strained to look at objects too distant, or not made for them to see.

Are then our intellectual faculties of no use in religion? Yes, undoubtedly, of the most necessary use when rightly employed. The proper employment of them is to distinguish its genuine doctrines from others erroneously or corruptly ascribed to it; to consider the importance and purport of them, with the connection they bear to one another; but, first of all, to examine, with the strictest attention, the evidence by which religion is proved, internal as well as external. If the external evidence be convincingly strong, and there is no internal proof of its falsehood, but much to support and confirm its truth, then surely no difficulties ought to prevent our giving a full assent and belief to it. It is our duty, indeed, to endeavor to find the best solutions we can to them; but where no satisfactory ones are to be found, it is no less our duty to acquiesce with humility, and believe that to be right which we know is above us, and belonging to a wisdom superior to ours.

Nor let it be said that this will be an argument for admitting all doctrines, however absurd, that may have been grafted upon the Christian faith: those which can plainly be proved *not to belong to it*, fall not under the reasoning I have laid down; (and certainly none do

belong to it which contradict either our *clear, intuitive knowledge*, or the *evident principles and dictates of reason*.) I speak only of difficulties which attend the belief of the Gospel in some of its pure and essential doctrines, plainly and evidently delivered there, which being made known to us by a *revelation* supported by *proofs* that our reason *ought to admit*, and not being such things as it can *certainly know to be false*, must be received by it as *objects of faith*, though they are such as it could not have discovered by any natural means, and such as are difficult to be conceived, or satisfactorily explained by its limited powers. If the *glorious light of the Gospel* be sometimes overcast with clouds of doubt, so is the light of our *reason* too. But shall we deprive ourselves of the advantages of *either*, because those clouds cannot, perhaps, be entirely removed while we remain in this mortal life? Shall we obstinately and frowardly shut our eyes against *that day-spring from on high that has visited us*, because we are not, as yet, able to bear the full blaze of his beams? Indeed, not even in heaven itself, not in the highest state of perfection to which a finite being can ever attain, will all the counsels of Providence, all the *height* and the *depth* of the infinite wisdom of God, be ever disclosed or understood. *Faith* even then will be necessary, and there will be *mysteries* which cannot be penetrated by the most exalted archangel, and truths which cannot be known by him otherwise than from *revelation*, or believed upon any other ground of assent than a *submissive confidence in the divine wisdom*. What then, shall man presume that his weak and narrow understanding is sufficient to guide him *into all truth*, without any need of reve-

*lation or faith? Shall he complain that the ways of God are not like his ways, and past his finding out? True philosophy, as well as true Christianity, would teach us a wiser and modester part. It would teach us to be content within those bounds which God has assigned to us, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. 2 Cor. 10 : 5.*

THE END.

REPLY TO GIBBON;

OR, AN

APOLOGY FOR CHRISTIANITY;

IN

LETTERS TO EDWARD GIBBON, Esq.

Author of the History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.

WITH AN APPEAL TO INFIDELS.

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BY R. WATSON, D. D. F. R. S.

Bishop of Landaff, and Professor of Divinity in the University of  
Cambridge.



# REPLY TO GIBBON.

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## LETTER I.

SIR:—It would give me much uneasiness to be reputed an enemy to free inquiry in religious matters, or as capable of being animated into any degree of personal malevolence against those who differ from me in opinion. On the contrary, I look upon the right of private judgment, in every concern respecting God and ourselves, as superior to the control of human authority; and have ever regarded free disquisition as the best means of illustrating the doctrine and establishing the truth of Christianity. Let the followers of Mahomed, and the zealots of the church of Rome, support their several religious systems by damping every effort of the human intellect to pry into the foundations of their faith; but never can it become a Christian to be afraid of being asked “a reason of the hope that is in him;” nor a Protestant to be studious of enveloping his religion in mystery and ignorance; or to abandon that moderation by which she permits every individual *et sentire quæ velit, et quæ sentiat dicere*: [both to think what he will, and to speak what he thinks.]

It is not, sir, without some reluctance, that, under the influence of these opinions, I have prevailed upon myself to address these letters to you; and you will

attribute to the same motive my not having given you this trouble sooner. I had, moreover, an expectation that the task would have been undertaken by some person capable of doing greater justice to the subject, and more worthy of your attention. Perceiving, however, that the two last chapters, the fifteenth in particular, of your very laborious and classical history of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, had made upon many an impression not at all advantageous to Christianity; and that the silence of others, of the clergy especially, began to be looked upon as an acquiescence in what you had therein advanced, I have thought it my duty, with the utmost respect and good will towards you, to take the liberty of suggesting to your consideration a few remarks upon some of the passages which have been esteemed (whether you meant that they should be so esteemed or not) as powerfully militating against that revelation, which still is to many, what it formerly was "to the Greeks—foolishness;" but which we deem to be true, to "be the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

To the inquiry, by what means the Christian faith obtained so remarkable a victory over the established religions of the earth, you rightly answer, by the evidence of the doctrine itself, and the ruling providence of its author. But, afterwards, in assigning to this astonishing event *five secondary causes*, derived from the passions of the human heart, and the general circumstances of mankind, you seem to some to have insinuated that Christianity, like other impostures, might have made its way in the world, though its origin had been as human as the means by which you suppose it was spread. It is no wish or intention of



mine to fasten the odium of this insinuation upon you : I shall simply endeavor to show that the causes you produce, are either inadequate to the attainment of the end proposed, or that their efficiency, great as you imagine it, was derived from other principles than those you have thought proper to mention.

Your first cause is, "the inflexible, and, if you may use the expression, the intolerant zeal of the Christians, derived, it is true, from the Jewish religion, but purified from the narrow and unsocial spirit which, instead of inviting, had deterred the Gentiles from embracing the law of Moses." Yes, sir, we are agreed that the zeal of the Christians was inflexible ; "neither death, nor life, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come," could bend it into a separation "from the love of God which was in Christ Jesus their Lord." It was an inflexible obstinacy, in not blaspheming the name of Christ, which every where exposed them to persecution ; and which even your amiable and philosophic Pliny thought proper, for want of other crimes, to punish with death in the Christians of his province. We are agreed, too, that the zeal of the Christians was intolerant ; for it denounced "tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that did evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile : " it would not tolerate in Christian worship those who supplicated the image of Cæsar, who bowed down at the altars of Paganism, who mixed with the votaries of Venus, or wallowed in the filth of Bacchanalian festivals.

But, though we are thus far agreed with respect to the inflexibility and intolerance of Christian zeal, yet, as to the principle from which it was derived, we are

*toto cælo* divided in opinion. You deduce it from the Jewish religion; I would refer it to a more adequate and a more obvious source—a full persuasion of the truth of Christianity. What! think you that it was a zeal derived from the unsocial spirit of Judaism, which inspired Peter with courage to upbraid the whole people of the Jews, in the very capital of Judea, with having “delivered up Jesus, with having denied him in the presence of Pilate, with having desired a murderer to be granted them in his stead, with having killed the Prince of Life?” Was it from this principle that the same apostle, in conjunction with John, when summoned, not before the dregs of the people, (whose judgment they might have been supposed capable of misleading, and whose resentment they might have despised,) but before the rulers and the elders, and the scribes, the dread tribunal of the Jewish nation, and commanded by them to teach no more in the name of Jesus, boldly answered, “that they could not but speak the things which they had seen and heard?” They had “seen with their eyes, they had handled with their hands the word of life;” and no human jurisdiction could deter them from being faithful witnesses of what they had seen and heard. Here, then, you may perceive the genuine and undoubted origin of that zeal which you ascribe to what appears to me a very insufficient cause; and which the Jewish rulers were so far from considering as the ordinary effect of their religion, that they were exceedingly at a loss how to account for it. “Now, when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled.” The apostles, heedless of consequences, and regardless of every

thing but truth, openly every where professed themselves witnesses of the resurrection of Christ; and with a confidence which could proceed from nothing but conviction, and which pricked the Jews to the heart, bade "the house of Israel know assuredly, that God had made that same Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Christ."

I mean not to produce these instances of apostolic zeal as direct proofs of the truth of Christianity; for every religion, nay, every absurd sect of every religion, has had its zealots, who have not scrupled to maintain their principles at the expense of their lives; and we ought no more to infer the truth of Christianity from the mere zeal of its propagators, than the truth of Mahomedanism from that of a Turk. When a man suffers himself to be covered with infamy, pillaged of his property, and dragged at last to the block or the stake, rather than give up his opinion, the proper inference is, not that his opinion is true, but that he believes it to be true; and a question of serious discussion immediately presents itself—upon what foundation has he built his belief? This is often an intricate inquiry, including in it a vast compass of human learning. A Brahmin or a Mandarin, who should observe a missionary attesting the truth of Christianity with his blood, would, notwithstanding, have a right to ask many questions, before it could be expected that he should give an assent to our faith. In the case, indeed, of the apostles, the inquiry would be much less perplexed, since it would briefly resolve itself into this—whether they were credible reporters of facts which they themselves professed to have seen—and it would be an easy matter to show, that

their zeal in attesting what they were certainly competent to judge of, could not proceed from any alluring prospect of worldly interest or ambition, or from any other probable motive than a love of truth.

But the credibility of the apostles' testimony, or their competency to judge of the facts which they relate, is now to be examined; the question before us simply relates to the principle by which their zeal was excited; and it is a matter of real astonishment to me, that any one conversant with the history of the first propagation of Christianity, acquainted with the opposition it every where met with from the people or the Jews, and aware of the repugnancy which must ever subsist between its tenets and those of Judaism, should ever think of deriving the zeal of the primitive Christians from the Jewish religion.

Both Jew and Christian, indeed, believed in one God, and abominated idolatry; but this detestation of idolatry, had it been unaccompanied with the belief of the resurrection of Christ, would probably have been just as inefficacious in exciting the zeal of the Christian to undertake the conversion of the Gentile world, as it had for ages been in exciting that of the Jew. But supposing, what I think you have not proved, and what I am certain cannot be admitted without proof, that a zeal derived from the Jewish religion inspired the first Christians with fortitude to oppose themselves to the institutions of Paganism; what was it that encouraged them to attempt the conversion of their own countrymen? Amongst the Jews they met with no superstitious observances of idolatrous rites; and therefore amongst them could have no opportunity of "declaring and confirming their

zealous opposition to Polytheism, or of fortifying, by frequent protestations, their attachment to the Christian faith." Here, then, at least, the cause you have assigned for Christian zeal ceases to operate; and we must look out for some other principle than a zeal against idolatry, or we shall never be able satisfactorily to explain the ardor with which the apostles pressed the disciples of Moses to become the disciples of Christ.

Again: Does a determined opposition to, and an open abhorrence of, even the minutest part of an old established religion, appear to you to be the most likely method of conciliating to another faith those who profess it? The Christians, you contend, could neither mix with the heathens in their convivial entertainments, nor partake with them in the celebration of their solemn festivals; they could neither associate with them in their hymeneal nor funeral rites; they could not cultivate their arts, or be spectators of their shows: in short, in order to escape the rites of Polytheism, they were, in your opinion, obliged to renounce the commerce of mankind, and all the offices and amusements of life. Now, how such an extravagant and intemperate zeal, as you here describe, can, humanly speaking, be considered as one of the chief causes of the quick propagation of Christianity, in opposition to all the established powers of Paganism, is a circumstance I can by no means comprehend. The Jesuit missionaries, whose human prudence no one will question, were quite of a contrary way of thinking; and brought a deserved censure upon themselves for not scrupling to propagate the faith of Christ by indulging to their Pagan converts a frequent use of

idolatrous ceremonies. Upon the whole it appears to me, that the Christians were in nowise indebted to the Jewish religion for the zeal with which they propagated the Gospel amongst Jews as well as Gentiles; and that such a zeal as you describe, let its principles be what you please, could never have been devised by any human understanding as a probable means of promoting the progress of a reformation in religion, much less could it have been thought of, or adopted, by a few ignorant and unconnected men.

In expatiating upon this subject you have taken an opportunity of remarking, that "the contemporaries of Moses and Joshua had beheld with careless indifference the most amazing miracles—and that, in contradiction to every known principle of the human mind, that singular people (the Jews) seem to have yielded a stronger and more ready assent to the traditions of their remote ancestors, than to the evidence of their own senses." This observation bears hard upon the veracity of the Jewish Scriptures; and, was it true, would force us either to reject them, or to admit a position as extraordinary as a miracle itself—that the testimony of others produced in the human mind a stronger degree of conviction, concerning a matter of fact, than the testimony of the senses themselves. It happens, however, in the present case, that we are under no necessity of either rejecting the Jewish Scriptures, or of admitting such an absurd position; for the fact is not true, that the contemporaries of Moses and Joshua beheld with careless indifference the miracles related in the Bible to have been performed in their favor. That these miracles were not sufficient to awe the Israelites into a uniform obedience to

the Theocracy, cannot be denied; but whatever reasons may be thought best adapted to account for the propensity of the Jews to idolatry, and their frequent defection from the worship of the one true God, a "stubborn incredulity" cannot be admitted as one of them.

To men, indeed, whose understandings have been enlightened by the Christian revelation, and enlarged by all the aids of human learning; who are under no temptations to idolatry from without, and whose reason from within would revolt at the idea of worshipping the infinite Author of the universe under any created symbol; to men who are compelled, by the utmost exertion of their reason, to admit, as an irrefragable truth, what puzzles the first principles of all reasoning, the eternal existence of an uncaused being, and who are conscious that they cannot give a full account of any one phenomenon in nature, from the rotation of the great orbs of the universe to the germination of a blade of grass, without having recourse to him as the primary incomprehensible cause of it; and who, from seeing him every where, have, by a strange fatality, (converting an excess of evidence into a principle of disbelief,) at times doubted concerning his existence any where, and made the very universe their God: to men of such a stamp, it appears almost an incredible thing, that any human being, which had seen the order of nature interrupted, or the uniformity of its course suspended, though but for a moment, should ever afterwards lose the impression of reverential awe which they apprehend would have been excited in their minds. But whatever effect the visible interposition of the Deity might have in removing the scepticism,

or confirming the faith, of a few philosophers, it is with me a very great doubt, whether the people in general of our days would be more strongly affected by it than they appear to have been in the days of Moses.

Was any people under heaven to escape the certain destruction impending over them, from the close pursuit of an enraged and irresistible enemy, by seeing the waters of the ocean "becoming a wall to them on their right hand and on their left," they would, I apprehend, be agitated by the very same passions we are told the Israelites were, when they saw the sea returning to his strength, and swallowing up the host of Pharaoh; they "would fear the Lord, they would believe the Lord," and they would express their faith and their fear by praising the Lord: they would not behold such a great work with "careless indifference," but with astonishment and terror; nor would you be able to detect the slightest vestige of "stubborn incredulity" in their song of gratitude. No length of time would be able to blot from their minds the memory of such a transaction, or induce a doubt concerning its author; though future hunger and thirst might make them call out for water and bread with a desponding and rebellious importunity.

But it was not at the Red Sea only that the Israelites regarded, with something more than a "careless indifference," the amazing miracles which God had wrought; for, when the law was declared to them from Mount Sinai, "all the people saw the thunders, and the lightnings, and the noise of the tempest, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they removed and stood afar off: and they said unto



Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear ; but let not God speak with us, lest we die." This again, sir, is the Scripture account of the language of the contemporaries of Moses and Joshua ; and I leave it to you to consider whether this is the language of " stubborn incredulity and careless indifference."

We are told, in Scripture, too, that whilst any of the " contemporaries" of Moses and Joshua were alive, the whole people served the Lord ; the impression which a sight of the miracles had made was never effaced ; nor the obedience, which might have been expected as a natural consequence, refused, till Moses and Joshua, and all their contemporaries, were gathered unto their fathers ; till, " another generation after them arose, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel." But " the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord that he did for Israel."

I am far from thinking you, sir, unacquainted with Scripture, or desirous of sinking the weight of its testimony ; but as the words of the history, from which you must have derived your observation, will not support you in imputing " careless indifference" to the contemporaries of Moses, or " stubborn incredulity" to the forefathers of the Jews, I know not what can have induced you to pass so severe a censure upon them, except that you look upon a lapse into idolatry as a proof of infidelity. In answer to this, I would remark, that with equal soundness of argument we ought to infer, that every one who transgresses a religion, disbelieves it ; and that every individual, who in any community incurs civil pains and penalties, is a dis-

believer of the existence of the authority by which they are inflicted. The sanctions of the Mosaic law were, in your opinion, terminated within the narrow limits of this life; in that particular, then, they must have resembled the sanctions of all other civil laws: "transgress and die," is the language of every one of them, as well as that of Moses; and I know not what reason we have to expect that the Jews, who were animated by the same hopes of temporal rewards, impelled by the same fears of temporal punishments, with the rest of mankind, should have been so singular in their conduct, as never to have listened to the clamors of passion before the still voice of reason, as never to have preferred a present gratification of sense, in the lewd celebration of idolatrous rites, before the rigid observance of irksome ceremonies.

Before I release you from the trouble of this letter I cannot help observing, that I could have wished you had furnished your reader with Limborch's answers to the objections of the Jew Orobio, concerning the perpetual obligation of the law of Moses. You have, indeed, mentioned Limborch with respect, in a short note; but, though you have studiously put into the mouths of the Judaizing Christians in the apostolic days, and with great strength inserted into your text whatever has been said by Orobio, or others, against Christianity, from the supposed perpetuity of the Mosaic dispensation, yet you have not favored us with any one of the numerous replies which have been made to these seemingly strong objections. You are pleased, it is true, to say, "that the industry of our learned divines has abundantly explained the ambiguous language of the Old Testament, and the ambiguous con-

duct of the apostolic teachers." It requires, sir, no learned industry to explain what is so obvious and so express, that he who runs may read it. The language of the Old Testament is this: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, and I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt." This, methinks, is a clear and solemn declaration; there is no ambiguity at all in it; that the covenant with Moses was not to be perpetual, but was, in some future time, to give way to a "new covenant." I will not detain you with an explanation of what Moses himself has said upon this subject; but you may try, if you please, whether you can apply the following declaration, which Moses made to the Jews, to any prophet, or succession of prophets, with the same propriety that you can to Jesus Christ: "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto thee: unto him shall ye hearken." If you think this ambiguous or obscure, I answer, that it is not a history, but a prophecy; and, as such, unavoidably liable to some degree of obscurity, till interpreted by the event.

Nor was the conduct of the apostles more ambiguous than the language of the Old Testament; they did not, indeed, at first comprehend the whole of the nature of the new dispensation; and when they did understand it better, they did not think proper, upon every occasion, to use their Christian liberty; but, with true Christian charity, accommodated themselves in matters of indifference to the prejudices of their weaker

brethren. But he who changes his conduct with a change of sentiments, proceeding from an increase of knowledge, is not ambiguous in his conduct; nor should he be accused of a culpable duplicity, who, in a matter of the last importance, endeavors to conciliate the good-will of all, by conforming in a few innocent observances to the particular persuasions of different men.

One remark more, and I have done. In your account of the Gnostics, you have given us a very minute catalogue of the objections which they made to the authority of Moses, from his account of the creation, of the patriarchs, of the law, and of the attributes of the Deity. I have not leisure to examine whether the Gnostics of former ages really made all the objections you have mentioned; I take it for granted, upon your authority, that they did: but I am certain, if they did, that the Gnostics of modern times have no reason to be puffed up with their knowledge, or to be held in admiration as men of subtle penetration or refined erudition; they are all miserable copiers of their brethren of antiquity; and neither Morgan, nor Tindal, nor Bolingbroke, nor Voltaire, have been able to produce scarce a single new objection. You think that the Fathers have not properly answered the Gnostics. I make no question, sir, you are able to answer them to your own satisfaction, and informed of every thing that has been said by our "industrious divines" upon the subject; and we should have been glad if it had fallen in with your plan to have administered, together with the poison, its antidote. But since that is not the case, lest its malignity should spread too far, I must just mention it to my younger readers, that Leland, and others,

in their replies to the modern deists, have given very full, and, as many learned men apprehend, very satisfactory answers to every one of the objections which you have derived from the Gnostic heresy. I am, &c.

## LETTER II.

SIR:—"The doctrine of a future life, improved by every additional circumstance which could give weight and efficacy to that important truth," is the second of the causes to which you attribute the quick increase of Christianity. Now, if we impartially consider the circumstances of the persons to whom the doctrine, not simply of a future life, but of a future life accompanied with punishments as well as rewards; not only of the immortality of the soul, but of the immortality of the soul accompanied with that of the resurrection, was delivered, I cannot be of opinion that, abstracted from the supernatural testimony by which it was enforced, it could have met with any very extensive reception amongst them.

It was not that kind of future life which they expected; it did not hold out to them the punishments of the infernal regions as *aniles fabulas*. [Old wives' fables.] To the question, *Quid si post mortem maneat animi?* [What if souls exist after death?] they would not answer with Cicero and the philosophers, *Beatos esse concedo*; [They are happy;] because, there was a great probability that it might be quite otherwise with them. I am not to learn that there are passages to be picked up in the writings of the ancients, which might be produced as proofs of their expecting a future state of punishment for the flagi-

tious; but this opinion was worn out of credit before the time of our Savior: the whole disputation in the first book of the Tusculan Questions goes upon the other supposition. Nor was the absurdity of the doctrine of future punishments confined to the writings of the philosophers, or the circles of the learned and polite; for Cicero, to mention no others, makes no secret of it in his public pleadings before the people at large. You, yourself, sir, have referred to his oration for Cluentius. In this oration, you may remember, he makes great mention of a very abandoned fellow who had forged, I know not how many wills, murdered, I know not how many wives, and perpetrated a thousand other villanies; yet, even to this profligate, by name Oppianicus, he is persuaded that death was not the occasion of any evil. Hence, I think, we may conclude, that such of the Romans as were not wholly infected with the annihilating notions of Epicurus, but entertained (whether from remote tradition or enlightened argumentation) hopes of a future life, had no manner of expectation of such a life as included in it the severity of punishment denounced in the Christian scheme against the wicked.

Nor was it that kind of future life which they wished: they would have been glad enough of an Elysium which could have admitted into it men who had spent this life in the perpetration of every vice which can debase and pollute the human heart. To abandon every seducing gratification of sense, to pluck up every latent root of ambition, to subdue every impulse of revenge, to divest themselves of every inveterate habit in which their glory and their pleasure consisted: to do all this, and more, before they could look up to the

doctrine of a future life without terror and amazement, was not, one would think, an easy undertaking; nor was it likely, that many would forsake the religious institutions of their ancestors, set at naught the gods under whose auspices the capitol had been founded, and Rome made mistress of the world; and suffer themselves to be persuaded into the belief of a tenet the very mention of which made Felix tremble, by any thing less than a full conviction of the supernatural authority of those who taught it.

The several schools of Gentile philosophy had discussed, with no small subtlety, every argument which reason could suggest, for and against the immortality of the soul; and those uncertain glimmerings of the light of nature would have prepared the minds of the learned for the reception of the full illustration of this subject by the Gospel, had not the resurrection been a part of the doctrine therein advanced. But that this corporeal frame, which is hourly mouldering away, and resolved at last into the undistinguished mass of elements from which it was first derived, should ever be "clothed with immortality; that this corruptible should *ever* put on incorruption," is a truth so far removed from the apprehension of philosophical research, so dissonant from the common conceptions of mankind, that amongst all ranks and persuasions of men it was esteemed an impossible thing. At Athens, the philosophers had listened with patience to St. Paul, whilst they conceived him but a "setter forth of strange gods:" but as soon as they comprehended, that by the *αναστασις* he meant the *resurrection*, they turned from him with contempt. It was principally the insisting upon the same topic which made Festus

think "that much learning had made him mad." And the questions, "How are the dead raised up?" and, "With what body do they come?" seem, by Paul's solicitude to answer them with fullness and precision, to have been not unfrequently proposed to him by those who were desirous of becoming Christians.

The doctrine of a future life, then, as promulged in the Gospel, being neither agreeable to the expectations, nor corresponding with the wishes, nor conformable to the reason of the Gentiles, I can discover no motive (setting aside the true one, the divine power of its first preachers,) which could induce them to receive it; and, in consequence of their belief, to conform their loose morals to the rigid standard of Gospel purity, upon the mere authority of a few contemptible fishermen of Judea. And even you, yourself, sir, seem to have changed your opinion concerning the efficacy of the expectation of a future life in converting the heathen, when you observe in the following chapter, that "the Pagan multitude, reserving their gratitude for temporal benefits alone, rejected the inestimable present of life and immortality which was offered to mankind by Jesus of Nazareth."

Montesquieu is of opinion that it will ever be impossible for Christianity to establish itself in China and the East, from the circumstance that it prohibits a plurality of wives. How then could it have been possible for it to have pervaded the voluptuous capital, and traversed the utmost limits of the empire of Rome, by the feeble efforts of human industry or human knavery?

But the Gentiles, you are of opinion, were converted by their fears; and you reckon the doctrine of Christ's



speedy appearance, of the millennium, and of the general conflagration, amongst those additional circumstances which gave weight to that concerning a future state. Before I proceed to the examination of the efficiency of these several circumstances in alarming the apprehensions of the Gentiles, what if I should grant your position? Still the main question recurs. From what source did they derive the fears which converted them? Not surely from the mere human labors of men who were every where spoken against, made a spectacle of, and considered as the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things; not surely from the human powers of him, who professed himself "rude in speech, in bodily presence contemptible," and a despiser of "the excellency of speech, and the enticing words of man's wisdom." No, such wretched instruments were but ill fitted to inspire the haughty and the learned Romans with any other passions than those of pity or contempt.

Now, sir, if you please, we will consider that universal *expectation of the approaching end of the world*, which, you think, had such great influence in converting the Pagans to the profession of Christianity. The near approach, you say, of this wonderful event had been predicted by the apostles, "though the revolution of seventeen centuries has instructed us not to press too closely the mysterious language of prophecy and revelation." That this opinion, even in the times of the apostles, had made its way into the Christian church, I readily admit; but that the apostles ever either predicted this event to others, or cherished the expectation of it in themselves, does not seem probable to me. As this is a point of some difficulty

and importance, you will suffer me to explain it at some length.

It must be owned that there are several passages in the writings of the apostles which, at the first view, seem to countenance the opinion you have adopted. "Now," says St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, "it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand." And in his First Epistle to the Thessalonians he comforts such of them as were sorrowing for the loss of their friends, by assuring them, that they were not lost for ever; but that the Lord, when he came, would bring them with him; and that they would not, in the participation of any blessings, be in anywise behind those who should happen then to be alive: "We," says he, (the Christians of whatever age or country, agreeable to a frequent use of the pronoun *we*,) "which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep; for the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive, and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord." In his Epistle to the Philippians he exhorts his Christian brethren not to disquiet themselves with carking cares about their temporal concerns, from this powerful consideration, that the Lord was at hand: "Let your moderation be known to all men; the Lord is at hand: be careful for nothing." In the Epistle to the Hebrews he inculcates the same doctrine, admonishing his converts "to provoke one another to love, and to good

works; and so much the more, as they saw the day approaching." The age in which the apostles lived is frequently called by them the end of the world, the last days, the last hour. I think it unnecessary, sir, to trouble you with an explication of these and other similar texts of Scripture, which are usually adduced in support of your opinion, since I hope to be able to give you a direct proof, that the apostles neither comforted themselves, nor encouraged others, with the delightful hope of seeing their Master coming again into the world.

It is evident, then, that St. John, who survived all the other apostles, could not have had any such expectation; since, in the book of the revelation, the future events of the Christian church, which were not to take place, many of them, till a long series of years after his death, and some of which have not yet been accomplished, are there minutely described. St. Peter, in like manner, strongly intimates, that the day of the Lord might be said to be at hand, though it was at the distance of a thousand years or more; for in replying to the taunt of those who did then, or should in future ask, "Where is the promise of his coming?" he says, "Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day: The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness." And he speaks of putting off his tabernacle, as the Lord had showed him; and of his endeavor that the Christians after his decease might be able to have these things in remembrance: so that it is past a doubt, he could not be of opinion that the Lord would come in his time. As to St. Paul, upon a partial view

of whose writings the doctrine concerning the speedy coming of Christ is principally founded, it is manifest, that he was conscious he should not live to see it, notwithstanding the expression before mentioned, "we which are alive;" for he foretells his own death in express terms: "The time of my departure is at hand;" and he speaks of his reward, not as immediately to be conferred upon him, but as laid up, and reserved for him till some future day. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day." There is, moreover, one passage in his writings which is so express, and full to the purpose, that it will put the matter, I think, beyond all doubt; it occurs in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians. They, it seems, had, either by misinterpreting some parts of his former letter to them, or by the preaching of some, who had not the spirit of truth, by some means or other they had been led to expect the speedy coming of Christ, and been greatly disturbed in mind upon that account. To remove this error, he writes to them in the following very solemn and affectionate manner: "We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of the Lord is at hand; let no man deceive you by any means." He then goes on to describe a falling away, a great corruption of the Christian church, which was to happen before the day of the Lord. Now, by this revelation of the man of sin, this mystery of iniquity, which is to be consumed with the spirit of

his mouth, destroyed by the brightness of his coming, we have every reason to believe, is to be understood the past and present abominations of the church of Rome. How then can it be said of Paul, who clearly foresaw this corruption above seventeen hundred years ago, that he expected the coming of the Lord in his own day? Let us press, sir, the mysterious language of prophecy and revelation as closely as you please; but let us press it truly: and we may, perhaps, find reason from thence to receive, with less reluctance, a religion which describes a corruption, the strangeness of which, had it not been foretold in unequivocal terms, might have amazed even a friend to Christianity.

I will produce you, sir, a prophecy, which, the more closely you press it, the more reason you will have to believe, that the speedy coming of Christ could never have been "predicted" by the apostles. Take it, as translated by Bishop Newton: "But the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times, some shall apostatize from the faith; giving heed to erroneous spirits, and doctrines concerning demons, through the hypocrisy of liars; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats." Here you have an express prophecy; the Spirit hath spoken it; that in the latter times, not immediately, but at some distant period, some should apostatize from the faith; some, who had been Christians, should in truth be so no longer, but should give heed to erroneous spirits, and doctrines concerning demons. Press this expression closely, and you may, perhaps, discover in it the erroneous tenets, and the demon or saint worship, of the church of Rome "Through the hypocrisy of liars:" you recognize, no

doubt, the priesthood, and the martyrologists. "Having their conscience seared with a hot iron:" callous, indeed, must his conscience be, who traffics in indulgence. "Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats:" this language needs no pressing; it discovers, at once, the unhappy votaries of monastic life, and the mortal sin of eating flesh on fast days.

If, notwithstanding what has been said, you should still be of opinion that the apostles expected Christ would come in their time; it will not follow that this their error ought in any wise to diminish their authority as preachers of the Gospel. I am sensible this position may alarm even some well-wishers to Christianity; and supply its enemies with what they will think an irrefragable argument. The apostles, they will say, were inspired with the Spirit of truth; and yet they fell into a gross mistake concerning a matter of great importance; how is this to be reconciled? Perhaps, in the following manner: When the time of our Savior's ministry was nearly at an end, he thought proper to raise the spirits of his disciples, who were quite cast down with what he had told them about his design of leaving them, by promising that he would send to them the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, who should teach them all things, and lead them into all truth. And we know, that this his promise was accomplished on the day of Pentecost, when they were all filled with the Holy Ghost; and we know farther, that from that time forward they were enabled to speak with tongues, to work miracles, to preach the word with power, and to comprehend the mystery of the new dispensation which was com-

mitted unto them. But we have no reason from hence to conclude, that they were immediately inspired with the apprehension of whatever might be known : that they became acquainted with all kinds of truth. They were undoubtedly led into such truths as it was necessary for them to know, in order to their converting the world to Christianity ; but, in other things, they were probably left to the exercise of their understanding, as other men usually are. But surely they might be proper witnesses of the life and resurrection of Christ, though they were not acquainted with every thing which might have been known ; though, in particular, they were ignorant of the precise time when our Lord would come to judge the world. It can be no impeachment, either of their integrity as men, or their ability as historians, or their honesty as preachers of the Gospel, that they were unacquainted with what had never been revealed to them ; that they followed their own understandings where they had no better light to guide them ; speaking from conjecture, when they could not speak from certainty ; of themselves, when they had no commandment of the Lord. They knew but in part, and they prophesied but in part ; and concerning this particular point, Jesus himself had told them, just as he was about finally to leave them, that it was not for them to “ know the times and the seasons, which the Father had put in his own power.” Nor is it to be wondered at, that the apostles were left in a state of uncertainty concerning the time in which Christ should appear ; since beings far more exalted, and more highly favored of heaven than they, were under an equal degree of ignorance : “ Of that day,” says our Savior, “ and of that hour, knoweth no man ;

no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only." I am afraid, sir, I have tired you with Scripture quotations; but if I have been fortunate enough to convince you, either that the speedy coming of Christ was never expected, much less "predicted," by the apostles; or that their mistake in that particular expectation can in no degree diminish the general weight of their testimony as historians, I shall not be sorry for the ennui I may have occasioned you.

The doctrine of the Millenium is the second of the circumstances which you produce as giving weight to that of a future state; and you represent this doctrine as having been "carefully calculated by a succession of the fathers, from Justin Martyr and Irenæus, down to Lactantius;" and observe, that when "the edifice of the church was almost completed, the temporary support was laid aside:" and in the notes you refer us, as a proof of what you advance, to "Irenæus, the disciple of Papias, who had seen the apostle John," and to the second dialogue of Justin with Trypho.

I wish, sir, you had turned to Eusebius for the character of this Papias, who had seen the apostle John: you would there have found him represented as little better than a credulous old woman; very averse from reading, but mightily given to picking up stories and traditions next to fabulous; amongst which, Eusebius reckons this of the Millenium one. Nor is it, I apprehend, quite certain, that Papias ever saw, much less discoursed, as seems to be insinuated, with the apostle John. Eusebius thinks rather, that it was John the presbyter he had seen. But what if he had seen the apostle himself? Many a weak-



headed man had undoubtedly seen him as well as Papias; and it would be hard indeed upon Christians, if they were compelled to receive, as apostolical traditions, the wild reveries of ancient enthusiasm, or such crude conceptions of ignorant fanaticism as nothing but the rust of antiquity can render venerable.

As to the works of Justin, the very dialogue you refer to contains a proof that the doctrine of the millennium had not, even in his time, the universal reception you have supposed; but that many Christians of pure and pious principles rejected it. I wonder how this passage escaped you; but it may be that you followed Tillotson, who himself followed Mede, and read in the original *ov* instead of *av*; and thus unwarily violated the idiom of the language, the sense of the context, and the authority of the best editions. In the note you observe, that it is unnecessary for you to mention all the intermediate fathers between Justin and Lactantius, as the fact, you say, is not disputed. In a man who has read so many books, and to so good a purpose, he must be captious indeed, who cannot excuse small mistakes. That unprejudiced regard to truth, however, which is the great characteristic of every distinguished historian, will, I am persuaded, make you thank me for recalling to your memory that Origen, the most learned of all the fathers; and Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, usually, for his immense erudition, surnamed the Great, were both of them prior to Lactantius, and both of them impugners of the millennium doctrine. Look, sir, into Mosheim, or ask any writer of ecclesiastical history, and you will find the opposition of Origen and Dionysius to this system particularly noticed: look into so common an author

as Whitby, and in his learned treatise upon this subject you will find that he has well proved these two propositions : first, that this opinion of the millennium was never generally received in the church of Christ ; secondly, that there is no just ground to think it was derived from the apostles. From hence, I think, we may conclude, that this millennium doctrine (which, by the by, though it be new-modelled, is not yet thrown aside) could not have been any very serviceable scaffold in the erection of that mighty edifice which has crushed by the weight of its materials, and debased by the elegance of its structure, the stateliest temples of heathen superstition. With these remarks, I take leave of the millennium ; just observing, that your third circumstance, the general conflagration, seems to be effectually included in your first, the speedy coming of Christ. I am, &c.

### LETTER III.

SIR,—You esteem “ the miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive church,” as the third of the secondary causes of the rapid growth of Christianity. I should be willing to account the miracles, not merely ascribed to the primitive church, but really performed by the apostles, as the one great primary cause of the conversion of the Gentiles. But waiving this consideration, let us see whether the miraculous powers which you ascribe to the primitive church, were in any eminent degree calculated to spread the belief of Christianity amongst a great and enlightened people.

They consisted, you tell us, “ of divine inspirations, conveyed sometimes in the form of a sleeping, some-

times of a waking vision ; and were liberally bestowed on all ranks of the faithful, on women as on elders, on boys as well as upon bishops." "The design of these visions," you say, "was for the most part either to disclose the future history, or to guide the present administration of the church." You speak of "the expulsion of demons as an ordinary triumph of religion, usually performed in a public manner ; and when the patient was relieved by the skill or the power of the exorcist, the vanquished demon was heard to confess that he was one of the fabled gods of antiquity, who had impiously usurped the adoration of mankind ;" and you represent even the miracle of the resurrection of the dead as frequently performed on necessary occasions. Cast your eye, sir, upon the church of Rome, and ask yourself (I put the question to your heart, and beg you will consult that for an answer ; ask yourself,) whether her absurd pretensions to that very kind of miraculous powers you have here displayed as operating to the increase of Christianity, have not converted half her numbers to Protestantism, and the other half to infidelity ? Neither the sword of the civil magistrate, nor the possession of the keys of heaven, nor the terrors of her spiritual thunder, have been able to keep within her pale even those who have been bred up in her faith ; how then should you think, that the very cause which has almost extinguished Christianity among Christians, should have established it among Pagans ? I beg I may not be misunderstood. I do not take upon me to say, that all the miracles recorded in the history of the primitive church after the apostolical age were forgeries : it is foreign to the present purpose to deliver any opinion upon that subject : but I

do beg leave to insist upon this, that such of them as were forgeries must, in that learned age, by their easy detection, have rather impeded than accelerated the progress of Christianity; and it appears very probable to me, that nothing but the recent prevailing evidence of real, unquestioned, apostolical miracles, could have secured the infant church from being destroyed by those which were falsely ascribed to it.

It is not every man who can nicely separate the corruptions of religion from religion itself, or justly apportion the degrees of credit due to the diversities of evidence, and those who have ability for the task are usually ready enough to emancipate themselves from Gospel restraints (which, thwart the propensities of sense, check the ebullitions of passion, and combat the prejudices of the world at every turn) by blending its native simplicity with the superstitions which have been derived from it. No argument is so well suited to the indolence or the immorality of mankind, as that priests of all ages and religions are the same: we see the pretensions of the Romish priesthood to miraculous powers, and we know them to be false; we are conscious that they, at least, must sacrifice their integrity to their interest or their ambition; and being persuaded that there is a great sameness in the passions of mankind and in their incentives to action; and knowing that the history of past ages is abundantly stored with similar claims to supernatural authority, we traverse back, in imagination, the most distant regions of antiquity; and finding, from a superficial view, nothing to discriminate one set of men or one period of time from another, we hastily conclude that all revealed religion is a cheat, and that the miracles attri-

buted to the apostles themselves are supported by no better testimony, nor more worthy of our attention than the prodigies of Pagan story or the lying wonders of Papal artifice. I have no intention, in this place, to enlarge upon the many circumstances by which a candid inquirer after truth might be enabled to distinguish a pointed difference between the miracles of Christ and his apostles, and the tricks of ancient or modern superstition. One observation I would just suggest to you upon this subject: the miracles recorded in the Old and New Testament are so intimately united with the narration of common events, and the ordinary transactions of life, that you cannot, as in profane history, separate the one from the other. My meaning will be illustrated by an instance: Tacitus and Suetonius have handed down to us an account of many great actions performed by Vespasian; and, among the rest, they inform us of his having wrought some miracles; of his having cured a lame man, and restored sight to one that was blind. But what they tell us of these miracles is so unconnected with every thing that goes before and after, that you may reject the relation of them without injuring, in any degree, the consistency of the narration of the other circumstances of his life: on the other hand, if you reject the relation of the miracles said to have been performed by Jesus Christ, you must necessarily reject the account of his whole life, and of several transactions, concerning which we have the undoubted testimony of other writers besides the evangelists. But if this argument should not strike you, perhaps the following observation may tend to remove a little of the prejudice usually conceived against Gospel miracles by men

of lively imaginations, on account of the gross forgeries attributed to the first ages of the church.

The phenomena of physics are sometimes happily illustrated by an hypothesis; and the most recondite truths of mathematical science, not unfrequently, investigated from an absurd position. What if we try the same method of arguing the case before us? Let us suppose, then, that a new revelation was to be promulgated to mankind; and that twelve unlearned and unfriended men, inhabitants of any country most odious and despicable in the eyes of Europe, should, by the power of God, be endowed with the faculty of speaking languages they had never learned, and performing works surpassing all human ability; and that, being strongly impressed with a particular truth which they were commissioned to promulgate, they should travel, not only through the barbarous regions of Africa, but through all the learned and polished states of Europe, preaching every where with unremitting sedulity a new religion, working stupendous miracles in attestation of their mission, and communicating to their first converts (as a seal of their conversion) a variety of spiritual gifts: does it appear probable to you that, after the death of these men, and probably after the deaths of most of their immediate successors who had been zealously attached to the faith they had seen so miraculously confirmed, none would ever attempt to impose upon the credulous or the ignorant by a fictitious claim to supernatural powers? Would none of them aspire to the gift of tongues? would none of them mistake frenzy for illumination, and the delusions of a heated brain for the impulses of the Spirit? would none undertake to cure inveterate disorders, to expel demons,

or to raise the dead? As far as I can apprehend, we ought, from such a position, to deduce, by every rule of probable reasoning, the precise conclusion which was, in fact, verified in the case of the apostles: every species of miracles which heaven had enabled the first preachers to perform, would be counterfeited, either from misguided zeal or interested cunning: either through the imbecility or the iniquity of mankind; and we might just as reasonably conclude that there never was any piety, charity, or chastity in the world, from seeing such plenty of pretenders to these virtues, as that there never were any real miracles performed, from considering the great store of those which have been forged.

But, I know not how it has happened, there are many in the present age (I am far from including you, sir, in the number,) whose prejudices against all miraculous events have arisen to that height, that it appears to them utterly impossible for any human testimony, however great, to establish their credibility. I beg pardon for styling their reasoning, prejudice. I have no design to give offence by that word. They may, with equal right, throw the same imputation upon mine; and I think it just as illiberal in divines to attribute the scepticism of every deist to wilful infidelity, as it is in the deists to refer the faith of every divine to professional bias. I have not had so little intercourse with mankind, nor shunned so much the delightful freedom of social converse, as to be ignorant that there are many men of upright morals and good understandings, to whom, as you express it, "a latent and even involuntary scepticism adheres;" and who would be glad to be persuaded to be Christians. For the sake of such

men, if such should ever be induced to employ an hour in the perusal of these letters, suffer me to step for a moment out of my way, whilst I hazard an observation or two upon the subject.

Knowledge is rightly divided by Mr. Locke into intuitive, sensitive, and demonstrative. It is clear, that a past miracle can neither be the object of sense nor of intuition, nor consequently of demonstration: we cannot then, philosophically speaking, be said to know, that a miracle has ever been performed. But, in all the great concerns of life, we are influenced by probability rather than knowledge: and of probability, the same great author establishes two foundations; a conformity to our own experience, and the testimony of others. Now, it has been contended, that by the opposition of these two principles probability is destroyed; or, in other terms, that human testimony can never influence the mind to assent to a proposition repugnant to uniform experience. Whose experience do you mean? You will not say, your own; for the experience of an individual reaches but a little way; and, no doubt, you daily assent to a thousand truths in politics, in physics, and in the business of common life, which you have never seen verified by experience. You will not produce the experience of your friends; for that can extend itself but a little way beyond your own. But by uniform experience, I conceive, you are desirous of understanding the experience of all ages and nations since the foundation of the world. I answer, first; how is it that you become acquainted with the experience of all ages and nations? You will reply, from history. Be it so: peruse, then, by far the most ancient records of antiquity; and if you find no



mention of miracles in them, I give up the point. Yes; but every thing related therein respecting miracles is to be reckoned fabulous. Why? Because miracles contradict the experience of all ages and nations. Do you not perceive, sir, that you beg the very question in debate? for we affirm, that the great and learned nation of Egypt, that the heathen inhabiting the land of Canaan, that the numerous people of the Jews, and the nations which, for ages, surrounded them, have all had great experience of miracles. You cannot otherwise obviate this conclusion, than by questioning the authenticity of that book, concerning which Newton, when he was writing his commentary on Daniel, expressed himself to the person\* from whom I had the anecdote, and which deserves not to be lost: "I find more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible than in any profane history whatsoever."

However, I mean not to press you with the argument *ad verecundiam*; it is needless to solicit your *modesty*, when it may be possible, perhaps, to make an impression upon your judgment: I answer, therefore, in the second place, that the admission of the principle by which you reject miracles will lead us into absurdity. The laws of gravitation are the most obvious of all the laws of nature; every person in every part of the globe must of necessity have had experience of them. There was a time when no one was acquainted with the laws of magnetism: these suspend in many instances the laws of gravity: nor can I see, upon the principle in question, how the rest of mankind could have credited the testimony of their first

\* Dr. Smith, late Master of Trinity College.

discoverer; and yet to have rejected it would have been to reject the truth. But that a piece of iron should ascend gradually from the earth, and fly at last with an increasing rapidity through the air; and attaching itself to another piece of iron, or to a particular species of iron ore, should remain suspended, in opposition to the action of its gravity, it will be alledged, is consonant to the laws of nature. I grant it; but there was a time when it was contrary, I say not to the laws of nature, but to the uniform experience of all preceding ages and countries; and at that particular point of time, the testimony of an individual, or of a dozen individuals, who should have reported themselves eye-witnesses of such a fact, ought, according to your argumentation, to have been received as fabulous. And what are those laws of nature, which, you think, can never be suspended? Are they not different to different men, according to the diversities of their comprehension and knowledge? And if any of them (that, for instance, which rules the operations of magnetism or electricity) should have been known to you or to me alone, whilst all the rest of the world were unacquainted with it; the effects of it would have been new, and unheard of in the annals, and contrary to the experience of mankind; and therefore ought not, in your opinion, to have been believed! Nor do I understand what difference, as to credibility, there could be between the effects of such an unknown law of nature, and a miracle; for it is a matter of no moment, in that view, whether the suspension of the known laws of nature be effected; that is, whether a miracle be performed, by the mediation of other laws that are unknown, or by the ministry of a person divinely com-

missioned; since it is impossible for us to be certain that it is contradictory to the constitution of the universe, that the laws of nature, which appear to us general, should be suspended, and their action overruled by others, still more general though less known; that is, that miracles should be performed before such a being as man, at those times, in those places, and under those circumstances, which God, in his universal providence, had pre-ordained. I am, &c.

#### LETTER IV.

SIR;—I readily acknowledge the utility of your fourth cause, “the virtues of the first Christians,” as greatly conducing to the spreading of their religion; but then you seem to quite mar the compliment you pay them, by representing their virtues as proceeding either from their repentance for having been the most abandoned sinners, or from the laudable desire of supporting the reputation of the society in which they were engaged.

That repentance is the first step to virtue, is true enough; but I see no reason for supposing, according to the calumnies of Celsus and Julian, “that the Christians allured into their party men who washed away in the waters of baptism the guilt for which the temples of the gods refused to grant them any expiation.” The apostles, sir, did not, like Romulus, open an asylum for debtors, thieves and murderers; for they had not the same sturdy means of securing their adherents from the grasp of civil power; they did not persuade them to abandon the temples of the gods

because they could there obtain no expiation for their guilt, but because every degree of guilt was expiated in them with too great facility, and every vice practiced, not only without remorse of private conscience but with the powerful sanction of public approbation.

“After the example,” you say, “of their Divine Master, the missionaries of the Gospel addressed themselves to men, and especially to women, oppressed by the consciousness, and very often by the effects, of their vices.”—This, sir, I really think, is not a fair representation of the matter; it may catch the applause of the unlearned, embolden many a stripling to cast off for ever the sweet blush of modesty, confirm many a dissolute veteran in the practice of his impure habits, and suggest great occasion of merriment and wanton mockery to the flagitious of every denomination and every age; but still it will want that foundation of truth which alone can recommend it to the serious and judicious. The apostles, sir, were not like the Italian *Fratricelli* of the thirteenth, nor the French *Turlupins* of the fourteenth century: in all the dirt that has been raked up against Christianity, even by the worst of its enemies, not a speck of that kind have they been able to fix, either upon the apostles or their Divine Master. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, sir, was not preached in single houses or obscure villages, not in subterraneous caves and impure brothels, not in lazars and in prisons; but in the synagogues and in the temples, in the streets and the market places of the great capitals of the Roman provinces; in Jerusalem, in Corinth, and in Antioch; in Athens, in Ephesus, and in Rome. Nor do I any where find, that its missionaries were ordered

particularly to address themselves to the shameless women you mention: I do indeed find the direct contrary; for they were ordered to turn away from, to have no fellowship or intercourse with such as were wont "to creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts." And what if a few women, who had either been seduced by their passions, or had fallen victims to the licentious manners of their age, should be found amongst those who were most ready to receive a religion that forbade all impurity? I do not apprehend that this circumstance ought to bring an insinuation of discredit, either upon the sex, or upon those who wrought their reformation.

That the majority of the first converts to Christianity were of an inferior condition in life, may readily be allowed; and you yourself have, in another place, given a good reason for it: those who are distinguished by riches, honors, or knowledge, being so very inconsiderable in number when compared with the bulk of mankind. But though not many mighty, not many noble were called—yet some mighty, and some noble, some of as great reputation as any of the age in which they lived, were attached to the Christian faith. Short indeed are the accounts which have been transmitted to us of the first propagating of Christianity; yet, even in these we meet with the names of many who would have done credit to any cause. I will not pretend to enumerate them all; a few of them will be sufficient to make you recollect that there were, at least, some converts to Christianity, both from among the Jews and the Gentiles, whose lives were not stained with inextinguishable crimes. Among these we reckon Nicode-

mus, a ruler of the Jews; Joseph of Arimathea, a man of fortune and a counsellor; a nobleman and a centurion of Capernaum; Jairus, Crispus, Sosthenes, rulers of synagogues; Apollos, an eloquent and learned man; Zenas, a Jewish lawyer; the treasurer of Candace, queen of Æthiopia; Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian band; Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus at Athens, and Sergius Paulus, a man of proconsular or prætorian authority, of whom it may be remarked, that if he resigned his high and lucrative office in consequence of his turning Christian, it is a strong presumption in its favor; if he retained it, we may conclude that the profession of Christianity was not so utterly incompatible with the discharge of the offices of civil life as you sometimes represent it.

This catalogue of men of rank, fortune, and knowledge, who embraced Christianity, might, was it necessary, be much enlarged; and probably another conversation with St. Paul would have enabled us to grace it with the names of Festus, and king Agrippa himself; not that the writers of the books of the New Testament seem to have been at all solicitous in mentioning the great or the learned men who were converted to the faith. Had that been part of their design, they would, in the true style of impostors, have kept out of sight the publicans and sinners, the tanners and tent-makers with whom they conversed and dwelt, and introduced to our notice none but those who had been "brought up with Herod or the chief men of Asia," whom they had the honor to number among their friends.

That the primitive Christians took great care to save an unsullied reputation by abstaining from the com-

mission of whatever might tend to pollute it, is easily admitted; but we do not so easily grant that this care is a "circumstance which usually attends small assemblies of men when they separate themselves from the body of a nation, or the religion to which they belonged." It did not attend the Nicolaitanes, the Simonians, the Menandrians, and the Carpocratians, in the first ages of the church, of which you are speaking; and it cannot be unknown to you, sir, that the scandalous vices of these very early sectaries brought a general and undistinguished censure upon the Christian name; and, so far from promoting the increase of the church, excited in the minds of the Pagans an abhorrence of whatever respected it. It cannot be unknown to you, sir, that several sectaries, both at home and abroad, might be mentioned, who have departed from the religion to which they belonged; and which, unhappily for themselves and the community, have taken as little care to preserve their reputation unspotted, as those of the first and second centuries. If, then, the first Christians did take the care you mention, (and I am wholly of your opinion in that point,) their solicitude might as candidly, perhaps, and as reasonably be derived from a sense of their duty, and an honest endeavor to discharge it, as from the mere desire of increasing the honor of their confraternity by the illustrious integrity of its members.

You are eloquent in describing the austere morality of the primitive Christians, as adverse to the propensities of sense, and abhorrent from all the innocent pleasures and amusements of life; and you enlarge, with a studied minuteness, upon their censures of luxury, and their sentiments concerning marriage and

chastity: but in this circumstantial enumeration of their errors or their faults (which I am under no necessity of denying or excusing) you seem to forget the very purpose for which you profess to have introduced the mention of them; for the picture you have drawn is so hideous, and the coloring so dismal, that instead of alluring to a closer inspection, it must have made every man of pleasure or of sense turn from it with horror or disgust; and so far from contributing to the rapid growth of Christianity by the austerity of their manners, it must be a wonder to any one, how the first Christians ever made a single convert. It was first objected by Celsus, that Christianity was a mean religion, inculcating such a pusillanimity and patience under affronts, such a contempt of riches and worldly honors, as must weaken the nerves of civil government, and expose a society of Christians to the prey of the first invaders. This objection has been repeated by Bayle; and though fully answered by Bernard and others, it is still the favorite theme of every *esprit fort* [freethinker.] of our own age: even you, sir, think the aversion of Christians to the business of war and government, "a criminal disregard to the public welfare." To all that has been said upon this subject it may with justice, I think, be answered, that Christianity troubles not itself with ordering the constitutions of civil societies, but levels the weight of all its influence at the hearts of the individuals which compose them; and, as Origen said to Celsus, was every individual in every nation a Gospel Christian, there would be neither internal injustice, nor external war; there would be none of those passions which embitter the intercourse of civil life, and desolate the globe. What



reproach then can it be to a religion, that it inculcates doctrines, which, if universally practiced, would introduce universal tranquility, and the most exalted happiness amongst mankind?

It must proceed from a total misapprehension of the design of the Christian dispensation, or from a very ignorant interpretation of the particular injunctions, forbidding us to make riches or honors a primary pursuit, or the prompt gratification of revenge a first principle of action, to infer, that an individual Christian is obliged by his religion to offer his throat to an assassin, and his property to the first plunderer, or that a society of Christians may not repel, in the best manner they are able, the unjust assaults of hostile invasion.

I know of no precepts in the Gospel which debar a man from the possession of domestic comforts, or deaden the activity of his private friendships, or prohibit the exertion of his utmost ability in the service of the public: the *nisi quietum nihil beatum* [no happiness without rest] is no part of the Christian's creed: his virtue is an active virtue: and we justly refer to the school of Epicurus the doctrines concerning abstinence from marriage, from the cultivation of friendship, from the management of public affairs, as suited to that selfish indolence which was the favorite tenet of his philosophy. I am, &c.

## LETTER V.

SIR,—“The union and the discipline of the Christian church,” or, as you are pleased to style it, of the

Christian republic, is the last of the five secondary causes to which you have referred the rapid and extensive spread of Christianity. It must be acknowledged that union essentially contributes to the strength of every association, civil, military, and religious; but, unfortunately for your argument, and much to the reproach of Christians, nothing has been more wanting amongst them, from the apostolic age to your own, than union. "I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ," are expressions of disunion, which we meet with in the earliest period of church history: and we cannot look into the writings of any, either friend or foe to Christianity, but we find the one of them lamenting, and the other exulting in an immense catalogue of sectaries; and both of them thereby furnishing us with great reason to believe that the divisions with respect to doctrine, worship, and discipline, which have ever subsisted in the church, must have greatly tended to hurt the credit of Christianity, and to alienate the minds of the Gentiles from the reception of such a various and discordant faith.

I readily grant, that there was a certain community of doctrine, an intercourse of hospitality, and a confederacy of discipline established among the individuals of every church; so that none could be admitted into any assembly of Christians without undergoing a previous examination into his manner of life, (which shows, by-the-by, that every reprobate could not, as the fit seized him, or his interest induced him, become a Christian,) and without protesting in the most solemn manner, that he would neither be guilty of murder, nor adultery, nor theft, nor perfidy; and it may be granted also, that those who broke this compact were ejected by

common consent from the confraternity into which they had been admitted. It may be farther granted, that this confederacy extended itself to independent churches; and that those who had, for their immoralities, been excluded from Christian community in any one church, were rarely, if ever, admitted to it by another; just as a member who has been expelled any one college in a university, is generally thought unworthy of being admitted by any other: but it is not admitted, that this severity and this union of discipline could ever have induced the Pagans to forsake the gods of their country, and to expose themselves to the contemptuous hatred of their neighbors, and to all the severities of persecution, exercised with unrelenting barbarity, against the Christians.

The account you give of the origin and progress of episcopal jurisdiction, of the pre-eminence of the metropolitan churches, and of the ambition of the Roman pontiff, I believe to be in general accurate and true; and I am not in the least surprised at the bitterness which now and then escapes you in treating this subject: for to see the most benign religion that imagination can form, becoming an instrument of oppression, and the most humble one administering to the pride, and the avarice, and the ambition of those who wished to be considered as its guardians, and who avowed themselves its professors, would extort a censure from men more attached probably to church authority than yourself. Not that I think it either a very candid, or a very useful undertaking, to be solely and industriously engaged in portraying the characters of the professors of Christianity in the worst colors: it is not *candid*, because "the great law of impartiality, which obliges

an historian to reveal the imperfections of the uninspired teachers and believers of the Gospel," obliges him also not to conceal, or to pass over with niggard and reluctant mention, the illustrious virtues of those who gave up fortune and fame, all their comforts, and all their hopes in this life; nay, life itself, rather than violate any one of the precepts of that Gospel which, from the testimony of inspired teachers, they conceived they had good reason to believe: it is not *useful*, because "to a careless observer," (that is, to the generality of mankind,) "*their* faults may seem to cast a shade on the faith which they professed;" and may really infect the minds of the young and unlearned especially, with prejudices against a religion, upon their rational reception or rejection of which, a matter of the utmost importance may (believe me, sir, it may, for aught you or any person else can prove to the contrary) entirely depend.

It is an easy matter to amuse ourselves and others with the immoralities of priests and the ambition of prelates; with the absurd virulence of synods and councils; with the ridiculous doctrines which visionary enthusiasts or interested churchmen have sanctified with the name of Christian; but a display of ingenuity or erudition upon such subjects is much misplaced, since it excites, almost in every person, an unavoidable suspicion of the purity of the source itself from which such polluted streams have been derived. Do not mistake my meaning. I am far from wishing that the clergy should be looked up to with a blind reverence, or their imperfections screened by the sanctity of their functions from the animadversion of the world; quite the contrary. Their conduct, I am

of opinion, ought to be more nicely scrutinized, and their deviation from the rectitude of the Gospel more severely censured than that of other men; but great care should be taken not to represent *their* vices, or *their* indiscretion, as originating in the principles of their religion. Do not mistake me. I am not here begging quarters for Christianity, or contending that even the principles of our religion should be received with implicit faith; or that every objection to Christianity should be stifled by a representation of the mischief it might do if publicly promulged; on the contrary, we invite, nay, we challenge you to a direct and liberal attack, though oblique glances and disingenuous insinuations we are willing to avoid; well knowing that the character of our religion, like that of an honest man, is defended with greater difficulty against the suggestions of ridicule, and the secret malignity of pretended friends, than against positive accusations and the avowed malice of open enemies.

In your account of the primitive church, you set forth that "the want of discipline and human learning was supplied by the occasional assistance of the prophets, who were called to that function without distinction of age, sex, or natural abilities." That the gift of prophecy was one of the spiritual gifts by which some of the first Christians were enabled to co-operate with the apostles in the general design of preaching the Gospel; and that this gift, or rather as Mr. Locke thinks, the gift of tongues (by the ostentation of which many of them were prompted to speak in their assemblies at the same time) was the occasion of some disorder in the church of Corinth, which required the interposition of the apostle to compose, is confessed on all

hands. But, if you mean that the prophets were ever the sole pastors of the faithful, or that no provision was made by the apostles for the good government and edification of the church, except what might be accidentally derived from the occasional assistance of the prophets, you are much mistaken, and have undoubtedly forgot what is said of Paul and Barnabas having ordained elders in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch; and of Paul's commission to Titus, whom he had left in Crete, to ordain elders in every city; and of his instructions both to him and Timothy concerning the qualifications of those whom they were to appoint bishops; one of which was, that a bishop should be able, by sound doctrine, to exhort and to convince the gainsayer. Nor is it said, that this sound doctrine was to be communicated to the bishop by prophecy, or that all persons, without distinction, might be called to that office; but a bishop was to be "able to teach," not what he had learned by prophecy, but what Paul publicly preached, "the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." And in every place almost, where prophets are mentioned, they are joined with apostles and teachers, and other ministers of the Gospel; so that there is no reason for your representing them as a distinct order of men, who were, by their occasional assistance, to supply the want of discipline and human learning in the church. It would be taking too large a field to inquire whether the prophets you speak of were endowed with ordinary or extraordinary gifts; whether they always spoke by the immediate impulse of the Spirit, or according to "the analogy of faith;" whether their gift

consisted in the foretelling of future events, or in the interpreting of Scripture to the edification, and exhortation, and comfort of the church, or in both. I will content myself with observing, that he will judge very improperly concerning the prophets of the apostolic church who takes his idea of their office or importance from your description of them.

In speaking of the community of goods, which, you say, was adopted for a short time in the primitive church, you hold as inconclusive the arguments of Mosheim, who has endeavored to prove that it was a community quite different from that recommended by Pythagoras or Plato, consisting principally in a common use derived from an unbounded liberality, which induced the opulent to share their riches with their indigent brethren. There have been others, as well as Mosheim, who have entertained this opinion; and it is not quite so indefensible as you represent it: but whether it be reasonable or absurd, need not now be examined; it is far more necessary to take notice of an expression which you have used, and which may be apt to mislead unwary readers into a very injurious suspicion concerning the integrity of the apostles. In process of time, you observe, "the converts who embraced the new religion were permitted to retain the possession of their patrimony." This expression, "permitted to retain," in ordinary acceptation, implies an antecedent obligation to part with. Now, sir, I have not the shadow of a doubt in affirming that we have no account in Scripture of any such obligation being imposed upon the converts to Christianity, either by Christ himself, or by his apostles, or by any other authority; nay, in the very place where this community

of goods is treated of, there is an express proof (I know not how your impartiality has happened to overlook it) to the contrary. When Peter was about to inflict an exemplary punishment upon Ananias (not for keeping back a part of the price, as some men are fond of representing it, but) for his lying and hypocrisy, in offering a part of the price of his land as the whole of it; he said to him, "Whilst it remained (unsold) was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?" From this account it is evident that Ananias was under no obligation to part with his patrimony; and after he had parted with it, the price was in his own power. The apostle would have "permitted him to retain" the whole of it, if he had thought fit, though he would not permit his prevarication to go unpunished.

You have remarked, that "the feasts of love, the *agapæ*, as they were called, constituted a very pleasing and essential part of public worship." Lest any one should from hence be led to suspect that these feasts of love, this pleasing part of the public worship of the primitive church, resembled the unhallowed meetings of some impure sectaries of our own times, I will take the liberty to add to your account a short explication of the nature of these *agapæ*. Tertullian, in the 39th chapter of his Apology, has done it to my hands. "The nature of our supper," says he, "is indicated by its name; it is called by a word which, in the Greek language, signifies *love*. We are not anxious about expense of the entertainment, since we look upon that as gain which is expended, with a pious purpose, in the relief and refreshment of all our indigent. The occasion of our entertainment being



so honorable, you may judge of the manner of its being conducted: it consists in the discharge of religious duties; it admits nothing vile, nothing immodest. Before we sit down, prayer is made to God. The hungry eat as much as they desire, and every one drinks as much as can be useful to sober men. We so feast as men who have their minds impressed with the idea of spending the night in the worship of God; we so converse as men who are conscious that the Lord heareth them," &c. Perhaps you may object to this testimony in favor of the innocence of Christian meetings as liable to a partiality, because it is the testimony of a Christian; and you may, perhaps, be able to pick out, from the writings of this Christian, something that looks like a contradiction of this account: however, I will rest the matter upon this testimony for the present; forbearing to quote any other Christian writer upon the subject, as I shall, in a future letter, produce you a testimony superior to every objection. You speak too of the *agapæ* as an essential part of the public worship. This is not according to your usual accuracy; for, had they been essential, the edict of a heathen magistrate would not have been able to put a stop to them; yet Pliny, in his letter to Trajan, expressly says, that the Christians left them off upon his publishing an edict prohibiting assemblies. We know that in the council of Carthage, in the fourth century, on account of the abuses which attended them, they began to be interdicted, and ceased, almost universally, in the fifth.

I have but two observations to make upon what you have advanced concerning the severity of ecclesiastical penance; the first is, that even you yourself do not

deduce its institution from the Scriptures, but from the power which every voluntary society has over its own members; and, therefore, however extravagant, or however absurd—however opposite to the attributes of a commiserating God, or the feelings of a fallible man, it may be thought; or upon whatever trivial occasion, such as that you mention, of calumniating a bishop, a presbyter, or even a deacon, it may have been inflicted, Christ and his apostles are not answerable for it. The other is, that it was, of all possible expedients, the least fitted to accomplish the end for which you think it was introduced, the propagation of Christianity. The sight of a penitent, humbled by a public confession, emaciated by fasting, clothed in sackcloth, prostrated at the door of the assembly, and imploring for years together the pardon of his offences, and a re-admission into the bosom of the church, was a much more likely means of deterring the Pagans from Christian community, than the pious liberality you mention was of alluring them into it. This pious liberality, sir, would exhaust even your elegant powers of description, before you could exhibit it in the amiable manner it deserves. It is derived from the “new commandment of loving one another;” and it has ever been the distinguishing characteristic of Christians, as opposed to every other denomination of men, Jews, Mahomedans, or Pagans. In the times of the apostles, and in the first ages of the church, it showed itself in voluntary contributions for the relief of the poor and the persecuted, the infirm and the unfortunate. As soon as the church was permitted to have permanent possessions in land, and acquired the protection of the civil power, it exerted itself in the erection of hospitals of

every kind; institutions like these, of charity and humanity, which were forgotten in the laws of Solon and Lycurgus; and for even one example of which, you will, I believe, in vain explore the boasted annals of Pagan Rome. Indeed, sir, you will think too injuriously of this liberality, if you look upon its origin as superstitious, or upon its application as an artifice of the priesthood to seduce the indigent into the bosom of the church: it was the pure and uncorrupted fruit of genuine Christianity.

You are much *surprised*, and not a little *concerned*, that Tacitus and the younger Pliny have spoken so slightly of the Christian system; and that Seneca and the elder Pliny have not vouchsafed to mention it at all. This difficulty seems to have struck others as well as yourself; and I might refer you to the conclusion of the second volume of Dr. Lardner's Collection of Ancient, Jewish, and Heathen Testimonies to the Truth of the Christian Religion, for full satisfaction in this point; but perhaps an observation or two may be sufficient to diminish your surprise.

Obscure sectaries of upright morals, when they separate themselves from the religion of their country, do not speedily acquire the attention of men of letters. The historians are apprehensive of depreciating the dignity of their learned labor, and contaminating their splendid narration of illustrious events, by mixing with it a disgusting detail of religious combinations; and the philosophers are usually too deeply engaged in abstract science, or in exploring the infinite intricacy of natural appearances, to busy themselves with what they, perhaps hastily, esteem popular superstitions. Historians and philosophers, of no mean reputation,

might be mentioned, I believe, who were the contemporaries of Luther and the first reformers; and who have passed over, in negligent or contemptuous silence, their daring and unpopular attempts to shake the stability of St. Peter's chair. Opposition to the religion of a people must become general before it can deserve the notice of the civil magistrate; and till it does that, it will mostly be thought below the animadversion of distinguished writers. This remark is peculiarly applicable to the case in point. The first Christians, as Christ had foretold, were "hated of all men for his name's sake:" it was the name itself, not any vices adhering to the name, which Pliny punished; and they were every where held in exceeding contempt, till their numbers excited the apprehension of the ruling powers. The philosophers considered them as enthusiasts, and neglected them; the priests opposed them as innovators, and calumniated them; the great overlooked them; the learned despised them; and the curious alone, who examined into the foundation of their faith, believed them. But the negligence of some half dozen of writers (most of them, however, bear incidental testimony to the truth of several facts respecting Christianity) in not relating circumstantially the origin, the progress, and the pretensions of a new sect, is a very insufficient reason for questioning, either the evidence of the principles upon which it was built, or the supernatural power by which it was supported.

The Roman historians, moreover, were not only culpably incurious concerning the Christians, but unpardonably ignorant of what concerned either them or the Jews: I say, unpardonably ignorant, because the means of information were within their reach; the writings

of Moses were every where to be had in Greek; and the works of Josephus were published before Tacitus wrote his history; and yet even Tacitus has fallen into great absurdity, and self-contradiction, in his account of the Jews; and though Tertullian's zeal carried him much too far, when he called him *Mendaciorum loquacissimus*, [the most loquacious of liars,] yet one cannot help regretting the little pains he took to acquire proper information upon that subject. He derives the name of the Jews, by a forced interpolation, from mount Ida in Crete; and he represents them as abhorring all kinds of images in public worship, and yet accuses them of having placed the image of an ass in the holy of holies; and presently after he tells us, that Pompey, when he profaned the temple, found the sanctuary entirely empty. Similar inaccuracies might be noticed in Plutarch, and other writers who have spoken of the Jews; and you yourself have referred to an obscure passage in Suetonius, as offering a proof how strangely the Jews and Christians of Rome were confounded with each other. Why, then, should we think it remarkable, that a few celebrated writers, who looked upon the Christians as an obscure sect of the Jews, and upon the Jews as a barbarous and detested people, whose history was not worth the perusal, and who were moreover engaged in the relation of the great events which either occasioned or accompanied the ruin of their eternal empire; why should we be surprised that men occupied in such interesting subjects, and influenced by such inveterate prejudices, should have left us but short and imperfect descriptions of the Christian system?

“But how shall we excuse,” you say, “the supine

inattention of the Pagan and philosophic world to those evidences which were presented by the hand of Omnipotence, not to their reason but to their senses?" "The laws of nature were perpetually suspended for the benefit of the church; but the sages of Greece and Rome turned aside from the awful spectacle." To their shame be it spoken, that they did so; "and, pursuing the ordinary occupations of life and study, appeared unconscious of any alterations in the moral or physical government of the world." To this objection I answer, in the first place, that we have no reason to believe that miracles were performed as often as the philosophers deigned to give their attention to them; or that, at the period of time you allude to, the laws of nature were "perpetually" suspended for the benefit of the church. It may be, that not one of the few heathen writers, whose books have escaped the ravages of time, was ever present when a miracle was wrought; but will it follow, because Pliny, or Plutarch, or Galen, or Seneca, or Suetonius, or Tacitus, had never seen a miracle, that no miracles were ever performed? They, indeed, were learned and observant men; and it may be a matter of surprise to us, that miracles so celebrated, as the friends of Christianity suppose the Christian ones to have been, should never have been mentioned by them, though they had not seen them. Had an Adrian, or a Vespasian been the author of but a thousandth part of the miracles you have ascribed to the primitive church, more than one, probably, of these very historians, philosophers as they were, would have adorned his history with the narration of them; for though they turned aside from the awful spectacle of the miracles of a poor despised apostle, yet they

beheld, with exulting complacency, and have related, with unsuspecting credulity, the ostentatious tricks of a Roman emperor. It was not for want of faith in miraculous events that these sages neglected the Christian miracles, but for want of candor and impartial examination.

I answer, in the second place, that in the Acts of the Apostles we have an account of a great multitude of Pagans of every condition of life, who were so far from being inattentive to the evidences which were presented by the hand of Omnipotence to their senses, that they contemplated them with reverence and wonder; and, forsaking the religion of their ancestors, and all the flattering hopes of worldly profit, reputation, and tranquility, adhered with astonishing resolution to the profession of Christianity. From the conclusion of the Acts, till the time in which some of the sages you mention flourished, is a very obscure part of church history; yet we are certain, that many of the Pagan, and we have some reason to believe, that not a few of the philosophic world, during that period, did not turn aside from the awful spectacle of miracles, but saw, and believed: and that a few others should be found, who probably had never seen, and therefore would not believe, is surely no very extraordinary circumstance. Why should we not answer to objections such as these with the boldness of St. Jerome; and bid Celsus, and Porphyry, and Julian, and their followers, learn the illustrious characters of the men who founded, built up, and adorned the Christian church? Why should we not tell them, with Arnobius, of the orators, the grammarians, the rhetoricians, the lawyers, the physicians, the philosophers, "who appeared

conscious of the alterations in the moral and physical government of the world ;” and from that consciousness, forsook the ordinary occupations of life and study, and attached themselves to the Christian discipline ?

I answer, in the last place, that the miracles of Christians were falsely attributed to magic ; and were, for that reason, thought unworthy the notice of the writers you have referred to. Suetonius, in his life of Nero, calls the Christians men of a new and a magical superstition. I am sensible that you laugh at those “sagacious commentators” who translate the original word by magical ; and, adopting the idea of Mosheim, you think it ought to be rendered mischievous or pernicious : unquestionably it frequently has that meaning ; with due deference, however, to Mosheim and yourself, I cannot help being of opinion, that in this place, as descriptive of the Christian religion, it is rightly translated magical. The Theodosian Code must be my excuse for dissenting from such respectable authority ; and in it I conjecture you will find good reason for being of my opinion. Nor ought any friend to Christianity to be astonished or alarmed at Suetonius applying the word magical to the Christian religion ; for the miracles wrought by Christ and his apostles principally consisted in alleviating the distresses by curing the obstinate diseases of human kind ; and the proper meaning of magic, as understood by the ancients, is a higher and more holy branch of the art of healing. The elder Pliny lost his life in an eruption of Mount Vesuvius, about forty-seven years after the death of Christ : some fifteen years before the death of Pliny, the Christians were persecuted at Rome for a crime of which every person knew them innocent ;



but from the description which Tacitus gives of the low estimation they were held in at that time, (for which, however, he assigns no cause, and therefore we may reasonably conjecture it was the same for which the Jews were every where become so odious, an opposition to polytheism,) and of the extreme sufferings they underwent, we cannot be much surprised that their name is not to be found in the works of Pliny or of Seneca: the sect itself must, by Nero's persecution, have been almost destroyed in Rome; and it would have been uncourtly, not to say unsafe, to have noticed an order of men whose innocence an emperor had determined to traduce, in order to divert the dangerous but deserved stream of popular censure from himself. Notwithstanding this, there is a passage in the Natural History of Pliny which, how much soever it may have been overlooked, contains, I think, a very strong allusion to the Christians, and clearly intimates he had heard of their miracles. In speaking concerning the origin of magic, he says: there is also another faction of magic, derived from the Jews, Moses, and Lotopea, and subsisting at present. The word faction does not ill denote the opinion the Romans entertained of the religious associations of the Christians; and a magical faction implies their pretensions, at least, to the miraculous gifts of healing; and its descending from Moses is according to the custom of the Romans, by which they confounded the Christians with the Jews; and its being then subsisting seems to have a strong reference to the rumors Pliny had negligently heard reported of the Christians.

Submitting each of these answers to your cool and

candid consideration, I proceed to take notice of another difficulty in your fifteenth chapter, which some have thought one of the most important in your whole book; the silence of profane historians concerning the preternatural darkness at the crucifixion of Christ. You know, sir, that several learned men are of opinion, that profane history is not silent upon this subject; I will neither trouble you with the testimony of Phlegon, nor with the appeal of Tertullian to the public registers of the Romans; but, meeting you upon your own ground, and granting you every thing you desire, I will endeavor, from a fair and candid examination of the history of this event, to suggest a doubt, at least to your mind, whether this was "the greatest phenomenon to which the mortal eye has been witness since the creation of the globe."

This darkness is mentioned by three of the four evangelists; St. Matthew thus expresses himself: "Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour;" St. Mark says: "And when the sixth hour was come there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour;" St. Luke: "And it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour; and the sun was darkened." The three evangelists agree that there was darkness; and they agree in the extent of the darkness: for it is the same expression in the original, which our translators have rendered earth in Luke, and land in the two other accounts; and they agree in the duration of the darkness—it lasted three hours. Luke adds a particular circumstance, "that the sun was darkened." I do not know whether this event be any where else mentioned in

Scripture, so that our inquiry can neither be extensive nor difficult.

In philosophical propriety of speech, darkness consists in the total absence of light, and admits of no degrees; however, in the more common acceptation of the word, there are degrees of darkness as well as of light; and as the evangelists have said nothing, by which the particular degree of darkness can be determined, we have as much reason to suppose it was slight, as you have that it was excessive; but if it was slight, though it had extended itself over the surface of the whole globe, the difficulty of its not being recorded by Pliny or Seneca vanishes at once. Do you not perceive, sir, upon what a slender foundation this mighty objection is grounded, when we have only to put you upon proving that the darkness at the crucifixion was of so unusual a nature as to have excited the particular attention of all mankind, or even of those who were witnesses to it? But I do not mean to deal so logically with you; rather give me leave to spare you the trouble of your proof, by proving or showing the probability, at least, of the direct contrary. There is a circumstance mentioned by St. John which seems to indicate that the darkness was not so excessive as is generally supposed; for it is probable that during the continuance of the darkness, Jesus spoke both to his mother, and to his beloved disciple, whom he saw from the cross; they were near the cross; but the soldiers which surrounded it must have kept them at too great a distance for Jesus to have seen them and known them, had the darkness at the crucifixion been excessive, like the preternatural darkness which God brought upon the land of Egypt; for

it is expressly said, that during the continuance of that darkness, "they saw not one another." The expression in St. Luke, "the sun was darkened," tends rather to confirm than to overthrow this reasoning. I am sensible this expression is generally equivalent to another; the sun was eclipsed: but the Bible is open to us all; and there can be no presumption in endeavoring to investigate the meaning of Scripture for ourselves. Happily for the present argumentation, the very phrase of the sun's being darkened, occurs, in so many words, in one other place (and in only one) of the New Testament; and from that place you may possibly see reason to imagine that the darkness might not, perhaps, have been so intense as to deserve the particular notice of the Roman naturalists: "And he opened the bottomless pit, and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun was darkened, and the air, by reason of the smoke of the pit." If we should say, that the sun at the crucifixion was obnubilated, and darkened by the intervention of clouds, as it is here represented to be by the intervention of a smoke, like the smoke of a furnace, I do not see what you could object to our account; but such a phenomenon has surely no right to be esteemed the greatest that mortal eye has ever beheld. I may be mistaken in this interpretation; but I have no design to misrepresent the fact in order to get rid of a difficulty: the darkness may have been as intense as many commentators have supposed it; but neither they nor you can prove it was so; and I am surely under no necessity, upon this occasion, of granting you, out of deference to any commentator, what you can neither prove nor render probable.

But you still, perhaps, may think that the darkness, by its extent, made up for this deficiency in point of intenseness. The original word, expressive of its extent, is sometimes interpreted by the whole earth; more frequently, in the New-Testament, of any little portion of the earth: for we read of the land of Judah, of the land of Israel, of the land of Zabulon, and of the land of Nephthalim; and it may very properly I conceive, be translated in the place in question by region. But why should all the world take notice of a darkness which extended itself for a few miles about Jerusalem, and lasted but three hours? The Italians, especially, had no reason to remark the event as singular; since they were accustomed at that time, as they are at present, to see the neighboring regions so darkened for days together by the eruptions of Etna and Vesuvius, that no man could know his neighbor. We learn from the Scripture account, that an earthquake accompanied this darkness; and a dark clouded sky, I apprehend, very frequently precedes an earthquake; but its extent is not great, nor is its intenseness excessive, nor is the phenomenon itself so unusual as not commonly to pass unnoticed in ages of science and history. I fear I may be liable to misrepresentation in this place; but I beg it may be observed, that however slight in degree, or however confined in extent the darkness at the crucifixion may have been, I am of opinion that the power of God was as supernaturally exerted in its production and in that of the earthquake which accompanied it, as in the opening of the graves, and the resurrection of the saints, which followed the resurrection of Christ.

In another place, you seem not to believe "that

Pontius Pilate informed the emperor of the unjust sentence of death which he had pronounced against an innocent person." And the same reason which made him silent as to the death, ought, one would suppose, to have made him silent as to the miraculous events which accompanied it; and if Pilate, in his dispatches to the emperor, transmitted no account of the darkness (how great soever you suppose it to have been) which happened in a distant province, I cannot apprehend that the report of it could have ever gained such credit at Rome as to induce either Pliny or Seneca to mention it as an authentic fact. I am, &c.

#### LETTER VI.

SIR:—I mean not to detain you long with my remarks upon your sixteenth chapter; for in a short Apology for Christianity, it cannot be expected that I should apologize at length for the indiscretions of the first Christians. Nor have I any disposition to reap a malicious pleasure from exaggerating, which you have had so much good-natured pleasure in extenuating, the truculent barbarity of their Roman persecutors.

M. de Voltaire has embraced every opportunity of contrasting the persecuting temper of the Christians with the mild tolerance of the ancient heathens; and I never read a page of his upon this subject without thinking Christianity materially, if not intentionally, obliged to him, for his endeavor to depress the lofty spirit of religious bigotry. I may with justice pay the same compliment to you; and I do it with sincerity, heartily wishing that, in the prosecution of your work, you may render every species of intolerance univer-

sally detestable. There is no reason why you should abate the asperity of your invective, since no one can suspect you of a design to traduce Christianity under the guise of a zeal against persecution; or if any one should be so simple, he need but open the Gospel to be convinced that such a scheme is too palpably absurd to have ever entered the head of any sensible and impartial man.

I wish, for the credit of human nature, that I could find reason to agree with you in what you have said of the "universal toleration of Polytheism; of the mild indifference of antiquity; of the Roman princes beholding without concern a thousand forms of religion subsisting in peace under their gentle sway." But there are some passages in the Roman history which make me hesitate at least in this point, and almost induce me to believe that the Romans were exceedingly jealous of all foreign religions, whether they were accompanied with immoral manners or not.

It was the Roman custom, indeed, to invite the tutelary gods of the nations, which they intended to subdue, to abandon their charge, and to promise them the same, or even a more august worship, in the city of Rome; and their triumphs were graced as much with the exhibition of their captive gods, as with the less humane one of their captive kings. But this custom, though it filled the city with hundreds of gods of every country, denomination, and quality, cannot be brought as a proof of Roman toleration; it may indicate the excess of their vanity, the extent of their superstition, or the refinement of their policy; but it can never show that the religion of individuals, when it differed from public wisdom, was either connived at as a matter of

indifference, or tolerated as an inalienable right of human nature.

Upon another occasion, you, sir, have referred to Livy as relating the introduction and suppression of the rites of Bacchus; and in that very place we find him confessing, that the prohibiting of all foreign religions, and abolishing every mode of sacrifice which differed from the Roman mode, was a business frequently intrusted by their ancestors to the care of the proper magistrates; and he gives this reason for the procedure: that nothing could contribute more effectually to the ruin of religion than the sacrificing after an external rite, and not after the manner instituted by their fathers.

Not thirty years before this event, the Prætor, in conformity to a decree of the senate, had issued an edict, that no one should presume to sacrifice in any public place after a new or foreign manner. And in a still more early period, the ædiles had been commanded to take care that no gods were worshiped except the Roman gods; and that the Roman gods were worshiped after no manner but the established manner of the country.

But to come nearer to the times of which you are writing. In Dion Cassius you may meet with a great courtier, one of the interior cabinet, and a polished statesman, in a set speech upon the most momentous subject, expressing himself to the emperor in a manner agreeable enough to the practice of antiquity, but utterly inconsistent with the most remote idea of religious toleration. The speech alluded to contains, I confess, nothing more than the advice of an individual; but it ought to be remembered that that indivi-



dual was Mæcenas, that the advice was given to Augustus, and that the occasion of giving it was no less important than settling the form of the Roman government. He recommends it to Cæsar to worship the gods himself according to the established form, and to *force* all others to do the same, and to *hate* and to *punish* all those who should attempt to introduce foreign religions; nay, he bids him, in the same place, have an eye upon the philosophers also: so that free thinking, free speaking at least, upon religious matters, was not quite so safe under the gentle sway of the Roman princes as, thank God, it is under the much more gentle government of our own.

In the Edict of Toleration, published by Galerius after six years unremitted persecution of the Christians, we perceive his motive for persecution to have been the same with that which had influenced the conduct of the more ancient Romans, an abhorrence of all innovations in religion. You have favored us with the translation of this edict, in which he says, "we were particularly desirous of reclaiming into the way of reason and nature," *ad bonas mentes* (a good pretence this for a polytheistic persecutor) "the deluded Christians, who had renounced the religion and ceremonies instituted by their fathers:" this is the precise language of Livy, describing a persecution of a foreign religion three hundred years before, "*turba erat nec sacrificantium nec precantium deos patrio more.*" And the very expedient of forcing the Christians to deliver up their religious books, which was practiced in this persecution, and which Mosheim attributes to the advice of Hierocles, and you to that of the philosophers of those times, seems clear to me, from the places

in Livy before quoted, to have been nothing but an old piece of state policy, to which the Romans had recourse as often as they apprehended their established religion to be in any danger.

In the preamble of the letter of toleration, which the emperor Maximin reluctantly wrote to Sabinus about a year after the publication of Galerius's Edict, there is a plain avowal of the reasons which induced Galerius and Diocletian to commence their persecution; they had seen the temples of the gods forsaken, and were determined by the severity of punishment to reclaim men to their worship.

In short, the system recommended by Mæcenas, of forcing every person to be of the emperor's religion, and of hating and punishing every innovator, contained no new doctrine: it was correspondent to the practice of the Roman senate, in the most illustrious times of the republic, and seems to have been generally adopted by the emperors in their treatment of Christians, whilst they themselves were pagans; and in their treatment of pagans, after they themselves became Christians; and if any one should be willing to derive those laws against heretics (which are so abhorrent from the mild spirit of the Gospel, and so reproachful to the Roman code) from the blind adherence of the Christian emperors to the intolerant policy of their pagan predecessors, something, I think, might be produced in support of his conjecture.

But I am sorry to have said so much upon such a subject. In endeavoring to palliate the severity of the Romans towards the Christians, you have remarked, "It was in vain that the oppressed believer asserted the inalienable rights of conscience and private judg

ment." "Though his situation might excite the pity, his arguments could never reach the understanding, either of the philosophic, or of the believing part of the pagan world." How is this, sir? are the arguments for liberty of conscience so exceedingly inconclusive that you think them incapable of reaching the understanding, even of philosophers? A captious adversary would embrace with avidity the opportunity this passage affords him, of blotting your character with the odious stain of being a persecutor; a stain which no learning can wipe out, which no genius or ability can render amiable. I am far from entertaining such an opinion of your principles; but this conclusion seems fairly deducible from what you have said, that the minds of the pagans were so pre-occupied with the notions of forcing, and hating, and punishing those who differed from them in religion; that arguments for the inalienable rights of conscience, which would have convinced yourself, and every philosopher in Europe, and staggered the resolution of an inquisitor, were incapable of reaching their understandings, or making any impression on their hearts; and you might, perhaps, have spared yourself some perplexity in the investigation of the motives which induced the Roman emperors to persecute, and the Roman people to hate the Christians, if you had not overlooked the true one, and adopted with too great facility the erroneous idea of the extreme tolerance of pagan Rome.

The Christians, you observe, were accused of atheism: and it must be owned that they were the greatest of all atheists, in the opinion of the polytheists; for, instead of Hesiod's thirty thousand gods, they could not be brought to acknowledge above one; and even

that one they refused, at the hazard of their lives, to blaspheme with the appellation of Jupiter. But is it not somewhat singular, that the pretensions of the Christians to a constant intercourse with superior beings, in the working of miracles, should have been a principal cause of converting to their faith those who branded them with the imputation of atheism?

They were accused, too, of forming dangerous conspiracies against the state: this accusation, you own, was as unjust as the preceding: but there seems to have been a peculiar hardship in the situation of the Christians, since the very same men who thought them dangerous to the state, on account of their conspiracies, condemned them, as you have observed, for not interfering in its concerns; for their criminal disregard to the business of war and government, and for their entertaining doctrines which were supposed "to prohibit them from assuming the character of soldiers, of magistrates, and of princes:" men, such as these, would have made but poor conspirators.

They were accused, lastly, of the most horrid crimes. This accusation, it is confessed, was mere calumny; yet as calumny is generally more extensive in its influence than truth, perhaps this calumny might be more powerful in stopping the progress of Christianity than the virtues of the Christians were in promoting it; and, in truth, Origen observes, that the Christians, on account of the crimes which were maliciously laid to their charge, were held in such abhorrence that no one would so much as speak to them. It may be worth while to remark from him, that the Jews, in the very beginning of Christianity, were the authors of all those calumnies which Celsus afterwards took such great

delight in urging against the Christians, and which you have mentioned with such great precision.

It is no improbable supposition, that the clandestine manner in which the persecuting spirit of the Jews and Gentiles obliged the Christians to celebrate their eucharist, together with the expressions of eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ, which were used in its institution, and the custom of imparting a kiss of charity to each other, and of calling each other by the appellations of brother and sister, (which the Romans often used in an impure sense,) gave occasions to their enemies to invent, and induced careless observers to believe, all the odious things which were said against the Christians.

You have displayed at length, in expressive diction, the accusations of the enemies of Christianity; and you have told us of the imprudent defence by which the Christians vindicated the purity of their morals; and you have huddled up in a short note (which many a reader will never see) the testimony of Pliny to their innocence. Permit me to do the Christians a little justice, by producing in their cause the whole truth.

Between seventy and eighty years after the death of Christ, Pliny had occasion to consult the emperor Trajan concerning the manner in which he should treat the Christians; it seems as if there had been judicial proceedings against them, though Pliny had never happened to attend any of them. He knew, indeed, that men were to be punished for being Christians or he would not, as a sensible magistrate, have received the accusations of legal, much less of illegal, anonymous informers against them; nor would he, before he wrote to the emperor, have put to death those

whom his threats could not hinder from persevering in their confession that they were Christians. His harsh manner of proceeding "in an office the most repugnant to his humanity," had made many apostatize from their profession. Persons of this complexion were well fitted to inform him of every thing they knew concerning the Christians; accordingly, he examined them, but not one of them accused the Christians of any other crime than of praying to Christ, as to some God, and of binding themselves by an oath not to be guilty of any wickedness. Not contented with this information, he put two maid servants, which were called ministers, to the torture; but even the rack could not extort from the imbecility of the sex a confession of any crime, any account different from that which the apostates had voluntarily given; not a word do we find of their feasting upon murdered infants, or of their mixing in incestuous commerce. After all his pains, Pliny pronounced the meal of the Christians to be promiscuous and innocent; persons of both sexes, of all ages, and of every condition, assembled promiscuously together; there was nothing for chastity to blush at, or for humanity to shudder at in these meetings: there was no secret initiation of proselytes by abhorred rites, but they ate a promiscuous meal in Christian charity, and with the most perfect innocence. Plin. Epis. 97: lib. 10.

Whatever faults, then, the Christians may have been guilty of in after-times—though you could produce to us a thousand ambitious prelates of Carthage, or sensual ones of Antioch, and blot ten thousand pages with the impurities of the Christian clergy, yet, at this period, while the memory of Christ and his apostles was

fresh in their minds—or, in the more emphatic language of Jerome, “while the blood of our Lord was warm, and recent faith was fervent in the believers,” we have the greatest reason to conclude that they were eminently distinguished for the probity and the purity of their lives. Had there been but a shadow of a crime in their assemblies, it must have been detected by the industrious search of the intelligent Pliny; and it is a matter of real surprise that no one of the apostates thought of paying court to the governor by a false testimony, especially as the apostacy seems to have been exceeding general; since the temples, which had been almost deserted, began again to be frequented; and the victims, for which a little time before scarce a purchaser was to be found, began again every where to be bought up. This, sir, is a valuable testimony in our favor; it is not that of a declaiming apologist, of a deluding priest, or of a deluded martyr of an orthodox bishop, or of any “of the most pious of men,” the Christians; but it is that of a Roman magistrate, philosopher, and lawyer, who cannot be supposed to have wanted inclination to detect the immoralities or the conspiracies of the Christians, since, in his treatment of them, he had stretched the authority of his office and violated alike the laws of his country and of humanity.

With this testimony I will conclude my remarks, for I have no disposition to blacken the character you have given of Nero; or to lessen the humanity of the Roman magistrates; or to magnify the number of Christians or of martyrs; or to undertake the defence of a few fanatics, who by their injudicious zeal brought ruin upon themselves and disgrace upon their profes-

sion. I may not, probably, have convinced you that you are wrong in any thing which you have advanced, or that the authors you have quoted will not support you in the inferences you have drawn from their works ; or that Christianity ought to be distinguished from its corruptions ; yet I may, perhaps, have had the good fortune to lessen, in the minds of others, some of that dislike to the Christian religion which the perusal of your book had unhappily excited. I have touched but upon general topics, for I should have wearied out your patience, to say nothing of my reader's, or my own, had I enlarged upon every thing in which I dissent from you ; and a minute examination of your work would, moreover, have had the appearance of a captious disposition to descend into illiberal personalities, and might have produced a certain acrimony of sentiment or expression which may be serviceable in supplying the place of argument, or adding a zest to a dull composition, but has nothing to do with the investigation of truth. Sorry shall I be if what I have written should give the least interruption to the prosecution of the great work in which you are engaged. The world is now possessed of the opinion of us both upon the subject in question, and it may, perhaps, be proper for us both to leave it in this state. I say not this from any backwardness to acknowledge my mistakes, when I am convinced that I am in an error, but to express the almost insuperable reluctance which I feel to the bandying abusive argument in public controversy. It is not, in good truth, a difficult task to chastise the forward petulance of those who mistake personal invective for reasoning, and clumsy banter for ingenuity : but it is a dirty business at best, and should never be



undertaken by a man of any temper except when the interests of truth may suffer by his neglect. Nothing of this nature, I am sensible, is to be expected from you; and if any thing of the kind has happened to escape myself, I hereby disclaim the intention of saying it, and heartily wish it unsaid.

Will you permit me, sir, through this channel (I may not, perhaps, have another so good an opportunity of doing it) to address a few words, not to yourself, but to a set of men who disturb all serious company with their profane declamation against Christianity; and who, having picked up in their travels, or in the writings of the Deists, a few flimsy objections, infect, with their ignorant and irreverent ridicule, the ingenuous minds of the rising generation?

### APPEAL TO INFIDELS.

GENTLEMEN,—Suppose the mighty work accomplished, the cross trampled upon, Christianity everywhere proscribed, and the religion of nature once more become the religion of Christendom; what advantage will you have derived to your country, or to yourselves, from the exchange? I know your answer: you will have freed the world from the hypocrisy of priests, and the tyranny of superstition. No; you forget that Lycurgus, and Numa, and Odin, and Mago-Copac, and all the great legislators of ancient and modern story, have been of opinion that the affairs of civil society could not well be conducted without *some* religion; you must of necessity introduce a priesthood, with probably as much hypocrisy; a reli-

gion with assuredly more superstition, than that which you now reprobate with such indecent and ill-grounded contempt. But I will tell you from what you will have freed the world: you will have freed it from its abhorrence of vice, and from every powerful incentive to virtue; you will, with the religion, have brought back the depraved morality of Paganism; you will have robbed mankind of their firm assurance of another life, and thereby you will have despoiled them of their patience, of their humility, of their charity, of their chastity, of all those mild and silent virtues, which (however despicable they may appear in your eyes) are the only ones which meliorate and sublime our nature; which Paganism never knew, which spring from Christianity alone, which do or might constitute our comfort in this life, and without the possession of which, another life, if after all there should happen to be one, must (unless a miracle be exerted in the alteration of our disposition) be more vicious and more miserable than this is.

Perhaps you will contend that the universal light of reason, that the truth and fitness of things, are of themselves sufficient to exalt the nature, and regulate the manners of mankind. Shall we never have done with this groundless commendation of natural law? Look into the first chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and you will see the extent of its influence over the Gentiles of those days; or if you dislike Paul's authority, and the manners of antiquity, look into the more admired accdunts of modern voyagers; and examine its influence over the pagans of our own times, over the sensual inhabitants of Otaheite, over

the cannibals of New Zealand, or the remorseless savages of America. "But these men are barbarians." Your law of nature, notwithstanding, extends even to them. "But they have misused their reason" they have then the more need of, and would be the more thankful for, that revelation which you, with an ignorant and fastidious self-sufficiency, deem useless. "But they might of themselves, if they thought fit, become wise and virtuous." I answer with Cicero, "Ut nihil interest, utrum nemo valeat, an nemo valere possit; sic non intelligo quid intersit, utrum nemo, sit sapiens, an nemo esse possit:" i. e. if they in fact continue in ignorance and vice, the evil is as great as if they had no means of learning a better way.

These, however, you will think, are extraordinary instances: and that we ought not from these to take our measure of the excellency of the law of nature, but rather from the civilized states of China and Japan, or from the nations which flourished in learning and in arts before Christianity was heard of in the world. You mean to say, that by the law of nature, which you are desirous of substituting in the room of the Gospel, you do not understand those rules of conduct which an individual, abstracted from the community, and deprived of the institution of mankind, could excogitate for himself: but such a system of precepts as the most enlightened men of the most enlightened ages have recommended to our observance. Where do you find this system? We cannot meet with it in the works of Stobæus, or the Scythian Anacharsis; nor in those of Plato, or Cicero; nor in those of the Emperor Antoninus, or the slave Epicte-

tus; for we are persuaded that the most animated consideration of the *πρῆστον*, and the *honestum*, of the beauty of virtue, and the fitness of things, are not able to furnish even a Brutus himself with permanent principles of action; much less are they able to purify the polluted recesses of a vitiated heart, to curb the irregularity of appetite, or restrain the impetuosity of passion in common men. If you order us to examine the works of Grotius, or Puffendorf, or Burlamaqui, or Hutchinson, for what you understand by the law of nature, we apprehend that you are in a great error, in taking your notions of natural law, as discoverable by natural reason, from the elegant systems of it, which have been drawn up by Christian philosophers; since they have all laid their foundations, either tacitly or expressly, upon a principle derived from revelation; a thorough knowledge of the being and attributes of God: and even those amongst yourselves who, rejecting Christianity, still continue theists, are indebted to revelation (whether you are either aware of, or disposed to acknowledge the debt, or not) for those sublime speculations concerning the Deity which you have fondly attributed to the excellency of your own unassisted reason. If you would know the real genius of natural law, and how far it can proceed in the investigation or enforcement of moral duties, you must consult the manners and writings of those who have never heard of either the Jewish or the Christian dispensation, or of those other manifestations of himself which God vouchsafed to Adam, and to the patriarchs before and after the flood. It would be difficult, perhaps, anywhere to find a people entirely destitute of traditionary notices concern-

ing the Deity, and of traditionary fears or expectations of another life; and the morals of mankind may have, perhaps, been nowhere quite so abandoned as they would have been, had they been left wholly to themselves in these points: however, it is a truth which cannot be denied, how much soever it may be lamented, that though the generality of mankind have always had some faint conceptions of God and his providence, yet they have been always greatly inefficacious in the production of good morality, and highly derogatory to his nature, amongst all the people of the earth, except the Jews and Christians; and some may perhaps be desirous of excepting the Mahomedans, who derive all that is good in their *Koran* from Christianity.

The laws concerning justice, and the reparation of damages; concerning the security of property, and the performance of contracts; concerning, in short, whatever affects the well-being of civil society, have been everywhere understood with sufficient precision; and if you choose to style Justinian's code, a code of natural law, though you will err against propriety of speech, yet you are so far in the right, that natural reason discovered, and the depravity of human nature compelled human kind to establish, by proper sanctions, the laws therein contained; and you will have, moreover, Carneades, no mean philosopher, on your side; who knew of no law of nature different from that which men had institued for their common utility, and which was various according to the manners of men in different climates, and changeable with a change of times in the same. And, in truth in all countries where Paganism has been the estab-

lished religion, though a philosopher may now and then have stepped beyond the paltry prescript of civil jurisprudence in his pursuit of virtue, yet the bulk of mankind have ever been contented with that scanty pittance of morality which enabled them to escape the lash of civil punishment: I call it a scanty pittance, because a man may be intemperate, iniquitous, impious, a thousand ways a profligate and a villain, and yet elude the cognizance and avoid the punishment of civil laws.

I am sensible you will be ready to say, "what is all this to the purpose? Though the bulk of mankind may never be able to investigate the laws of natural religion, nor disposed to reverence their sanctions when investigated by others, nor solicitous about any other standard of moral rectitude than civil legislation; yet the inconveniences which may attend the extirpation of Christianity can be no proof of its truth." I have not produced them as a proof of its truth; but they are a strong and conclusive proof, if not of its truth, at least of its utility; and the consideration of its utility may be a motive to yourselves for examining whether it may not chance to be true; and it ought to be a reason with every good citizen, and with every man of sound judgment, to keep his opinions to himself, if from any particular circumstances in his studies or in his education he should have the misfortune to think that it is not true. If you can discover to the rising generation a better religion than the Christian, one that will more effectually animate their hopes, and subdue their passions, make them better men or better members of society, we importune you to publish it for their advantage; but till you can de

that, we beg of you not to give the reins to their passions, by instilling into their unsuspecting minds your pernicious prejudices. Even now, men scruple not, by their lawless lust, to ruin the repose of private families, and to fix a stain of infamy upon the noblest; even now, they hesitate not in lifting up a murderous arm against the life of their friend, or against their own, as often as the fever of intemperance stimulates their resentment, or the satiety of a useless life excites their despondency: even now, whilst we are persuaded of a resurrection from the dead, and of a *judgment to come*, we find it difficult enough to resist the solicitations of sense, and to escape unspotted from the licentious manners of the world: but what will become of our virtue, what of the consequent peace and happiness of society, if you persuade us that there are no such things? In two words, you may ruin yourselves by your attempt, and you will certainly ruin your country by your success.

But the consideration of the inutility of your design is not the only one which should induce you to abandon it; the argument *a tuto* [from safety] ought to be warily managed, or it may tend to the silencing of our opposition to any system of superstition which has had the good fortune to be sanctified by public authority: it is, indeed, liable to no objection in the present case: we do not, however, wholly rely upon its cogency. It is not contended that Christianity is to be received merely because it is useful, but because it is *true*. This you deny, and think your objections well grounded: we conceive them originating in your vanity, your immorality, or your misapprehension. There are many worthless doctrines many supersti-

tious observances, which the fraud or folly of mankind have every where annexed to Christianity, (especially in the church of Rome,) as essential parts of it: if you take these sorry appendages to Christianity for Christianity itself, as preached by Christ, and by the apostles; if you confound the Roman with the Christian religion, you quite misapprehend its nature, and are in a state similar to that of men mentioned by Plutarch, in his Treatise of Superstition; who, flying from superstition, leapt over religion, and sunk into downright atheism. Christianity is not a religion very palatable to a voluptuous age; it will not conform its precepts to the standard of fashion; it will not lessen the deformity of vice by lenient appellations; but calls keeping, whoredom, intrigue, adultery; and duelling, murder: it will not pander to lust, it will not license the intemperance of mankind; it is a troublesome monitor to a man of pleasure; and your way of life may have made you quarrel with your religion. As to your vanity, as a cause of your infidelity, suffer me to produce the sentiments of M. Bayle upon that head: if the description does not suit your character, you will not be offended at it; and if you are offended with its freedom, it will do you good. "This inclines me to believe that libertines, like Des-Barreaux, are not greatly persuaded of the truth of what they say. They have made no deep examination; they have learned some few objections, which they are perpetually making a noise with; they speak from a principle of ostentation, and give themselves the lie in the time of danger. Vanity has a greater share in their disputes than conscience; they imagine that the singularity and boldness of the opinions



which they maintain, will give them the reputation of men of parts: by degrees, they get a habit of holding impious discourses; and if their vanity be accompanied by a voluptuous life, their progress in that road is the swifter.”

The main stress of your objections rests not upon the insufficiency of the external evidence to the truth of Christianity; for few of you, though you may become the future ornaments of the senate, or of the bar, have ever employed an hour in its examination; but upon the difficulty of the doctrines contained in the New Testament: they exceed, you say, your comprehension; and you felicitate yourselves that you are not arrived at the true standard of orthodox faith—*credo quia impossibile*. [I believe it, because it is impossible.] You think it would be taking a superfluous trouble to inquire into the nature of the external proofs by which Christianity is established; since, in your opinion, the book itself carries with it its own refutation. A gentleman as acute, probably, as any of you, and who once believed, perhaps, as little as any of you, has drawn a quite different conclusion from the perusal of the New Testament: his treatise exhibits not only a distinguished triumph of reason over prejudice, of Christianity over deism, but it exhibits, what is infinitely more rare, the character of a man who has had courage and candor enough to acknowledge it.\*

But what if there should be some incomprehensible doctrines in the Christian religion; some circumstances which in their causes, or their consequences, surpass

\* See the view of the Internal Evidence, by Soame Jenyns.

the reach of human reason ; are they to be rejected on that account ? You are, or would be thought, men of reading, and knowledge, and enlarged understandings ; weigh the matter fairly, and consider whether revealed religion be not, in this respect, just upon the same footing with every other object of your contemplation. Even in mathematics, the science of demonstration itself, though you get over its first principles, and learn to digest the idea of a point without parts, a line without breadth, and a surface without thickness, yet you will find yourself at a loss to comprehend the perpetual approximation of lines which can never meet ; the doctrine of incommensurables, and of an infinity of infinites, each infinitely greater, or infinitely less, not only than any finite quantity, but than each other. In physics, you cannot comprehend the primary cause of any thing ; not of the light by which you see ; nor of the elasticity of the air, by which you hear ; nor of the fire by which you are warmed. In physiology, you cannot tell what first gave motion to the heart, nor what continues it, nor why its motion is less voluntary than that of the lungs ; nor why you are able to move your arm to the right or left, by a simple volition : you cannot explain the cause of animal heat, nor comprehend the principle by which your body was at first formed, nor by which it is sustained, nor by which it will be reduced to earth. In natural religion you cannot comprehend the eternity or omnipresence of the Deity ; nor easily understand how his prescience can be consistent with your freedom, or his immutability with his government of moral agents ; nor why he did not make all his creatures equally perfect ; nor why he did not create them sooner ; in short, you cannot look

into any branch of knowledge but you will meet with subjects above your comprehension. The fall and the redemption of human kind are not more incomprehensible than the creation and the conservation of the universe; the infinite Author of the works of providence, and of nature, is equally inscrutable; equally past our finding out, in them both. And it is somewhat remarkable, that the deepest inquirers into nature have ever thought with most reverence, and spoken with most diffidence, concerning those things which, in revealed religion, may seem hard to be understood: they have ever avoided that self-sufficiency of knowledge which springs from ignorance, produces indifference, and ends in infidelity. Admirable to this purpose is the reflection of the greatest mathematician of the present age, when he is combating an opinion of Newton's by an hypothesis of his own, still less defensible than that which he opposes: "Tous les jours que je vois de ces esprits forts, qui critique les vérités de notre religion, et s'en mocquent meme avec la plus impertinente suffisance, je pense, chetifs mortels! combien et combien des choses sur lesquelles vous raisonnez si légèrement, sont elles plus sublimes, et plus élevés, que celles sur lesquelles le grand Newton s'égare si grossièrement! [When I see these pretended free-thinkers cavilling at the truths of our religion, and scoffing at them with the most impertinent self-sufficiency, I think, poor mortals! how many things on which you argue so flippantly are more sublime and elevated than those on which the great Newton so much erred!] Euler.

Plato mentions a set of men who were very ignorant, and thought themselves supremely wise, and who

rejected the arguments for the being of a God, derived from the harmony and order of the universe, as old and trite. There have been men it seems in all ages, who, in affecting singularity, have overlooked truth; an argument, however, is not the worse for being old; and surely it would have been a more just mode of reasoning if you had examined the external evidence for the truth of Christianity, weighed the old arguments from miracles, and from prophecies, before you had rejected the whole account from the difficulties you met with in it. You would laugh at an Indian, who, in peeping into a history of England, and meeting with the mention of the Thames being frozen, or of a shower of hail, or of snow, should throw the book aside as unworthy of his farther notice, from his want of ability to comprehend these phenomena.

In considering the argument from miracles, you will soon be convinced that it is possible for God to work miracles; and you will be convinced that it is as possible for human testimony to establish the truth of miraculous, as of physical or historical events: but before you can be convinced that the miracles in question are supported by such testimony as deserves to be credited, you must inquire at what period, and by what persons, the books of the Old and New Testament were composed. If you reject the account without making this examination, you reject it from prejudice, not from reason.

There is, however, a short method of examining this argument, which may, perhaps, make as great an impression on your minds as any other. Three men, of distinguished abilities, rose up at different times, and attacked Christianity with every objection which their

malice could suggest or their learning could devise ; but neither Celsus in the second century, nor Porphyry in the third, nor the emperor Julian himself in the fourth century, ever questioned the reality of the miracles related in the Gospels. Do but you grant us what these men (who were more likely to know the truth of the matter than you can be) granted to their adversaries, and we will very readily let you make the most of the magic, to which, as the last wretched shift, they were forced to attribute them. We can find you men, in our days, who, from the mixture of two colorless liquors, will produce you a third as red as blood, or of any other color you desire ; *et dicto citius*, [quicker than a word,] by a drop resembling water, will restore the transparency ; they will make two fluids coalesce into a solid body ; and from the mixture of liquors, colder than ice, will instantly raise you a horrid explosion and a tremendous flame. These, and twenty other tricks, they will perform, without having been sent with our Savior to Egypt to learn magic ; nay, with a bottle or two of oil they will compose the undulations of a lake ; and, by a little art, they will restore the functions of life to a man who has been an hour or two under water, or a day or two buried in the snow. But in vain will these men, or the greatest magician that Egypt ever saw, say to a boisterous sea, "Peace, be still ;" in vain will they say to a carcass rotting in the grave, "Come forth ;" the winds and the sea will not obey them, and the putrid carcass will not hear them. You need not suffer yourselves to be deprived of the weight of this argument from its having been observed that the fathers have acknowledged the supernatural part of Paganism, since the fathers were in no condi-

tion to detect a cheat which was supported both by the disposition of the people, and the power of the civil magistrate; and they were, from that inability, forced to attribute to infernal agency what was too cunningly contrived to be detected, and contrived for too impious a purpose to be credited as the work of God.

With respect to prophecy, you may, perhaps, have accustomed yourselves to consider it as originating in Asiatic enthusiasm, in Chaldean mystery, or the subtle stratagem of interested priests, and have given yourselves no more trouble concerning the predictions of sacred, than concerning the oracles of Pagan history. Or, if you have ever cast a glance upon this subject, the dissensions of learned men concerning the proper interpretation of the Revelation, and other difficult prophecies, may have made you rashly conclude that all prophecies were equally unintelligible, and more indebted for their accomplishment to a fortunate concurrence of events, and the pliant ingenuity of the expositor, than to the inspired foresight of the prophet. In all that the prophets of the Old Testament have delivered concerning the destruction of particular cities, and the desolation of particular kingdoms, you may see nothing but shrewd conjectures, which any one acquainted with the history of the rise and fall of empires, might certainly have made; and as you would not hold him for a prophet who should now affirm that London or Paris would afford to future ages a spectacle just as melancholy as that which we now contemplate, with a sigh, in the ruins of Agrigentum or Palmyra, so you cannot persuade yourselves to believe that the denunciations of the prophets against the haughty cities of Tyre or Babylon, for instance,

proceeded from the inspiration of the Deity. There is no doubt, that by some such general kind of reasoning, many are influenced to pay no attention to an argument which, if properly considered, carries with it the strongest conviction.

Spinoza said that he would have broken his atheistic system to pieces, and embraced, without repugnance, the ordinary faith of Christians, if he could have persuaded himself of the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead; and I question not that there are many unbelievers who would relinquish their deistical tenets, and receive the Gospel, if they could persuade themselves that God had ever so far interfered in the moral government of the world as to illumine the mind of any one man with the knowledge of future events. A miracle strikes the senses of the persons who see it; a prophecy addresses itself to the understandings of those who behold its completion; and it requires, in many cases, some learning, in all some attention, to judge of the correspondence of events with the predictions concerning them. No one can be convinced that what Jeremiah and the other prophets foretold of the fate of Babylon, that it should be besieged by the Medes; that it should be taken when her mighty men were drunken, when her springs were dried up; and that it should become a pool of water, and should remain desolate for ever; no one, I say, can be convinced that all these and other parts of the prophetic denunciation have been minutely fulfilled, without spending some time in reading the accounts which profane historians have delivered down to us concerning its being taken by Cyrus; and which modern travelers have given us of its present situation.

Porphyry was so persuaded of the coincidence between the prophecies of Daniel and the events, that he was forced to affirm the prophecies were written after the things prophesied had happened. Another Porphyry has, in our days, been so astonished at the correspondence between the prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, as related by St. Matthew, and the history of that event, as recorded by Josephus, that, rather than embrace Christianity, he has ventured (contrary to the faith of all ecclesiastical history, the opinion of the learned of all ages, and all the rules of good criticism) to assert that St. Matthew wrote his Gospel after Jerusalem had been taken and destroyed by the Romans. You may, from these instances, perceive the strength of the argument from prophecy; it has not been able indeed to vanquish the prejudices of either the ancient or the modern Porphyry; but it has been able to compel them both to be guilty of obvious falsehoods, which have nothing but impudent assertions to support them. Some over zealous interpreters of Scripture have found prophecies in simple narrations, extended real predictions beyond the times and circumstances to which they naturally were applied, and perplexed their readers with a thousand quaint allusions and allegorical conceits; this proceeding has made men of sense pay less regard to prophecy in general. There are some predictions, however, such as those concerning the present state of the Jewish people, and the corruptions of Christianity, which are now fulfilling in the world; and which, if you will take the trouble to examine them, you will find of such an extraordinary nature that you will not perhaps hesitate to refer them to God as their author;



and if you once become persuaded of the truth of any one miracle, or of the completion of any one prophecy, you will resolve all your difficulties (concerning the manner of God's interposition in the moral government of our species, and the nature of the doctrines contained in revelation) into your own inability fully to comprehend the whole scheme of divine providence.

We are told, however, that the strangeness of the narration, and the difficulty of the doctrines contained in the New Testament, are not the only circumstances which induce you to reject it; you have discovered, you think, so many contradictions in the accounts which the evangelists have given of the life of Christ, that you are compelled to consider the whole as an ill-digested and improbable story. You would not reason thus upon any other occasion; you would not reject, as fabulous, the accounts given by Livy and Polybius of Hannibal and the Carthaginians, though you should discover a difference betwixt them in several points of little importance. You cannot compare the history of the same events, as delivered by any two historians, but you will meet with many circumstances which, though mentioned by one, are either wholly omitted, or differently related by the other; and this observation is peculiarly applicable to biographical writings: but no one ever thought of disbelieving the leading circumstances of the lives of Vitellius or Vespasian, because Tacitus and Suetonius did not in every thing correspond in their accounts of these emperors. And if the memoirs of the life and doctrines of M. de Voltaire himself were, some twenty or thirty years after his death, to be delivered to the world by four of his most intimate acquaintance, I do not apprehend that

we should discredit the whole account of such an extraordinary man, by reason of some slight inconsistencies and contradictions, which the avowed enemies of his name might chance to discover in the several narrations. Though we should grant you, then, that the evangelists had fallen into some trivial contradictions in what they have related concerning the life of Christ, yet you ought not to draw any other inference from our concession than that they had not plotted together, as cheats would have done, in order to give an unexceptionable consistency to their fraud. We are not, however, disposed to make you any such concession; we will rather show you the futility of your general argument, by touching upon a few of the places which you think are most liable to your censure.

You observe that neither Luke, nor Mark, nor John, have mentioned the cruelty of Herod in murdering the infants of Bethlehem; and that no account is to be found of this matter in Josephus, who wrote the life of Herod; and therefore the fact recorded by Matthew is not true. The concurrent testimony of many independent writers concerning a matter of fact, unquestionably adds to its probability; but if nothing is to be received as true, upon the testimony of a single author, we must give up some of the best writers, and disbelieve some of the most interesting facts of ancient history.

According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, there was only an interval of three months, you say, between the baptism and crucifixion of Jesus; from which time, taking away the forty days of the temptation, there will only remain about six weeks for the whole period of his public ministry; which lasted, however,

according to St. John, at the least above three years. Your objection, fairly stated, stands thus : Matthew, Mark, and Luke, in writing the history of Jesus Christ, mention the several events of his life, as following one another in continued succession, without taking notice of the times in which they happened. But is it a just conclusion, from their silence, to infer, that there were really no intervals of time between the transactions which they seem to have connected ? Many instances might be produced, from the most admired biographers of antiquity, in which events are related as immediately consequent to each other, which did happen at very distant periods : we have an obvious example of this manner of writing in St. Matthew, who connects the preaching of John the Baptist with the return of Joseph from Egypt, though we are certain that the latter event preceded the former by a great many years.

John has said nothing of the institution of the Lord's Supper ; the other evangelists have said nothing of the washing of the disciples' feet. What then ? are you not ashamed to produce these facts as instances of contradiction ? If omissions are contradictions, look into the history of the age of Louis XIV, or into the general history of M. de Voltaire, and you will meet with a great abundance of contradictions.

John, in mentioning the discourses which Jesus had with his mother and his beloved disciple, at the time of his crucifixion, says that she, with Mary Magdalene, stood near the cross. Matthew, on the other hand, says that Mary Magdalene and the other women were there, beholding afar off. This you think a manifest contradiction ; and scoffingly inquire

whether the women and the beloved disciple, which were near the cross, could be the same with those who stood far from the cross? It is difficult not to transgress the bounds of moderation and good manners, in answering such sophistry. What! have you to learn that, though the evangelists speak of the crucifixion as of one event, it was not accomplished in one instant, but lasted several hours? And why the women, who were at a distance from the cross, might not, during its continuance, draw near the cross; or, from being near the cross, might not move from the cross, is more than you can explain to either us or yourselves. And we take from you your only refuge, by denying expressly that the different evangelists, in their mention of the women, speak of the same point of time.

The evangelists, you affirm, have fallen into gross contradictions in their accounts of the appearances by which Jesus manifested himself to his disciples, after his resurrection from the dead; for Matthew speaks of two, Mark of three, Luke of two, and John of four. That contradictory propositions cannot be true, is readily granted; and if you will produce the place in which Matthew says that Jesus Christ appeared twice, and *no oftener*, it will be further granted that he is contradicted by John in a very material part of his narration; but till you do that, you must excuse me if I cannot grant that the evangelists have contradicted each other in this point; for to common understandings, it is pretty evident that if Christ appeared four times according to John's account, he must have appeared twice according to that of Matthew and Luke, and thrice according to that of Mark.

The different evangelists are not only accused of contradicting each other, but Luke is said to have contradicted himself; for in his Gospel he tells us, that Jesus ascended into heaven from Bethany; and in the Acts of the Apostles, of which he is the reputed author, he informs us that he ascended from Mount Olivet. Your objection proceeds either from your ignorance of geography, or your ill-will to Christianity; and upon either supposition deserves our contempt: be pleased, however, to remember for the future, that Bethany was not only the name of a town, but of a district of Mount Olivet adjoining to the town.

From this specimen of the contradictions ascribed to the historians of the life of Christ, you may judge for yourselves what little reason there is to reject Christianity upon their account; and how sadly you will be imposed upon (in a matter of more consequence to you than any other) if you take every thing for a contradiction which the uncandid adversaries of Christianity think proper to call one.

Before I put an end to this address, I cannot help taking notice of an argument by which some philosophers have of late endeavored to overturn the whole system of revelation; and it is the more necessary to give an answer to their objection, as it is become a common subject of philosophical conversation, especially among those who have visited the continent. The objection tends to invalidate, as is supposed, the authority of Moses, by showing that the earth is much older than it can be proved to be from his account of the creation, and the Scripture chronology. We contend, that six thousand years have not yet elapsed since the creation; and these philosophers contend,

that they have indubitable proof of the earth's being at the least fourteen thousand years old; and they complain that Moses hangs as a dead weight upon them, and blunts all their zeal for inquiry.

The Canonico Recupero, who, it seems, is engaged in writing the history of Mount *Ætna*, has discovered a stratum of lava which flowed from that mountain, according to his opinion, in the time of the second Punic war, or about two thousand years ago; this stratum is not yet covered with soil sufficient for the production of either corn or vines; it requires, then, says the Canon, two thousand years at least to convert a stratum of lava into a fertile field. In sinking a pit near Jaci, in the neighborhood of *Ætna*, they have discovered evident marks of seven distinct lavas, one under the other; the surfaces of which are parallel, and most of them covered with a thick bed of rich earth. Now, the eruption which formed the lowest part of these lavas (if we may be allowed to reason, says the Canon, from analogy) flowed from the mountain at least fourteen thousand years ago. It might be briefly answered to this objection, by denying, that there is any thing in the history of Moses repugnant to this opinion concerning the great antiquity of the earth; for though the rise and progress of arts and sciences, and the small multiplication of the human species, render it almost to a demonstration probable that man has not existed longer upon the surface of this earth than according to the Mosaic account, yet that the earth itself was then created out of nothing, when man was placed upon it, is not, according to the sentiments of some philosophers, to be proved from the original text of sacred Scripture: we

might, I say, reply with these philosophers to this formidable objection of the Canon, by granting it in its fullest extent; we are under no necessity, however, of adopting their opinion, in order to show the weakness of the Canon's reasoning. For, in the first place, the Canon has not satisfactorily established his main fact, that the lava in question is the identical lava which Diodorus Siculus mentions to have flowed from *Ætna* in the second Carthaginian war; and, in the second place, it may be observed, that the time necessary for converting lava into fertile fields must be very different, according to the different consistencies of the lavas, and their different situations, with respect to elevation or depression; to their being exposed to winds, rains, and to other circumstances; just as the time in which the heaps of iron slag (which resembles lava) are covered with verdure, is different at different furnaces, according to the nature of the slag, and situation of the furnace; and something of this kind is deducible from the account of the Canon himself; since the crevices of this famous stratum are really full of rich, good soil, and have pretty large trees growing in them.

But if all this should be thought not sufficient to remove the objection, I will produce the Canon an analogy in opposition to his analogy, and which is founded on more certain facts. *Ætna* and *Vesuvius* resemble each other in the causes which produce their eruptions, and in the nature of their lavas, and in the time necessary to mellow them into soil fit for vegetation; or if there be any slight difference in this respect, it is probably not greater than what subsists between different lavas of the same mountain. This

being admitted, which no philosopher will deny, the Canon's analogy will prove just nothing at all, if we can produce an instance of seven different lavas (with interjacent strata of vegetable earth) which have flowed from Mount Vesuvius within the space, not of fourteen thousand, but of somewhat less than seventeen hundred years; for then, according to our analogy, a stratum of lava may be covered with vegetable soil in about two hundred and fifty years, instead of requiring two thousand for the purpose. The eruption of Vesuvius which destroyed Herculaneum and Pompeii, is rendered still more famous by the death of Pliny, recorded by his nephew in his letter to Tacitus. This event happened in the year 79. It is not then quite seventeen hundred years since Herculaneum was swallowed up; but we are informed by unquestionable authority, that "the matter which covers the ancient town of Herculaneum is not the produce of one eruption only; for there are evident marks that the matter of six eruptions has taken its course over that which lies immediately above the town, and was the cause of its destruction. These strata are either of lava or burnt matter, *with veins of good soil betwixt them.*"\* I will not add another word upon this subject, except that the bishop of the diocese was not much out in his advice to Canonico Recupero, to take care not to make his mountain older than Moses; though it would have been full as well to have shut his mouth with a reason, as to have stopped it with the dread of an ecclesiastical censure.

\* See Sir William Hamilton's Remarks upon the Nature of the Soil of Naples and its Neighborhood, in the *Philos. Trans* vol. 61, p. 7.



You perceive with what ease a little attention will remove a great difficulty ; but had we been able to say nothing in explanation of this phenomenon, we should not have acted a very rational part in making our ignorance the foundation of our infidelity, or suffering a minute philosopher to rob us of our religion.

Your objections to revelation may be numerous ; you may find fault with the account which Moses has given of the creation and the fall ; you may not be able to get water enough for a universal deluge ; nor room enough in the ark of Noah for all the different kinds of aerial and terrestrial animals ; you may be dissatisfied with the command for sacrificing Isaac, for plundering the Egyptians, and for extirpating the Canaanites ; you may find fault with the Jewish economy, for its ceremonies, its sacrifices, and its multiplicity of priests ; you may object to the imprecations in the Psalms, and think the immoralities of David a fit subject for dramatic ridicule ; you may look upon the partial promulgation of Christianity as an insuperable objection to its truth, and waywardly reject the goodness of God toward yourselves, because you do not comprehend how you have deserved it more than others ; you may know nothing of the entrance of sin and death into the world by one man's transgression ; nor be able to comprehend the doctrine of the cross, and of redemption by Jesus Christ : in short, if your mind is so disposed, you may find food for your scepticism in every page of the Bible, as well as in every appearance of nature ; and it is not in the power of any person, but yourselves, to clear up your doubts. You must read, and you must think for yourselves ; and you must do both with temper, with candor, and

with care. Infidelity is a rank weed; it is nurtured by our vices, and cannot be plucked up as easily as it may be planted. Your difficulties with respect to revelation may have first arisen from your own reflection on the religious indifference of those whom, from your earliest infancy, you have been accustomed to revere and imitate: domestic irreligion may have made you a willing hearer of libertine conversation; and the uniform prejudices of the world may have finished the business, at a very early age, and left you to wander through life, without a principle to direct your conduct, and to die without hope. We are far from wishing you to trust the word of the clergy for the truth of your religion; we beg of you to examine it to the bottom, to try it, to prove it, and not to hold it fast unless you find it good. Till you are disposed to undertake this task, it becomes you to consider, with great seriousness and attention, whether it can be for your interest to esteem a few witty sarcasms, or metaphysic subtleties, or ignorant misrepresentations, or unwarranted assertions, as unanswerable arguments against revelation; and a very slight reflection will convince you that it will certainly be for your reputation to employ the flippancy of your rhetoric, and the poignancy of your ridicule, upon any subject rather than upon the subject of religion.

I take my leave with recommending to your notice the advice which Mr. Locke gave to a young man who was desirous of becoming acquainted with the doctrines of the Christian religion:—"Study the holy Scripture, especially the New Testament: therein are contained the words of eternal life. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth without any mixture of error for its matter." I am, &c.

**REPLY TO PAINE;**

OR, AN

**APOLOGY FOR THE BIBLE:**

IN

LETTERS TO THOMAS PAINE,

AUTHOR OF

**The "Age of Reason," Part the Second.**

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BY R. WATSON, D. D. F. R. S.

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Cambridge.



# REPLY TO PAINE.

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## LETTER I.

SIR:—I have lately met with a book of yours entitled “THE AGE OF REASON, part the second, being an investigation of true and of fabulous theology;” and I think it not inconsistent with my station, and the duty I owe to society, to trouble you and the world with some observations on so extraordinary a performance. Extraordinary I esteem it, not from any novelty in the objections which you have produced against revealed religion, (for I find little or no novelty in them,) but from the zeal with which you labor to disseminate your opinions, and from the confidence with which you esteem them true. You perceive by this that I give you credit for your sincerity, how much-soever I may question your wisdom, in writing in such a manner, on such a subject; and I have no reluctance in acknowledging that you possess a considerable share of energy of language, and acuteness of investigation; though I must be allowed to lament that these talents have not been applied in a manner more useful to human kind, and more creditable to yourself.

I begin with your preface. You therein state that you had long had an intention of publishing your thoughts upon religion, but that you had originally reserved it to a later period in life—I hope there is no

want of charity in saying, that it would have been fortunate for the Christian world had your life been terminated before you had fulfilled your intention. In accomplishing your purpose, you will have unsettled the faith of thousands; rooted from the minds of the unhappy virtuous all their comfortable assurances of a future recompense; have annihilated in the minds of the flagitious all their fears of future punishment; you will have given the reins to the domination of every passion, and have thereby contributed to the introduction of the public insecurity, and of the private unhappiness, usually and almost necessarily accompanying a state of corrupt morals.

No one can think worse of confession to a priest and subsequent absolution, as practiced in the church of Rome, than I do; but I cannot, with you, attribute the guillotine massacres to that cause. Men's minds were not prepared, as you suppose, for the commission of all manner of crimes, by any doctrines of the church of Rome, corrupted as I esteem it, but by their not thoroughly believing even that religion. What may not society expect from those who shall imbibe the principles of your book?

A fever, which you and those about you expected would prove mortal, made you remember, with renewed satisfaction, that you had written the former part of your *Age of Reason*—and you know, therefore, you say, by experience, the conscientious trial of your own principles. I admit this declaration to be a proof of the sincerity of your persuasion, but I cannot admit it to be any proof of the *truth* of your principles. What is conscience? Is it, as has been thought, an internal monitor implanted in us by the Supreme Being, and

dictating to us, on all occasions, what is right or wrong? Or is it merely our own judgment of the moral rectitude or turpitude of our own actions? I take the word (with Mr. Locke) in the latter, as the only intelligible sense. Now, who sees not that our judgments of virtue and vice, right and wrong, are not always formed from an enlightened and dispassionate use of our reason, in the investigation of truth? They are more generally formed from the nature of the religion we profess; from the quality of the civil government under which we live; from the general manners of the age, or the particular manners of the persons with whom we associate; from the education we have had in our youth; from the books we have read at a more advanced period; and from other accidental causes. Who sees not that, on this account, conscience may be conformable or repugnant to the law of nature? may be certain, or doubtful—and that it can be no criterion of moral rectitude, even when it is certain, because the certainty of an opinion is no proof of its being a right opinion? A man may be certainly persuaded of an error in reasoning, or an untruth in matters of fact. It is a maxim of every law, human and divine, that a man ought never to act in opposition to his conscience, but it will not from thence follow that he will, in obeying the dictates of his conscience on all occasions, act right. An inquisitor, who burns Jews and heretics; a Robespierre, who massacres innocent and harmless women; a robber, who thinks that all things ought to be in common, and that a state of property is an unjust infringement of natural liberty—these, and a thousand perpetrators of different crimes, may all follow the dictates of conscience; and may, at

the real or supposed approach of death, remember, "with renewed satisfaction," the worst of their transactions, and experience, without dismay "a conscientious trial of their principles." But this, their conscientious composure, can be no proof to others of the rectitude of their principles, and ought to be no pledge to themselves of their innocence in adhering to them.

I have thought fit to make this remark, with a view of suggesting to you a consideration of great importance—whether you have examined calmly, and according to the best of your ability, the arguments by which the truth of revealed religion may, in the judgment of learned and impartial men, be established? You will allow that thousands of learned and impartial men, (I speak not of priests, who, however, are, I trust, as learned and impartial as yourself, but of laymen of the most splendid talents)—you will allow, that thousands of these, in all ages, have embraced revealed religion as true. Whether these men have all been in an error, enveloped in the darkness of ignorance, shackled by the chains of superstition, whilst you and a few others have enjoyed light and liberty, is a question I submit to the decision of your readers.

If you have made the best examination you can, and yet reject revealed religion as an imposture, I pray that God may pardon what I esteem your error. And whether you have made this examination or not, does not become me or any man to determine. That Gospel which you despise, has taught me this moderation; it has said to me—"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth." I think that you are in an error; but whether that error be to you a vincible or an invincible



error, I presume not to determine. I know indeed where it is said, "that the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, and that if the Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." The consequence of your unbelief must be left to the just and merciful judgment of Him who alone knoweth the mechanism and the liberty of our understandings; the origin of our opinions; the strength of our prejudices; the excellencies and the defects of our reasoning faculties.

I shall, designedly, write this and the following letters in a popular manner; hoping that thereby they may stand a chance of being perused by that class of readers for whom your work seems to be particularly calculated, and who are the most likely to be injured by it. The really learned are in no danger of being infected by the poison of infidelity; they will excuse me, therefore, for having entered as little as possible into deep disquisitions concerning the authenticity of the Bible. The subject has been so learnedly and so frequently handled by other writers, that it does not want (I had almost said, it does not admit) any further proof. And it is the more necessary to adopt this mode of answering your book, because you disclaim all learned appeals to other books, and undertake to prove, from the Bible itself, that it is unworthy of credit. I hope to show, from the Bible itself, the direct contrary. But in case any of your readers should think that you had not put forth all your strength, by not referring for proof of your opinion to ancient authors; lest they should expect that all ancient authors are in your favor, I will venture to affirm, that had you made a learned appeal to all the ancient books in the world, sacred or profane, Christian, Jewish, or Pagan, instead of les-

sening, they would have established the credit and authority of the Bible as the word of God.

Quitting your preface, let us proceed to the work itself, in which there is much repetition, and a defect of proper arrangement. I will follow your track, however, as nearly as I can. The first question you propose for consideration is—"Whether there is sufficient authority for believing the Bible to be the Word of God, or whether there is not?" You determine this question in the negative, upon what you are pleased to call moral evidence. You hold it impossible that the Bible can be the Word of God, because it is therein said, that the Israelites destroyed the Canaanites by the express command of God; and to believe the Bible to be true, we must, you affirm, unbelieve all our belief of the moral justice of God; for wherein, you ask, could crying or smiling infants offend? I am astonished that so acute a reasoner should attempt to disparage the Bible, by bringing forward this exploded and frequently refuted objection of Morgan, Tindal, and Bolingbroke. You profess yourself to be a deist, and to believe that there is a God, who created the universe, and established the laws of nature, by which it is sustained in existence. You profess that, from the contemplation of the works of God, you derive a knowledge of his attributes; and you reject the Bible, because it ascribes to God things inconsistent (as you suppose) with the attributes which you have discovered to belong to him; in particular, you think it repugnant to his moral justice, that he should doom to destruction the crying or smiling infants of the Canaanites. Why do you not maintain it to be repugnant to his moral justice that he should suffer crying or smiling infants

to be swallowed up by an earthquake, drowned by an inundation, consumed by fire, starved by a famine, or destroyed by pestilence? The word of God is in perfect harmony with his work; crying or smiling infants are subjected to death in both. We believe that the earth, at the express command of God, opened her mouth, and swallowed up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, with their wives, their sons, and their little ones. This you esteem so repugnant to God's moral justice, that you spurn, as spurious, the book in which the circumstance is related. When Catania, Lima, and Lisbon, were severally destroyed by earthquakes, men, with their wives, their sons, and their little ones, were swallowed up alive—why do you not spurn as spurious the book of nature, in which this fact is certainly written, and from the perusal of which you infer the moral justice of God? You will, probably, reply that the evils which the Canaanites suffered from the express command of God, were different from those which were brought on mankind by the operation of the laws of nature. Different! in what? Not in the magnitude of the evil—not in the subjects of sufferance—not in the author of it—for my philosophy, at least, instructs me to believe that God not only primarily formed, but that he has, through all ages, executed the laws of nature; and that he will, through all eternity, administer them for the general happiness of his creatures, whether we can, on every occasion, discern that end or not.

I am far from being guilty of the impiety of questioning the existence of the moral justice of God, as proved either by natural or revealed religion; what I contend for is briefly this—that you have no right, in fairness of reasoning, to urge any apparent deviation

from moral justice as an argument against revealed religion, because you do not urge an equally apparent deviation from it, as an argument against natural religion: you reject the former, and admit the latter without adverting that, as to your objection, they must stand or fall together.

As to the Canaanites, it is needless to enter into any proof of the depraved state of their morals; they were a wicked people in the time of Abraham, and they, even then, were devoted to destruction by God; but their iniquity was not then full. In the time of Moses they were idolaters, sacrificers of their own crying or smiling infants; devourers of human flesh; addicted to unnatural lusts; immersed in the filthiness of all manner of vice. Now, I think it will be impossible to prove that it was a proceeding contrary to God's moral justice, to exterminate so wicked a people. He made the Israelites the executors of his vengeance; and, in doing this, he gave such an evident and terrible proof of his abomination to vice, as could not fail to strike the surrounding nations with astonishment and terror, and to impress on the minds of the Israelites what they were to expect if they followed the example of the nations whom he commanded them to cut off. "Ye shall not commit any of these abominations—that the land spue not you out also, as it spued out the nations before you." How strong and descriptive this language! the vices of the inhabitants were so abominable, that the very land was sick of them, and forced to vomit them forth, as the stomach disgorges a deadly poison.

I have often wondered what could be the reason that men, not destitute of talents, should be desirous of un-

dermining the authority of revealed religion, and studious in exposing, with a malignant and illiberal exultation, every little difficulty attending the Scriptures, to popular animadversion and contempt. I am not willing to attribute this strange propensity to what Plato attributed the atheism of his time—to profligacy of manners—to affectation of singularity—to gross ignorance, assuming the semblance of deep research and superior sagacity. I had rather refer it to an impropriety of judgment respecting the manners and mental acquirements of human kind in the first ages of the world. Most unbelievers argue as if they thought that man, in remote and rude antiquity, in the very birth and infancy of our species, had the same distinct conceptions of one, eternal, invisible, incorporeal, infinitely wise, powerful, and good God, which they themselves have now. This I look upon as a great mistake, and a pregnant source of infidelity. Human kind, by long experience; by the institutions of civil society; by the cultivation of arts and science; by, as I believe, divine instruction actually given to some, and traditionally communicated to all, is in a far more distinguished situation, as to the powers of the mind, than it was in the childhood of the world. The history of man is the history of the providence of God; who, willing the supreme felicity of all his creatures, has adapted his government to the capacity of those who, in different ages, were the subjects of it. The history of any one nation, throughout all ages, and that of all nations in the same age, are but separate parts of one great plan which God is carrying on for the moral melioration of mankind. But who can comprehend the whole of this immense design? The shortness of life.

the weakness of our faculties, the inadequacy of our means of information, conspire to make it impossible for us, worms of the earth, insects of an hour, completely to understand any one of its parts. No man, who well weighs the subject, ought to be surprised, that in the histories of ancient times many things should occur foreign to our manners, the propriety and necessity of which we cannot clearly apprehend.

It appears incredible to many, that God Almighty should have had colloquial intercourse with our first parents; that he should have contracted a kind of friendship for the patriarchs, and entered into covenants with them; that he should have suspended the laws of nature in Egypt; should have been so apparently partial as to become the God and governor of one particular nation; and should have so far demeaned himself, as to give to that people a burdensome ritual of worship, statutes and ordinances, many of which seem to be beneath the dignity of his attention, unimportant and impolitic. I have conversed with many deists, and have always found that the strangeness of these things was the only reason for their disbelief of them: nothing similar has happened in their time; they will not, therefore, admit that these events have really taken place at any time. As well might a child, when arrived at a state of manhood, contend that he never either stood in need of, or experienced the fostering care of a mother's kindness, the wearisome attention of his nurse, or the instruction and discipline of his schoolmaster. The Supreme Being selected one family from an idolatrous world; nursed it up, by various acts of his providence, into a great nation; communicated to that

nation a knowledge of his holiness, justice, mercy, power, and wisdom; disseminated them at various times, through every part of the earth, that they might be a "leaven to leaven the whole lump;" that they might assure all other nations of the existence of one supreme God, the creator and preserver of the world, the only proper object of adoration. With what reason can we expect, that what was done to one nation, not out of any partiality to them, but for the general good, should be done to all? That the mode of instruction, which was suited to the infancy of the world, should be extended to the maturity of its manhood, or to the imbecility of its old age? I own to you, that when I consider how nearly man, in a savage state, approaches to the brute creation, as to intellectual excellence, and when I contemplate his miserable attainments, as to the knowledge of God, in a civilized state, when he has had no divine instruction on the subject, or when that instruction has been forgotten, (for all men have known something of God from tradition,) I cannot but admire the wisdom and goodness of the Supreme Being, in having let himself down to our apprehensions: in having given to mankind, in the earliest ages, sensible and extraordinary proofs of his existence and attributes; in having made the Jewish and Christian dispensations mediums to convey to all men, through all ages, that knowledge concerning himself which he has vouchsafed to give immediately to the first. I own it is strange, very strange, that he should have made an immediate manifestation of himself in the first ages of the world; but what is there that is not strange? It is strange that you and I are here—that there is water, and

earth, and air, and fire—that there is a sun, and moon, and stars—that there is generation, corruption, reproduction. I can account ultimately for none of these things, without recurring to Him who made every thing. I also am his workmanship, and look up to him with hope of preservation through all eternity; I adore him for his word as well as for his work: his work I cannot comprehend, but his word has assured me of all that I am concerned to know—that he has prepared everlasting happiness for those who love and obey him. This you will call preachment—I will have done with it; but the subject is so vast, and the plan of providence, in my opinion, so obviously wise and good, that I can never think of it without having my mind filled with reverence, admiration and gratitude.

In addition to the moral evidence (as you are pleased to think it) against the Bible, you threaten, in the progress of your work, to produce such other evidence as even a priest cannot deny. A philosopher in search of truth, forfeits with me all claim to candor and impartiality, when he introduces railing for reasoning, vulgar and illiberal sarcasm in the room of argument. I will not imitate the example you set me: but examine what you shall produce with as much coolness and respect as if you had given the priests no provocation; as if you were a man of the most unblemished character, subject to no prejudices, actuated by no bad designs, nor liable to have abuse retorted upon you with success.

## LETTER II.

Before you commence your grand attack upon the



Bible, you wish to establish a difference between the evidence necessary to prove the authenticity of the Bible, and that of any other ancient book. I am not surprised at your anxiety on this head ; for all writers on the subject have agreed in thinking that St. Austin reasoned well, when, in vindicating the genuineness of the Bible, he asked—"What proofs have we that the works of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Varro, and other profane authors, were written by those whose name they bear; unless it be that this has been an opinion generally received at all times, and by all those who have lived since the authors?" This writer was convinced that the evidence which established the genuineness of any profane book, would establish that of the sacred book; and I profess myself to be of the same opinion, notwithstanding what you have advanced to the contrary.

In this part your ideas seem to me to be confused; I do not say that you designedly jumble together mathematical science and historical evidence; the knowledge acquired by demonstration, and the probability derived from testimony. You know but one ancient book that authoritatively challenges universal consent and belief, and that is Euclid's Elements. If I were disposed to make frivolous objections, I should say that even Euclid's Elements had not met with universal consent; that there had been men, both in ancient and modern times, who had questioned the intuitive evidence of some of his axioms, and denied the justness of some of his demonstrations; but, admitting the truth, I do not see the pertinency of your observation. You are attempting to subvert the authenticity of the Bible, and you tell us that Euclid's

Elements are certainly true. What then? Does it follow that the Bible is certainly false? The most illiterate scrivener does not want to be informed that the examples in his Arithmetic are proved by a different kind of reasoning from that by which he persuades himself to believe, that there was such a person as Henry VIII, or that there is such a city as Paris.

It may be of use, to remove this confusion in your argument to state distinctly the difference between the genuineness and the authenticity of a book. A genuine book is that which was written by the person whose name it bears, as the author of it. An authentic book is that which relates matters of fact, as they really happened. A book may be genuine without being authentic; and a book may be authentic, without being genuine. The books written by Richardson and Fielding are genuine books, though the histories of Clarissa and Tom Jones are fables. The history of the Island of Formosa is a genuine book; it was written by Psalmanazar; but it is not an authentic book; (though it was long esteemed as such, and translated into different languages;) for the author, in the latter part of his life, took shame to himself for having imposed on the world, and confessed that it was a mere romance. Anson's Voyage may be considered as an authentic book; it probably contains a true narration of the principal events recorded in it; but it is not a genuine book, having not been written by Walters, to whom it is ascribed, but by Robins.

This distinction between the genuineness and authenticity of a book, will assist us in detecting the fallacy of an argument, which you state with great confidence in the part of your work now under con-

sideration, and which you frequently allude to, in other parts, as conclusive evidence against the truth of the Bible. Your arguments stand thus—If it be found that the books ascribed to Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, were not written by Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, every part of the authority and authenticity of these books is gone at once. I presume to think otherwise. The genuineness of those books (in the judgment of those who say that they were written by these authors) will certainly be gone; but their authenticity may remain: they may still contain a true account of real transactions, though the names of the writers of them should be found to be different from what they are generally esteemed to be.

Had, indeed, Moses said that he wrote the first five books of the Bible; and had Joshua and Samuel said that they wrote the books which are respectively attributed to them; and had it been found that Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, did not write these books; then, I grant, the authority of the whole would have been gone at once; these men would have been found liars, as to the genuineness of these books; and this proof of their want of veracity, in one point, would have invalidated their testimony in every other; these books would have been justly stigmatized, as neither genuine nor authentic.

A history may be true, though it should not only be ascribed to a wrong author, but though the author of it should not be known; anonymous testimony does not destroy the reality of facts, whether natural or miraculous. Had lord Clarendon published his History of the Rebellion, without prefixing his name to it; or had the History of Titus Livius come down to us

under the name of Valerius Flaccus, or Valerius Maximus; the facts mentioned in these histories would have been equally certain.

As to your assertion, that the miracles recorded in Tacitus, and in other profane historians, are quite as well authenticated as those of the Bible—it, being a mere assertion, destitute of proof, may be properly answered by a contrary assertion. I take the liberty then to say, that the evidence for the miracles recorded in the Bible is, both in kind and in degree, so greatly superior to that for the prodigies mentioned by Livy, or the miracles related by Tacitus, as to justify us in giving credit to the one as the work of God, and in withholding it from the other as the effect of superstition and imposture. This method of derogating from the credibility of Christianity, by opposing to the miracles of our Savior the tricks of ancient impostors, seems to have originated with Hierocles in the fourth century; and it has been adopted by unbelievers from that time to this; with this difference, indeed, that the heathens of the third and fourth century admitted that Jesus wrought miracles; but lest that admission should have compelled them to abandon their gods and become Christians, they said that their *Apolonius*, their *Apuleius*, their *Aristeas*, did as great: whilst modern deists deny the fact of Jesus having ever wrought a miracle. And they have some reason for this proceeding; they are sensible that the Gospel miracles are so different, in all their circumstances, from those related in pagan story, that if they admit them to have been performed, they must admit Christianity to be true; hence they have fabricated a kind of deistical axiom—that no human testi-

mony can establish the credibility of a miracle.— This, though it has been a hundred times refuted, is still insisted upon, as if its truth had never been questioned, and could not be disproved.

You “proceed to examine the authenticity of the Bible; and you begin, you say, with what are called the five books of Moses, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Your intention, you profess, is to show that these books are spurious, and that Moses is not the author of them; and still farther, that they were not written in the time of Moses, nor till several hundred years afterwards; that they are no other than an attempted history of the life of Moses, and of the times in which he is said to have lived, and also of times prior thereto, written by some very ignorant and stupid pretender to authorship, several hundred years after the death of Moses.” In this passage the utmost force of your attack on the authority of the five books of Moses is clearly stated. You are not the first who has started this difficulty; it is a difficulty, indeed, of modern date; having not been heard of, either in synagogue or out of it, till the twelfth century. About that time *Aben Ezra*, a Jew of great erudition, noticed some passages (the same that you have brought forward) in the first five books of the Bible, which he thought had not been written by Moses, but inserted by some person after the death of Moses. But he was far from maintaining, as you do, that these books were written by some ignorant and stupid pretender to authorship, many hundred years after the death of Moses. *Hobbes* contends that the Books of Moses are so called, not from their having been written by Moses, but from their

containing an account of Moses. *Spinoza* supported the same opinion; and *Le Clerc*, a very able theological critic of the last and present century, once entertained the same notion. You see that this fancy has had some patrons before you; the merit or the demerit, the sagacity or the temerity of having asserted that Moses is not the author of the Pentateuch, is not entirely yours. *Le Clerc*, indeed, you must not boast of. When his judgment was matured by age, he was ashamed of what he had written on the subject in his younger years; he made a public recantation of his error, by annexing to his commentary on Genesis a Latin dissertation, concerning Moses, the author of the Pentateuch, and his design in composing it. If in your future life you should chance to change your opinion on the subject, it will be an honor to your character to emulate the integrity and to imitate the example of *Le Clerc*. The Bible is not the only book which has undergone the fate of being reprobated as spurious, after it had been received as genuine and authentic for many ages. It has been maintained that the history of *Herodotus* was written in the time of *Constantine*; and that the Classics are forgeries of the thirteenth or fourteenth century. These extravagant reveries amused the world at the time of their publication, and have long since sunk into oblivion. You esteem all prophets to be such lying rascals, that I dare not predict the fate of your book.

Before you produce your main objections to the genuineness of the books of Moses, you assert—"That there is no affirmative evidence that Moses is the author of them." What! no affirmative evidence? In the eleventh century *Maimonides* drew up a con-

profession of faith for the Jews, which all of them at this day admit; it consists only of thirteen articles, and two of them have respect to Moses; one affirming the authenticity, the other the genuineness of his books. The doctrine and prophecy of Moses is true. The law that we have was given by Moses. This is the faith of the Jews at present, and has been their faith ever since the destruction of their city and temple; it was their faith at the time when the authors of the New Testament wrote; it was their faith during their captivity in Babylon; in the time of their kings and judges; and no period can be shown, from the age of Moses to the present hour, in which it was not their faith. Is this no affirmative evidence? I cannot desire a stronger. *Josephus*, in his book against *Appion*, writes thus—"We have only two and twenty books which are to be believed as of divine authority, and which comprehend the history of all ages; five belong to Moses, which contain the original of man and the tradition of the succession of generations, down to his death, which takes in a compass of about three thousand years." Do you consider this as no affirmative evidence? Why should I mention *Juvenal* speaking of the volume which Moses had written? Why enumerate a long list of profane authors, all bearing testimony to the fact of *Moses* being the leader and the law-giver of the Jewish nation? And if a law-giver, surely a writer of the laws. But what says the Bible? In *Exodus* it says—"Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people."—In *Deuteronomy* it says—"And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in

a book, until they were finished, (this surely imports the finishing of a laborious work,) that Moses commanded the Levites, which bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, Take this book of the law and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee." This is said in Deuteronomy, which is a kind of repetition or abridgment of the four preceding books; and it is well known that the Jews gave the name of the law to the first five books of the Old Testament. What possible doubt can there be that Moses wrote the books in question? I could accumulate many other passages from the Scriptures to this purpose; but if what I have advanced will not convince you that there is affirmative evidence, and of the strongest kind, for Moses being the author of these books, nothing that I can advance will convince you.

What if I should grant all you undertake to prove, (the stupidity and ignorance of the writer excepted?) What if I should admit that *Samuel* or *Ezra*, or some other learned Jew, composed those books from public records, many years after the death of Moses? Will it follow that there was no truth in them? According to my logic, it will only follow that they are not genuine books; every fact recorded in them may be true, whenever or by whomsoever they were written. It cannot be said that the Jews had no public records; the Bible furnishes abundance of proof to the contrary. I by no means admit that these books, as to the main part of them, were not written by Moses; but I do contend, that a book may contain a true history, though we knew not the author of it, or though we may be mistaken in ascribing it to a wrong author.



The first argument you produce against Moses being the author of these books is so old, that I do not know its original author; and it is so miserable a one, that I wonder you should adopt it. "These books cannot be written by Moses, because they are wrote in the third person—it is always, the Lord said unto Moses, or Moses said unto the Lord. This, you say, is the style and manner that historians use in speaking of the persons whose lives and actions they are writing." This observation is true, but it does not extend far enough; for this is the style and manner not only of historians writing of other persons, but of eminent men, such as *Xenophon* and *Josephus*, writing of themselves. If General *Washington* should write the history of the American War, and should, from his great modesty, speak of himself in the third person, would you think it reasonable that, two or three thousand years hence, any person should, on that account, contend that the history was not true? *Cæsar* writes of himself in the third person. It is always, *Cæsar* made a speech, or a speech was made to *Cæsar*, *Cæsar* crossed the Rhine, *Cæsar* invaded Britain; but every school-boy knows that this circumstance cannot be adduced as a serious argument against *Cæsar's* being the author of his own Commentaries.

But Moses, you urge, cannot be the author of the book of Numbers, because he says of himself, "that Moses was a very meek man, above all the men that were on the face of the earth." If he said this of himself, he was, as you say, "a vain and arrogant coxcomb (such is your phrase) and unworthy of credit—and if he did not say it, the *books* are without authori-

ty." This your dilemma is perfectly narmless; it has not a horn to hurt the weakest logician. If Moses did not write this little verse, if it was inserted by Samuel, or any of his countrymen, who knew his character and revered his memory, will it follow that he did not write any other part of the book of Numbers? Or if he did not write any part of the book of Numbers will it follow that he did not write any of the other books of which he is usually reputed the author? And if he did write this of himself, he was justified by the occasion which extorted from him this commendation. Had this expression been written in a modern style and manner it would probably have given you no offence. For who would be so fastidious as to find fault with an illustrious man, who, being calumniated by his nearest relations, as guilty of pride and fond of power, should vindicate his character by saying—my temper was naturally as meek and unassuming as that of any man upon earth? There are occasions in which a modest man, who speaks truly, may speak proudly of himself, without forfeiting his general character; and there is no occasion which either more requires, or more excuses this conduct, than when he is repelling the foul and envious aspersions of those who both knew his character and had experienced his kindness; and in that predicament stood *Aaron* and *Miriam*, the accusers of Moses. You yourself have probably felt the sting of calumny, and have been anxious to remove the impression. I do not call you a vain and arrogant coxcomb for vindicating your character, when in the latter part of this very work you boast, I hope truly, "the man does not exist that can say I have persecuted him, or any man, or any set of men, in the American revolution, or in the French

revolution; or that I have in any case returned evil for evil." I know not what kings and priests may say to this: you may not have returned to them evil for evil, because they never, I believe, did you any harm; but you have done them all the harm you could, and that without provocation.

I think it needless to notice your observation upon what you call the dramatic style of Deuteronomy; it is an ill-founded hypothesis. You might as well ask where the author of Cæsar's Commentaries got the speeches of Cæsar, as where the author of Deuteronomy got the speeches of Moses. But your argument—that Moses was not the author of Deuteronomy, because the reason given in that book for the observation of the Sabbath is different from that given in Exodus, merits a reply.

You need not be told that the very name of this book imports, in Greek, a repetition of a law; and that the Hebrew doctors have called it by a word of the same meaning. In the fifth verse of the first chapter it is said in our Bibles, "Moses began to declare this law;" but the Hebrew words, more properly translated, import that "Moses began, or determined to explain the law." This is no shift of mine to get over a difficulty; the words are so rendered in most of the ancient versions, and by *Fagius*, *Vatablus*, and *Le Clerc*, men eminently skilled in the Hebrew language. This repetition and explanation of the law was a wise and benevolent proceeding in Moses: that those who were either not born, or were mere infants, when it was first (forty years before) delivered in Horeb, might have an opportunity of knowing it; especially as Moses their leader was so soon to be taken from them, and they

were about to be settled in the midst of nations given to idolatry and sunk in vice. Now, where is the wonder, that some variations, and some additions, should be made to a law, when a legislator thinks fit to republish it many years after its first promulgation ?

With respect to the Sabbath, the learned are divided in opinion concerning its origin ; some contending that it was sanctified from the creation of the world ; that it was observed by the patriarchs before the flood ; that it was neglected by the Israelites during their bondage in Egypt ; revived on the falling of manna in the wilderness ; and enjoined as a positive law at Sinai. Others esteem its institution to have been no older than the age of Moses ; and argue, that what is said of the sanctification of the Sabbath in the book of Genesis, is said by way of anticipation. There may be truth in both these accounts. To me it is probable that the memory of the creation was handed down from Adam to all his posterity ; and that the seventh day was for a long time held sacred by all nations, in commemoration of that event ; but that the peculiar rigidity of its observance was enjoined by Moses to the Israelites alone. As to there being two reasons given for its being kept holy—one, that on that day God rested from the work of creation—the other, that on that day God had given them rest from the servitude of Egypt—I see no contradiction in the accounts. If a man, in writing the history of England, should inform his readers that the parliament had ordered the fifth day of November to be kept holy, because on that day God delivered the nation from a bloody intended massacre by gunpowder ; and if, in another part of his history, he should assign the deliverance of our church and nation

from popery and arbitrary power, by the arrival of King William, as a reason for its being kept holy; would any one contend that he was not justified in both these ways of expression, or that we ought from thence to conclude that he was not the author of them both?

You think "that law in Deuteronomy inhuman and brutal, which authorizes parents, the father and the mother, to bring their own children to have them stoned to death for what it is pleased to call stubbornness." You are aware, I suppose, that paternal power amongst the *Romans*, the *Gauls*, the *Persians*, and other nations, was of the most arbitrary kind; that it extended to the taking away of the life of the child. I do not know whether the Israelites in the time of Moses exercised this paternal power; it was not a custom adopted by all nations; but it was by many; and in the infancy of society, before individual families had coalesced into communities, it was probably very general. Now Moses, by this law, which you esteem brutal and inhuman, hindered such an extravagant power from being either introduced or exercised among the Israelites. This law is so far from countenancing the arbitrary power of a father over the life of his child, that it takes from him the power of accusing the child before a magistrate—the father and mother of the child must agree in bringing the child to judgment; and it is not by their united will that the child was to be condemned to death—the elders of the city were to judge whether the accusation was true; and the accusation was to be not merely, as you insinuate, that the child was stubborn, but that he was "stubborn and rebellious, a glutton and a drunkard." Considered in this light, you must allow the law to have been a humane

restriction of a power improper to be lodged with any parent.

That you may abuse the priests, you abandon your subject. "Priests," you say, "preach up Deuteronomy, for Deuteronomy preaches up tithes." I do not know that priests preach up Deuteronomy more than they preach up other books of Scripture; but I do know that tithes are not preached up in Deuteronomy more than in Leviticus, in Numbers, in Chronicles, in Malachi, in the law, the history, and the prophets of the Jewish nation. You go on: "It is from this book, chap. 25, ver. 4, they have taken the phrase, and applied it to tithing, 'Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn:' and that this might not escape observation, they have noted it in the table of the contents at the head of the chapter, though it is only a single verse of less than two lines. O priests! priests! ye are willing to be compared to an ox, for the sake of tithes!" I cannot call this reasoning, and I will not pollute my page by giving it a proper appellation. Had the table of contents, instead of simply saying—the ox is not to be muzzled, said—tithes enjoined, or priests to be maintained—there would have been a little ground for your censure. Whoever noted this phrase at the head of the chapter, had better reason for doing it than you have attributed to them. They did it, because St. Paul had quoted it when he was proving to the Corinthians that they who preached the Gospel had a right to live by the Gospel; it was Paul, and not the priests, who first applied this phrase to tithing. St. Paul, indeed, did not avail himself of the right he contended for; he was not, therefore, interested in what he said. The reason on which he

grounds the right is not merely this quotation, which you ridicule; nor the appointment of the law of Moses, which you think fabulous; nor the injunction of Jesus, which you despise; no, it is a reason founded in the nature of things, and which no philosopher, no unbeliever, no man of common sense can deny to be a solid reason; it amounts to this—that “the laborer is worthy of his hire.” Nothing is so much a man’s own as his labor and ingenuity; and it is entirely consonant to the law of nature, that by the innocent use of these he should provide for his subsistence. Husbandmen, artists, soldiers, physicians, lawyers, all let out their labor and talents for a stipulated reward: why may not a priest do the same? Some accounts of you have been published in England; but, conceiving them to have proceeded from a design to injure your character, I never read them. I know nothing of your parentage, your education, or condition of life. You may have been elevated, by your birth, above the necessity of acquiring the means of sustaining life by the labor of either hand or head; if this be the case, you ought not to despise those who have come into the world in less favorable circumstances. If your origin has been less fortunate, you must have supported yourself either by manual labor or the exercise of your genius. Why should you think that conduct disreputable in priests, which you probably consider as laudable in yourself? I will just mention, that the payment of tithes is no new institution, but that they were paid in the most ancient times, not to priests only, but to kings. I could give an hundred instances of this: two may be sufficient. *Abraham* paid tithes to the king of Salem, four hundred years

before the law of Moses was given. The king of Salem was priest also of the most high God. Priests, you see, existed in the world, and were held in high estimation—for kings were priests—long before the impostures, as you esteem them, of the Jewish and Christian dispensations were heard of. But as this instance is taken from a book which you call “a book of contradictions and lies”—the Bible—I will give you another, from a book, to the authority of which, as it is written by a profane author, you probably will not object. *Diogenes Laertius*, in his life of *Solon*, cites a letter of *Pisistratus* to that lawgiver, in which he says—“ I *Pisistratus*, the Tyrant, am contented with the stipends which were paid to those who reigned before me; the people of Athens set apart a *tenth* of the fruits of their land, not for my private use, but to be expended in the public sacrifices, and for the general good.”

### LETTER III.

Having done with what you call the grammatical evidence that Moses was not the author of the books attributed to him, you come to your historical and chronological evidence, and you begin with Genesis. Your first argument is taken from the single word—Dan—being found in Genesis, when it appears, from the book of Judges, that the town Laish was not called Dan till above three hundred and thirty years after the death of Moses; therefore the writer of Genesis, you conclude, must have lived after the town of Laish had the name of Dan given it. Lest this objection should not be obvious enough to a common capacity, you illus-



trate in the following manner: "Havre-de-Grace was called Havre-Marat in 1793; should then any dateless writing be found, in after-times, with the name of Havre-Marat, it would be certain evidence that such a writing could not have been written till after the year 1793." This is a wrong conclusion. Suppose some hot republican should at this day publish a new edition of any old history of France, and instead of Havre-de-Grace should write Havre-Marat; and that, two or three thousand years hence, a man like yourself should, on that account, reject the whole history as spurious, would he be justified in so doing? Would it not be reasonable to tell him that the name of Havre-Marat had been inserted, not by the original author of the history, but by a subsequent editor of it; and to refer him, for a proof of the genuineness of the book, to the testimony of the whole French nation? This supposition so obviously applies to your difficulty, that I cannot but recommend it to your impartial attention. But if this solution does not please you, I desire it may be proved that the *Dan* mentioned in Genesis was the same town as the *Dan* mentioned in Judges; I desire, further, to have it proved that the *Dan* mentioned in Genesis was the name of a town and not of a river. It is merely said—Abraham pursued them, the enemies of Lot, to *Dan*. Now, a river was full as likely as a town to stop a pursuit. Lot, we know, was settled in the plain of *Jordan*; and *Jordan*, we know, was composed of the united streams of two rivers called *Jor* and *Dan*.

Your next difficulty respects its being said in Genesis—"These are the kings that reigned in *Edom* before there reigned any king over the children of Israel;

this passage could only have been written, you say, (and I think you say rightly,) after the first king began to reign over Israel; so far from being written by Moses, it could not have been written till the time of Saul at the least." I admit this inference, but I deny its application. A small addition to a book does not destroy either the genuineness or the authenticity of the whole book. I am not ignorant of the manner in which commentators have answered this objection of Spinoza, without making the concession which I have made; but I have no scruple in admitting that the passage in question, consisting of nine verses, containing the genealogy of some kings of Edom, might have been inserted in the book of Genesis after the book of Chronicles (which was called in Greek by a name importing that it contained things left out in other books) was written. The learned have shown that interpolations have happened to other books; but these insertions by other hands have never been considered as invalidating the authority of the books.

"Take away from Genesis," you say, "the belief that Moses was the author, on which only the strange belief that it is the word of God has stood, and there remains nothing of Genesis but an anonymous book of stories, fables, traditionary or invented absurdities, or of downright lies." What! is it a story, then, that the world had a beginning, and that the author of it was God? If you deem this a story, I am not disputing with a deistical philosopher, but with an atheistic madman. Is it a story, that our first parents fell from a paradisiacal state—that this earth was destroyed by a deluge—that Noah and his family were preserved in the ark, and that the world has been re-peopled by his

descendants? Look into a book so common that almost every body has it, and so excellent that no person ought to be without it—Grotius on the truth of the Christian religion—and you will there meet with abundant testimony to the truth of all the principal facts recorded in Genesis. The testimony is not that of Jews, Christians and priests; it is the testimony of the philosophers, historians, and poets of antiquity. The oldest book in the world is Genesis; and it is remarkable that those books which come nearest to it in age, are those which make either the most distinct mention, or the most evident allusion to the facts related in Genesis concerning the formation of the world from a chaotic mass, the primeval innocence and subsequent fall of man, the longevity of mankind in the first ages of the world, the depravity of the antediluvians, and the destruction of the world. Read the tenth chapter of Genesis. It may appear to you to contain nothing but an uninteresting narration of the descendants of *Sheri, Ham, and Japheth*; a mere fable, an invented absurdity, a downright lie. No, sir, it is one of the most valuable and the most venerable records of antiquity. It explains what all profane historians were ignorant of—the origin of nations. Had it told us, as other books do, that one nation had sprung out of the earth they inhabited; another from a cricket or a grasshopper; another from an oak; another from a mushroom; another from a dragon's tooth; then indeed it would have merited the appellation you, with so much temerity, bestow upon it. Instead of these absurdities, it gives such an account of peopling the earth after the deluge, as no other book in the world ever did give; and the truth of which, all other books in the world,

which contain any thing on the subject, confirm. The last verse of the chapter says, "These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations; and by these were the nations divided in the earth, after the flood." It would require great learning to trace out precisely, either the actual situation of all the countries in which these founders of empires settled, or to ascertain the extent of their dominions. This, however, has been done by various authors, to the satisfaction of all competent judges; so much at least to my satisfaction, that, had I no other proof of the authenticity of Genesis, I should consider this as sufficient. But, without the aid of learning, any man who can barely read his Bible, and has but heard of such people as the *Assyrians*, the *Elamites*, the *Lydians*, the *Medes*, the *Ionians*, the *Thracians*, will readily acknowledge that they had *Asur*, and *Elam*, and *Lud*, and *Madia*, and *Javan*, and *Tiras*, grandsons of Noah, for their respective founders; and knowing this, he will not, I hope, part with his Bible, as a system of fables. I am no enemy to philosophy; but when philosophy would rob me of my Bible, I must say of it, as Cicero said of the twelve tables—This little book alone exceeds the libraries of all the philosophers, in the weight of its authority and in the extent of its utility.

From the abuse of the Bible you proceed to that of Moses, and again bring forward the subject of his wars in the land of Canaan. There are many men who look upon all war (would to God that all men saw it in the same light) with extreme abhorrence, as afflicting mankind with calamities not necessary, shocking to humanity, and repugnant to reason. But is it repugnant to reason that God should, by an express act

of his providence, destroy a wicked nation? I am fond of considering the goodness of God as the leading principle of his conduct towards mankind, of considering his justice as subservient to his mercy. He punishes individuals and nations with the rod of his wrath; but I am persuaded that all his punishments originate in his abhorrence of sin, are calculated to lessen its influence, and are proofs of his goodness; inasmuch as it may not be possible for Omnipotence itself to communicate supreme happiness to the human race whilst they continue servants of sin. The destruction of the Canaanites exhibits to all nations, in all ages, a signal proof of God's displeasure against sin: it has been to others, and it is to ourselves, a benevolent warning. Moses would have been the wretch you represent him, had he acted by his own authority alone; but you may as reasonably attribute cruelty and murder to the judge of the land in condemning criminals to death, as butchery and massacre to Moses in executing the command of God.

The Midianites, through the counsel of Balaam, and by the vicious instrumentality of their women, had seduced a part of the Israelites to idolatry—to the impure worship of their infamous god Baalpeor: for this offence, twenty-four thousand Israelites had perished in a plague from heaven, and Moses received a command from God “to smite the Midianites who had beguiled the people.” An army was equipped and sent against Midian. When the army returned victorious, Moses and the princes of the congregation went to meet it; and “Moses was wroth with the officers.” He observed the women captives, and he asked with astonishment, “Have ye saved all the

women alive? Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation." He then gave an order that the boys and the women should be put to death, but that the young maidens should be kept alive for themselves. I see nothing in this proceeding, but good policy combined with mercy. The young men might have become dangerous avengers of what they would esteem their country's wrongs; the mothers might have again allured the Israelites to love licentious pleasures and the practice of idolatry, and brought another plague upon the congregation; but the young maidens, not being polluted by the flagitious habits of their mothers, nor likely to create disturbance by rebellion, were kept alive. You give a different turn to the matter; you say—"that thirty-two thousand women-children were consigned to debauchery by the order of Moses." Prove this, and I will allow that Moses was the horrid monster you make him—prove this, and I will allow that the Bible is what you call it—"a book of lies, wickedness, and blasphemy,"—prove this, or excuse my warmth if I say to you, as Paul said to Elymas the sorcerer, who sought to turn away Sergius Paulus from the faith, 'O full of all subtilty and of all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?' I did not, when I began these letters, think that I should have been moved to this severity of rebuke by any thing you could have written; but when so gross a misrepresentation is made of God's proceedings, coolness would be a crime. The women

children were not reserved for the purposes of debauchery, but of slavery—a custom abhorrent from our manners, but every where practiced in former times, and still practiced in countries where the benignity of the Christian religion has not softened the ferocity of human nature. You here admit a part of the account given in the Bible respecting the expedition against Midian to be a true account; it is not unreasonable to desire that you will admit the whole, or show sufficient reason why you admit one part and reject the other. I will mention the part to which you have paid no attention. The Israelitish army consisted but of twelve thousand men, a mere handful when opposed to the people of Midian; yet, when the officers made a muster of their troops after their return from the war, they found that they had not lost a single man! This circumstance struck them as so decisive an evidence of God's interposition, that out of the spoils they had taken they offered "an oblation to the Lord, an atonement for their souls." Do but believe what the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds believed at the time when these things happened, and we shall never more hear of your objections to the Bible from its account of the wars of Moses.

You produce two or three other objections respecting the genuineness of the first five books of the Bible. I cannot stop to notice them: every commentator answers them in a manner suited to the apprehension of even a mere English reader. You calculate to the thousandth part of an inch, the length of the iron bed of *Og* the king of Bashan; but you do not prove that the bed was too big for the body, or that a

Patagonian would have been lost in it. You make no allowance for the size of a royal bed, nor ever suspect that king Og might have been possessed with the same kind of vanity which occupied the mind of king Alexander when he ordered his soldiers to enlarge the size of their beds, that they might give the Indians, in succeeding ages, a great idea of the prodigious stature of a Macedonian. In many parts of your work you speak much in commendation of science. I join with you in every commendation you can give it; but you speak of it in such a manner as to give room to believe that you are a great proficient in it; if this be the case, I would recommend a problem to your attention, the solution of which you will readily allow to be far above the powers of a man conversant only, as you represent priests and bishops to be, in *hic, hæc, hoc*. The problem is this—to determine the height to which a human body, preserving its similarity of figure, may be augmented before it will perish by its own weight. When you have solved this problem, we shall know whether the bed of the king of Bashan was too big for any giant; whether the existence of a man twelve or fifteen feet high is in the nature of things impossible. My philosophy teaches me to doubt of many things; but it does not teach me to reject every testimony which is opposite to my experience: had I been in Shetland, I could, on proper testimony, have believed in the existence of the Lincolnshire ox, or of the largest dray-horse in London; though the oxen and horses in Shetland had not been bigger than mastiffs.



## LETTER IV.

Having finished your objections to the genuineness of the books of Moses, you proceed to your remarks on the book of Joshua; and from its internal evidence you endeavor to prove that this book was not written by Joshua. What then? what is your conclusion? "That it is anonymous and without authority." Stop a little; your conclusion is not connected with your premises; your friend Euclid would have been ashamed of it. "Anonymous, and therefore without authority!" I have noticed this solecism before; but as you frequently bring it forward—and indeed your book stands much in need of it—I will submit to your consideration another observation on the subject. The book called Fleta is anonymous; but it is not on that account without authority. Domesday book is anonymous, and was written above seven hundred years ago; yet our courts of law do not hold it to be without authority as to the facts related in it. Yes, you will say, but this book has been preserved with peculiar care amongst the records of the nation. And who told you that the Jews had no records, or that they did not preserve them with singular care? Josephus says the contrary; and in the Bible itself an appeal is made to many books which have perished; such as the book of Jasher, the book of Nathan, of Abijah, of Iddo, of Jehu, of natural history by Solomon, of the acts of Manasseh, and others which might be mentioned. If any one, having access to the journals of the lords and commons, to the books of the treasury, war-office, privy council, and other public documents,

should at this day write a history of the reigns of George the First and Second, and should publish it without his name, would any man, three or four hundreds or thousands of years hence, question the authority of that book, when he knew that the whole British nation had received it as an authentic book from the time of its first publication to the age in which he lived? This supposition is in point. The books of the Old Testament were composed from the records of the Jewish nation, and they have been received as true by that nation, from the time in which they were written to the present day. Dodsley's Annual Register is an anonymous book, we only know the name of its editor; the New Annual Register is an anonymous book; the Reviews are anonymous books; but do we, or will our posterity esteem those books of no authority? On the contrary, they are admitted at present, and will be received in after-ages as authoritative records of the civil, and military, and literary history of England and of Europe. So little foundation is there for our being startled by your assertion, "It is anonymous, and without authority."

If I am right in this reasoning, (and I protest to you that I do not see any error in it,) all the arguments you adduce in proof that the book of Joshua was not written by Joshua, nor that of Samuel by Samuel, are nothing to the purpose for which you have brought them forward: these books may be books of authority, though all you advance against the genuineness of them should be granted. No article of faith is injured by allowing that there is no such positive proof, when or by whom these and some other books of holy Scripture were written, as to exclude all possibility

of doubt and cavil. There is no necessity, indeed, to allow this. The chronological and historical difficulties, which others before you have produced, have been answered, and, as to the greatest part thereof, so well answered, that I will not waste the reader's time by entering into a particular examination of them.

You make yourself merry with what you call the tale of the sun standing still upon mount Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon; and you say that "the story detects itself, because there is not a nation in the world that knows any thing about it." How can you expect that there should, when there is not a nation in the world whose annals reach this era by many hundred years? It happens, however, that you are probably mistaken as to the fact; a confused tradition concerning this miracle, and a similar one in the time of Ahaz, when the sun went back ten degrees, has been preserved amongst one of the most ancient nations, as we are informed by one of the most ancient historians. Herodotus, in his *Euterpe*, speaking of the Egyptian priests, says—"They told me that the sun had four times deviated from his course, having twice risen where he uniformly goes down, and twice gone down where he uniformly rises. This however had produced no alteration in the climate of Egypt; the fruits of the earth and the phenomena of the Nile had always been the same."—(Beloe's Translation.) The last part of this observation confirms the conjecture, that this account of the Egyptian priests had a reference to the two miracles respecting the sun mentioned in Scripture; for they were not of that kind which could introduce any change in climates or seasons. You would have been

contented to admit the account of this miracle as a fine piece of poetical imagery: you may have seen some Jewish doctors, and some Christian commentators, who consider it as such, but improperly, in my opinion. I think it idle at least, if not impious, to undertake to explain how the miracle was performed; but one who is not able to explain the mode of doing a thing, argues ill if he hence infers that the thing was not done. We are perfectly ignorant how the sun was formed, how the planets were projected at the creation, how they are still retained in their orbits by the power of gravity; but we admit, notwithstanding, that the sun was formed, that the planets were then projected, and that they are still retained in their orbits. The machine of the universe is in the hand of God; he can stop the motion of any part, or of the whole of it, with less trouble and less danger of injuring it than you can stop your watch. In testimony of the reality of the miracle, the author of the book says—"Is not this written in the book of Jasher?" No author in his senses would have appealed, in proof of his veracity, to a book which did not exist, or in attestation of a fact which, though it did exist, was not recorded in it; we may safely therefore conclude, that, at the time the book of Joshua was written, there was such a book as the book of Jasher, and that the miracle of the sun's standing still was recorded in that book. But this observation, you will say, does not prove the fact of the sun's having stood still. I have not produced it as a proof of that fact; but it proves that the author of the book of Joshua believed the fact, that the people of Israel admitted the authority of the book of Jasher. An appeal to a fabulous book

would have been as senseless an insult upon their understanding, as it would have been upon ours had Rapin appealed to the Arabian Nights' Entertainments as a proof of the battle of Hastings.

I cannot attribute much weight to your argument against the genuineness of the book of Joshua, from its being said that—"Joshua burned Ai, and made it an heap for ever, even a desolation *unto this day.*" Joshua lived twenty-four years after the burning of Ai; and if he wrote his history in the latter part of his life, what absurdity is there in saying, Ai is still in ruins, or Ai is in ruins to this very day? A young man, who had seen the heads of the rebels in forty-five, when they were first stuck upon the poles at Temple-Bar, might, twenty years afterwards, in attestation of his veracity in speaking of the fact, have justly said—And they are there to this very day. Whoever wrote the Gospel of St. Matthew, it was written not many centuries, probably (I had almost said certainly) not a quarter of a century after the death of Jesus; yet the author, speaking of the potter's field which had been purchased by the chief priests with the money they had given to Judas to betray his Master, says that it was therefore called the field of blood *unto this day*; and in another place, he says, that the story of the body of Jesus being stolen out of the sepulchre was commonly reported among the Jews *until this day*. Moses, in his old age, had made use of a similar expression, when he put the Israelites in mind of what the Lord had done to the Egyptians in the Red Sea. "The Lord hath destroyed them unto this day." Deut. 11 : 4.

In the last chapter of the book of Joshua it is related

that Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and there, in the presence of the elders and principal men of Israel, he recapitulated, in a short speech, all that God had done for their nation from the calling of Abraham to that time, when they were settled in the land which God had promised to their forefathers. In finishing his speech, he said to them, "Choose you this day whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served, that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." And the people answered and said, "God forbid that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods." Joshua urged farther, that God would not suffer them to worship other gods in fellowship with him. They answered that "they would serve the Lord." Joshua then said to them, "Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the Lord to serve him." And they said, "We are witnesses." Here was a solemn covenant between Joshua, on the part of the Lord, and all the men of Israel, on their own part. The text then says, "So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem; and Joshua wrote these words in the book of the Law of God." Here is a proof of two things—first, that there was then, a few years after the death of Moses, existing a book called the Book of the Law of God; the same, without doubt, which Moses had written, and committed to the custody of the Levites, that it might be kept in the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that it might be a witness against them—secondly, that Joshua wrote a part at least of his own transactions in that very book, as an addition

to it. It is not a proof that he wrote all his own transactions in any book ; but I submit entirely to the judgment of every candid man, whether this proof of his having recorded a very material transaction does not make it probable that he recorded other material transactions ; that he wrote the chief part of the book of Joshua ; and that such things as happened after his death have been inserted in it by others, in order to render the history more complete.

The book of Joshua, chap. 6, ver. 26, is quoted in the first book of Kings, chap. 16 : 34. " In his (Ahab's) days did Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho ; he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his first born, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun." Here is a proof that the book of Joshua is older than the first book of Kings : but that is not all which may reasonably be inferred, I do not say proved, from this quotation. It may be inferred from the phrase, " according to the word of the Lord which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun," that Joshua *wrote down* the word which the Lord had spoken. In Baruch (which, though an apocryphal book, is authority for this purpose) there is a similar phrase—as thou spakest by thy servant Moses in the day when thou didst command him *to write thy law*.

I think it unnecessary to make any observations on what you say relative to the book of Judges ; but I cannot pass unnoticed your censure of the book of Ruth, which you call " an idle bungling story, foolishly told, nobody knows by whom, about a strolling country girl creeping sily to bed to her cousin Boaz : pretty stuff indeed," you exclaim, " to be called the word of God !"

It seems to me that you do not perfectly comprehend what is meant by the expression—the word of God—or the divine authority of the Scriptures: I will explain it to you in the words of Dr. Law, late bishop of Carlisle, and in those of St. Austin. My first quotation is from bishop Law's Theory of Religion, a book not undeserving your notice. "The true sense then of the *divine authority* of the books of the Old Testament, and which perhaps is enough to denominate them in general *divinely inspired*, seems to be this: that as in those times God has all along, besides the inspection or superintendency of his general providence, interfered upon particular occasions, by giving express commissions to some persons (thence called *prophets*) to declare his will in various manners and degrees of evidence, as best suited the occasion, time, and nature of the subject, and in all other cases left them wholly to themselves: in like manner he has interposed his more immediate assistance (and notified it to them, as they did to the world) in the *recording* of these revelations; so far as that was necessary, amidst the common (but from hence termed *sacred*) history of those times; and mixed with various other occurrences, in which the historian's own natural qualifications were sufficient to enable him to relate things with all the accuracy they required." The passage from St. Austin is this: "I am of opinion that those men to whom the Holy Ghost revealed what ought to be received as authoritative in religion, might write some things as men, with historical diligence, and other things as prophets, by divine inspiration; and that these things are so distinct, that the former may be attributed to themselves as contributing to the increase of



knowledge, and the latter to God speaking, by them, things appertaining to the authority of religion." Whether this opinion be right or wrong, I do not here inquire; it is the opinion of many learned men and good Christians; and if you will adopt it as your opinion, you will see cause, perhaps, to become a Christian yourself; and you will see cause to consider chronological, geographical, or genealogical errors—apparent mistakes or real contradictions as to historical facts—needless repetitions and trifling interpolations—indeed you will see cause to consider all the principal objections of your book to be absolutely without foundation. Only receive the Bible as composed by upright and well informed, though, in some points, fallible men, (for I exclude all fallibility when they profess to deliver the word of God,) and you must receive it as a book revealing to you, in many parts, the express will of God; and in other parts, relating to you the ordinary history of the times. Give but the authors of the Bible that credit which you give to other historians; believe them to deliver the word of God, when they tell you that they do so; believe, when they relate other things as of themselves and not of the Lord, that they wrote to the best of their knowledge and capacity, and you will be in your belief something very different from a deist; you may not be allowed to aspire to the character of an orthodox believer, but you will not be an unbeliever in the divine authority of the Bible, though you should admit human mistakes and human opinions to exist in some parts of it. This I take to be the first step towards the removal of the doubts of many sceptical men; and when they are advanced thus far, the grace of God assisting, a teachab. .

disposition and a pious intention may carry them on to perfection.

As to Ruth, you do an injury to her character. She was not a strolling country girl. She had been married ten years; and being left a widow without children, she accompanied her mother-in-law, returning into her native country, out of which, with her husband and her two sons, she had been driven by a famine. The disturbances in France have driven many men with their families to America; if, ten years hence, a woman, having lost her husband and her children, should return to France with a daughter-in-law, would you be justified in calling the daughter-in-law a strolling country girl?—"But she crept slyly to bed to her cousin Boaz." I do not find it so in the history—as a person imploring protection, she laid herself down at the foot of an aged kinsman's bed, and she rose up with as much innocence as she had laid herself down. She was afterward married to Boaz, and reputed by all her neighbors a virtuous woman; and they were more likely to know her character than you are. Whoever reads the book of Ruth, bearing in mind the simplicity of ancient manners, will find it an interesting story of a poor young woman, following in a strange land the advice, and affectionately attaching herself to the fortunes of the mother of her deceased husband.

The two books of Samuel come next under your review. You proceed to show that these books were not written by Samuel, that they are anonymous, and thence, you conclude, without authority. I need not here repeat what I have said upon the fallacy of your conclusion; and as to your proving that the books

were not written by Samuel, you might have spared yourself some trouble if you had recollected that it is generally admitted that Samuel did not write any part of the second book which bears his name, and only a part of the first. It would, indeed, have been an inquiry not undeserving your notice, in many parts of your work, to have examined what was the opinion of learned men respecting the authors of the several books of the Bible; you would have found that you were in many places fighting a phantom of your own raising, and proving what was generally admitted. Very little certainty, I think, can at this time be obtained on this subject; but that you may have some knowledge of what has been conjectured by men of judgment, I will quote to you a passage from Dr. Hartley's observations on Man. The author himself does not vouch for the truth of his observations, for he begins it with a supposition—"I suppose, then, that the Pentateuch consists of the writings of *Moses*, put together by *Samuel*, with a very few additions; that the books of Joshua and Judges were, in like manner, collected by him; and the book of Ruth, with the first part of the book of Samuel, written by him; that the latter part of the first book of Samuel, and the second book, were written by the prophets who succeeded Samuel, suppose *Nathan* and *Gad*; that the books of Kings and Chronicles are extracts from the records of the succeeding prophets concerning their own times, and from the public genealogical tables made by *Ezra*; that the books of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* are collections of like records, some written by *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*, and some by their predecessors; that the book of *Esther* was written by some

eminent Jew, in or near the times of the transactions there recorded, perhaps *Mordecai*; the book of Job by a Jew, of an uncertain time; the Psalms by *David*, and other pious persons; the books of Proverbs and Canticles by *Solomon*; the book of Ecclesiastes by *Solomon*, or perhaps by a Jew of later times, speaking in his person, but not with an intention to make him pass for the author; the prophecies by the prophets whose names they bear; and the books of the New Testament by the persons to whom they are usually ascribed." I have produced this passage to you, not merely to show you that, in a great part of your work, you are attacking what no person is interested in defending, but to convince you that a wise and good man, and a firm believer in revealed religion—for such was Dr. Hartley, and no priest—did not reject the anonymous books of the Old Testament as books without authority. I shall not trouble either you or myself with any more observations on that head; you may ascribe the two books of Kings and the two books of Chronicles to what authors you please; I am satisfied with knowing that the annals of the Jewish nation were written in the time of Samuel, and probably, in all succeeding times, by men of ability, who lived in or near the times of which they write. Of the truth of this observation we have abundant proof, not only from the testimony of Josephus and of the writers of the Talmuds, but from the Old Testament itself. I will content myself with citing a few places. "Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer." 1 Chron. 29 : 29. "Now the

rest of the acts of Solomon, first and last, are they not written in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer?" 2 Chron. 9 : 29. "Now the acts of Rehoboam, first and last, are they not written in the book of Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the seer, concerning genealogies?" 2 Chronicles, 12 : 15. "Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, first and last, behold they are written in the book of Jehu, the son of Hanani." 2 Chron. 20 : 34. Is it possible for writers to give a stronger evidence of their veracity, than by referring their readers to the books from which they had extracted the materials of their history ?

"The two books of Kings," you say, "are little more than a history of assassinations, treachery and war." That the kings of Israel and Judah were many of them very wicked persons, is evident from the history which is given of them in the Bible ; but it ought to be remembered that their wickedness is not to be attributed to their religion ; nor were the people of Israel chosen to be the people of God on account of their wickedness ; nor was their being chosen, a cause of it. One may wonder indeed, that having experienced so many singular marks of God's goodness towards their nation, they did not at once become, and continue to be, (what, however, they have long been,) strenuous advocates for the worship of one only God, the maker of heaven and earth. This was the purpose for which they were chosen, and this purpose has been accomplished. For above three-and-twenty hundred years, the Jews have uniformly witnessed, to all the nations of the earth, the

unity of God and his abomination of idolatry. But as you look upon "the appellation of the Jews being God's *chosen* people, as a *lie*, which the priests and leaders of the Jews had invented to cover the baseness of their own characters, and which Christian priests, sometimes as corrupt, and often as cruel, have professed to believe," I will plainly state to you the reasons which induce me to believe that it is no *lie*, and I hope they will be such reasons as you will not attribute either to cruelty or corruption.

To any one contemplating the universality of things and the fabric of nature, this globe of earth, with the men dwelling on its surface, will not appear (exclusive of the divinity of their souls) of more importance than a hillock of ants; all of which, some with corn, some with eggs, some without any thing, run hither and thither, bustling about a little heap of dust. This is a thought of the immortal Bacon; and it is admirably fitted to humble the pride of philosophy, attempting to prescribe forms to the proceedings, and bounds to the attributes of God. We may as easily circumscribe infinity as penetrate the secret purposes of the Almighty. There are but two ways by which I can acquire any knowledge of the Supreme Being—by reason, and by revelation; to you, who reject revelation, there is but one. Now, my reason informs me that God has made a great difference between the kinds of animals, with respect to their capacity of enjoying happiness. Every kind is perfect in its order; but if we compare different kinds together, one will appear to be greatly superior to another. An animal which has but one sense, has but one source of happiness; but if it be supplied with what is suited to that sense,

it enjoys all the happiness of which it is capable, and is in its nature perfect. Other sorts of animals, which have two or three senses, and which have also abundant means of gratifying them, enjoy twice or thrice as much happiness as those do which have but one. In the same sort of animals there is a great difference amongst individuals, one having the senses more perfect, and the body less subject to disease, than another. Hence, if I were to form a judgment of the divine goodness by this use of my reason, I could not but say that it was partial and unequal. "What shall we say then? Is God unjust? God forbid!" His goodness may be unequal without being imperfect; it must be estimated from the whole, and not from a part. Every order of beings is so sufficient for its own happiness, and so conducive at the same time to the happiness of every other, that, in one view, it seems to be made for itself alone, and in another, not for itself, but for every other. Could we comprehend the whole of the immense fabric which God hath formed, I am persuaded that we should see nothing but perfection, harmony and beauty in every part of it; but whilst we dispute about parts, we neglect the whole, and discern nothing but supposed anomalies and defects. The maker of a watch, or the builder of a ship, is not to be blamed because a spectator cannot discover either the beauty or the use of the disjointed parts. And shall we dare to accuse God of injustice, for not having distributed the gifts of nature in the same degree to all kinds of animals, when it is probable that this very inequality of distribution may be the means of producing the greatest sum total of happiness to the whole system? In exactly the same manner may we reason concerning

the acts of God's especial providence. If we consider any one act, such as that of appointing the Jews to be his peculiar people, as unconnected with every other, it may appear to be a partial display of his goodness; it may excite doubts concerning the wisdom or the benignity of his divine nature. But if we connect the history of the Jews with that of other nations, from the most remote antiquity to the present time, we shall discover that they were not chosen so much for their own benefit, or on account of their own merit, as for the general benefit of mankind. To the Egyptians, Chaldeans, Grecians, Romans, to all the people of the earth, they were formerly, and they are still to all civilized nations, a beacon set upon a hill, to warn them from idolatry, to light them to the sanctuary of a God, holy, just, and good. Why should we suspect such a dispensation of being a *lie*? when, even from the little which we can understand of it, we see that it is founded in wisdom, carried on for the general good, and analogous to all that reason teaches us concerning the nature of God.

Several things you observe are mentioned in the book of the Kings, such as the drying up of Jeroboam's hand, the ascent of Elijah into heaven, the destruction of the children who mocked Elisha, and the resurrection of a dead man: these circumstances being mentioned in the book of Kings, and not in that of Chronicles, is a proof to you that they are lies. I esteem it a very erroneous mode of reasoning, which, from the silence of one author concerning a particular circumstance, infers the want of veracity in another who mentions it, and this observation is still more cogent when applied to a book which is only a supplement to, or



abridgment of other books ; and under this description the book of Chronicles has been considered by all writers. But though you will not believe the miracle of the drying up of Jeroboam's hand, what can you say to the prophecy which was then delivered concerning the future destruction of the idolatrous altar of Jeroboam ? The prophecy is thus written, 1 Kings, 13 · 2, " Behold a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name, and upon thee (the altar) shall he offer the priests of the high places." Here is a clear prophecy ; the name, family, and office of a particular person are described in the year 975 (according to the Bible chronology) before Christ. About 350 years after the delivery of the prophecy you will find, by consulting the second book of Kings, (chap. 23 : 15, 16,) this prophecy fulfilled in all its parts.

You make a calculation that Genesis was not written till 800 years after Moses, and that it is of the same age, and you may probably think of the same authority, as Æsop's fables. You give, what you call the evidence of this, the air of a demonstration—" It has but two stages ; first, the account of the kings of Edom, mentioned in Genesis, is taken from Chronicles, and therefore the book of Genesis was written after the book of Chronicles :—secondly, the book of Chronicles was not begun to be written till after Zedekiah, in whose time Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem, 588 years before Christ, and more than 860 after Moses." Having answered this objection before, I might be excused taking any more notice of it ; but as you build much, in this place, upon the strength of your argument, I will show its weakness when it is properly stated. *A few verses in the book of Genesis could not*

be written by Moses; *therefore no part* of Genesis could be written by Moses: a child would deny your *therefore*. Again, a few verses in the book of Genesis could not be written by *Moses*, because they speak of kings of Israel, there having been no kings of Israel in the time of Moses; and *therefore* they could not be written by *Samuel*, or by *Solomon*, or any other person who lived after there were kings in Israel, except by the author of the book of Chronicles; this is also an illegitimate inference from your position. Again, a few verses in the book of Genesis are, word for word, the same as a few verses in the book of Chronicles; *therefore* the author of the book of Genesis must have taken them from Chronicles; another lame conclusion. Why might not the author of the book of Chronicles have taken them from Genesis, as he has taken many other genealogies, supposing them to have been inserted in Genesis by Samuel? But where, you may ask, could Samuel, or any other person, have found the account of the kings of Edom? Probably in the public records of the nation, which were certainly as open for inspection to Samuel, and the other prophets, as they were to the author of Chronicles. I hold it needless to employ more time on the subject.

## LETTER V.

At length you come to two books, Ezra and Nehemiah, which you allow to be genuine books, giving an account of the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity, about 536 years before Christ; but then you say, "those accounts are nothing to us, nor to any other persons, unless it be to the Jews, as a part of

the history of their nation : and there is just as much of the word of God in those books as there is in any of the histories of France, or in Rapin's History of England." Here let us stop a moment, and try if from your own concessions it be not possible to confute your argument. Ezra and Nehemiah, you grant, are genuine books—"but they are nothing to us." The very first verse of Ezra says—the prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled: is it nothing to us to know that Jeremiah was a true prophet? Do but grant that the supreme Being communicated to any of the sons of men a knowledge of future events, so that their predictions were plainly verified, and you will find little difficulty in admitting the truth of revealed religion. Is it nothing to us to know that, five hundred and thirty-six years before Christ, the books of Chronicles, Kings, Judges, Joshua, Deuteronomy, Numbers, Leviticus, Exodus, Genesis, every book the authority of which you have attacked, are all referred to by Ezra and Nehemiah as authentic books, containing the history of the Israelitish nation from Abraham to that very time? Is it nothing to us to know that the history of the Jews is true? It is every thing to us; for if that history be not true, Christianity must be false. The Jews are the root, we are the branches "grafted in amongst them;" to whom pertain "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and, whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen."

The history of the Old Testament has, without doubt some difficulties in it; but a minute philo-

sopher, who busies himself in searching them out, whilst he neglects to contemplate the harmony of all its parts, the wisdom and goodness of God displayed throughout the whole, appears to me to be like a purblind man, who, in surveying a picture, objects to the simplicity of the design and the beauty of the execution, from the asperities he has discovered in the canvass and the coloring. The history of the Old Testament, notwithstanding the real difficulties which occur in it, notwithstanding the scoffs and cavils of unbelievers, appears to me to have such internal evidences of its truth, to be so corroborated by the most ancient profane histories, so confirmed by the present circumstances of the world, that if I were not a Christian, I would become a Jew. You think this history to be a collection of lies, contradictions, and blasphemies: I look upon it to be the oldest, the truest, the most comprehensive, and the most important history in the world. I consider it as giving more satisfactory proofs of the being and attributes of God, of the origin and end of human kind, than ever was attained by the deepest researches of the most enlightened philosophers. The exercise of our reason in the investigation of truths respecting the nature of God and the future expectations of human kind, is highly useful; but I hope I shall be pardoned by the metaphysicians in saying that the chief utility of such disquisitions consists in this—that they make us acquainted with the weakness of our intellectual faculties. I do not presume to measure other men by my standard; you may have clearer notions than I am able to form of the infinity of space; of the eternity of duration; of necessary existence; of the connec-

tion between necessary existence and intelligence; between intelligence and benevolence; you may see nothing in the universe but organized matter; or, rejecting a material, you may see nothing but an ideal world. With a mind weary of conjecture, fatigued by doubt, sick of disputation, eager for knowledge, anxious for certainty, and unable to attain it by the best use of my reason in matters of the utmost importance, I have long ago turned my thoughts to an impartial examination of the proofs on which revealed religion is grounded, and I am convinced of its truth. This examination is a subject within the reach of human capacity: you have come to one conclusion respecting it, I have come to another; both of us cannot be right; may God forgive him that is in an error.

You ridicule, in a note, the story of an angel appearing to Joshua. Your mirth you will perceive to be misplaced, when you consider the design of this appearance: it was to assure Joshua, that the same God who had appeared to Moses, ordering him to pull off his shoes, because he stood on holy ground, had now appeared to himself. Was this no encouragement to a man who was about to engage in war with many nations? Had it no tendency to confirm his faith? Was it no lesson to him to obey in all things the commands of God, and to give the glory of his conquest to the author of them, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? As to your wit about pulling off the shoe, it originates, I think, in your ignorance; you ought to have known that this rite was an indication of reverence to the Divine presence; and that the custom of entering barefoot into their temples subsists, in some countries, to this day.

You allow the book of Ezra to be a genuine book; but that the author of it may not escape without a blow, you say that in matters of record it is not to be depended on, and as a proof of your assertion, you tell us that the total amount of the numbers who returned from Babylon does not correspond with the particulars; and that every child may have an argument for its infidelity, you display the particulars, and show your skill in arithmetic by summing them up. And can you suppose that Ezra, a man of great learning, knew so little of science, so little of the lowest branch of science, that he could not give his readers the sum-total of sixty particular sums? You know undoubtedly that the Hebrew letters denoted also numbers; and that there is such a similarity between some of these letters that it was extremely easy for a transcriber of a manuscript to mistake a כ for a ב (or 2 for 20) a ג for a ה (or 3 for 50) a ד for a ו (or a 5 for 200.) Now, what have we to do with numerical contradictions in the Bible, but to attribute them, wherever they occur, to this obvious source of error—the inattention of the transcriber in writing one letter for another that was like it?

I should extend these letters to a length troublesome to the reader, to you, and to myself, if I answered minutely every objection you have made, and rectified every error into which you have fallen; it may be sufficient briefly to notice some of the chief.

The character represented in Job under the name of Satan, is, you say, “the first and the only time this name is mentioned in the Bible.” Now, I find this name, as denoting an enemy, frequently occurring in the Old Testament: thus, 2 Sam. 19:22, “What hav

I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruah, that ye should this day be adversaries unto me?" In the original it is, satans unto me. Again, 1 Kings, 5 : 4, "The Lord my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent." In the original, neither Satan nor evil. I need not mention other places; these are sufficient to show that the word Satan, denoting an adversary, does occur in various places of the Old Testament; and it is extremely probable to me, that the root Satan was introduced in the Hebrew and other eastern languages to denote an adversary, from its having been the proper name of the great enemy of mankind. I know it is an opinion of Voltaire, that the word satan is not older than the Babylonian captivity: this is a mistake, for it is met with in the hundred and ninth psalm, which all allow to have been written by David, long before the captivity. Now we are upon this subject, permit me to recommend to your consideration the universality of the doctrine concerning an evil being, who, in the beginning of time, had opposed himself, who still continues to oppose himself to the supreme source of all good. Amongst all nations, in all ages, this opinion prevailed, that human affairs were subject to the will of the gods, and regulated by their interposition. Hence has been derived whatever we have read of the wandering stars of the Chaldeans, two of them beneficent and two malignant—hence the Egyptian *Typho* and *Osiris*—the Persian *Arimanius* and *Oromasdes*—the Grecian *celestial* and *infernal Jove*—the *Brama* and the *Zupay* of the Indians, Peruvians, Mexicans—the good and evil principle, by whatever names they may be called, of all other barbarous nations—and hence the structure of the whole book of Job,

in whatever light, of history or drama, it may be considered. Now, does it not appear reasonable to suppose that an opinion so ancient and so universal has arisen from tradition concerning the fall of our first parents; disfigured, indeed, and obscured, as all traditions must be, by many fabulous additions?

The Jews, you tell us, "never prayed but when they were in trouble." I do not believe this of the Jews; but that they prayed more fervently when they were in trouble than at other times, may be true of the Jews, and I apprehend is true of all nations and of all individuals. But "the Jews never prayed for any thing but victory, vengeance, and riches." Read Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, and blush for your assertion—illiberal and uncharitable in the extreme!

It appears, you observe, "to have been the custom of the heathens to personify both virtue and vice by statues and images, as is done now-a-days both by statuary and painting; but it does not follow from this that they worshiped them any more than we do." Not worshiped them! What think you of the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar set up? Was it not worshiped by the princes, the rulers, the judges, the people, the nations, and the languages of the Babylonian empire? Not worshiped them! What think you of the decree of the Roman senate for fetching the statue of the mother of the gods from Pessinum? Was it only that they might admire it as a piece of workmanship? Not worshiped them! "What man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshiper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?" Not worshiped them! The



worship was universal. "Every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of their high-places, which the Samaritans had made—the men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashima, and the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burnt their children in fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim." (2 Kings, chap. 17.) The heathens are much indebted to you for this curious apology for their idolatry; for a mode of worship the most cruel, senseless, impure, abominable, that can possibly disgrace the faculties of the human mind. Had this your conceit occurred in ancient times, it might have saved *Micah's teraphims, the golden calves of Jeroboam and of Aaron*, and quite superseded the necessity of the second commandment. Heathen morality has had its advocates before you; the facetious gentleman who pulled off his hat to the statue of Jupiter, that he might have a friend when heathen idolatry should again be in repute, seems to have had some foundation for his improper humor, some knowledge that certain men, esteeming themselves great philosophers, had entered into a conspiracy to abolish Christianity, some foresight of the consequences which will certainly attend their success.

It is an error, you say, to call the Psalms the Psalms of David. This error was observed by St. Jerome many hundred years before you were born; his words are, "We know that they are in error who attribute all the Psalms to David." You, I suppose, will not deny that David wrote some of them. Songs are of various sorts; we have hunting songs, drinking songs, fighting songs, love songs, foolish, wanton, wicked

songs; if you will have the "Psalms of David to be nothing but a collection from different song-writers," you must allow that the writers of them were inspired by no ordinary spirit; that it is a collection incapable of being degraded by the name you give it; that it greatly excels every other collection in matter and in manner. Compare the book of Psalms with the odes of Horace or Anacreon, with the hymns of Callimachus, the golden verses of Pythagoras, the choruses of the Greek tragedians, (no contemptible compositions any of these,) and you will quickly see how greatly it surpasses them all in piety of sentiment, in sublimity of expression, in purity of morality, and in rational theology.

As you esteem the Psalms of David a song-book, it is consistent enough in you to esteem the Proverbs of Solomon a jest-book: there have not come down to us above eight hundred of his jests; if we had the whole three thousand which he wrote, our mirth would become extreme. Let us open the book, and see what kind of jests it contains: take the very first as a specimen: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and instruction." Do you perceive any jest in this? The fear of the Lord! What Lord does Solomon mean? He means the Lord who took the posterity of Abraham to be his peculiar people; who redeemed that people from Egyptian bondage by a miraculous interposition of his power; who gave the law to Moses; who commanded the Israelites to exterminate the nations of Canaan. Now this Lord you will not fear; the jest says, you despise wisdom and instruction. Let us try again. "My son, hear the

instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother." If your heart has been ever touched by parental feelings you will see no jest in this. Once more. "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." These are the three first proverbs in Solomon's "jest-book;" if you read it through, it may not make you merry; I hope it will make you wise; that it will teach you, at least, the beginning of wisdom—the fear of that Lord whom Solomon feared. Solomon, you tell us, was witty; jesters are sometimes witty: but though all the world, from the time of the queen of Sheba, has heard of the wisdom of Solomon, his wit was never heard of before. There is a great difference, Mr. Locke teaches us, between wit and judgment, and there is a greater between wit and wisdom. Solomon "was wiser than Ethan the Ezahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol." These men you may think were jesters; and so you may call the seven wise men of Greece; but you will never convince the world that Solomon, who was wiser than them all, was nothing but a witty jester. As to the sins and debaucheries of Solomon, we have nothing to do with them but to avoid them; and to give full credit to his experience, when he preaches to us his admirable sermon on the vanity of every thing but piety and virtue.

Isaiah has a greater share of your abuse than any other writer in the Old Testament, and the reason of it is obvious—the prophecies of Isaiah have received such a full and circumstantial completion, that unless you can persuade yourself to consider the whole book (a few historical sketches excepted) "as one continued bombastical rant, full of extravagant metaphor,

without application, and destitute of meaning," you must of necessity allow its divine authority. You compare the burden of Babylon, the burden of Moab, the burden of Damascus, and the other denunciations of the prophet against cities and kingdoms, to the story "of the knight of the burning mountain, the story of Cinderella, &c." I may have read these stories, but I remember nothing of the subjects of them; I have read also Isaiah's burden of Babylon, and I have compared it with the past and present state of Babylon, and the comparison has made such an impression on my mind, that it will never be effaced from my memory. I shall never cease to believe that the Eternal alone, by whom things future are more distinctly known than past or present things are to man, that the eternal God alone could have dictated to the prophet Isaiah the subject of the burden of Babylon.

The latter part of the forty-fourth and the beginning of the forty-fifth chapter of Isaiah are, in your opinion, so far from being written by Isaiah, that they could only have been written by some person who lived at least an hundred and fifty years after Isaiah was dead. These chapters, you go on, "are a compliment to Cyrus, who permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity, above an hundred and fifty years after the death of Isaiah." And is it for this, sir, that you accuse the church of audacity, and the priests of ignorance, in imposing, as you call it, this book upon the world as the writing of Isaiah? What shall be said of you, who, either designedly or ignorantly, represent one of the most clear and important prophecies in the Bible as an histori-

cal compliment, written above an hundred and fifty years after the death of the prophet? We contend, sir, that this is a prophecy and not a history; that God called *Cyrus* by his name, declared that he should conquer Babylon, and described the means by which he should do it, above an hundred years before *Cyrus* was born, and when there was no probability of such an event. *Porphyry* could not resist the evidence of *Daniel's* prophecies, but by saying that they were forged after the events predicted had taken place; *Voltaire* could not resist the evidence of the prediction of *Jesus* concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, but by saying that the account was written after Jerusalem had been destroyed; and you, at length, (though, for aught I know, you may have had predecessors in this presumption) unable to resist the evidence of *Isaiah's* prophecies, contend that they are bombastical rant, without application, though the application is circumstantial; and destitute of meaning, though the meaning is so obvious that it cannot be mistaken; and that one of the most remarkable of them is not a prophecy, but a historical compliment written after the event. We will not, sir, give up *Daniel* and *St. Matthew* to the impudent assertions of *Porphyry* and *Voltaire*, nor will we give up *Isaiah* to your assertion. Proof, proof is what we require, and not assertion; we will not relinquish our religion in obedience to your abusive assertion respecting the prophets of God. That the wonderful absurdity of this hypothesis may be more obvious to you, I beg you to consider that *Cyrus* was a Persian, had been brought up in the religion of his country, and was probably addicted to the magian superstition of two

independent beings equal in power but different in principle, one the author of light and of all good, the other the author of darkness and all evil. Now, is it probable that a captive Jew, meaning to compliment the greatest prince in the world, should be so stupid as to tell the prince his religion was a lie? "I am the Lord, and there is none else: I form the *light* and create *darkness*, I make peace and create evil: I the Lord do all these things."

But if you will persevere in believing that the prophecy concerning Cyrus was written after the event, peruse the burden of Babylon: was that also written after the event? Were the Medes *then* stirred up against Babylon? Was Babylon, the glory of the kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees, *then* overthrown, and become as Sodom and Gomorrah? Was it *then* uninhabited? Was it *then* neither fit for the Arabian's tent nor the shepherd's fold? Did the wild beasts of the desert *then* lie there? Did the wild beasts of the islands *then* cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant places? Were Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, the son and the grandson, *then* cut off? Was Babylon *then* become a possession of the bittern, and pools of water? Was it *then* swept with the besom of destruction, so swept that the world knows not where to find it?

I am unwilling to attribute bad designs, deliberate wickedness to you or to any man; I cannot avoid believing that you think you have truth on your side and that you are doing service to mankind in endeavoring to root out what you esteem superstition. What I blame you for is this—that you have attempted to lessen the authority of the Bible by ridicule more

than by reason ; that you have brought forward every petty objection which your ingenuity could discover, or your industry pick up from the writings of others, and, without taking any notice of the answers which have been repeatedly given to these objections, you urge and enforce them as if they were new. There is certainly some novelty at least in your manner, for you go beyond all others in boldness of assertion and in profaneness of argumentation ; Bolingbroke and Voltaire must yield the palm of scurrility to Thomas Paine.

Permit me to state to you what would, in my opinion, have been a better mode of proceeding—better suited to the character of an honest man, sincere in his endeavors to search out truth. Such a man, in reading the Bible, would, in the first place, examine whether the Bible attributed to the Supreme Being any attributes repugnant to holiness, truth, justice, goodness ; whether it represented him as subject to human infirmities ; whether it excluded him from the government of the world, or assigned the origin of it to chance and an eternal conflict of atoms. Finding nothing of this kind in the Bible, (for the destruction of the Canaanites by his express command I have shown not to be repugnant to his moral justice,) he would, in the second place, consider that the Bible being, as to many of its parts, a very old book, and written by various authors and at different and distant periods, there might probably occur some difficulties and apparent contradictions in the historical part of it ; he would endeavor to remove these difficulties, to reconcile these apparent contradictions, by the rules of such sound criticism as he would use in

examining the contents of any other book ; and if he found that most of them were of a trifling nature, arising from short additions inserted into the text as explanatory and supplemental, or from mistakes and omissions of transcribers, he would infer that all the rest were capable of being accounted for, though he was not able to do it ; and he would be the more willing to make this concession, from observing that there ran through the whole book a harmony and connection utterly inconsistent with every idea of forgery and deceit. He would then, in the third place, observe that the miraculous and historical parts of this book were so intermixed that they could not be separated, and that they must either both be true, or both false ; and from finding that the historical part was as well or better authenticated than that of any other history, he would admit the miraculous part ; and to confirm himself in this belief, he would advert to the prophecies, well knowing that the prediction of things to come was as certain a proof of the Divine interposition as the performance of a miracle could be. If he should find, as he certainly would, that many ancient prophecies had been fulfilled in all their circumstances, and that some were fulfilling at this very day, he would not suffer a few seeming or real difficulties to overbalance the weight of the accumulated evidence for the truth of the Bible. Such, I presume to think, would be a proper conduct in all those who are desirous of forming a rational and impartial judgment on the subject of revealed religion.

To return—

As to your observation that the book of Isaiah is (at least in translation) that kind of composition and



false taste which is properly called prose run mad, I have only to remark that your taste for Hebrew poetry, even judging of it from the translation, would be more correct if you would suffer yourself to be informed on the subject by Bishop Lowth, who tells you in his *Prelections*—"that a poem translated literally from the Hebrew into any other language, whilst the same forms of the sentences remain, will still retain, even as far as relates to versification, much of its native dignity, and a faint appearance of versification." If this is what you mean by prose run mad, your observation may be admitted.

You explain at some length your notion of the misapplication made by St. Matthew of the prophecy in Isaiah—"Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son." That passage has been handled largely and minutely by almost every commentator, and it is too important to be handled superficially by any one. I am not on the present occasion concerned to explain it. It is quoted by you to prove—and it is the only instance you produce—that Isaiah was "a lying prophet and an impostor." Now, I maintain that this very instance proves that he was a true prophet, and no impostor. The history of the prophecy, as delivered in the seventh chapter, is this: Rezin king of Syria, and Pekah king of Israel, made war upon Ahaz king of Judah; not merely, or, perhaps, not at all, for the sake of plunder or the conquest of territory, but with a declared purpose of making an entire revolution in the government of Judah, of destroying the royal house of David, and of placing another family on the throne. Their purpose is thus expressed—"Let us go up against Judah and vex it, and let us make a

breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal." Now, what did the Lord commission Isaiah to say to Ahaz? Did he commission him to say, the kings shall not vex thee? No. The kings shall not conquer thee? No. The kings shall not succeed against thee? No. He commissioned him to say: "It (the purpose of the two kings) shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass." I demand, did it stand? did it come to pass? Was any revolution effected? Was the royal house of David dethroned and destroyed? Was Tabeal ever made king of Judah? No. The prophecy was perfectly accomplished. You say, "Instead of these two kings failing in their attempt against Ahaz, they succeeded; Ahaz was defeated and destroyed." I deny the fact; Ahaz was defeated, but was not destroyed; and even the "two hundred thousand women, and sons, and daughters," whom you represent as carried into captivity, were not carried into captivity; they were made captives, but they were not carried into captivity; for the chief men of Samaria, being admonished by a prophet, would not suffer Pekah to bring the captives into the land—"They rose up and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat, and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses (some humanity, you see, amongst those Israelites whom you every where represent as barbarous brutes) and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm-trees, to their brethren." 2 Chron. 28 : 15. The kings did fail in their attempt; their attempt was to destroy the house of David, and to make a revolution; but they made no revolution,

they did not destroy the house of David; for Ahaz slept with his fathers, and Hezekiah his son, of the house of David, reigned in his stead.

### LETTER VI.

After what I conceive to be a great misrepresentation of the character and conduct of Jeremiah, you bring forward an objection which Spinoza and others before you had much insisted upon, though it is an objection which neither affects the genuineness nor the authenticity of the book of Jeremiah, any more than the blunder of a bookbinder, in misplacing the sheets of your performance, would lessen its authority. The objection is, that the book of Jeremiah has been put together in a disordered state. It is acknowledged that the order of time is not every where observed; but the cause of the confusion is not known. Some attribute it to *Baruch* collecting into one volume all the several prophecies which Jeremiah had written, and neglecting to put them in their proper places. Others think that the several parts of the work were at first properly arranged, but that, through accident or the carelessness of transcribers, they were deranged. Others contend that there is no confusion; that prophecy differs from history in not being subject to an accurate observance of time and order. But, leaving this matter to be settled by critical discussion, let us come to a matter of greater importance—to your charge against Jeremiah for his duplicity, and for his false prediction. First, as to his duplicity.

Jeremiah, on account of his having boldly predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, had been thrust into a

miry dungeon by the princes of Judah who sought his life; there he would have perished had not one of the eunuchs taken compassion on him and petitioned king Zedekiah in his favor, saying, "These men (the princes) have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, (no small testimony this of the probity of the prophet's character,) whom they have cast into the dungeon, and he is like to die for hunger." On this representation Jeremiah was taken out of the dungeon by an order from the king, who soon afterwards sent privately for him, and desired him to conceal nothing from him, binding himself by an oath, that, whatever might be the nature of his prophecy, he would not put him to death, or deliver him into the hands of the princes who sought his life. Jeremiah delivered to him the purpose of God respecting the fate of Jerusalem. The conference being ended, the king, anxious to perform his oath to preserve the life of the prophet, dismissed him, saying, "Let no man know of these words, and thou shalt not die. But if the princes hear that I have talked with thee, and they come unto thee, and say unto thee, Declare unto us now what thou hast said unto the king, hide it not from us, and we will not put thee to death; also what the king said unto thee: then thou shalt say unto them, I presented my supplication before the king, that he would not cause me to return to Jonathan's house to die there. Then came all the princes unto Jeremiah and asked him, and he told them according to all these words that the king had commanded." Thus, you remark, "this man of God, as he is called, could tell a lie, or very strongly prevaricate; for certainly he did not go to Zedekiah to make his supplication, neither did he

make it." It is not said that he told the princes he went to make his supplication, but that he presented it. Now, it is said in the preceding chapter that he did make the supplication, and it is probable that in this conference he renewed it; but be that as it may, I contend that Jeremiah was not guilty of duplicity, or, in more intelligible terms, that he did not violate any law of nature or of civil society, in what he did on this occasion. He told the truth, in part, to save his life; and he was under no obligation to tell the whole to men who were certainly his enemies, and no good subjects to his king. "In a matter (says Puffendorf) which I am not obliged to declare to another, if I cannot, with safety, conceal the whole, I may fairly discover no more than a part." Was Jeremiah under any obligation to declare to the princes what had passed in his conference with the king? You may as well say that the house of lords has a right to compel privy counsellors to reveal the king's secrets. The king cannot justly require a privy counsellor to tell a lie for him, but he may require him not to divulge his counsels to those who have no right to know them. Now for the false prediction—I will give the description of it in your own words.

In the 34th chapter is a prophecy of Jeremiah to Zedekiah, in these words, ver. 2: "Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and will burn it with fire; and thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but thou shalt surely be taken and delivered into his hand; and thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth, and thou shalt go to Babylon. *Yet hear the word of the Lord, O*

*Zedekiah, king of Judah, thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not die by the sword, but thou shalt die in peace; and with the burnings of thy fathers, the former kings that were before thee, so shall they burn odors for thee, and will lament thee, saying, Ah! Lord! for I have pronounced the word, saith the Lord."*

"Now, instead of Zedekiah beholding the eyes of the king of Babylon, and speaking with him mouth to mouth, and dying in peace, and with the burning of odors, as at the funeral of his fathers, (as Jeremiah had declared the Lord himself had pronounced,) the reverse, according to the 52d chapter, was the case; it is there stated, verse 10, 'that the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes; then he put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death.' What can we say of these prophets, but that they are impostors and liars?" I can say this, that the prophecy you have produced was fulfilled in all its parts: and what then shall be said of those who call Jeremiah a liar and an impostor? Here then we are fairly at issue—you affirm that the prophecy was not fulfilled, and I affirm that it was fulfilled in all its parts. "I will give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire:" so says the prophet; what says the history? "They (the forces of the king of Babylon) burnt the house of God, and brake down the walls of Jerusalem, and burnt all the places thereof with fire." 2 Chron. 36: 19. "Thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but shalt surely be *taken* and *delivered* into his hand:" so says the prophet; what says the history? "The

me: of war fled by night, and the king went the way towards the plain; and the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho; and all his army were scattered from him; so they *took* the king and *brought him up to the king of Babylon, to Riblah.*" 2 Kings, 25 : 5. The prophet goes on, "Thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth." No pleasant circumstance this to Zedekiah, who had provoked the king of Babylon by revolting from him! The history says, "The king of Babylon gave judgment upon Zedekiah," or, as it is more literally rendered from the Hebrew, "*Spake judgment with him at Riblah.*" The prophet concludes this part with, "And thou shalt go to Babylon;" the history says, "The king of Babylon bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death." Jer. 52 : 11. "Thou shalt not die by the sword." He did not die by the sword, he did not fall in battle. "But thou shalt die in peace." He did die in peace, he neither expired on the rack or on the scaffold; was neither strangled nor poisoned; no unusual fate of captive kings! He died peaceably in his bed, though that bed was in a prison. "And with the burnings of thy fathers shall they burn odors for thee." I cannot prove from the history that this part of the prophecy was accomplished, nor can you prove that it was not. The probability is, that it was accomplished; and I have two reasons on which I ground this probability. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, to say nothing of other Jews, were men of great authority in the court of the king of Babylon, before and after the commencement of the imprisonment

of Zedekiah; and Daniel continued in power till the subversion of the kingdom of Babylon by Cyrus. Now, it seems to me to be very probable that Daniel and the other great men of the Jews would both have inclination to request, and influence enough with the king of Babylon to obtain, permission to bury their deceased prince Zedekiah after the manner of his fathers. But if there had been no Jews at Babylon of consequence enough to make such a request, still it is probable that the king of Babylon would have ordered the Jews to bury and lament their departed prince after the manner of their country. Monarchs, like other men, are conscious of the instability of human condition; and when the pomp of war has ceased, when the insolence of conquest is abated, and the fury of resentment subsided, they seldom fail to revere royalty even in its ruins; and grant, without reluctance, proper obsequies to the remains of captive kings.

You profess to have been particular in treating of the books ascribed to Isaiah and Jeremiah. Particular! in what? You have particularized two or three passages, which you have endeavored to represent as objectionable, and which I hope have been shown, to the reader's satisfaction, to be not justly liable to your censure; and you have passed over all the other parts of these books without notice. Had you been particular in your examination, you would have found cause to admire the probity and the intrepidity of the characters of the authors of them; you would have met with many instances of sublime composition, and, what is of more consequence, with many instances of prophetic veracity. Particularities of these kinds you have wholly overlooked. I cannot account for this; I have



no right, no inclination to call you a dishonest man; am I justified in considering you as a man not altogether destitute of ingenuity, but so entirely under the dominion of prejudice in every thing respecting the Bible, that, like a corrupted judge, previously determined to give sentence on one side, you are negligent in the examination of the truth?

You proceed to the rest of the prophets, and you take them collectively, carefully however selecting for your observations such peculiarities as are best calculated to render, if possible, the prophets odious or ridiculous in the eyes of your readers. You confound prophets with poets and musicians: I would distinguish them thus: many prophets were poets and musicians, but all poets and musicians were not prophets. Prophecies were often delivered in poetic language and measure; but flights and metaphors of the Jewish poets have not, as you affirm, been foolishly erected into what are now called prophecies; they are now called, and have always been called, prophecies; because they were real predictions, some of which have received, some are now receiving, and all will receive their full accomplishment.

That there were false prophets, witches, necromancers, conjurers, fortune-tellers among the Jews, no person will attempt to deny; no nation, barbarous or civilized, has been without them; but when you would degrade the prophets of the Old Testament to a level with these conjuring, dreaming, strolling gentry; when you would represent them as spending their lives in fortune-telling, casting nativities, predicting riches, fortunate or unfortunate marriages, conjuring for lost goods, &c. I must be allowed to

say that you wholly mistake their office and misrepresent their character: their office was to convey to the children of Israel the commands, the promises, the threatenings of Almighty God; and their character was that of men sustaining, with fortitude, persecution in the discharge of their duty. There were false prophets in abundance amongst the Jews; and if you oppose these to the true prophets, and call them both party prophets, you have the liberty of doing so, but you will not thereby confound the distinction between truth and falsehood. False prophets are spoken of with detestation in many parts of Scripture, particularly by Jeremiah, who accuses them of prophesying lies in the name of the Lord, saying, "I have dreamed, I have dreamed. Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues and say, He saith; that prophecy false dreams, and cause my people to err by their lies and by their lightness." Jeremiah cautions his countrymen against giving credit to their prophets, to their diviners, to their dreamers, to their enchanters, to their sorcerers, which speak unto you, saying, "Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon." You cannot think more contemptibly of these gentry than they were thought of by the true prophets at the time they lived; but, as Jeremiah says on this subject, "what is the chaff to the wheat?" what are the false prophets to the true ones? Every thing good is liable to abuse; but who argues against the use of a thing from the abuse of it? against physicians, because there are pretenders to physic? Was Isaiah a fortune-teller predicting riches, when he said to king Hezekiah, "Behold, the days come that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have

laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." Fortune-tellers generally predict good luck to their simple customers, that they may make something by their trade; but Isaiah predicts to a monarch desolation of his country and ruin of his family. This prophecy was spoken in the year before Christ 713; and, above a hundred years afterwards, it was accomplished; when Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem, and carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house, (2 Kings, 24 : 13,) and when he commanded the master of the eunuchs (Dan. 1 : 3,) that he should take certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes, and educate them for three years, till they were able to stand before the king.

Jehoram king of Israel, Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and the king of Edom, going with their armies to make war on the king of Moab, came into a place where there was no water either for their men or cattle. In this distress they waited upon Elisha (a high honor for one of your conjurers) by the advice of Jehoshaphat, who knew that the word of the Lord was with him. The prophet, on seeing Jehoram, an idolatrous prince, who had revolted from the worship of the true God, come to consult him, said to him, "Get thee to the prophets of thy father and the prophets of thy mother." This, you think, shows Elisha to have been a party prophet, full of venom and vulgarity. It shows him to have been a man of great courage, who

respected the dignity of his own character, the sacredness of his office as a prophet of God, whose duty it was to reprove the wickedness of kings, as of other men. He ordered them to make the valley where they were, full of ditches. This, you say, "every countryman could have told, that the way to get water was to dig for it." But this is not a true representation of the case: the ditches were not dug that water might be got by digging for it, but that they might hold the water when it should miraculously come, "without wind or rain," from another country; and it did come "from the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water." As to Elisha's cursing the little children who had mocked him, and their destruction in consequence of his imprecation, the whole story must be taken together. The provocation he received is, by some, considered as an insult offered to him, not as a man, but as a prophet; and that the persons who offered it were not what we understand by little children, but grown up youths; the term child being applied, in the Hebrew language, to grown up persons. Be this as it may, the cursing was the act of the prophet; had it been a sin, it would not have been followed by a miraculous destruction of the offenders; for this was the act of God, who best knows who deserve punishment. What effect such a signal judgment had on the idolatrous inhabitants of the land, is nowhere said; but it is probable it was not without a good effect.

Ezekiel and Daniel lived during the Babylonian captivity; you allow their writings to be genuine. In this you differ from some of the greatest adversaries of Christianity; and, in my opinion, cut up, by this

concession, the very root of your whole performance. It is next to an impossibility for any man, who admits the book of Daniel to be a genuine book, and who examines that book with intelligence and impartiality, to refuse his assent to the truth of Christianity. As to your saying that the interpretations which commentators and priests have made of these books only show the fraud, or the extreme folly to which credulity and priestcraft can go, I consider it as nothing but a proof of the extreme folly or fraud to which prejudice and infidelity can carry a minute philosopher. You profess a fondness for science; I will refer you to a scientific man, who was neither a commentator nor a priest—to Ferguson. In a tract entitled “The year of our Savior’s crucifixion ascertained; and the darkness, at the time of his crucifixion proved to be supernatural,” this real philosopher interprets the remarkable prophecy in the 9th chapter of Daniel, and concludes his dissertation in the following words: “Thus we have an astronomical demonstration of the truth of this ancient prophecy, seeing that the prophetic year of the Messiah’s being cut off was the very same with the astronomical.” I have somewhere read an account of a solemn disputation which was held at Venice, in the last century, between a Jew and a Christian: the Christian strongly argued from Daniel’s prophecy of the seventy weeks, that Jesus was the Messiah whom the Jews had long expected, from the predictions of their prophets, the learned Rabbi who presided at this disputation, was so forcibly struck by the argument, that he put an end to the business by saying, “Let us shut up our Bibles; for if we proceed in the examination of this pro-

phesy, it will make us all become Christians." Was it a similar apprehension which deterred you from so much as opening the book of Daniel? You have not produced from it one exceptionable passage. I hope you will read that book with attention, with intelligence, and with an unbiassed mind follow the advice of our Savior when he quoted this prophecy, "Let him that readeth understand," and I shall not despair of your conversion from deism to Christianity.

In order to discredit the authority of the books which you allow to be genuine, you form a strange and prodigious hypothesis concerning Ezekiel and Daniel, for which there is no manner of foundation either in history or probability. You suppose these two men to have had no dreams, no visions, no revelations from God Almighty; but to have pretended to these things; and, under that disguise, to have carried on an enigmatical correspondence relative to the recovery of their country from the Babylonian yoke. That any man in his senses should frame or adopt such an hypothesis, and should have so little regard to his own reputation as an impartial inquirer after truth, so little respect for the understanding of his readers, as to obtrude it on the world, would have appeared an incredible circumstance, had not you made it a fact.

You quote a passage from Ezekiel: in the 29th chapter, ver. 11, speaking of Egypt, it is said, "No foot of man shall pass through it, nor foot of beast shall pass through it, neither shall it be inhabited forty years:" this, you say, "never came to pass, and consequently it is false, as all the books I have already reviewed are." Now that this did come to pass, we

have, as Bishop Newton observes, “the testimonies of Megasthenes and Berosus, two heathen historians, who lived about 300 years before Christ; one of whom affirms expressly that Nebuchadnezzar conquered the greater part of Africa; and the other affirms it in effect, in saying, that when Nebuchadnezzar heard of the death of his father, having settled his affairs *in Egypt*, and committed the captives whom he took in Egypt to the care of some of his friends to bring them after him, he hasted directly to Babylon.” And if we had been possessed of no testimony in support of the prophecy, it would have been a hasty conclusion that the prophecy never came to pass; the history of Egypt, at so remote a period, being no where accurately and circumstantially related. I admit that no period can be pointed out, from the age of Ezekiel to the present, in which there was no foot of man or beast to be seen for forty years in all Egypt; but some think that only a part of Egypt is here spoken of; and surely you do not expect a literal accomplishment of a hyperbolical expression, denoting great desolation; importing that the trade of Egypt, which was carried on then, as at present, by caravans, by the foot of man and beast, should be annihilated. Had you taken the trouble to have looked a little further into the book from which you have made your quotation, you would have there seen a prophecy delivered above two thousand years ago, and which has been fulfilling from that time to this: “Egypt shall be the basest of the kingdoms, neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations—there shall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt.” This you may call a dream, a vision, a lie: I esteem it a wonderful prophecy; for “as is the prophecy, so

has been the event. Egypt was conquered by the Babylonians; and after the Babylonians, by the Persians; and after the Persians it became subject to the Macedonians; and after the Macedonians, to the Romans; and after the Romans, to the Saracens; and then to the Mamelukes; and is now a province of the Turkish empire."

Suffer me to produce to you from this author, not an enigmatical letter to Daniel respecting the recovery of Jerusalem from the hands of the king of Babylon, but an enigmatical prophecy concerning Zedekiah the king of Jerusalem, before it was taken by the Chaldeans: "I will bring him (Zedekiah) to Babylon, to the land of the Chaldeans; yet he shall not see it, though he shall die there." How! not see Babylon, when he should die there? How, moreover, is this consistent, you may ask, with what Jeremiah had foretold—that Zedekiah should see the eyes of the king of Babylon? This darkness of expression, and apparent contradiction between the two prophets, induced Zedekiah (as Josephus informs us) to give no credit to either of them; yet he unhappily experienced (and the fact is worthy of your observation) the truth of them both. He saw the eyes of the king of Babylon, not at Babylon, but at Riblah; his eyes were there put out; and he was carried to Babylon, yet he saw it not; and thus were the predictions of both the prophets verified, and the enigma of Ezekial explained.

As to your wonderful discovery that the prophecy of Jonah is a book of some Gentile, "and that it has been written as a fable, to expose the nonsense and to satirize the vicious and malignant character of a



Bible prophet, or a predicting priest," I shall put it on the same shelf with your hypothesis concerning the conspiracy of Daniel and Ezekiel, and shall not say another word about it.

You conclude your objections to the Old Testament in a triumphant style; an angry opponent would say, in a style of extreme arrogance and sottish self-sufficiency. "I have gone," you say, "through the Bible (mistaking here, as in other places, the Old Testament for the Bible) as a man would go through a wood, with an ax on his shoulders, and fell trees: here they lie; and the priests, if they can, may replant them. They may, perhaps, stick them in the ground, but they will never grow." And is it possible that you think so highly of your performance as to believe that you have thereby demolished the authority of a book which Newton himself esteemed the most authentic of all histories; which, by its celestial light illumines the darkest ages of antiquity; which is the touchstone whereby we are enabled to distinguish between true and fabulous theology, between the God of Israel, holy, just, and good, and the impure rabble of heathen Baalim; which has been thought, by competent judges, to have afforded matter for the laws of Solon, and a foundation for the philosophy of Plato; which has been illustrated by the labor of learning in all ages and countries; and been admired and venerated for its piety, its sublimity, its veracity, by all who were able to read and understand it? No, sir; you have gone indeed through the wood, with the best intention in the world to cut it down; but you have merely busied yourself in exposing to vulgar contempt a few unsightly shrubs, which good

men had wisely concealed from public view; you have entangled yourself in thickets of thorns and briars; you have lost your way on the mountains of Lebanon; the goodly cedar trees whereof, lamenting the madness and pitying the blindness of your rage against them, have scorned the blunt edge and the base temper of your ax, and laughed, unhurt, at the feebleness of your strokes.

In plain language, you have gone through the Old Testament hunting after difficulties; and you have found some real ones; these you have endeavored to magnify into insurmountable objections to the authority of the whole book. When it is considered that the Old Testament is composed of several books, written by different authors and at different periods, from Moses to Malachi, comprising an abstracted history of a particular nation for above a thousand years, I think the real difficulties which occur in it are much fewer and of much less importance than could reasonably have been expected. Apparent difficulties you have represented as real ones, without hinting at the manner in which they have been explained. You have ridiculed things held most sacred, and calumniated characters esteemed most venerable; you have excited the scoffs of the profane, increased the scepticism of the doubtful, shaken the faith of the unlearned, suggested cavils to the "disputers of this world," and perplexed the minds of honest men who wish to worship the God of their fathers in sincerity and truth. This and more you have done in going through the Old Testament; but you have not so much as glanced at the great design of the whole, at the harmony and mutual dependance of the several parts.

You have said nothing of the wisdom of God in selecting a particular people from the rest of mankind, not for their own sakes, but that they might witness to the whole world, in successive ages, his existence and attributes; that they might be an instrument of subverting idolatry, and of declaring the name of the God of Israel throughout the whole earth. It was through this nation that the Egyptians saw the wonders of God; that the Canaanites (whom wickedness had made a reproach to human nature) felt his judgments; that the Babylonians issued their decrees, "that none should dare to speak amiss of the God of Israel; that all should fear and tremble before him;" and it is through them that you and I, and all the world, are not at this day worshipers of idols. You have said nothing of the goodness of God in promising that, through the seed of Abraham, all the nations of the earth were to be blessed; that the desire of all nations, the blessing of Abraham to the Gentiles, should come. You have passed by all the prophecies respecting the coming of the Messiah: though they absolutely fixed the time of his coming, and of his being cut off; described his office, character, condition, sufferings, and death, in so circumstantial a manner that we cannot but be astonished at the accuracy of their completion in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. You have neglected noticing the testimony of the whole Jewish nation to the truth both of the natural and miraculous facts recorded in the Old Testament. That we may better judge of the weight of this testimony, let us suppose that God should now manifest himself to us, as we contend he did to the Israelites in Egypt, in the desert, and in the land of Canaan.

and that he should continue these manifestations of himself to our posterity for a thousand years or more, punishing or rewarding them according as they disobeyed or obeyed his commands; what would you expect would be the issue? You would expect that our posterity would, in a remote period of time, adhere to their God, and maintain, against all opponents, the truth of the books in which the dispensations of God to us and to our successors had been recorded. They would not yield to the objections of men, who, not having experienced the same divine government, should, for want of such experience, refuse assent to their testimony. No. They would be to the then surrounding nations, what the Jews are to us, witnesses of the existence and of the moral government of God.

### LETTER VII.

“The New Testament, they tell us, is founded upon the prophecies of the Old; if so, it must follow the fate of its foundation.” Thus you open your attack upon the New Testament; and I agree with you, that the New Testament must follow the fate of the Old; and that fate is to remain unimpaired by such efforts as you have made against it. The New Testament, however, is not founded solely on the prophecies of the Old. If a heathen from Athens or Rome, who had never heard of the prophecies of the Old Testament, had been an eye-witness of the miracles of Jesus, he would have made the same conclusion that the Jew Nicodemus did: “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.”

Our Savior tells the Jews, "Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me ; for he wrote of me ;" and he bids them search the Scriptures, for they testified of him. But, notwithstanding this appeal to the prophecies of the Old Testament, Jesus said to the Jews, "Though ye believe not me, believe the works"—"believe me for the very works' sake." "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin." These are sufficient proofs that the truth of Christ's mission was not even to the Jews, much less to the Gentiles, founded solely on the truth of the prophecies of the Old Testament. So that if you could prove some of these prophecies to have been misapplied, and not completed in the person of Jesus, the truth of the Christian religion would not thereby be overturned. That Jesus of Nazareth was the person in whom all the prophecies, direct and typical, in the Old Testament, respecting the Messiah, were fulfilled, is a proposition founded on those prophecies, and to be proved by comparing them with the history of his life. That Jesus was *a* prophet sent from God, is one proposition ; that Jesus was *the* prophet, the Messiah, is another ; and though he certainly was both *a* prophet and *the* prophet, yet the foundations of the proof of these propositions are separate and distinct.

The mere existence "of such a woman as Mary and of such a man as Joseph, and Jesus," is, you say, a matter of indifference, about which there is no ground either to believe or to disbelieve. Belief is different from knowledge, with which you here seem to confound it. We know that the whole is greater than its parts—and we know that all the angles in

the same segment of a circle are equal to each other—we have intuition and demonstration as grounds of this knowledge ; but is there no ground for belief of past or future existence? Is there no ground for believing that the sun will exist to-morrow, and that your father existed before you? You condescend, however, to think it probable that there were such persons as Mary, Joseph, and Jesus; and without troubling yourself about their existence or non-existence, assuming, as it were, for the sake of argument, but without positively granting their existence, you proceed to inform us “that it is the fable of Jesus Christ, as told in the New Testament, and the wild and visionary doctrine raised thereon,” against which you contend. You will not repute it a fable, that there was such a man as Jesus Christ; that he lived in Judea near eighteen hundred years ago; that he went about doing good, and preaching, not only in the villages of Galilee, but in the city of Jerusalem; that he had several followers, who constantly attended him; that he was put to death by Pontius Pilate; that his disciples were numerous a few years after his death, not only in Judea, but in Rome, the capital of the world, and in every province of the Roman empire; that a particular day has been observed in a religious manner by all his followers, in commemoration of a real or supposed resurrection; and that the constant celebration of baptism, and of the Lord's supper, may be traced back from the present time to him, as the author of those institutions. These things constitute, I suppose, no part of your fable; and if these things be facts, they will, when maturely considered, draw after them so many other things related in the New

Testament concerning Jesus, that there will be left for your fable but very scanty materials, which will require great fertility of invention before you will dress them up into any form which will not disgust even a superficial observer.

The miraculous conception you esteem a fable, and in your mind it is an obscene fable. Impure, indeed, must that man's imagination be, who can discover any obscenity in the angel's declaration to Mary, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God." I wonder you do not find obscenity in Genesis, where it is said, "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters," and brought order out of confusion, a world out of chaos, by his fostering influence. As to the Christian faith being built upon the heathen mythology, there is no ground whatever for the assertion: there would have been some for saying that much of the heathen mythology was built upon the events recorded in the Old Testament.

You come now to a demonstration, or which amounts to the same thing, to a proposition which cannot, you say, be controverted. First, "That the *agreement* of all the parts of a story does not prove that story to be true, because the parts may agree, and the whole may be false. Secondly, That the *disagreement* of the parts of a story proves that the *whole cannot be true*. The agreement does not prove truth, but the disagreement proves falsehood positively." Great use, I perceive, is to be made of this proposition. You will pardon my unskillfulness in dialectics, if I presume to con-

trovert the truth of this abstract proposition, as applied to any purpose in life. The agreement of the parts of a story implies that the story has been told by at least two persons, (the life of Doctor Johnson, for instance, by Sir John Hawkins and Mr. Boswell.) Now I think it scarcely possible for even two persons, and the difficulty is increased if there are more than two, to write the history of the life of any one of their acquaintance without there being a considerable difference between them with respect to the number and order of the incidents of his life. Some things will be omitted by one, and mentioned by the other; some things will be briefly touched by one, and the same things circumstantially detailed by the other; the same things which are mentioned in the same way by them both, may not be mentioned as having happened exactly at the same point of time, with other possible and probable differences. But these real or apparent difficulties in minute circumstances, will not invalidate their testimony as to the material transactions of his life, much less will they render the whole of it a fable. If several independent witnesses, of fair character, should agree in all the parts of a story, (in testifying, for instance, that a murder or a robbery was committed at a particular time, in a particular place, and by a certain individual,) every court of justice in the world would admit the fact, notwithstanding the abstract possibility of the whole being false. Again, if several honest men should agree in saying that they saw the king of France beheaded, though they should disagree as to the figure of the guillotine or the size of his executioner, as to the king's hands being bound or loose, as to his being composed or agitated in ascending the scaffold, yet every



court of justice in the world would think that such a difference respecting the circumstances of the fact did not invalidate the evidence respecting the fact itself. When you speak of the whole of a story, you cannot mean every particular circumstance connected with the story, but not essential to it; you must mean the pith and marrow of the story; for it would be impossible to establish the truth of any fact, (of Admirals Byng or Keppel, for example, having neglected or not neglected their duty,) if a disagreement in the evidence of witnesses, in minute points, should be considered as annihilating the weight of their evidence in points of importance. In a word, the relation of a fact differs essentially from the demonstration of a theorem. If one step is left out, one link in the chain of ideas constituting a demonstration is omitted, the conclusion will be destroyed; but a fact may be established, notwithstanding the disagreement of the witnesses in certain trifling particulars of their evidence respecting it.

You apply your incontrovertible proposition to the genealogies of Christ given by Matthew and Luke—there is a disagreement between them; therefore, you say, “if Matthew speak truth, Luke speaks falsehood; and if Luke speak truth, Matthew speaks falsehood; and thence there is no authority for believing either; and if they cannot be believed even in the very first thing they say and set out to prove, they are not entitled to be believed in any thing they say afterwards.” I cannot admit either your premises or your conclusion: not your conclusion; because two authors, who differ in tracing back the pedigree of an individual for above a thousand years, cannot, on that account, be esteemed incompetent to bear testimony to the trans

actions of his life, unless an intention to falsify could be proved against them. If two Welsh historians should at this time write the life of any remarkable man of their country who had been dead twenty or thirty years, and should, through different branches of their genealogical tree, carry up the pedigree to *Cadwallon*, would they, on account of that difference, be discredited in every thing they said? Might it not be believed that they gave the pedigree as they had found it recorded in different instruments, but without the least intention to write a falsehood. I cannot admit your premises; because Matthew speaks truth, and Luke speaks truth, though they do not speak the same truth; Matthew giving the genealogy of Joseph, the reputed father of Jesus, and Luke giving the genealogy of Mary, the real mother of Jesus. If you will not admit this, other explanations of the difficulty might be given; but I hold it sufficient to say, that the authors had no design to deceive the reader; that they took their accounts from the public registers, which were carefully kept; and that, had they been fabricators of these genealogies, they would have been exposed at the time to instant detection; and the certainty of that detection would have prevented them from making the attempt to impose a false genealogy on the Jewish nation.

But that you may effectually overthrow the credit of these genealogies, you make the following calculation: "From the birth of David to the birth of Christ is upwards of 1080 years; and as there were but 27 full generations, to find the average age of each person mentioned in St. Matthew's list at the time his first son was born, it is only necessary to divide 1080 by 27, which gives 40 years for each person. As the life

time of man was then but of the same extent it is now, it is absurdity to suppose that 27 generations should all be old bachelors before they married. So far from this genealogy being a solemn truth, it is not even a reasonable lie." This argument assumes the appearance of arithmetical accuracy, and the conclusion is in a style which even its truth would not excuse; yet the argument is good for nothing and the conclusion is not true. You have read the Bible with some attention, and you are extremely liberal in imputing to it lies and absurdities: read it over again, especially the books of the Chronicles, and you will there find, that, in the genealogical list of St. Matthew, three generations are omitted between Joram and Ozias; Joram was the father of Azariah, Azariah of Joash, Joash of Amaziah, and Amaziah of Ozias. I inquire not in this place whence this omission proceeded; whether it is to be attributed to an error in the genealogical tables from whence Matthew took his account, or to a corruption of the text of the evangelist; still it is an omission. Now, if you will add these three generations to the twenty-seven you mention, and divide one thousand and eighty by thirty, you will find the average age when these Jews had each of them their first son born was thirty-six. They married sooner than they ought to have done according to Aristotle, who fixes thirty-seven as the most proper age when a man should marry. Nor was it necessary that they should have been old bachelors, though each of them had not a son to succeed him till he was thirty-six; they might have been married at twenty, without having a son till they were forty. You assume in your argument, that the first born son succeeded the father in the list; this is

not true. Solomon succeeded David, yet David had at least six sons who were grown to manhood before Solomon was born; and Rehoboam had at least three sons before he had Abia, (Abijah,) who succeeded him. It is needless to cite more instances to this purpose; but from these, and other circumstances which might be insisted upon, I can see no ground for believing that the genealogy of Jesus Christ, mentioned by St. Matthew, is not a solemn truth.

You insist much upon some things being mentioned by one evangelist, which are not mentioned by all, or by any of the others; and you take this to be a reason why we should consider the Gospels, not as the works of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, but as the productions of some *unconnected* individuals, each of whom made his own legend. I do not admit the truth of this supposition; but I may be allowed to use it as an argument against yourself: it removes every possible suspicion of fraud and imposture, and confirms the Gospel history in the strongest manner. Four *unconnected* individuals have each written memoirs of the life of Jesus: from whatever source they derived their materials, it is evident that they agree in a great many particulars of the last importance; such as the purity of his manners, the sanctity of his doctrines, the multitude and publicity of his miracles, the persecuting spirit of his enemies, the manner of his death, and the certainty of his resurrection; and whilst they agree in these great points, their disagreement in points of little consequence is rather a confirmation of the truth, than an indication of the falsehood of their several accounts. Had they agreed in nothing, their testimony ought to have been reject-

ed as a legendary tale ; had they agreed in every thing, it might have been suspected that, instead of unconnected individuals, they were a set of impostors. The manner in which the evangelists have recorded the particulars of the life of Jesus is wholly conformable to what we experience in other biographers, and claims our highest assent to its truth, notwithstanding the force of your incontrovertible proposition.

As an instance of contradiction between the evangelists, you tell us that Matthew says, the angel announcing the immaculate conception appeared unto Joseph ; but Luke says, he appeared unto Mary. The angel, sir, appeared to them both ; to Mary, when he informed her that she should, by the power of God, conceive a son ; to Joseph, some months afterwards, when Mary's pregnancy was visible ; in the interim she had paid a visit of three months to her cousin Elizabeth. It might have<sup>d</sup> been expected, that, from the accuracy with which you have read your Bible, you could not have confounded these obviously distinct appearances ; but men, even of candor, are liable to mistakes. Who, you ask, would now believe a girl, who should say that she was gotten with child by a ghost ? Who, but yourself, would ever have asked a question so abominably indecent and profane ? I cannot argue with you on this subject. You will never persuade the world that the Holy Spirit of God has any resemblance to the stage ghosts in Hamlet or Macbeth, from which you seem to have derived your idea of it.

The story of the massacre of the young children by the order of Herod, is mentioned only by Matthew ; and therefore you think it is a lie. We must give up

all history, if we refuse to admit facts recorded by only one historian. Matthew addressed his Gospel to the Jews, and put them in mind of a circumstance of which they must have had a melancholy remembrance; but Gentile converts were less interested in that event. The evangelists were not writing the life of Herod, but of Jesus; it is no wonder then that they omitted, above half a century after the death of Herod, an instance of his cruelty which was not essentially connected with their subject. The massacre, however, was probably known even at Rome; and it was certainly correspondent to the character of Herod. "John," you say, at the time of the massacre, "was under two years of age, and yet he escaped; so that the story circumstantially belies itself." John was six months older than Jesus; and you cannot prove that he was not beyond the age to which the order of Herod extended; it probably reached no farther than to those who had completed their first year, without including those who had entered upon their second: but without insisting upon this, still I contend that you cannot prove John to have been under two years of age at the time of the massacre; and I could give many probable reasons to the contrary. Nor is it certain that John was, at that time, in that part of the country to which the edict of Herod extended. But there would be no end of answering at length all your little objections.

No two of the evangelists, you observe, agree in reciting, *exactly in the same words*, the written inscription which was put over Christ when he was crucified. I admit that there is an unessential verbal difference; and are you certain that there was not a ver-

bal difference in the inscriptions themselves? One was written in Hebrew, another in Greek, another in Latin; and though they all had the same meaning, yet it is probable, that if two men had translated the Hebrew and the Latin into Greek, there would have been a verbal difference between their translations. You have rendered yourself famous by writing a book called *The Rights of Man*: had you been guillotined by Robespierre, with this title, written in French, English, and German, and affixed to the guillotine, "Thomas Paine, of America, author of *The Rights of Man*;" and had four persons, some of whom had seen the execution, and the rest had heard of it from eye-witnesses, written short accounts of your life twenty years or more after your death, and one had said the inscription was, "This is Thomas Paine, the author of *The Rights of Man*;" another, "The author of *The Rights of Man*;" a third, "This is the author of *The Rights of Man*;" and a fourth, "Thomas Paine, of America, the author of *The Rights of Man*;" would any man of common sense have doubted, on account of this disagreement, the veracity of the authors in writing your life? "The only one," you tell us, "of the men called apostles, who appears to have been near the spot where Jesus was crucified, was Peter." This your assertion is not true: we do not know that Peter was present at the crucifixion; but we do know that John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was present; for Jesus spoke to him from the cross. You go on, "But why should we believe Peter, convicted by their own account of perjury, in swearing that he knew not Jesus?" I will tell you why; because Peter sincerely repented of the wick-

edness into which he had been betrayed, through fear for his life, and suffered martyrdom in attestation of the truth of the Christian religion.

But the evangelists disagree, you say, not only as to the superscription on the cross, but as to the time of the crucifixion, "Mark saying it was at the third hour, (nine in the morning,) and John at the sixth hour, (twelve, as you suppose, at noon.\*)" Various solutions have been given of this difficulty, none of which satisfied Doctor Middleton, much less can it be expected that any of them should satisfy you; but there is a solution not noticed by him, in which many judicious men have acquiesced, that John, writing his Gospel in Asia, used the Roman method of computing time, which was the same as our own; so that by the sixth hour, when Jesus was *condemned*, we are to understand six o'clock in the morning; the intermediate time from six to nine, when he was crucified, being employed in preparing for the crucifixion. But if this difficulty should be still esteemed insuperable, it does not follow that it will always remain so; and if it should, the main point, the crucifixion of Jesus, will not be affected thereby.

I cannot, in this place, omit remarking some circumstances attending the crucifixion, which are so natural, that we might have wondered if they had not occurred. Of all the disciples of Jesus, John was beloved by him with a peculiar degree of affection; and, as kindness produces kindness, there can be little doubt that the regard was reciprocal. Now, whom should we expect to be the attendants of Jesus in his last suffering? Whom but John, the friend of his heart? Whom but his mother, whose soul was now pierced through by



the sword of sorrow, which *Simeon* had foretold? Whom but those who had been attached to him through life, who, having been healed by him of their infirmities, were impelled by gratitude to minister to him of their substance, to be attentive to all his wants? These were the persons whom we should have expected to attend his execution, and these were there. To whom would an expiring son, of the best affections, recommend a poor, and, probably, a widowed mother, but to his warmest friend? And this did Jesus. Unmindful of the extremity of his own torture, and anxious to alleviate the burden of her sorrows, and to protect her old age from future want and misery, he said to his beloved disciple, "Behold thy mother! and from that hour that disciple took her to his own home." I own to you that such instances as these, of the conformity of events to our probable expectation, are to me genuine marks of the simplicity and truth of the Gospels; and far outweigh a thousand little objections, arising from our ignorance of manners, times, and circumstances, or from our incapacity to comprehend the means used by the Supreme Being in the moral government of his creatures.

St. Matthew mentions several miracles which attended our Savior's crucifixion—the darkness which overspread the land—the rending of the veil of the temple—an earthquake which rent the rocks—and the resurrection of many saints, and their going into the noly city. "Such," you say, "is the account which this dashing writer of the book of Matthew gives, but in which he is not supported by the writers of the other books." This is not accurately expressed; Matthew is supported by Mark and Luke, with respect to two of

the miracles—the darkness—and the rending of the veil; and their omission of the others does not prove that they were either ignorant of them, or disbelieved them. I think it idle to pretend to say positively what influenced them to mention only two miracles: they probably thought them sufficient to convince any person, as they convinced the centurion, that Jesus “was a righteous man, the Son of God.” And these two miracles were better calculated to produce general conviction amongst the persons for whose benefit Mark and Luke wrote their Gospels, than either the earthquake or the resurrection of the saints. The earthquake was, probably, confined to a particular spot, and might, by an objector, have been called a natural phenomenon; and those to whom the saints appeared might, at the time of writing the Gospels of Mark and Luke, have been dead; but the darkness must have been generally known and remembered, and the veil of the temple might still be preserved at the time these authors wrote. As to John not mentioning any of these miracles—it is well known that his Gospel was written as a kind of supplement to the other Gospels; he has therefore omitted many things which the other three evangelists had related, and he has added several things which they had not mentioned: in particular, he has added a circumstance of great importance; he tells us that he saw one of the soldiers pierce the side of Jesus with a spear, and that the blood and water flowed through the wound; and lest any one should doubt of the fact, from its not being mentioned by the other evangelists, he asserts it with peculiar earnestness. “And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye

might believe." John saw blood and water flowing from the wound; the blood is easily accounted for; but whence came the water? The anatomists tell us that it came from the *pericardium*; so consistent is evangelical testimony with the most curious researches into natural science! You amuse yourself with the account of what the Scripture calls *many* saints, and you call an *army* of saints, and are angry with Matthew for not having told you a great many things about them. It is very possible that Matthew might have known the fact of their resurrection without knowing every thing about them; but if he had gratified your curiosity in every particular, I am of opinion that you would not have believed a word of what he had told you. I have no curiosity on the subject; it is enough for me to know that "Christ was the first fruits of them that slept," and "that all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth," as those holy men did who heard the voice of the Son of God at his resurrection, and passed from death to life. If I first indulge myself in being wise above what is written, I must be able to answer many of your inquiries relative to the saints; but I dare not touch the ark of the Lord, I dare not support the authority of the Scripture by the boldness of conjecture. Whatever difficulty there may be in accounting for the silence of the other evangelists, and of St. Paul also on this subject, yet there is a greater difficulty in supposing that Matthew did not give a true narration of what had happened at the crucifixion. If there had been no supernatural darkness, no earthquake, no rending of the veil of the temple, no graves opened, no resurrection of holy men, no appearance of them unto many—if none of these things

had been true, or rather, if any one of them had been false, what motive could Matthew, writing to the Jews, have had for trumping up such wonderful stories? He wrote, as every man does, with an intention to be believed; and yet every Jew he met would have stared him in the face and told him that he was a liar and an impostor. What author, who, twenty years hence, should address to the French nation a history of Louis XVI. would venture to affirm that when he was beheaded there was darkness for three hours over all France? that there was an earthquake? that rocks were split? graves opened? and dead men brought to life, who appeared to many persons in Paris? It is quite impossible to suppose that any one should dare to publish such obvious lies; and I think it equally impossible to suppose that Matthew would have dared to publish his account of what happened at the death of Jesus, had not the account been generally known to be true.

#### LETTER VIII.

The "tale of the resurrection," you say, "follows that of the crucifixion." You have accustomed me so much to this kind of language, that when I find you speaking of a tale, I have no doubt of meeting with a truth. From the apparent disagreement in the accounts which the evangelists have given of some circumstances respecting the resurrection, you remark—"If the writers of these books had gone into any court of justice to prove an *alibi*, (for it is the nature of an *alibi* that is here attempted to be proved, namely, the absence of a dead body by supernatural means,) and have given their evidence in the same contradictory

manner as it is here given, they would have been in danger of having their ears cropt for perjury, and would have justly deserved it:"—"hard words, or hanging," it seems, if you had been their judge. Now I maintain that it is the brevity with which the account of the resurrection is given by all the evangelists which has occasioned the seeming confusion, and that this confusion would have been cleared up at once, if the witnesses of the resurrection had been examined before any judicature. As we cannot have this *viva voce* examination of all the witnesses, let us call up and question the evangelists as witnesses to a supernatural alibi. Did you find the sepulchre of Jesus empty? One of us actually saw it empty, and the rest heard, from eye-witnesses, that it was empty. Did you, or any of the followers of Jesus, take away the dead body from the sepulchre? All answer, No. Did the soldiers or the Jews take away the body? No. How are you certain of that? Because we saw the body when it was dead, and saw it afterwards when it was alive. How do you know that what you saw was the body of Jesus? We had been long and intimately acquainted with Jesus, and knew his person perfectly. Were you not affrighted, and mistook a spirit for a body? No; the body had flesh and bones; we are sure that it was the very body which hung upon the cross, for we saw the wound in his side, and the print of the nails in the hands and feet. And to all this you are ready to swear? We are; and we are ready to die also, sooner than we will deny any part of it. This is the testimony which all the evangelists would give, in whatever court of justice they were examined; and this, I apprehend, would sufficiently establish the alibi

of the dead body from the sepulchre by supernatural means.

But as the resurrection of Jesus is a point which you attack with all your force, I will examine minutely the principal of your objections; I do not think them deserving of this notice, but they shall have it. The book of Matthew, you say, "states that when Christ was put in the sepulchre, the Jews applied to Pilate for a watch or a guard to be placed over the sepulchre, to prevent the body being stolen by the disciples." I admit this account; but it is not the whole of the account; you have omitted the reason for the request which the chief priests made to Pilate: "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, after three days I will rise again." It is material to remark this; for at the very time that Jesus predicted his resurrection, he predicted also his crucifixion, and all that he should suffer from the malice of those very men who now applied to Pilate for a guard. "He showed to his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." Matthew, 16: 21. These men knew full well that the first part of this prediction had been actually fulfilled through their malignity; and instead of repenting of what they had done, they were so infatuated as to suppose that by a guard of soldiers they could prevent the completion of the second. The other books, you observe, "say nothing about this application, nor about the sealing of the stone, nor the guard, nor the watch, and according to these accounts there were none." This, Sir, I deny. The other books do not say that there were none of these things: how of-

ten must I repeat, that omissions are not contradictions, nor silence concerning a fact a denial of it?

You go on: "The book of Matthew continues its account, that at the end of the Sabbath, as it began to *dawn*, towards the first day of the week, came *Mary Magdalene* and the other *Mary* to see the sepulchre. Mark says it was sun-rising, and John says it was dark. Luke says it was *Mary Magdalene*, and *Joanna*, and *Mary the mother of James*, and *other women* that came to the sepulchre. And John says that *Mary Magdalene* came alone. So well do they all agree about their first evidence! They all appear, however, to have known most about *Mary Magdalene*; she was a woman of a large acquaintance, and it was not an ill conjecture that she might be upon the stroll." This is a long paragraph: I will answer it distinctly. First, there is no disagreement of evidence with respect to the time when the women went to the sepulchre; all the evangelists agree as to the day on which they went; and, as to the time of the day, it was early in the morning: what court of justice in the world would set aside this evidence, as insufficient to substantiate the fact of the women's having gone to the sepulchre, because the witnesses differed as to the degree of twilight which lighted them on their way? Secondly, there is no disagreement of evidence with respect to the persons who went to the sepulchre. John states that *Mary Magdalene* went to the sepulchre; but he does not state, *as you make him state*, that *Mary Magdalene* went alone; she might, for any thing you have proved, or can prove to the contrary, have been accompanied by all the women mentioned by Luke: is it an unusual thing to distinguish by name a principal per-

son going on a visit, or on an embassy, without mentioning his subordinate attendants? Thirdly, in opposition to your insinuation that Mary Magdalene was a common woman, I wish it to be considered whether there is any scriptural authority for that imputation; and whether there be or not, I must contend that a repentant and reformed woman ought not to be esteemed an improper witness of a fact. The conjecture which you adopt concerning her is nothing less than an illiberal, indecent, unfounded calumny, not excusable in the mouth of a libertine, and intolerable in yours.

“The book of Matthew,” you observe, “goes on to say, ‘And behold, there was an earthquake, for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and *sat upon it*; but the other books say nothing about an earthquake.’” What then? does their silence prove that there was none? “Nor about the angel rolling back the stone and sitting upon it;” what then? does their silence prove that the stone was not rolled back by an angel, and that he did not sit upon it? “And according to their accounts, there was no angel sitting there.” This conclusion I must deny: their accounts do not say there was no angel sitting there at the time that Matthew says he sat upon the stone. They do not deny the fact, they simply omit the mention of it; and they all take notice that the women, when they arrived at the sepulchre, found the stone rolled away: hence it is evident that the stone was rolled away *before* the women arrived at the sepulchre; and the other evangelists, giving an account of what happened to the women when they reached the sepulchre, have merely omitted giving an account of a transaction previous



to their arrival. Where is the contradiction? What space of time intervened between the rolling away the stone and the arrival of the women at the sepulchre, is nowhere mentioned; but it certainly was long enough for the angel to have changed his position; from sitting on the outside he might have entered into the sepulchre: and another angel might have made his appearance; or, from the first, there might have been two, one on the outside, rolling away the stone, and the other within. Luke, you tell us, "says there were two, and they were both standing; and John says there were two, and both sitting." It is impossible, I grant, even for an angel to be sitting and standing at the same instant of time; but Luke and John do not speak of the same instant, nor of the same appearance. Luke speaks of the appearance to all the women, and John of the appearance to Mary Magdalene alone, who tarried weeping at the sepulchre after Peter and John had left it. But I forbear making any more minute remarks on still minuter objections, all of which are grounded on this mistake—that the angels were seen at one particular time, in one particular place, and by the same individuals.

As to your inference, from Matthew's using the expression *unto this day*, "that the book must have been manufactured after the lapse of some generations at least," it cannot be admitted against the positive testimony of all antiquity. That the story about stealing away the body was a bungling story, I readily admit; but the chief priests are answerable for it: it is not worthy either your notice or mine, except as it is a strong instance to you, to me, and to every body, how far prejudices may mislead the understanding.

You come to that part of the evidence in those books that respects, you say, "the pretended appearance of Christ after his pretended resurrection." The writer of the book of Matthew relates, that the angel that was sitting on the stone at the mouth of the sepulchre, said to the two Marys, (ch. 28: 7,) "Behold, Christ is gone before you into Galilee, there shall you see him." The Gospel, sir, was preached to poor and illiterate men, and it is the duty of priests to preach it to them in all its purity; to guard them against the error of mistaken, or the designs of wicked men. You, then, who can read your Bible, turn to this passage, and you will find that the angel did not say, "Behold, Christ *is gone* before you into Galilee;" but, "Behold, *he goeth* before you into Galilee." I know not what Bible you made use of in this quotation, none that I have seen render the original word by, he is gone. It might be properly rendered, he will go: and it is literally rendered, he is going. This phrase does not imply an immediate setting out for Galilee. When a man has fixed upon a long journey to London or Bath, it is common enough to say, he is going to London or Bath, though the time of his going may be at some distance. Even your dashing Matthew could not be guilty of such a blunder as to make the angel say, *he is gone*; for he tells us immediately afterwards, that, as the women were departing from the sepulchre to tell his disciples what the angels had said to them, Jesus himself met them. Now, how Jesus could be *gone* into Galilee, and yet meet the women at Jerusalem, I leave you to explain, for the blunder is not chargeable upon Matthew. I excuse your introducing the expression, "then the eleven disciples

went away into Galilee," for the quotation is rightly made; but had you turned to the Greek Testament, you would not have found in this place any word answering to *then*: the passage is better translated "and the eleven." Christ had said to his disciples, (Matt. 26:32,) "After I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee;" and the angel put the women in mind of the very expression and prediction: *he is risen, as he said; and behold, he goeth before you into Galilee.* Matthew, intent upon the appearance in Galilee, of which there were, probably, at the time he wrote, many living witnesses in Judea, omits the mention of many appearances taken notice of by John, and by this omission seems to connect the day of the resurrection of Jesus with that of the departure of the disciples for Galilee. You seem to think this a great difficulty, and incapable of solution; for you say, "It is not possible, unless we admit these disciples the right of willful lying, that the writers of these books could be any of the eleven persons called disciples; for if, according to Matthew, the eleven went into Galilee to meet Jesus in a mountain, by his own appointment, on the same day that he is said to have risen, Luke and John must have been two of that eleven; yet the writer of Luke says expressly, and John implies as much, that the meeting was that day in a house at Jerusalem: and on the other hand, if, according to Luke and John, the *eleven* were assembled in a house at Jerusalem, Matthew must have been one of that eleven; yet Matthew says the meeting was in a mountain in Galilee, and consequently the evidence given in those books destroy each other." When I was a young man in the university, I was pretty much accustomed to drawing

of consequences; but my *Alma Mater* did not suffer me to draw consequences after your manner: she taught me that a false position must end in an absurd conclusion. I have shown your position, "that the eleven went into Galilee on the day of the resurrection," to be false, and hence your consequence, "that the evidence given in these two books destroy each other," is not to be admitted. You ought, moreover, to have considered that the feast of unleavened bread, which immediately followed the day on which the passover was eaten, lasted seven days; and that strict observers of the law did not think themselves at liberty to leave Jerusalem till that feast was ended; and this is a collateral proof that the disciples did not go to Galilee on the day of the resurrection.

You certainly have read the New Testament, but not, I think, with great attention, or you would have known who the apostles were. In this place you reckon *Luke* as one of the eleven, and in other places you speak of him as an eye-witness of the things he relates. You ought to have known that *Luke* was no apostle; and he tells you himself, in the preface to his Gospel, that he wrote from the testimony of others. If this mistake proceeds from your ignorance, you are not a fit person to write comments on the Bible; if from design, (which I am unwilling to suspect,) you are still less fit: in either case it may suggest to your readers the propriety of suspecting the truth and accuracy of your assertions, however daring and intemperate. "Of the numerous priests or parsons of the present day, bishops and all, the sum total of whose learning," according to you, "is *ab ab*, and *hic, hæc, hoc*, there is not one amongst them;" you say, "who

can write poetry like Homer, or science like Euclid." If I should admit this, (though there are many of them, I doubt not, who understand these authors better than you do,) yet I cannot admit that there is one amongst them, bishops and all, so ignorant as to rank Luke the evangelist among the apostles of Christ. I will not press this point; any man may fall into a mistake, and the consciousness of this fallibility should create in all men a little modesty, a little diffidence, a little caution, before they presume to call the most illustrious characters of antiquity liars, fools, and knaves.

You want to know why Jesus did not show himself to all the people after the resurrection. This is one of Spinoza's objections, and it may sound well enough in the mouth of a Jew, wishing to excuse the infidelity of his countrymen: but it is not judiciously adopted by deists of other nations. God gives us the means of health, but he does not force us to the use of them; he gives us the powers of the mind, but he does not compel us to the cultivation of them; he gave the Jews opportunities of seeing the miracles of Jesus, but he did not oblige them to believe them. They who persevered in their incredulity after the resurrection of Lazarus, would have persevered also after the resurrection of Jesus. Lazarus had been buried four days, Jesus but three; the body of Lazarus had begun to undergo corruption, the body of Jesus saw no corruption; why should you expect that they would have believed in Jesus on his own resurrection, when they had not believed in him on the resurrection of Lazarus? When the Pharisees were told of the resurrection of Lazarus, they, together with the chief priests, gathered a council and said, "What do we? for this man doeth many

miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him. Then from that day forth they took counsel together to put him to death." The great men at Jerusalem, you see, admitted that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead; yet the belief of that miracle did not generate conviction that Jesus was the Christ: it only exasperated their malice and accelerated their purpose of destroying him. Had Jesus shown himself after his resurrection, the chief priests would probably have gathered together another council, have opened it with "What do we?" and ended it with a determination to put him to death. As to us, the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, which we have in the New Testament, is far more convincing than if it had been related that he showed himself to every man in Jerusalem; for then we should have had a suspicion that the whole story had been fabricated by the Jews.

You think Paul an improper witness of the resurrection; I think him one of the fittest that could have been chosen; and for this reason—his testimony is the testimony of a former enemy. He had, in his own miraculous conversion, sufficient ground for changing his opinion as to the matter of fact—for believing that to have been a fact, which he had formerly, through extreme prejudice, considered as a fable. For the truth of the resurrection of Jesus he appeals to above two hundred and fifty living witnesses; and before whom does he make his appeal? Before his enemies, who were able and willing to blast his character, if he had advanced an untruth. You know, undoubtedly, that Paul had resided at Corinth near two years; that during a part of that time he had testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ; that, finding the bulk of that nation

obstinate in their unbelief, he had turned to the Gentiles, and had converted many to the faith in Christ; that he left Corinth, and went to preach the Gospel in other parts; that, about three years after he had quitted Corinth, he wrote a letter to the converts which he had made in that place, and who, after his departure, had been split into different factions, and had adopted different teachers in opposition to Paul. From this account we may be certain that Paul's letter, and every circumstance in it, would be minutely examined. The city of Corinth was full of Jews; these men were, in general, Paul's bitter enemies; yet, in the face of them all, he asserts "that Jesus Christ was buried; that he rose again the third day; that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve; that he was afterwards seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part were then alive." An appeal to above two hundred and fifty living witnesses is a pretty strong proof of a fact; but it becomes irresistible when that appeal is submitted to the judgment of enemies. St. Paul, you must allow, was a man of ability; but he would have been an idiot had he put it in the power of his enemies to prove, from his own letter, that he was a lying rascal. They neither proved, nor attempted to prove any such thing; and therefore we may safely conclude that this testimony of Paul to the resurrection of Jesus was true: and it is a testimony, in my opinion, of the greatest weight.

You come, you say, to the last scene, the ascension; upon which, in your opinion, "the reality of the future mission of the disciples was to rest for proof." I do not agree with you in this. The reality of the future mission of the apostles might have been proved, though

Jesus Christ had not visibly ascended into heaven. Miracles are the proper proofs of a divine mission; and when Jesus gave the apostles a commission to preach the Gospel, he commanded them to stay at Jerusalem till they were endued with power from on high. Matthew has omitted the mention of the ascension; and John, you say, has not said a syllable about it. I think otherwise. John has not given an express account of the ascension, but he has certainly said something about it; for he informs us that Jesus said to Mary, "Touch me not; for I am not yet *ascended* to my Father; but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I *ascend* unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." This is surely saying something about the ascension; and if the fact of the ascension be not related by John or Matthew, it may reasonably be supposed that the omission was made on account of the notoriety of the fact. That the fact was generally known may be justly collected from the reference which Peter makes to it, in the hearing of all the Jews, a very few days after it had happened, "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being *by the right hand of God exalted*." Paul bears testimony also to the ascension, when he says that Jesus was *received up into glory*. As to the difference you contend for, between the account of the ascension as given by Mark and Luke, it does not exist; except in this, that Mark omits the particulars of Jesus going with his apostles to Bethany and blessing them there, which are mentioned by Luke. But omissions, I must often put you in mind, are not contradictions.

You have now, you say, "gone through the exa-



mination of the four books ascribed to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; and when it is considered that the whole space of time, from the crucifixion to what is called the ascension, is but a few days, apparently not more than three or four, and that all the circumstances are reported to have happened near the same spot, Jerusalem, it is, I believe, impossible to find, in any story upon record, so many and such glaring absurdities, contradictions, and falsehoods, as are in those books."

What am I to say to this? Am I to say that, in writing this paragraph, you have forfeited your character as an honest man? Or, admitting your honesty, am I to say that you are grossly ignorant of the subject? Let the reader judge. John says that Jesus appeared to his disciples at Jerusalem on the day of his resurrection, and that Thomas was not then with them. The same John says, that after *eight days* he appeared to them again, when Thomas was with them. Now, sir, how *apparently three or four days* can be consistent with *really eight days* I leave you to make out. But this is not the whole of John's testimony, either with respect to place or time; for he says, "After these things (after the two appearances to the disciples at Jerusalem on the first and on the eighth day after the resurrection) Jesus showed himself again to his disciples at the sea of Tiberias." The sea of Tiberias, I presume you know, was in Galilee; and Galilee, you may know, was sixty or seventy miles from Jerusalem: it must have taken the disciples some time, after the eighth day, to travel from Jerusalem into Galilee. What, in your own insulting language to the priests, what have you to answer, as to the *same spot Jerusalem*, and as to your apparently *three or four days*?

But this is not all. Luke, in the beginning of the Acts, refers to his Gospel, and says, "Christ showed himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs, being seen of the apostles forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." Instead of *four*, you perceive there was *forty* days between the crucifixion and the ascension. I need not, I trust, after this, trouble myself about the falsehoods and contradictions which you impute to the evangelists; your readers cannot but be upon their guard as to the credit due to your assertions, however bold and improper. You will suffer me to remark, that the evangelists were plain men; who, convinced of the truth of their narration, and conscious of their own integrity, have related what they knew with admirable simplicity. They seem to have said to the Jews of their time, and to say to the unbelievers of all times, we have told you the truth; and if you will not believe us, we have nothing more to say. Had they been impostors they would have written with more caution and art, have obviated every cavil, and avoided every appearance of contradiction. This they have not done; and this I consider as a proof of their honesty and veracity.

John the Baptist had given his testimony to the truth of our Savior's mission in the most unequivocal terms; he afterwards sent two of his disciples to Jesus, to ask him whether he was really the expected Messiah or not. Matthew relates *both* these circumstances: had the writer of the book of Matthew been an impostor, would he have invalidated John's testimony, by bringing forward his real or apparent doubt? Impossible! Matthew, having proved the resurrection of Jesus, tells

us that the eleven disciples went away into Galilee into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them, and "when they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted." Would an impostor, in the very last place where he mentions the resurrection, and in the conclusion of his book, have suggested such a cavil to unbelievers, as to say, "some doubted?" Impossible! The evangelist has left us to collect the reason why some doubted. The disciples saw Jesus, at a distance, on the mountain; and some of them fell down and worshiped him; whilst others doubted whether the person they saw was really Jesus: their doubt, however, could not have lasted long, for in the very next verse we are told that Jesus came and spake unto them.

Great and laudable pains have been taken by many learned men to harmonize the several accounts given us by the evangelists of the resurrection. It does not seem to me to be a matter of any great consequence to Christianity whether the accounts can, in every minute particular, be harmonized or not; since there is no such discordance in them as to render the fact of the resurrection doubtful to any impartial mind. If any man, in a court of justice, should give positive evidence of a fact, and three others should afterwards be examined, and all of them should confirm the evidence of the first as to the fact, but should apparently differ from him and from each other, by being more or less particular in their accounts of the circumstances attending the fact; ought we to doubt of the fact because we could not harmonize the evidence respecting the circumstances relating to it? The omission of any one circumstance (such as that of Mary Magdalene having gone twice to the sepulchre; or that of the angel hav-

ing, after he had rolled away the stone from the sepulchre, entered into the sepulchre) may render a harmony impossible, without having recourse to supposition to supply the defect. You deists laugh at all such attempts, and call them priestcraft. I think it better then, in arguing with you, to admit that there may be (not granting, however, that there is) an irreconcilable difference between the evangelists in some of their accounts respecting the life of Jesus, or his resurrection. Be it so; what then? Does this difference, admitting it to be real, destroy the credibility of the Gospel history in any of its essential points? Certainly, in my opinion, not. As I look upon this to be a general answer to most of your deistical objections, I profess my sincerity in saying that I consider it as a true and sufficient answer; and I leave it to your consideration. I have purposely, in the whole of this discussion, been silent as to the inspiration of the evangelists, well knowing that you would have rejected, with scorn, any thing I could have said on that point; but in disputing with a deist, I do most solemnly contend that the Christian religion is true, and worthy of all acceptance, whether the evangelists were inspired or not.

Unbelievers in general wish to conceal their sentiments; they have a decent respect for public opinion; are cautious of affronting the religion of their country, fearful of undermining the foundations of civil society. Some few have been more daring, but less judicious, and have, without disguise, professed their unbelief. But you are the first who ever swore that he was an infidel, concluding your deistical creed with—So help me God! I pray that God may help you; that he may, through the influence of his Holy Spirit,

bring you to a right mind ; convert you to the religion of his Son, whom, out of his abundant love to mankind, he sent into the world, that all who believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

You swear that you think the Christian religion is not true. I give full credit to your oath ; it is an oath in confirmation—of what ? of an opinion. It proves the sincerity of your declaration of your opinion ; but the opinion, notwithstanding the oath, may be either true or false. Permit me to produce to you an oath not confirming an opinion, but a fact ; it is the oath of St. Paul, when he swears to the Galatians, that in what he told them of his miraculous conversion he did not lie ; “ Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not ”—do but give that credit to St. Paul which I give to you, do but consider the difference between an opinion and a fact, and I shall not despair of your becoming a Christian.

Deism, you say, consists in a belief of one God, and an imitation of his moral character, or the practice of what is called virtue ; and in this (as far as religion is concerned) you rest all your hopes. There is nothing in deism but what is in Christianity, but there is much in Christianity which is not in deism. The Christian has no doubt concerning a future state ; every deist, from Plato to Thomas Paine, is on this subject overwhelmed with doubts insuperable by human reason. The Christian has no misgivings as to the pardon of penitent sinners, through the intercession of a mediator ; the deist is harassed with apprehensions lest the moral justice of God should demand, with inexorable rigor, punishment for transgression.

The Christian has no doubt concerning the lawfulness and the efficacy of prayer ; the deist is disturbed on this point by abstract considerations concerning the goodness of God, which wants not to be entreated ; concerning his foresight, which has no need of our information ; concerning his immutability, which cannot be changed through our supplication. The Christian admits the providence of God and the liberty of human actions ; the deist is involved in great difficulties when he undertakes the proof of either. The Christian has assurance that the Spirit of God will help his infirmities ; the deist does not deny the possibility that God may have access to the human mind, but he has no ground to believe the fact of his either enlightening the understanding, influencing the will, or purifying the heart.

### LETTER IX.

“Those,” you say, “who are not much acquainted with ecclesiastical history, may suppose that the book called the New Testament has existed ever since the time of Jesus Christ: but the fact is historically otherwise ; there was no such book as the New Testament till more than three hundred years after the time that Christ is said to have lived.” This paragraph is calculated to mislead common readers ; it is necessary to unfold its meaning. The book called the New Testament, consists of twenty-seven different parts ; concerning seven of these, viz. the Epistle to the Hebrews, that of James, the second of Peter, the second of John, the third of John, that of Jude, and the Revelation, there were at first some doubts ; and

the question whether they should be received into the canon might be decided, as all questions concerning opinions must be, by vote. With respect to the other twenty parts, those who are most acquainted with ecclesiastical history will tell you, as Du Pin does after Eusebius, that they were owned as canonical, at all times, and by all Christians. Whether the council of Laodicea was held before or after that of Nice, is not a settled point: all the books of the New Testament, except the Revelation, are enumerated as canonical in the Constitution of that council; but it is a great mistake to suppose that the greatest part of the books of the New Testament were not in *general use* amongst the Christians long before the council of Laodicea was held. This is not merely my opinion on the subject; it is the opinion of one much better acquainted with ecclesiastical history than I am, and probably than you are—*Mosheim*. “The opinions,” says this author, “or rather the conjectures of the learned, concerning the time when the books of the New Testament were collected into one volume, as also about the authors of that collection, are extremely different. This important question is attended with great and almost insuperable difficulties to us in these latter times. It is however sufficient for us to know, that, before the middle of the second century, the greatest part of the books of the New Testament were read in every Christian society throughout the world, and received as a divine rule of faith and manners. Hence it appears that these sacred writings were carefully separated from several human compositions upon the same subject, either by some of the apostles themselves who lived so long, or by their

disciples and successors who were spread abroad through all nations. We are well assured that the *four Gospels* were collected during the life of St. John, and that the three first received the approbation of this divine apostle. And why may we not suppose that the other books of the New Testament were gathered together at the same time? What renders this highly probable is, that the most urgent necessity required its being done. For, not long after Christ's ascension into heaven, several histories of his life and doctrines, full of pious frauds and fabulous wonders, were composed by persons whose intentions, perhaps, were not bad, but whose writings discovered the greatest superstition and ignorance. Nor was this all; productions appeared, which were imposed on the world by fraudulent men, as the writings of the holy apostles. These apocryphal and spurious writings must have produced a sad confusion, and rendered both the history and the doctrine of Christ uncertain, had not the rulers of the Church used all possible care and diligence in separating the books that were truly apostolical and divine from all that spurious trash, and conveying them down to posterity in one volume."

Did you ever read the Apology for the Christians which Justin Martyr presented to the emperor Antoninus Pius, to the senate and people of Rome? I should sooner expect a fallacy in a petition which any body of persecuted men, imploring justice, should present to the king and parliament of Great Britain, than in this Apology. Yet in this Apology, which was presented not fifty years after the death of St. John, not only parts of *all the four Gospels* are quoted, but it is ex-



pressly said, that on the day called Sunday, a portion of them was read in the public assemblies of the Christians. I forbear pursuing this matter further, else it might easily be shown that probably the Gospels, and certainly some of St. Paul's epistles, were known to *Clement*, *Ignatius*, and *Polycarp*, contemporaries with the apostles. These men could not quote or refer to books which did not exist; and therefore, though you could make it cut that the book called the New Testament did not formally exist under that title till 350 years after Christ, yet I hold it to be a certain fact that all the books of which it is composed were written, and most of them received by all Christians, within a few years after his death.

You raise a difficulty relative to the time which intervened between the death and resurrection of Jesus, who had said, that the Son of man should be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Are you ignorant, then, that the Jews used the phrase three days and three nights to denote what we understand by three days? It is said in Genesis, chap. 7 : 12, "The rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights;" and this is equivalent to the expression, (ver. 17.) "And the flood was forty days upon the earth." Instead then of saying three days and three nights, let us simply say three days; and you will not object to Christ's being three days—Friday, Saturday, and Sunday—in the heart of the earth. I do not say that he was in the grave the whole of either Friday or Sunday; but a hundred instances might be produced, from writers of all nations, in which a part of a day is spoken of as the whole. Thus much for the defence of the historical part of the New Testament.

You have introduced an account of *Faustus*, as denying the genuineness of the books of the New Testament. Will you permit that great scholar in sacred literature, *Michaelis*, to tell you something about this *Faustus*? "He was ignorant, as were most of the African writers, of the Greek language, and acquainted with the New Testament merely through the channel of the Latin translation: he was not only devoid of a sufficient fund of learning, but illiterate in the highest degree. An argument which he brings against the genuineness of the Gospel affords sufficient ground for this assertion; for he contends that the Gospel of St. Matthew could not have been written by St. Matthew himself, because he is always mentioned in the third person." You know who has argued like *Faustus*, but I did not think myself authorized on that account to call you illiterate in the highest degree; but *Michaelis* makes a still more severe conclusion concerning *Faustus*, and he extends his observation to every man who argued like him: "A man capable of such an argument must have been ignorant not only of the Greek writers, the knowledge of which could not have been expected from *Faustus*, but even of the commentaries of Cæsar. And were it thought improbable that so heavy a charge could be laid with justice on the side of his knowledge, it would fall with double weight on the side of his honesty, and induce us to suppose that, preferring the art of sophistry to the plainness of truth, he maintained opinions which he believed to be false." Never more, I think, shall we hear of Moses not being the author of the Pentateuch, on account of its being written in the third person.

Not being able to produce any argument to render

questionable either the genuineness or the authenticity of St. Paul's Epistles, you tell us that "it is a matter of no great importance by whom they were written, since the writer, whoever he was, attempts to prove his doctrine by argument: he does not pretend to have been witness to any of the scenes told of the resurrection and ascension, and he declares that he had not believed them." That Paul had so far resisted the evidence which the apostles had given of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus as to be a persecutor of the disciples of Christ, is certain; but I do not remember the place where he declares that he had not believed them. The high priest and the senate of the children of Israel did not deny the reality of the miracles which had been wrought by Peter and the apostles; they did not contradict their testimony concerning the resurrection and the ascension; but, whether they believed it or not, they were fired with indignation, and took counsel to put the apostles to death: and this was also the temper of Paul: whether he believed or did not believe the story of the resurrection, he was exceedingly mad against the saints. The writer of Paul's Epistles does not attempt to prove his doctrine by argument; he in many places tells us that his doctrine was not taught him by man, or any invention of his own, which required the ingenuity of argument to prove it: "I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel, which was preached of me, is not after man; for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Paul does not pretend to have been a witness of the *story* of the resurrection, but he does much more, he asserts that he was himself a witness of the resurrection. After enumerating many

appearances of Jesus to his disciples, Paul says of himself, "Last of all, he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." Whether you will admit Paul to have been a *true* witness or not, you cannot deny that he pretends to have been *a* witness of the resurrection.

The story of his being struck to the ground, as he was journeying to Damascus, has nothing in it, you say, miraculous or extraordinary; you represent him as struck by lightning. It is somewhat extraordinary for a man who is struck by lightning, to have, at the very time, full possession of his understanding; to hear a voice issuing from the lightning, speaking to him in the Hebrew tongue, calling him by his name, and entering into conversation with him. His companions, you say, appear not to have suffered in the same manner; the greater the wonder. If it was a common storm of thunder and lightning which struck Paul and all his companions to the ground, it is somewhat extraordinary that he alone should be hurt; and that, notwithstanding his being struck blind by lightning, he should in other respects be so little hurt as to be immediately able to walk into the city of Damascus. So difficult is it to oppose truth by an hypothesis! In the character of Paul you discover a great deal of violence and fanaticism; and such men, you observe, are never good moral evidences of any doctrine they teach. Read, sir, Lord Lyttelton's *Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul*, and I think you will be convinced of the contrary. That elegant writer thus expresses his opinion on this subject: "Besides all the proofs of the Christian religion, which may be drawn from the prophecies of the Old Testament, from the

necessary connection it has with the whole system of the Jewish religion, from the miracles of Christ, and from the evidence given of his resurrection by all the other apostles, I think the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul alone, duly considered, is of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation." I hope this opinion will have some weight with you ; it is not the opinion of a lying Bible-prophet, of a stupid evangelist, or of an *a b ab* priest, but of a learned layman, whose illustrious rank received splendor from his talents.

You are displeased with St. Paul "for setting out to prove the resurrection of the *same* body." You know, I presume, that the resurrection of the same body is not, by all, admitted to be a scriptural doctrine. "In the New Testament (wherein, I think, are contained all the articles of the Christian faith,) I find our Savior and the apostles to preach the resurrection of the dead, and the resurrection from the dead, in many places ; but I do not remember any place where the resurrection of the same body is so much as mentioned." This observation of Mr. Locke I so far adopt, as to deny that you can produce any place in the writings of St. Paul, wherein he sets out to prove the resurrection of the same body. I do not question the possibility of the resurrection of the same body, and I am not ignorant of the manner in which some learned men have explained it ; (somewhat after the way of your vegetative speck in the kernel of a peach ;) but as you are discrediting St. Paul's doctrine, you ought to show that what you attempt to discredit is the doctrine of the apostle. As a matter of choice, you had rather have a better body—you will have a better bo-

dy, "your natural body will be raised a spiritual body, your corruptible will put on incorruption." You are so much out of humor with your present body, that you inform us every animal in the creation excels us in something. Now I had always thought that the single circumstance of our having hands, and their having none, gave us an infinite superiority, not only over insects, fishes, snails, and spiders, (which you represent as excelling us in locomotive powers,) but over all the animals of the creation; and enabled us, in the language of Cicero, describing the manifold utility of our hands, to make as it were a new nature of things. As to what you say about the consciousness of existence being the only conceivable idea of a future life, it proves nothing, either for or against the resurrection of a body, or of the same body; it does not inform us whether to any or to what substance, material or immaterial, this consciousness is annexed. I leave it however to others, who do not admit personal identity to consist in consciousness, to dispute with you on this point, and willingly subscribe to the opinion of Mr. Locke, "that nothing but consciousness can unite remote existences into the same person."

From a caterpillar's passing into a torpid state resembling death, and afterwards appearing a splendid butterfly, and from the (supposed) consciousness of existence which the animal had in these different states, you ask, "Why must I believe that the resurrection of the same body is necessary to continue in me the consciousness of existence hereafter?" I do not dislike analogical reasoning, when applied to proper objects and kept within due bounds; but where is it said in Scrip-

ture, that the resurrection of the same body is necessary to continue in you the consciousness of existence? Those who admit a conscious state of the soul between death and the resurrection, will contend that the soul is the substance in which consciousness is continued without interruption: those who deny the intermediate state of the soul as a state of consciousness, will contend that consciousness is not destroyed by death, but suspended by it, as it is suspended during a sound sleep, and that it may as easily be restored after death as after sleep, during which the faculties of the soul are not extinct but dormant. Those who think that the soul is nothing distinct from the compages of the body, not a substance but a mere quality, will maintain that the consciousness appertaining to every individual person is not lost when the body is destroyed; that it is known to God, and may, at the general resurrection, be annexed to any system of matter he may think fit, or to that particular compages to which it belonged in this life.

In reading your book I have been frequently shocked at the virulence of your zeal, at the indecorum of your abuse in applying vulgar and offensive epithets to men who have been held, and who will long, I trust, continue to be holden in high estimation. I know that the scar of calumny is seldom wholly effaced, it remains long after the wound is healed; and your abuse of holy men and holy things will be remembered when your arguments against them are refuted and forgotten. Moses you term an arrogant coxcomb, a chief assassin; Aaron, Joshua, Samuel, David, monsters and imposters; the Jewish kings a parcel of rascals; Jeremiah and the rest of the prophets liars; and Paul a

fool, for having written one of the sublimest compositions, and on the most important subject that ever occupied the mind of man—the fifteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians: this you call a doubtful jargon, as destitute of meaning as the tolling of the bell at a funeral. Men of low condition! pressed down, as you often are, by calamities generally incident to human nature, and groaning under burthens of misery peculiar to your condition, what thought you when you heard this chapter read at the funeral of your child, your parent, or your friend? Was it mere jargon to you, as destitute of meaning as the tolling of a bell? No. You understood from it that you would not all sleep, but that you would all be changed in a moment, at the last trump; you understood from it that this corruptible must put on incorruption, that this mortal must put on immortality, and that death would be swallowed up in victory; you understood from it, that if (notwithstanding profane attempts to subvert your faith) ye continue steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, your labor will not be in vain.

You seem fond of displaying your skill in science and philosophy; you speak more than once of Euclid; and, in censuring St. Paul, you intimate to us, that when the apostle says, one star differeth from another star in glory, he ought to have said in distance. All men *see* that one star differeth from another star in glory or brightness, but few men *know* that their difference in brightness arises from their difference in distance; and I beg leave to say, that even you, philosopher as you are, do not *know* it. You make an assumption which you cannot prove—that the stars are *equal* in



magnitude, and placed at *different* distances from the earth; but you cannot prove that they are not different in magnitude and placed at equal distances, though none of them may be so near to the earth as to have any sensible annual *parallax*. I beg pardon of my readers for touching upon this subject; but it really moves one's indignation to see a smattering in philosophy urged as an argument against the veracity of an apostle. "Little learning is a dangerous thing."

Paul, you say, affects to be a naturalist, and to prove (you might more properly have said illustrate) his system of resurrection from the principles of vegetation: "Thou fool," says he, "that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die;" to which one might reply in his own language, and say, "Thou fool, Paul, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die *not*." It may be seen, I think, from this passage, who affects to be a naturalist, to be acquainted with the microscopical discoveries of modern times; which were probably neither known to Paul nor to the Corinthians; and which, had they been known to them both, would have been of little use in the illustration of the subject of the resurrection. Paul said, "that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die:" every husbandman in Corinth, though unable perhaps to define the term death, would understand the apostle's phrase in a popular sense, and agree with him that a grain of wheat must become *rotten* in the ground before it could sprout; and that, as God raised, from a rotten grain of wheat, the roots, the stem, the leaves, the ear of a new plant, he might also cause a new body to spring up from the rotten carcass in the grave. Doctor Clarke observes, "In like manner, as

in every grain of corn there is contained a minute insensible seminal principle, which is itself the entire future blade and ear, and in due season, when all the rest of the grain is corrupted, evolves and unfolds itself visibly to the eye; so our present mortal and corruptible body may be but the *exuvia*, as it were, of some hidden and at present insensible principle, (possibly the present seat of the soul,) which at the resurrection shall discover itself in its proper form." I do not agree with this great man (for such I esteem him) in this philosophical conjecture; but the quotation may serve to show you that the germ does not evolve and unfold itself visibly to the eye till after the rest of the grain is *corrupted*; that is, in the language and meaning of St. Paul, till it *dies*. Though the authority of Jesus may have as little weight with you as that of Paul, yet it may not be improper to quote to you our Savior's expression, when he foretells the numerous disciples which his death would produce: "Except a corn of wheat fall unto the ground and *die*, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." You perceive from this, that the Jews thought the death of the grain was necessary to its reproduction: hence every one may see what little reason you had to object to the apostle's popular illustration of the possibility of a resurrection. Had he known as much as any naturalist in Europe does, of the progress of an animal from one state to another, as from a worm to a butterfly, (which you think applies to the case,) I am of opinion he would not have used that illustration in preference to what he has used, which is obvious and satisfactory.

Whether the fourteen epistles ascribed to Paul were

written by him or not, is, in your judgment, a matter of indifference. So far from being a matter of indifference, I consider the genuineness of St. Paul's epistles to be a matter of the greatest importance; for if the epistles ascribed to Paul were written by him, (and there is unquestionable proof that they were,) it will be difficult for you, or for any man, upon fair principles of sound reasoning, to deny that the Christian religion is true. The argument is a short one, and obvious to every capacity. It stands thus: St. Paul wrote several letters to those whom, in different countries, he had converted to the Christian faith; in these letters he affirms two things; first, that he had wrought miracles in their presence; secondly, that many of themselves had received the gift of tongues, and other miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost. The persons to whom these letters were addressed must, on reading them, have certainly known whether Paul affirmed what was true, or told a plain lie; they must have known whether they had seen him work miracles; they must have been conscious whether they themselves did or did not possess any miraculous gifts. Now, can you, or can any man, believe for a moment that Paul (a man certainly of great abilities) would have written public letters full of lies, and which could not fail of being discovered to be lies as soon as his letters were read? Paul could not be guilty of falsehood in these two points, or in either of them; and if either of them be true, the Christian religion is true. References to these two points are frequent in St. Paul's epistles: I will mention only a few. In his epistle to the Galatians he says, (chap. 4 : 2, 5,) "This only would I

learn of you, received ye the Spirit (gifts of the Spirit) by the works of the law? He ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you." To the Thessalonians he says, (1 Thess. ch. 1 : 5,) "Our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost." To the Corinthians he thus expressed himself, (Cor. 2 : 4,) "My preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power;" and he adds the reason for his working miracles, "That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." With what alacrity would the faction at Corinth, which opposed the apostle, have laid hold of this and many similar declarations in his letter, had they been able to have detected any falsehood in them? There is no need to multiply words on so clear a point: the genuineness of Paul's epistles proves their authenticity, independently of every other proof; for it is absurd in the extreme to suppose him, under circumstances of obvious detection, capable of advancing what was not true; and if Paul's epistles be both genuine and authentic, the Christian religion is true. Think of this argument.

You close your observations in the following manner: "Should the Bible (meaning, as I have before remarked, the Old Testament) and Testament hereafter fall, it is not I that have been the occasion." You look, I think, upon your production with a parent's partial eye, when you speak of it in such a style of self-complacency. The Bible, sir, has withstood the learning of *Porphyry* and the power of *Julian*, to say nothing of the Manichean *Faustus*; it

has resisted the genius of *Bolingbroke* and the wit of *Voltaire*, to say nothing of the numerous herd of inferior assailants; and it will not fall by your force. You have barbed anew the blunted arrows of former adversaries; you have feathered them with blasphemy and ridicule; dipped them in your deadliest poison; aimed them with your utmost skill; shot them against the shield of faith with your utmost vigor; but, like the feeble javelin of aged *Priam*, they will scarcely reach the mark, and will fall to the ground without a stroke.

### LETTER X.

The remaining part of your work can hardly be made the subject of animadversion. It principally consists of unsupported assertions, abusive appellations, illiberal sarcasms, "strifes of words, profane babblings, and oppositions of science, falsely so called." I am hurt at being, in mere justice to the subject, under the necessity of using such harsh language; and am sincerely sorry that, from what cause I know not, your mind has received a wrong bias in every point respecting revealed religion. You are capable of better things; for there is a philosophical sublimity in some of your ideas, when you speak of the Supreme Being as the Creator of the universe. That you may not accuse me of disrespect, in passing over any part of your work without bestowing proper attention upon it, I will wait upon you through what you call your conclusion.

You refer your reader to the former part of the *Age of Reason*; in which you have spoken of what you

esteem three frauds: mystery, miracle, and prophecy. I have not at hand the book to which you refer, and know not what you have said on these subjects. They are subjects of great importance, and we, probably, should differ essentially in our opinion concerning them; but, I confess, I am not sorry to be excused from examining what you have said on these points. The specimen of your reasoning which is now before me, has taken from me every inclination to trouble either my reader or myself with any observations on your former book.

You admit the possibility of God's revealing his will to man; yet "the thing so revealed," you say "is . revelation to the person only to whom it is made; his account of it to another is not revelation." This is true; his account is simple testimony. You add, there is no "possible criterion to judge of the truth of what he says." This I positively deny; and contend that a real miracle, performed in attestation of a revealed truth, is a certain criterion by which we may judge of the truth of that attestation. I am perfectly aware of the objections which may be made to this position; I have examined them with care; I acknowledge them to be of weight; but I do not speak unadvisedly, or as wishing to dictate to other men, when I say that I am persuaded the position is true. So thought Moses, when in the matter of Korah he said to the Israelites, "If these men die the common death of all men, then the Lord hath not sent me." So thought Elijah, when he said, "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant:"—and the people before whom he spake were of the same opinion; for, when

the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt-sacrifice, they said, "The Lord he is the God." So thought our Savior, when he said, "The works that I do in my Father's name they bear witness of me;" and, "if I do not the works of my Father, believe me not."

What reason have we to believe Jesus speaking in the Gospel, and to disbelieve Mahomet speaking in the Koran? Both of them lay claim to a Divine commission; and yet we receive the words of the one as a revelation from God, and we reject the words of the other as an imposture of man. The reason is evident: Jesus established his pretensions, not by alleging any secret communication with the Deity, but by working numerous and indubitable miracles in the presence of thousands, and which the most bitter and watchful of his enemies could not disallow; but Mahomet wrought no miracles at all: nor is a miracle the only criterion by which we may judge the truth of a revelation. If a series of prophets should, through a course of many centuries, predict the appearance of a certain person whom God would at a particular time send into the world for a particular end, and at length a person should appear in whom all the predictions were minutely accomplished; such a completion of prophecy would be a criterion of the truth of that revelation which that person should deliver to mankind. Or if a person should now say (as many false prophets have said, and are daily saying) that he had a commission to declare the will of God; and, as a proof of his veracity, should predict that, after his death, he would rise from the dead on the third day; the completion of such a prophecy would, I presume, be a sufficient criterion of the truth of what this man might have said

concerning the will of God. "Now I tell you (says Jesus to his disciples, concerning Judas, who was to betray him) before it come, that when it is come to pass ye may believe that I am he."

In various parts of the Gospels our Savior, with the utmost propriety, claims to be received as the messenger of God, not only from the miracles which he wrought, but from the prophecies which were fulfilled in his person, and from the predictions which he himself delivered. Hence, instead of there being no criterion by which we may judge of the truth of the Christian revelation, there are clearly three. It is an easy matter to use an indecorous flippancy of language in speaking of the Christian religion, and with a supercilious negligence, to class Christ and his apostles among the impostors who have figured in the world; but it is not, I think, an easy matter for any man, of good sense and sound erudition, to make an impartial examination into any one of the three grounds of Christianity which I have here mentioned, and to reject it.

What is it, you ask, the Bible teaches? The prophet Micah shall answer you: it teaches us "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God;" justice, mercy, and piety, instead of what you contend for,—rapine, cruelty, and murder. What is it, you demand, the Testament teaches us? You answer your question—to believe that the Almighty committed debauchery with a woman. Absurd and impious assertion! No, sir, no; this profane doctrine, this miserable stuff, this blasphemous perversion of Scripture, is your doctrine, not that of the New Testament. I will tell you the lesson which it teaches to



infidels as well as to believers; it is a lesson which philosophy never taught, which wit cannot ridicule, nor sophistry disprove; the lesson is this: "The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live: all that are in their graves shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

The moral precepts of the Gospel are so well fitted to promote the happiness of mankind in this world, and to prepare human nature for the future enjoyment of that blessedness, of which, in our present state, we can form no conception, that I had no expectation they would have met with your disapprobation. You say, however, "As to the scraps of morality that are irregularly and thinly scattered in those books, they make no part of the pretended thing, revealed religion." "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Is this a scrap of morality? Is it not rather the concentrated essence of all ethics, the vigorous root from which every branch of moral duty towards each other may be derived? Duties, you know, are distinguished by moralists into duties of perfect and imperfect obligation: does the Bible teach you nothing, when it instructs you that this distinction is done away? when it bids you "put on bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any." These, and precepts such as these, you will in vain look for in the codes of *Frederick* or *Justinian*; you cannot find them in your statute-books; they were not taught, nor are they taught, in the schools of heathen

philosophy ; or, if some one or two of them should chance to be glanced at by a Plato, a Seneca, or a Cicero, they are not bound upon the consciences of mankind by any sanction. It is in the Gospel, and in the Gospel alone, that we learn their importance : acts of benevolence and brotherly love may be to an unbeliever voluntary acts—to a Christian they are indispensable duties. Is a new commandment no part of revealed religion ? “ A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another :” the law of Christian benevolence is enjoined us by Christ himself, in the most solemn manner, as the distinguishing badge of our being his disciples.

Two precepts you particularize as inconsistent with the dignity and the nature of man—that of not resenting injuries, and that of loving enemies. Who but yourself ever interpreted literally the proverbial phrase ; “ If a man smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also ?” Did Jesus himself turn the other cheek when the officer of the high priest smote him ? It is evident that a patient acquiescence under slight personal injuries is here enjoined ; and that a proneness to revenge, which instigates men to savage acts of brutality for every trifling offence, is forbidden. As to loving enemies, it is explained in another place, to mean, the doing them all the good in our power ; “ if thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink ;” and what think you is more likely to preserve peace, and to promote kind affections amongst men, than the returning good for evil ? Christianity does not order us to love in proportion to the injury ; “ it does not offer a premium for a crime ;” it orders us to let our benevolence extend alike to all, that we may

emulate the benignity of God himself, who maketh "his sun to rise on the evil and on the good."

*Aristotle*, in his treatise of morals, says that some thought retaliation of personal wrongs an equitable proceeding; *Rhadamanthus* is said to have given it his sanction; the decemviral laws allowed it; the common law of England did not forbid it, and it is said to be still the law of some countries, even in Christendom: but the mild spirit of Christianity absolutely prohibits, not only the retaliation of injuries, but the indulgence of every resentful propensity.

"It has been," you affirm, "the scheme of the Christian church to hold man in ignorance of the Creator, as it is of government to hold him in ignorance of his rights." I appeal to the plain sense of any honest man to judge whether this representation be true. When he attends the services of the church, does he discover any design in the minister to keep him in ignorance of his Creator? Are not the public prayers in which he joins, and the sermons which are preached, all calculated to impress upon his mind a strong conviction of the mercy, justice, holiness, power, and wisdom of the one adorable God, blessed for ever? By these means which the Christian church has provided for our instruction, I will venture to say that the most unlearned congregation of Christians have more just and sublime conceptions of the Creator, a more perfect knowledge of their duty towards him, and a stronger inducement to the practice of virtue, holiness, and temperance, than all the philosophers of all the heathen countries in the world ever had, or now have. If, indeed, your scheme should take place, and men should no longer believe their Bible then would they soon become as ignorant

of the Creator as all the world was when God called Abraham from his kindred, and as all the world, which has had no communication with either Jews or Christians, now is. Then would they soon bow down to stocks and stones, kiss their hand (as they did in the time of Job, and as the poor African does now) to *the moon walking in brightness, and deny the God that is above*; then would they worship Jupiter, Bacchus and Venus, and emulate, in the transcendent flagitiousness of their lives, the impure morals of their gods.

You are animated with proper sentiments of piety, when you speak of the structure of the universe. No one, indeed, who considers it with attention, can fail of having his mind filled with the supremest veneration for its Author. Who can contemplate, without astonishment, the motion of a comet, running far beyond the orb of Saturn, endeavoring to escape into the pathless regions of unbounded space, yet feeling, at its utmost distance, the attractive influence of the sun; hearing, as it were, the voice of God arresting its progress, and compelling it, after a lapse of ages, to reiterate its ancient course? Who can comprehend the distance of the stars from the earth, and from each other? It is so great, that it mocks our conception; our very imagination is terrified, confounded, and lost, when we are told that a ray of light, which moves at the rate of ten millions of miles in a minute, will not, though emitted at this instant from the brightest star, reach the earth in less than six years. We think this earth a great globe, and we see the sad wickedness which individuals are often guilty of, in scraping together a little of its dirt; we view, with still greater ~~astonishment~~ and horror, the mighty ruin which has

in all ages, been brought upon human kind by the low ambition of contending powers, to acquire a temporary possession of a little portion of its surface. But how does the whole of this globe sink, as it were, to nothing, when we consider that a million of earths will scarcely equal the bulk of the sun; that all the stars are suns; and that millions of suns constitute, probably, but a minute portion of that material world which God hath distributed through the immensity of space! Systems, however, of insensible matter, though arranged in exquisite order, prove only the wisdom and the power of the great Architect of nature. As percipient beings, we look for something more—for his goodness; and we cannot open our eyes without seeing it.

Every portion of the earth, sea, and air, is full of sensitive beings, capable, in their respective orders, of enjoying the good things which God has prepared for their comfort. All the orders of beings are enabled to propagate their kind; and thus provision is made for a successive continuation of happiness. Individuals yield to the law of dissolution inseparable from the material structure of their bodies; but no gap is thereby left in existence; their place is occupied by other individuals capable of participating in the goodness of the Almighty. Contemplations such as these fill the mind with humility, benevolence, and piety. But why should we stop here? why not contemplate the goodness of God in the *redemption* as well as in the creation of the world? By the death of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ he has redeemed us from the eternal death which the transgression of Adam had entailed on all his posterity. You believe nothing about the

transgression of Adam. The history of Eve and the serpent excites your contempt; you will not admit that it is either a real history or an allegorical representation of death entering into the world through disobedience to the command of God. Be it so. You find, however, that death reigns over all mankind, by whatever means it was introduced: this is not a matter of belief, but of lamentable knowledge. The New Testament tells us that, through the merciful dispensation of God, Christ has overcome death, and restored man to that immortality which Adam had lost. This also you refuse to believe. Why? Because you cannot account for the propriety of this redemption. Miserable reason! stupid objection! What is there that you can account for? Not for the germination of a blade of grass, not for the fall of a leaf of the forest; and will you refuse to eat of the fruits of the earth, because God has not given you wisdom equal to his own? Will you refuse to lay hold on immortality, because he has not given you, because he, probably, could not give to such a being as man a full manifestation of the end for which he designs him, nor of the means requisite for the attainment of that end? What father of a family can make level to the apprehension of his infant children all the views of happiness which his paternal goodness is preparing for them? How can he explain to them the utility of reproof, correction, instruction, example, of all the various means by which he forms their minds to piety, temperance, and probity? We are children in the hand of God; we are in the very infancy of our existence, just separated from the womb of eternal duration; it may not be possible for the Father of the universe to explain to us (infants in

apprehension) the goodness and the wisdom of his dealings with the sons of men. What qualities of mind will be necessary for our well-doing through all eternity, we know not; what discipline in this infancy of existence may be necessary for generating these qualities, we know not; whether God could or could not, consistently with the general good, have forgiven the transgression of Adam without any atonement, we know not; whether the malignity of sin be not so great, so opposite to the general good, that it cannot be forgiven whilst it exists, that is, whilst the mind retains a propensity to it, we know not; so that if there should be much greater difficulty in comprehending the mode of God's moral government of mankind than there really is, there would be no reason for doubting of its rectitude. If the whole human race be considered as but one small member of a large community of free and intelligent beings of different orders, and if this whole community be subject to discipline and laws productive of the greatest possible good to the whole system, then may we still more reasonably suspect our capacity to comprehend the wisdom and goodness of all God's proceedings in the moral government of the universe.

You are lavish in your praise of deism. It is so much better than atheism, that I mean not to say any thing to its discredit; it is not, however, without its difficulties. What think you of an uncaused cause of every thing? of a Being who has no relation to time, not being older to-day than he was yesterday, nor younger to-day than he will be to-morrow? who has no relation to space, not being a part here, and a part there, or a whole any where? What think you of an

omniscient Being who cannot know the future actions of a man? Or, if his omniscience enables him to know them, what think you of the contingency of human actions? And if human actions are not contingent, what think you of the morality of actions, of the distinction between vice and virtue, crime and innocence, sin and duty? What think you of the infinite goodness of a Being who existed through eternity without any emanation of his goodness manifested in the creation of sensitive beings? Or, if you contend that there has been an eternal creation, what think you of an effect coeval with its cause, of matter not posterior to its Maker? What think you of the existence of evil, moral and natural, in the work of an infinite Being, powerful, wise, and good? What think you of the gift of freedom of will, when the abuse of freedom becomes the cause of general misery? I could propose to your consideration a great many other questions of a similar tendency, the contemplation of which has driven not a few from deism to atheism, just as the difficulties in revealed religion have driven yourself, and some others, from Christianity to deism.

For my own part, I can see no reason why either revealed or natural religion should be abandoned on account of the difficulties which attend either of them. I look up to the incomprehensible Maker of heaven and earth with unspeakable admiration and self-annihilation. I contemplate, with the utmost gratitude and numility of mind, his unsearchable wisdom and goodness in the redemption of the world from eternal death, through the intervention of his Son Jesus Christ; and I have no doubt of a future state. You and other men may conclude differently. From the inert nature



of matter, from the faculties of the human mind, from the apparent imperfection of God's moral government of the world, from many modes of analogical reasoning, and from other sources, some of the philosophers of antiquity did collect, and modern philosophers may, perhaps, collect a strong probability of a future existence; and not only of a future existence, but (which is quite a distinct question) of a future state of retribution proportioned to our moral conduct in this world. Far be it from me to loosen any of the obligations to virtue; but I must confess that I cannot, from the same sources of argumentation, derive any positive assurance on the subject. Think then with what thankfulness of heart I receive the word of God, which tells me, that though "in Adam (by the condition of our nature) all die," yet "in Christ (by the covenant of grace) shall all be made alive." I lay hold on "eternal life as the gift of God, through Jesus Christ;" I consider it not as any appendage to the nature I derive from Adam, but as the free gift of the Almighty, through his Son, whom he hath constituted Lord of all, the Savior, the Advocate, and the Judge of human kind.

"Deism," you affirm, "teaches us, without the possibility of being mistaken, all that is necessary or proper to be known." There are three things which all reasonable men admit are necessary and proper to be known; the *being of God*; the *providence of God*; a *future state of retribution*. Whether these three truths are so taught us by deism that there is no possibility of being mistaken concerning any of them, let the history of philosophy, and of idolatry, and superstition, in all ages and countries, determine. A volume

might be filled with an account of the mistakes into which the greatest reasoners have fallen, and of the uncertainty in which they lived, with respect to every one of these points. I will advert, briefly, only to the last of them. Notwithstanding the illustrious labors of Gassendi, Cudworth, Clarke, Baxter, and of above two hundred other modern writers on the subject, the *natural* mortality or immortality of the human soul is as little understood by us as it was by the philosophers of Greece or Rome. The opposite opinions of Plato and of Epicurus, on this subject, have their several supporters amongst the learned of the present age in Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy, in every enlightened part of the world; and they, who have been most seriously occupied in the study of the question concerning a future state, as deducible from the nature of the human soul, are least disposed to give, from reason, a positive decision of it either way. The importance of revelation is by nothing rendered more apparent than by the discordant sentiments of learned and good men (for I speak not of the ignorant and immoral) on this point. They show the insufficiency of human reason, in a course of above two thousand years, to unfold the mysteries of human nature, and to furnish, from the contemplation of it, any assurance of the quality of our future condition. If you should ever become persuaded of this insufficiency, (and you can scarce fail of becoming so, if you examine the matter deeply,) you will, if you act rationally, be disposed to investigate, with seriousness and impartiality, the truth of Christianity. You will say of the Gospel, as the Northumbrian heathens said to Paulinus, by whom they were converted to the Christian religion,

“The more we reflect on the nature of our soul, the less we know of it. Whilst it animates our body, we may know some of its properties; but when once separated, we know not whither it goes, or from whence it came. Since, then, the Gospel pretends to give us clearer notions of these matters, we ought to hear it, and, laying aside all passion and prejudice, follow that which shall appear most conformable to right reason.”

What a blessing is it to beings, with such limited capacities as ours confessedly are, to have God himself for our instructor in every thing which it much concerns us to know! We are principally concerned in knowing, not the origin of arts, or the recondite depths of science; not the history of mighty empires desolating the globe by their contentions; not the subtilities of logic, the mysteries of metaphysics, the sublimities of poetry, or the niceties of criticism. These, and subjects such as these, properly occupy the learned leisure of a few: but the bulk of human kind have ever been, and must ever remain, ignorant of them all; they must, of necessity, remain in the same state with that which a German emperor voluntarily put himself into, when he made a resolution, bordering on barbarism, that he would never read a printed book. We are all, of every rank and condition, equally concerned in knowing what will become of us after death; and, if we are to live again, we are interested in knowing whether it be possible for us to do any thing whilst we live here which may render that future life a happy one. Now, “that thing called Christianity,” as you scoffingly speak; that last best gift of Almighty God, as I esteem it, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, has given us the most clear and satisfactory information on both

these points. It tells us, what deism never could have told us, that we shall certainly be raised from the dead; that, whatever be the nature of the soul, we shall certainly live for ever; and that, whilst we live here, it is possible for us to do much towards the rendering that everlasting life a happy one. These are tremendous truths to bad men; they cannot be received and reflected on with indifference by the best; and they suggest to all such a cogent motive to virtuous action, as deism could not furnish even to Brutus himself.

Some men have been warped to infidelity by viciousness of life; and some may have hypocritically professed Christianity from prospects of temporal advantage; but, being a stranger to your character, I neither impute the former to you, nor can admit the latter as operating on myself. The generality of unbelievers are such, from want of information on the subject of religion; having been engaged from their youth in struggling for worldly distinction, or perplexed with the incessant intricacies of business, or bewildered in the pursuits of pleasure, they have neither ability, inclination, nor leisure, to enter into critical disquisitions concerning the truth of Christianity. Men of this description are soon startled by objections which they are not competent to answer; and the loose morality of the age (so opposite to Christian perfection) co-operating with their want of scriptural knowledge, they presently get rid of their nursery faith, and are seldom sedulous in the acquisition of another, founded, not on authority, but sober investigation. The Gospel has been offered to their acceptance; and, from whatever cause they reject it, I cannot but esteem their situation to be dangerous. Under the influence of that persua-

sion I have been induced to write this book. I do not expect to derive from it either fame or profit; these are not improper incentives to honorable activity, but there is a time of life when they cease to direct the judgment of thinking men. What I have written will not, I fear, make any impression on you; but I indulge a hope that it may not be without its effect on some of your readers. Infidelity is a rank weed; it threatens to overspread the land; its root is principally fixed amongst the great and opulent, but you are endeavoring to extend the malignity of its poison through all the classes of the community. For all I have the greatest respect, and am anxious to preserve them from the contamination of your irreligion. I know that many of the mercantile and laboring classes are given to reading, and desirous of information on all subjects. If this little book should chance to fall into their hands after they have read yours, and they should think that any of your objections to the authority of the Bible have not been fully answered, I entreat them to attribute the omission to the brevity which I have studied; to my desire of avoiding learned disquisitions; to my inadvertency; to my inability; to any thing rather than to an impossibility of completely obviating every difficulty you have brought forward. I address the same request to such of the youth of both sexes as may unhappily have imbibed, from your writings, the poison of infidelity; beseeching them to believe that all their religious doubts may be removed, though it may not have been in my power to answer, to their satisfaction, all your objections. I pray God that the rising generation of this land may be preserved from that "evil heart of unbelief" which has brought ruin on a neigh-

boring nation ; that neither a neglected education, nor domestic irreligion, nor evil communication, nor the fashion of a licentious world, may ever induce them to forget that religion alone ought to be their rule of life.

In the conclusion of my Apology for Christianity, I informed Mr. Gibbon of my extreme aversion to public controversy. I am now twenty years older than I was then, and I perceive that this my aversion has increased with my age. I have, through life, abandoned my little literary productions to their fate ; such of them as have been attacked, have never received any defence from me ; nor will this receive any, if it should meet with your public notice, or with that of any other man.

Sincerely wishing that you may become a partaker of that faith in revealed religion which is the foundation of my happiness in this world, and of all my hopes in another, I bid you farewell.

R. LANDAFF.

*Calgarth Park, Jan. 20, 1796.*

THE END.

## HUME'S

### DENIAL OF MIRACLES.

The plausible and sophistical argument of Hume, in his Essay on Miracles, in which he contends that "a miracle, however attested, can never be rendered credible," since "it is contrary to experience that a miracle should be true, but not contrary to experience that testimony should be false," has been ably answered by Drs. Campbell, Adam, Hey, Price, Douglass, Paley, Whately, Dwight, Alexander, Professor Vince, and others. The following brief notices seem all that it is necessary to insert in this volume.

"Independent," says Douglass in his 'Errors regarding Religion,' "of the *reductio ad absurdum* which Hume's own philosophy affords against his favorite argument, and which is undermined by the very system from which it springs, it may be observed that it contains within itself a complication of blunders, more numerous, perhaps, than ever were crowded into the same brief space. The argument of Hume against miracles is as follows: A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature, but we learn from experience that the laws of nature are never violated. Our only accounts of miracles depend upon testimony, and our belief in testimony itself depends upon experience. But experience shows that testimony is

sometimes true and sometimes false; therefore, we have only a *variable* experience in favor of testimony. But we have a *uniform* experience in favor of the uninterrupted course of nature. Therefore, as on the side of miracles there is but a variable experience, and on the side of no miracles a uniform experience, it is clear that the lower degree of evidence must yield to the higher degree, and therefore no testimony can prove a miracle to be true.

“Every one who has attacked this sophistry has pointed out a new flaw in it, and they are scarcely yet exhausted. Paley showed that it was necessary to demonstrate that there was no God, previously to demonstrating that there could be no miracles. Campbell showed that so far from belief in testimony being founded on experience alone, it was diffidence in testimony that we acquire by experience. Others have pointed out the sophism in the double use of the word experience, and the confusing of the experience of a particular individual with the universal experience of mankind; for to assert that miracles are contrary to experience in the last sense, is most pitifully to beg the question. Others have observed upon the complete misapprehension of the argument of Tillotson, and upon the sophism in the use of the word “contrary,” for as it is a begging of the question to say that miracles are contrary to the experience of mankind, so it is a sophism to say that they are contrary to the experience of Mr. Hume himself, unless he had been personally present at the time and place, when and where all the miracles recorded in the Bible are said to have been wrought, from the days of Moses to the time of our Savior. Our experience, so far from being



contrary to miracles, is decided in favor of them. Both our reason and our experience are altogether in favor of the veracity of testimony, where there is no motive to deceive, and no possibility of being deceived. Such was the case with the apostles. Their personal experience, and that of many others, is invincibly in favor of miracles. There is no experience—no, not even of a single individual, against miracles. No one was ever placed in the situation where miracles might be reasonably expected, to whom miracles were not vouchsafed. Thus so far from miracles being contrary to experience, the whole range of the experience we possess is altogether, and without one solitary exception, in favor of miracles.

“But to take entirely new ground, miracles, philosophically speaking, are not violations of the laws of nature. The miracles of the Bible, which are the only true miracles, so far from being violations of nature, are as natural as the lifting up of a stone from the ground, or impelling a vessel along the waves by the stroke of an oar. None would call it a violation of the laws of nature when human agents set a body in motion which was previously at rest, and which would have remained at rest without their interference; still less can it be called a violation of the laws of nature, when the Divine Agent, who is the law-giver of nature, impresses an additional force upon creation, and gives a new direction to its movements. But it would be endless to go over all the variety of mistakes which are involved in the sophistry against miracles, and to point out the many vulgar and unphilosophical notions which are implied in Hume's

reasonings, both concerning nature and her inviolable laws."

The proofs in Campbell's admirable treatise are summed up by the author in the following words :

"What is the sum of what has been now discussed ? It is briefly this, that the author's favorite argument, of which he boasts the discovery, is founded in error, is managed with sophistry, and is at last abandoned by its inventor, as fit only for show, not for use ; that he is not more successful in the collateral arguments he employs, particularly that there is no peculiar presumption against religious miracles ; that, on the contrary, there is a peculiar presumption in their favor ; that the general maxim, whereby he would enable us to decide betwixt opposite miracles, when it is stript of the pompous diction that serves it at once for decoration and for disguise, is discovered to be no other than an identical proposition, which, as it conveys no knowledge, can be of no service to the cause of truth, that there is no presumption, arising either from human nature or from the history of mankind, against the miracles said to have been wrought in proof of Christianity ; that the evidence of these is not subverted by those miracles which historians of other nations have recorded ; that neither the Pagan nor the Popish miracles, on which he has expatiated, will bear to be compared with those of holy writ ; that, abstracting from the evidence of particular facts, we have irrefragable evidence that there have been miracles in former times ; and, lastly, that his examination of the Pentateuch is both partial and imperfect, and consequently stands in need of a revisal."

## STARKIE'S EXAMINATION OF HUME'S ARGUMENT.

Starkie, an author of great eminence in the legal profession, in his "PRACTICAL TREATISE ON THE LAW OF EVIDENCE," under the head of "Force of Testimony," vol. 1, p. 471, appends the following note, than which nothing can be more conclusive.

"In observing upon the general principles on which the credibility of human testimony rests, it may not be irrelevant to advert to the summary positions on this subject advanced by Mr. Hume. He says in his Essay, vol. 2, sec. 10, A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined. As a matter of abstract philosophical consideration, (for in that point of view only can the subject be adverted to in a work like this,) Mr. Hume's reasoning appears to be altogether untenable. In the first place, the very basis of his inference is, that faith in human testimony is founded solely upon *experience*; this is by no means the fact; the credibility of testimony frequently depends upon the exercise of reason, on the effect of *coincidences in testimony*, which, if collusion be excluded, cannot be accounted for but upon the supposition that the testimony of concurring witnesses is true; so much so, that their individual character for veracity is frequently but of secondary importance, (*supra*, 466.) Its credibility also greatly de-

pend upon confirmation by collateral circumstances, and on analogies supplied by the aid of reason as well as of mere experience. But even admitting experience to be the basis, even the *sole* basis, of such belief, the position built upon it is unwarrantable; and it is fallacious, for, if adopted, it would lead to error. The position is, that human testimony, the force of which rests upon experience, is inadequate to prove a violation of the laws of nature, which are established by firm and unalterable experience. The very essence of the argument is, that the force of human testimony (the efficacy of which in the abstract is admitted) is *destroyed* by an opposite, conflicting, and superior force, derived also from experience. If this were so, the argument would be invincible; but the question is, whether mere previous *inexperience* of an event testified is directly opposed to human testimony, so that mere inexperience as strongly proves that the thing *is not*, as previous experience of the credibility of human testimony proves that it *is*. Now a miracle, or violation of the laws of nature, can mean nothing more than an event or effect never observed before; and on the other hand, an event or effect in nature never observed before is a violation of the laws of nature; thus, to take Mr. Hume's own example, 'it is a miracle that a dead man should come to life, because that *has never been observed* in any age or country;' precisely in the same sense, the production of a new metal from potash, by means of a powerful and newly-discovered agent in nature, and the first observed descent of meteoric stones, were violations of the laws of nature; they were events which had never before been observed, and to the production of which the known laws of nature are inadequate.

But none of these events can, with the least propriety, be said to be *against* or *contrary* to the laws of nature in any other sense than that they have never before been observed; and that the laws of nature, as far as they were previously known, were inadequate to their production. The proposition of Mr. Hume ought then to be stated thus: Human testimony is founded on experience, and is therefore inadequate to prove that of which there has been no previous experience. Now, whether it be plain and self-evident that the mere negation of experience of a particular fact necessarily destroys all faith in the testimony of those who assert the fact to be true; or whether, on the other hand, this be not to confound the *principle* of belief with the *subject matter* to which it is to be applied; and whether it be not plainly contrary to reason to infer the *destruction* of an active principle of belief from the mere *negation of experience*, which is perfectly consistent with the just operation of that principle; whether, in short, this be not to assume broadly that mere inexperience on the one hand is necessarily superior to positive experience on the other, must be left to every man's understanding to decide. The inferiority of mere negative evidence to that which is direct and positive, is, it will be seen, a consideration daily acted upon in judicial investigations. Negative evidence is, in the abstract, inferior to positive, because the negative is not directly opposed to the positive testimony; both may be true. Must not this consideration also operate where there is mere inexperience, on the one hand, of an event in nature, and positive testimony of the fact on the other? Again, what are the laws of nature, established by firm and unalterable expe-

rience? That there may be, and are, general and even *unalterable* laws of providence and nature may readily be admitted; but, that *human knowledge and experience* of those laws is unalterable (which alone can be the test of exclusion) is untrue, except in a very limited sense; that is, it may fairly be assumed that a law of nature once known to operate, will always operate in a similar manner, unless its operation be impeded or counteracted by a new and contrary cause. In a larger sense, the laws of nature are continually alterable: as experiments are more frequent, more perfect, and as new phenomena are observed, and new causes or agents are discovered, human experience of the laws of nature becomes more general and more perfect. How much more extended and perfect, for instance, are the laws which regulate chemical attractions and affinities than they were two centuries ago? And it is probable that in future ages experience of the laws of nature will be more perfect than it is at present; it is, in short, impossible to define to what extent such knowledge may be carried, or whether, ultimately, the whole may not be resolvable into principles admitting of no other explanation than that they result immediately from the will of a superior Being. This, at all events, is certain, that the laws of nature, as inferred by the aid of experience, have from time to time, by the aid of experience, been rendered more general and more perfect. Experience, then, so far from pointing out any unalterable laws of nature to the exclusion of events or phænomena which have never before been experienced, and which cannot be accounted for by the laws already observed, shows the very contrary, and proves that such new events or

phænomena may become the foundation of more enlarged, more general, and therefore more perfect laws. But whose experience is to be the test? that of the objector; for the very nature of the objection excludes all light from the experience of the rest of mankind. The credibility, then, of human testimony is to depend not on any intrinsic or collateral considerations which can give credit to testimony, but upon the casual and previous knowledge of the person to whom the testimony is offered; in other ends, it is plain that a man's scepticism must bear a direct proportion to his ignorance. Again, if Mr. Hume's inference be just, the consequences to which it leads cannot be erroneous; on the other hand, if it lead to error, the inference must be fallacious; the position is, that human testimony is inadequate to prove that which has never been observed before, and this, by proving far too much for the author's purpose, is *felo de se*, and in effect proves nothing: for if constant experience amount to stronger evidence on the one side than is supplied by positive testimony on the other, the argument applies necessarily to all cases where mere constant inexperience on the one hand is opposed to positive testimony on the other. According, then, to this argument, every philosopher was bound to reject the testimony of witnesses that they had seen the descent of meteoric stones, and even acted contrary to sound reason in attempting to account for a fact disproved by constant inexperience, and would have been equally foolish in giving credit to a chemist that he had produced a metal from potash by means of a galvanic battery. It will not, I apprehend, be doubted that in these and similar instances the effect of Mr. Hume's argument

would have been to exclude testimony which was true, and to induce false conclusions; the principle, therefore, on which it is founded, must of necessity be fallacious. Nay further, if the testimony of others is to be rejected, however unlikely they were either to deceive or be deceived on the mere ground of inexperience of the fact testified, the same argument might be urged even to the extravagant length of excluding the authority of a man's own senses; for it might be said that it is more probable that he should have labored under some mental delusion, than that a fact should have happened contrary to constant experience of the course of nature.

“In stating that the inference attempted to be drawn from mere inexperience is fallacious, I mean not to assert that the absence of previous experience of a particular fact or phenomenon is not of the highest importance to be weighed as a circumstance in all investigations, whether they be physical, judicial, or historical; the more remote the subject of testimony is from our own knowledge and experience, the stronger ought the evidence to be to warrant our assent; neither is it meant to deny that in particular instances, and under particular circumstances, the want or absence of previous experience may not be too strong for positive testimony, especially when it otherwise labors under suspicion. What is meant is this, that mere inexperience, however constant, is not in itself, and in the abstract, and without consideration of all the internal and external probabilities in favor of human testimony, sufficient to defeat and to destroy it, so as to supersede the necessity of investigation. Mr. Hume's conclusion is highly objectionable, in a philosophical point of



view, inasmuch as it would leave phenomena of the most remarkable nature wholly unexplained, and would operate to the utter exclusion of all inquiry. Estoppels are odious, even in judicial investigations, because they tend to exclude the truth; in metaphysics they are intolerable. So conscious was Mr. Hume himself of the weakness of his general and sweeping position, that in the second part of his 10th section he limits his inference in these remarkable terms, 'I beg the limitations here made may be remarked, when I say that a miracle can never be proved so as to be the foundation of a system of religion; for I own that otherwise there *may possibly* be miracles or violations of the usual course of nature of such a kind as *to admit of proof from human testimony.*'

"In what way the use to be made of a fact, when proved, can affect the validity of the proof, or how it can be that a fact *proved* to be true is not true for all purposes to which it is relevant, I pretend not to understand. Whether a miracle, when proved, may be the foundation of a system of religion, is foreign to the present discussion; but when it is once admitted that a miracle *may be proved by human testimony*, it necessarily follows, from Mr. Hume's own concession, that his general position is untenable; for that, if true, goes to the full extent of proving that human testimony is *inadequate* to the proof of a miracle, or violation of the laws of nature."

## THE RESURRECTION.

ORDER OF EVENTS, AS RECORDED BY THE FOUR  
EVANGELISTS.

In the unanswered and unanswerable treatise of GILBERT WEST, Esq. on the resurrection, all seeming contradictions in the narratives of the Evangelists are so fully explained, and the whole subject of the resurrection so amply and ably presented, that it forms one of the most convincing proofs of the truth of Christianity. The reader who would thoroughly examine the subject, is referred to the volume itself. Only the outline of the *order of events* as presented by the author is here given.

Having thus cleared the way, (he says, section 9,) I shall now set down the several incidents of this wonderful event, in the order in which, according to the foregoing observations, they seem to have arisen; after premising that our Savior, Christ, was crucified on a Friday, (the preparation, or the day before the Jewish Sabbath,) gave up the ghost about three o'clock in the afternoon of the same day, and was buried that evening, before the commencement of the Sabbath, which among the Jews was always reckoned to begin from the first appearance of the stars on Friday evening, and to end at the appearance of them again on the day we call Saturday: that some time, and most probably towards the close of the Sabbath, after the religious duties of the day were over, the chief priests obtained of Pilate, the Roman governor, a guard to watch the sepulchre till the third day was past, pretending to

apprehend that his disciples might come by night and steal away the body, and then give out that he was risen, according to what he himself had predicted while he was yet alive; that they did accordingly set a guard, made sure the sepulchre, and to prevent the soldiers themselves from concurring with the disciples, they put a seal upon the stone which closed up the entrance of the sepulchre.

The order I conceive to have been as follows:

Very early on the first day of the week (the day immediately following the Sabbath, and the third from the death of Christ) Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, in pursuance of the design of embalming the Lord's body, which they had concerted with the other women who attended him from Galilee to Jerusalem, and for the performing of which they had prepared unguents and spices, set out, in order to take a view of the sepulchre, just as the day began to break; and about the time of their setting out, "there was a great earthquake; for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door of the sepulchre, and sat upon it: his countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow; and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men," during whose amazement and terror Christ came out of the sepulchre; and the keepers being now recovered out of their trance and fled, the angel, who till then sat upon the stone, quitted the station on the outside, and entered into the sepulchre, and probably disposed the linen clothes and napkin in that order in which they were afterwards found and observed by John and Peter. Mary Magdalene, in the meanwhile, and the other Mary, were still on their

way to the sepulchre, where, together with Salome, (whom they had either called upon or met as they were going,) they arrived at the rising of the sun. And as they drew near, discoursing about the method of putting their intent of embalming the body of their Master in execution; "they said among themselves, who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? for it was very great;" and they themselves (the two Mariés at least) had seen it placed there two days before, and seen with what difficulty it was done. But in the midst of their deliberation about removing this great and sole obstacle to their design, (for it does not appear that they knew any thing of the guard,) lifting up their eyes, while they were yet at some distance, they perceived it was already rolled away. Alarmed at so extraordinary and so unexpected a circumstance, Mary Magdalene, concluding that, as the stone could not be moved without a great number of hands, so it was not rolled away without some design, and that they who rolled it away could have no other design but to remove the Lord's body; and being convinced by appearances that they had done so, ran immediately to acquaint Peter and John with what she had seen and what she suspected, leaving Mary and Salome there, that if Joanna and the other women should come in the meantime, they might acquaint them with their surprise at finding the stone removed and the body gone, and of Mary Magdalene's running to inform the two above-mentioned apostles of it. While she was going on this errand, Mary and Salome went on, and entered into the sepulchre, "and there saw an angel sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment, and they were affrighted. And he saith unto

them, Be not affrighted; ye seek Jesus of Nazareth which was crucified; he is risen, he is not here; behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples, and Peter, that he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him, as he said unto you. And they went out quickly and fled from the sepulchre, for they trembled and were amazed; neither said they any thing to any man, for they were afraid." After the departure of Mary and Salome came John and Peter, who having been informed by Mary Magdalene that the body of the Lord was taken away out of the sepulchre, and that she knew not where they had laid him, "ran both together to the sepulchre, and the other disciple [John] outran Peter, and came first to the sepulchre; and he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying, yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter, following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, and the napkin that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw and believed; for as yet they knew not the Scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home. But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping; and as she wept, she stooped down and looked into the sepulchre, and seeth two angels in white, sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain; and they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself

back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary! She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni! which is to say, Master! Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended unto my Father; but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." After this appearance of Christ to Mary Magdalene, to whom St. Mark says expressly he appeared first, the other Mary and Salome, who had fled from the sepulchre in such terror and amazement that they said not any thing to any man, (that is, as I understand, had not told the message of the angel to some whom they met, and to whom they were directed to deliver it,) were met on their way by Jesus Christ himself, who said to them, "All hail! And they came and held him by the feet and worshiped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid, go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me." These several women and the two apostles being now gone from the sepulchre, Joanna with the other Galilean women, "and others with them, came bringing the spices which they had prepared for the embalming the body of Jesus, and finding the stone rolled away from the sepulchre, they entered in, but not finding the body of the Lord Jesus, they were much perplexed thereabout, and behold two men stood by them in shining garments; and as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them,

Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen. Remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words, and returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest. And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not." But Peter, who upon the report of Mary Magdalene had been at the sepulchre, had entered into it, and with a curiosity that bespoke an expectation of something extraordinary, and a desire of being satisfied, had observed that the linen clothes in which Christ was buried, and the napkin which was about his head, were not only left in the sepulchre, but carefully wrapped up and laid in several places; and who from thence might begin to suspect what his companion St. John from those very circumstances seems to have believed: Peter, I say, hearing from Joanna that she had seen a vision of angels at the sepulchre, who had assured her that Christ was risen, starting up, ran thither immediately, and knowing that the angels, if they were within the sepulchre, might be discovered without his going in, he did not, as before, enter in, but stooping down looked so far in as to see the "linen clothes, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass." And either with Peter, or about that time, went some other disciples who were present when Joanna and the other women made their report, "and found it even so as the women had said. The same day two of the disciples went to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. And they

talked together of all those things which had happened. And it came to pass that while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden, that they should not know him. And he said unto them, What manner of communications [arguments] are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk and are sad? And one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days? And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people; and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel; and beside all this, to-day is the third day since these things were done. Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre; and when they found not his body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive. And certain of them which were with us, went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said; but him they saw not. Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. And they drew nigh unto the village whither they went, and he made as though he would have



gone farther. But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us, for it is towards evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them. And it came to pass as he sat at meat with them, he took bread and blessed it, and brake and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures? And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon. And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread."

This is the order in which the several incidents above related appear to have arisen; the conformity of which with the words of the evangelists, interpreted in their obvious and most natural sense, I have shown in my remarks upon the passages wherein they are contained. By this order, all the different events naturally and easily follow, and as it were rise out of one another, and the narration of the evangelists is cleared from all confusion and inconsistencies.

**THE END.**

