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THE
POPULAR EVIDENCE

OF

CHRISTIANITY :

STATED AND EXAMINED.

BY

THOMAS WILLIAM LANCASTER, M. A.

VICAR OF BANBURY, AND FORMERLY FELLOW OF QUEEN'S COLLEGE,
OXFORD.

‘Ο ΜΕΓΑΣ ‘ΗΜΩΝ ΘΕΟΣ ‘Ο ΚΟΙΝΟΣ
‘ΑΠΑΝΤΩΝ ΣΩΤΗΡ ΚΟΙΝΟΝ ‘ΑΠΑΣΙ ΤΟ ΦΩΣ ΕΞΕΤΕΙΝΕΝ.

Constantin. M. apud Euseb. in Vita, lib. II. c. 71.

J. PARKER, OXFORD :
AND J. G. AND F. RIVINGTON, LONDON.

MDCCCXXXI.

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EIGHT DISCOURSES

PREACHED BEFORE

THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

IN THE YEAR MDCCCXXXI.

AT THE

LECTURE

FOUNDED BY

THE LATE REV. JOHN BAMPTON, (M. A.)

CANON OF SALISBURY.

Leat
18



TO
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
THE DOWAGER
BARONESS LYTTELTON.



MADAM,

I HOPE I am not indulging an improper sentiment, in wishing thus to present the fruit of a recent labour, to a person, whose concurrence with my views on other subjects has been to me a source of extreme gratification.

Should the estimation of a literary work be in any way affected by considerations, distinct from the things contained in it: there

is no circumstance, which I should be more desirous of connecting with my appearance before the world, than the character of having been honoured with very obliging tokens of your Ladyship's friendship and respect.

I have the honour to be,

MADAM,

Your Ladyship's much obliged,
and faithful humble servant.

P R E F A C E.

THE present work contains passages, some of which require further illustration, while others might advantageously be corroborated by additional evidence. But these benefits cannot be accomplished without an inconvenient delay of publication. I shall only remark, therefore, that should the degree of attention bestowed on this book, be such as to justify a resumption of my labours: I purpose, if it be the Divine pleasure, to connect with it a volume of supplementary dissertations. Should I be permitted to realize this purpose, I intend, that the following three subjects should be points of prominent consideration: namely, The criterion of the canonical authority of scriptural books; The duration of miraculous powers in the church; and, The vindication of episcopacy, as a necessary part of an ecclesiastical constitution.

Should my general reasoning be approved,

it may contribute to illustrate its capacity of practical application, if I state, that the present work is nothing more than an expanded view of two sermons on the grounds of faith, belonging to a catechetical course, which it has been my practice to use in the sphere of my pastoral duty: the substance of those sermons being enlarged and modified, conformably to the change of circumstances and hearers; and more especially with a view to the answer of such objections, as are likely to occur to the minds of persons historically conversant with the subject.

With regard to the notes, it is to be remarked, that the matter contained in them is, in a great measure, presented in that form, only because the time allowed for the delivery of these Discourses, would not permit the introduction of it into the text.

I cannot deny myself the pleasure of embracing this method, of conveying my very thankful acknowledgments of the valuable information, and kind suggestions, which, in the course of my undertaking, I have occa-

sionally received from a gentleman, whose profound and various learning, place him in the very highest rank of theological and literary eminence ; and whose great attainments are fully equalled, by his kind disposition to impart the advantages of them. The gentleman of whom I speak, is the Rev. VAUGHAN THOMAS, B. D. and formerly fellow of Corpus Christi College in this University.

Oxford, June 8, 1831.



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EXTRACT

FROM

THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

OF THE LATE

REV. JOHN BAMPTON,

CANON OF SALISBURY.



——“ I give and bequeath my Lands and
“ Estates to the Chancellor, Masters, and Scholars
“ of the University of Oxford for ever, to have
“ and to hold all and singular the said Lands or
“ Estates upon trust, and to the intents and pur-
“ poses hereinafter mentioned; that is to say, I
“ will and appoint that the Vice-Chancellor of
“ the University of Oxford for the time being
“ shall take and receive all the rents, issues, and
“ profits thereof, and (after all taxes, reparations,
“ and necessary deductions made) that he pay all
“ the remainder to the endowment of eight Di-
“ vinity Lecture Sermons, to be established for
“ ever in the said University, and to be performed
“ in the manner following :

“ I direct and appoint, that, upon the first
“ Tuesday in Easter Term, a Lecturer be yearly

“ chosen by the Heads of Colleges only, and by
 “ no others, in the room adjoining to the Print-
 “ ing-House, between the hours of ten in the
 “ morning and two in the afternoon, to preach
 “ eight Divinity Lecture Sermons, the year fol-
 “ lowing, at St. Mary’s in Oxford, between the
 “ commencement of the last month in Lent Term,
 “ and the end of the third week in Act Term.

“ Also I direct and appoint, that the eight Di-
 “ vinity Lecture Sermons shall be preached upon
 “ either of the following subjects—to confirm and
 “ establish the Christian Faith, and to confute all
 “ heretics and schismatics—upon the divine author-
 “ ity of the holy Scriptures—upon the authority of
 “ the writings of the primitive Fathers, as to the
 “ faith and practice of the primitive Church—upon
 “ the Divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ
 “ —upon the Divinity of the Holy Ghost—upon the
 “ Articles of the Christian Faith, as comprehended
 “ in the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds.

“ Also I direct, that thirty copies of the eight
 “ Divinity Lecture Sermons shall be always printed,
 “ within two months after they are preached, and
 “ one copy shall be given to the Chancellor of the
 “ University, and one copy to the Head of every
 “ College, and one copy to the Mayor of the city of
 “ Oxford, and one copy to be put into the Bodleian
 “ Library; and the expense of printing them shall
 “ be paid out of the revenue of the Land or Estates
 “ given for establishing the Divinity Lecture Ser-
 “ mons: and the Preacher shall not be paid, nor be
 “ entitled to the revenue, before they are printed.

“ Also I direct and appoint, that no person shall
“ be qualified to preach the Divinity Lecture Ser-
“ mons, unless he hath taken the degree of Master
“ of Arts at least, in one of the two Universities of
“ Oxford or Cambridge; and that the same person
“ shall never preach the Divinity Lecture Sermons
“ twice.”

LECTURE I.

THE SUBJECT STATED.—PRELIMINARY REMARKS.

MATT. xi. 5.

The poor have the Gospel preached to them.

I. **THE** claims of the gospel on the faith and obedience of mankind, are in themselves so powerful, that they impart a commanding interest to every consideration which may promote their due effect. Of these claims we cannot magnify the authority : we cannot brighten the joys which recommend, nor amplify the terrors which enforce them : and we are concerned to remember, that they demand, not only our personal submission, but also our zealous efforts to procure the same submission in the hearts and lives of other men. It is plain then, that every contemplation of principles, which may operate to advance or to obstruct the propagation of Christianity, ought to be attended with a strong feeling of duty and responsibility. On

this general ground, without further introduction, I would rest the importance of the subject, which, in the present series of Lectures, I purpose to treat.

I hasten then to state to you the point of inquiry to which I would call your attention. It may be represented in the following brief expression. *The gospel demands to be received by all men to whom it is proposed: but it is contended, that the evidences of its truth can, in some measure at least, be estimated BY THE LEARNED ONLY: and that THE UNLEARNED ARE, AS TO THIS PARTICULAR, BOUND TO GIVE CREDIT TO THE LEARNED, and to acquiesce in the conclusions of persons more competent than themselves.*

II. I will, in the next place, state the reasons why I consider this subject as one which demands investigation. These are, first, because I am satisfied that the principle thus expressed is not true; secondly, because I am equally satisfied that it is in itself pernicious; and, thirdly, because it appears to me to derive a peculiarly dangerous character from its extensive prevalence, and from the names by which I find it to be sanctioned. Of these reasons if we regard only the two former, then the matter might well be suffered to repose in silence. For many errors

there are, which, because they are entertained by few, have little of evil consequence connected with them; and the confuting of all such errors is a work without end: but a religious error, which has at once an injurious character and an extensive influence, imperatively demands confutation.

That the sentiment is not true, it will be the purpose of the present series of Discourses to evince: and it will be my endeavour in the progress of my undertaking to demonstrate the contrary, by providing at length such a view of the proofs of revealed religion, as may suffice for the reasonable conviction of all men; and by contending, as I advance, that such proofs, without requiring any deference of ignorance to the authority of learning, are perfectly valid and tenable.

III. But I deem it important to represent to you, in the very beginning, that the falsehood of the objectionable proposition appears to me to be fully declared by scripture itself. For it is on principles wholly repugnant to that proposition, that revelation demands the assent of mankind. That it does so, may appear from the tenour of the following texts.

According to Solomon, the voice of Divine Wisdom addresses itself to mankind in a way, expressive of parental impartiality on the part

of God towards all his children : for it speaks to all with equal power and with indiscriminate regard. For thus he declares the matter : “ Wisdom crieth without : she uttereth her voice in the streets : she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates : in the city she uttereth her words ^a.” This may serve to illustrate a general principle of the Divine government : but it may not be thought sufficiently close in its application to the Christian dispensation.

It may be considered then, that our blessed Saviour ^b, in applying a prediction of Isaiah ^c, declares himself “ to have been anointed to preach the gospel to the poor :” and that Jeremiah, with reference to evangelical times, speaks respecting them thus : “ They shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord : for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord ^d.”

“ The grace of God,” says St. Paul, “ that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men ^e. ” While these words declare an impartial communication of Divine truth ; they

^a Prov. i. 20, 21.

^b Luke iv. 18, 21.

^c Isa. lxi. 1.

^d Jer. xxxi. 34.

^e Tit. ii. 11.

seem, by consequence, to exclude the notion of a readier access to it being afforded to one class of men than to another.

In the following words of our Lord, this notion appears to be strongly discountenanced: for it exhibits to the poor and unlearned a superior measure of favour proportioned to their greater need. “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight^f.”

In the text which follows, it will appear, that a willingness to obey the truth, is made the condition of being enabled to find it: and the promise is unconnected with any stipulation for giving credit to the dubious testimony of other men. “If any man,” says our Lord, “will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself^g.”

The same promise is more strongly and explicitly conveyed in another text: “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself

^f Matt. xi. 25, 26. ^g John vii. 17.

“ to him. Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot,
 “ Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thy-
 “ self unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus
 “ answered and said unto him, If a man love
 “ me, he will keep my words: and my Fa-
 “ ther will love him, and we will come unto
 “ him, and make our abode with him ^h.”

Of such passages I am unwilling to dismiss the notice without a remark. That for which I contend is, I think, not only a doctrine, but a *discriminative* doctrine, of scriptural religion. That the poor have the gospel preached to them, is not only an essential principle of the evangelical dispensation; it is not only (as in the words prefixed to this Discourse) alleged as a peculiar characteristic of the true Messiah: but it also carries with it, if I mistake not, a forcible condemnation of a corrupt doctrine relating to this point, which, at the time of our Lord's ministry, was sanctioned by the Jewish traditions. Of this corrupt doctrine a vestige may perhaps be discovered in that saying of the Pharisees; “This rabble ⁱ which “ knoweth not the law.” It is certain, at least, that the inaptitude of common minds to the purpose of religious apprehension, is fully declared in the rabbinical theology of later times: the doctrines of which are, as

^h John xiv. 21—23.

ⁱ ὄχλος. John vii. 49.

their leading particulars, easily proved to be the same with the Jewish traditions of our Saviour's time^k. But, in fact, it can hardly be doubted, on a mere view of the scripture statement, that this was the estimate, which the Jewish doctors of this period entertained of the poor: for, if they did not regard and treat them as improper subjects for religious instruction; how could the contrary principle and practice be noted as a characteristic peculiarity and criterion of the Messiah? It will naturally occur, that some of the foregoing citations will, if viewed in connexion with this circumstance, carry with them a stronger and more emphatic import.

IV. It is upon the strength of such representations I am fully persuaded, that the evidence which scripture professes to afford of its own truth, is of a nature wholly different from that which is sometimes prescribed for the bulk of mankind. This persuasion I purpose, by God's help, fully to vindicate. Meanwhile I am, by the texts now recited, justified

^k Thus Maimonides lays it down that a long preparatory course of human learning and science, embracing logic, mathematics, and natural philosophy, is a necessary step of advancement to Divine knowledge: that even the existence of a God is a truth, which can-

not, by regular process, be acquired without this preparation; and that the defect of such preparation must, in the generality of mankind, be compensated by cabalistical instruction. *Mose Nevochim*, pars I. ch. 34. p. 46. ed. Basil. 1629.

in so far assuming the falsehood of the proposition which I desire to repel, as may entitle me to speak of its injurious effect. Indeed, to argue against its tendency without a presumption of its falsehood, would be something worse than mere wantonness of disquisition. For it is in all cases unreasonable to expect, that we can promote utility, or elude inconvenience, by a departure from truth: and it is no less than impiety to think, that we can do so by any departure from that truth, which God has revealed, and which we, therefore, without any timorous calculation of consequences, are bound to embrace. To decline this obligation, is to measure our own wisdom against the understanding of God: for his truth was imparted with a view to our welfare, and our welfare can be secured only by our conformity to it.

It is supposed, then, that while the gospel affords to the learned full proof of its authority, it is nevertheless needful that others should lean upon *their* report, and thus supply from testimony the defects of knowledge. The mischiefs and inconveniences of this supposition are now to be displayed.

It cannot then be denied, that on this footing, the number of those who are able to satisfy *themselves* is very small: a serious mat-

ter indeed, when you reflect, that the point, on which satisfaction is required, is no less than the way of everlasting life. It is also to be remembered, that such number not only is, but unavoidably *must* be, small: for the state of the world renders it impossible that many should be able to obtain the learning, which is competent to discover or to estimate the whole body of external evidence adduced for the proof of the gospel: and an attempt to alter the state of human society, so that every man should have ready access to historical records and ancient testimonies, together with a just comprehension of their use, would at once be condemned as a project of philosophical insanity.

Shall it then be said, that those who are not themselves competent to this point, must rest their credit on others who are? If so, let me claim your attention to the difficulties inherent in this proposal. The first question is, who *are* the learned? Here the ignorant are to decide on the qualification of those who are to judge for them: which if they can do, they might better, as a shorter path to truth, decide the main question for themselves at once. In the next place, of the learned themselves, there are many of deep and various erudition, who nevertheless, as

to this branch of inquiry, are little superior to the generality of mankind. Nor do I say this as a topick of reproach: for it will be an obvious consequence of the leading principle which I purpose to maintain, that if they are so, their convictions may nevertheless be sound and reasonable, and they may know assuredly of the doctrine, that it is of God. This may help us to see, how very vague and undefined are the ideas employed in this proposition. But these are not all the difficulties which it presents. You may perhaps find a learned writer deeply versed in such inquiries, and one whose testimony to the authority of revelation is full and satisfactory: yet the same writer will be found to connect with such testimony a profession of heterodox opinions. What in this case must be done? Shall we give him credit with respect to the evidence of the gospel, and deny it with regard to his Arian, or Socinian, or Romish tenets? Surely we here want some clue of discrimination: for it cannot be denied, that the same department of learning, which furnishes the materials for the external evidence of the gospel, provides also very influential facts for the illustration and confirmation of its most essential doctrines. If Bull and Horsley provided from such regions

of knowledge a vindication of the doctrine of the blessed Trinity; be it remembered, that Lardner travelled over the same extended tracts, and was nevertheless a Socinian. But still the worst is to come. The ignorant are referred to the learned: now the learned have sometimes given their verdict on the side of infidelity. Nor is this to be said of general learning only: for it applies to that particular branch of it which furnishes the external evidence of Christianity. If for instance, when considering the external evidence, you would appeal to writers like Cave and Tillemont, to supply the want of that personal knowledge which cannot be attained without learning and leisure: if, I say, you would appeal to them, why will you not allow an appeal to Toland and to Gibbon? Should it be said, with respect to such writers, that their learning is incompetent, or that it has been over-rated: how are the ignorant to judge of that? You surely would not reject the appeal on the ground of the infidelity of the judges: for this is nothing less than begging the question, and declaring, that you will consent to no appeal without a previous security that the award will be favourable.

“Be ready always,” says St. Peter, “to give
“an answer to every man that asketh you a

“reason of the hope that is in you¹.” Suppose, then, an unlettered man, when thus interrogated, to allege the authority of the learned. Would not the answer be nugatory, inasmuch as the answerer cannot know who is learned? Would it not be dangerously indeterminate, requiring him to carry his assent further than you would be willing that it should go? Lastly, would it not be dangerously hazardous, putting it upon an uncertain issue, whether the authority thus appealed to, would decide in favour of the gospel, or in favour of infidelity? It is for these reasons I cannot think that *such* an answer would be agreeable to the mind of the apostle, or of God who directed him.

These remarks will of course be seen to apply exclusively to that part of the evidences which is peculiarly denominated *external*. What then shall we say of the external evidence? Shall we dismiss it altogether, as of no use to the decision of the great question? God forbid: for God has himself afforded this attestation to his blessed doctrine: it will therefore be our wisdom that we take heed to those means of conviction which he has mercifully provided. But I would have the external evidence placed upon a footing very

¹ 1 Pet. iii. 15.

different from that precarious one which I have described. That this may be done in a way satisfactory to all reasonable men, is one of the great points which I desire to evince.

V. Here there occur certain preliminary considerations, of which, in order to a due statement of the question, the notice is indispensably necessary.

First, If the evidence of the gospel cannot be estimated without deep acquirements of learning; then, viewed as a dispensation which commands a reasonable assent, we cannot easily discover how it can be well adapted to the state of human life. For this state admits not the possibility of affording to the great bulk of mankind, those advantages, of which the present supposition contemplates the necessity: nor can we imagine any possible arrangement of human society, which shall be capable of affording them. But the contrary of this is what we are bound to maintain. The gospel is worthy of all men to be received: it demands the assent of no man without reasonable conviction: its power of conviction must therefore be adapted to produce its due effect, without violating the order of the world: for its professed tendency is not to disturb, but to maintain this order. In our

endeavours then to establish this point, it behoves us to consider what measure of advantages, conducive to a just comprehension of the evidences of the gospel, may be afforded to all men without breaking in upon the settled relations and subordination of society. Here it will hardly be thought too much that all should be capable of reading the scriptures: for this power has not been found by experience to carry with it any detriment to social interests. I would therefore in general contend, that the power of reading the Scriptures is, in the way of education, amply sufficient in order to attain the knowledge needful for salvation. But I beg it to be understood, that if the case be supposed of a man to whom this humble attainment is wanting; I would not therefore admit the impossibility of that man attaining a reasonable surety of his faith. And when I say *reasonable*, I mean a conviction distinct on the one hand from that which we may suppose to be miraculously produced by God, and on the other, most clearly distinct from every groundless or fanatical persuasion. For to say that such conviction is impossible, appears to me to limit the omnipotence of God with regard to the power of producing it: it is also contradictory to fact, inasmuch as there

were vast multitudes of real and reasonable converts, who, having embraced the gospel before a single book of the New Testament was composed, must obviously have been without the advantage of reading any portion of that volume. It is obvious to remark, that the two cases are different; that eyewitnesses of miracles and martyrdoms, and ear-witnesses of men who gave their testimony at the peril of their lives, were differently circumstanced from those who look only to the records of a remote age. But this difference, such as it is, relates only to the *kinds* of external evidence enjoyed by them and by us: respecting which I trust it will appear in the sequel, that although our external evidence be different from theirs, it is nevertheless as strong as reason and candour can demand: in which case, that difference does not affect my argument. It will not, however, be improper to mention, as a fact illustrative of this subject, that Irenæus, with reference to his own age, declares, that there were vast multitudes of Christians, who, without the advantage of reading, had imbibed the doctrine of salvation by methods purely oral and catechetical; but whose faith nevertheless appears to have been of the most rational character, since it was accompanied not only

with a firm determination of purpose, but also with conspicuous evidence of great sobriety, wisdom, and virtue. Nay, it further appears from this same Father, that the simple instruction thus afforded was found sufficient, not only for the purpose of an assured faith, but also of a sound doctrine: so that men thus furnished should be able, not only to repel the attacks of infidels, but also to silence the contradiction of heresy, and protect their minds from the sophisms of heterodox teachers. Such is the import of the words of Irenæus^m: if the statement should seem too strong, let me remind you, that the catechetical discipline of the ancient church is now lost; and let me beg of you, not to esti-

^m Quid autem si neque apostoli quidem scripturas reliquissent nobis? Nonne oportebat ordinem sequi traditionis quam tradiderunt iis quibus committabant ecclesias? Cui ordinationi assentiunt multæ gentes barbarorum, eorum qui in Christum credunt sine charta et atramento scriptam habentes per Spiritum in cordibus suis salutem, et veterem traditionem diligenter custodientes. [Here follows a statement of some of the leading principles of the Christian faith: after which the writer proceeds thus.] Hanc fidem qui *sine literis* crediderunt, quantum ad sermonem nostrum barbari

sunt: quantum autem ad sententiam, et consuetudinem, et conversationem, propter fidem perquam sapientissimi sunt, et placent Deo, *conversantes in omni justitia, et castitate, et sapientia*. Quibus si aliquis annuntiaverit ea, quæ ab hæreticis adinventæ sunt, proprio sermone eorum colloquens, statim concludentes aures longo longius fugient, ne audire quidem sustinentes blasphemum colloquium. Sic per illam veterem apostolorum traditionem, ne in conceptionem quidem mentis admittunt, quodcumque eorum portentiloquium est. *Irenæus Cont. Hæc.* lib. III. c. 4. ed. Paris. 1710.

mate the effects of that discipline from any thing which you may discover in a state of things under which it is discontinued.

Secondly, you will remember my having declared, with regard to the principle I desire to contravene, that it is contrary to the promise of God. On this declaration I wish most strongly to insist. Faith, though it be required that it be reasonable and grounded upon evidence, is nevertheless the gift and the grace of God. As such, it is the subject of his promise and his covenant. But it must be carefully borne in mind, that this promise is not unconditional. That learning, or a deference to learning, forms no part of its conditions, I have already declared. But yet, conditions there are, to which the promise is subject: we have seen, for instance, that a willingness to obey is one of them: for the promise is, to him that is willing to do the will of God. The benefit is proposed to mankind only in connexion with particular circumstances: suppose then any of these circumstances to be found wanting; it cannot, in that case, invalidate my argument, it cannot evince a failure of the Divine promise; if the benefit be not realized to the souls of men. That I may explain myself, sufficiently for the present, I

would say for example, that this benefit can, by virtue of God's promise, be expected only in connection with the services of a lawful ministry, appointed by God. For it is plainly in connection with such ministration that the promise of God is made. Other requisites there also are to entitle a man to the benefit of this promise: these it will not at present be necessary to consider, since I would not now particularize further than is required for the sake of explaining myself. But it will in a future stage of this disquisition be necessary for me to enter more at large into the consideration of these requisites. This will be in order to shew, what are the things required in order to place a man within the condition, to which the promise of God's covenant, respecting the grace of faith, is annexed. It will thus be made to appear, that these requisites are not such as to demand, in order to verify the authority of revelation, that we should break the order of the world, by lifting men out of their proper stations, or by calling them away from their laborious duties and menial occupations, to the researches of learning: but that they are, on the contrary, things essentially, and by the declared will of God, connected with the appointed method of teaching the Christian

faith : that they are in Scripture represented, as indispensable concomitants to the effectual and convincing ministration of the Divine Word : that they are such, as no ordinary condition of man needs to exclude : that they are, by the constitution of the church to which we belong, made accessible to all men : and that, in every instance where there does not occur either a culpable neglect of pastoral duty, or an anomalous want of adequate regulation in matters of detail, the practice of the church agrees with its legitimate polity.

Thirdly, While I disclaim all submission to human authority in matters of faith, I am not bound wholly to forego the allegation of facts which rest upon human testimony. For there are facts known in a manner to all men, or which, by every man enjoying the most ordinary communication with his fellow creatures, *may* be known, from an universal concurrence of report: such, for example, as the existence of a nation called the Jews, and their belief in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. In this case, the credit which is given to a fact, is not a deference to human authority, but to reason : because reason may satisfy every man, that the falsehood of testimony thus unanimous, relating to matter not of judgment and opinion, but of fact ; that

such falsehood, I say, cannot be imagined, without carrying along with the contemplation of it incredible and absurd consequences. Such is the nature of the testimony to a fact which is known to all men who know any thing of the matter; unanimously declared to be true; never pronounced to be false; never even questioned: and which presents a phenomenon, which the supposition of truth at once adequately solves, which no other supposition can explain, and which imparts a character of palpable folly to those, who disbelieve it, or who attempt to substantiate a possibility of its falsehood. But this is far different from resting on the credit of others, either the general question respecting the truth of Christianity, or any subordinate question connected with the general issue: such, for instance, as the validity and genuineness of the Scriptural canon. The former is a case of reasonable assent, the latter of blind submission: the one rests upon moral evidence, the other upon human authority: in the one instance, the appeal to testimony is safe, and the award is sure: in the other, the award is uncertain, and the appeal dangerous. But I would observe, that even of facts thus attested, I shall make a very sparing use: for it seems to me, and I would hope to satisfy

you, that all the data required for the most satisfactory proof, are in this case remarkably few and simple, and within the reach of the most ordinary knowledge. Indeed I might, perhaps, without violating the hypothesis on which I am bound to reason, be entitled to a much larger use of facts thus attested. For the case must not be argued on a partial regard to the particulars which belong to it: we have no right to omit any considerations which are essential to the right view of it. We are therefore to remember, that we are, in the present case, to have an eye, not only to intrinsic grounds of proof and of probability belonging to the doctrine itself: we are also to have an eye to the promise of God respecting the manifestation of that doctrine to the soul of man; and we are to have an eye also to the Providence of God, in the communication of any facts which may be required for the reasonable evidence of it. With regard to his promise, we are sure that it cannot fail: with regard to his providence, we know that it lacketh not wisdom or power towards the fulfilment of the Divine Word. But this consideration does not in the least mar the validity of my argument; which stands firm and unshaken, so long as it appears that the facts and principles required

for the assurance of a reasonable faith are not of such a nature, that they cannot be attained consistently with the necessary business of the world, or without a recumbency on the verdict of other men, who may err, and who may deceive.

Fourthly, I would notice an objection which may be advanced against the great principle for which I contend. It may be said: If the case be so, you may ascertain it by experiment, and the poor man, whom you suppose to be capable of a reasonable faith, may be called upon to give his reasons: this, however, it will be found, is what they can seldom or never do. But it is a vain fallacy to think that poor men cannot attain reasonable convictions, because they are not able to unfold a reasonable account of them. It is one thing to think correctly, and another, to frame the enunciation of those thoughts agreeably to the principles of logic and of rhetoric. It often, and indeed most commonly happens, that the power of expression does not keep pace with the power of thought. I would add, that it may be doubted, whether the presumption be in this case true: for if you suppose the communication of Divine knowledge to be accompanied with such instruction as the Gospel

itself demands, and which no circumstances of human life will be found to forbid ; if you suppose this, I say: then I conceive that the contrary of that presumption will in general be found apparent. But it seems to me, that our estimate of this matter is in some degree vitiated by a common habit of depreciating the understandings of men in humble life : and it has occurred to me, that it is too common, respecting the habits, capacities, and propensities of the poor, to meet with dogmatical judgments pronounced by persons, who are by experience and intercourse as little qualified to form an estimate of the subject, as they are to estimate the character of the inhabitants of any remote region to which the navigation of Europeans has not yet extended. This is a sore evil among the things which are done under the sun : for a speculative error on such a point must lead to very bad practical results. No man will scatter his seed on ground which he fully esteems to be barren.

Fifthly, the tenor of my argument, if it be judged of in the present stage of the inquiry, may be thought likely to open a door to fanaticism, and to depreciate the usefulness of learning. I therefore deem it important to make, relating to this matter, a preliminary

explanation. It will be then my studied endeavour to point out the difference between a reasonable faith and a fanatical persuasion ; and to shew you, that the former is the point to which the evidences of Christianity, stated according to the principles for which I contend, is adapted to conduct the mind. It will also be my endeavour to vindicate the usefulness of learning in its subserviency to religion ; to maintain its necessity to the advocate who is called upon to defend its truth against the objections of the learned ; and to shew its manifest advantage to the ministry towards the establishment of evidence, and the distinction of true from adulterate doctrine.

VI. It is proper that I should now lay before you a view of the uses and advantages which, if this inquiry should be successful and satisfactory, appear to me to be the proper fruits of it. Among these, no inconsiderable one will be found to present itself in that which has been already adverted to. The Gospel embraces in it a mighty interest, far surpassing every other : to defend this must be not only a holy cause, but one supremely important. It cannot therefore be a matter of trifling benefit, to substitute, in the methods employed for its vindication, a

strong and impregnable point in the place of one which is assailable and weak. You cannot also but perceive the simplicity, power, and effect, which it is calculated to give to our endeavours for the instruction of common minds in the grounds and reasons of their faith. Every man should be able to give a reason for his faith : to enable him to do so, must be a leading aim of the pastoral office : and certainly this labour must be much facilitated by placing the evidence of the Gospel on a footing, which does not refer a man either to inaccessible records, or to a doubtful, dangerous, and incompetent authority.

Again; consider the matter with relation to the methods of propagating the Gospel. It is the will of God that all men should come to the knowledge of the truth : yet a vast portion of the world still lieth in darkness. I say then, let no man forget what, as to this point, is his duty, what will be the penalty of his neglect. “ Woe unto that man “ by whom the offence cometh !” If this subject be rightly viewed, we shall gladly avail ourselves of any methods which may facilitate the reasonable conviction and conversion of the heathen. Yet you cannot but see, that the learning which belongs to the

common systems of external evidence is far too cumbersome for the office of the missionary, and wholly unavailable to the circumstances of ignorant heathens. How much then of difficulty and complication must be removed from the work of an evangelist, if the range of argument (which is to supply the grounds of conversion) shall be narrowed to the scriptural volume itself, and to the common measures, derived from the common sources, of human knowledge; requiring, for their application to the unbelieving mind, no other human medium than the labours of a lawful ministry? For these advantages are in their own nature, if they be not withholden, accessible to all men, and were always designed to accompany the publication of the Gospel.

VII. These considerations may perhaps be thought sufficiently strong to claim your attention to the subject. But I would add a few words, previously to the close of my present address, for the sake of removing a mistaken impression which may have arisen respecting my undertaking.

There are few principles more detrimental to the advancement of useful knowledge, than the maxim of conduct which, as Xenophon relates, was professed by an ancient sophist ;

“I endeavour to say always something newⁿ.” Wherever this principle is acted upon, there it is obvious, that truth, however salutary, must be disesteemed only because it is generally acknowledged; and that however necessary, it must give way to the captivation of novelty and the praise of invention.

To discover truth and to impart it are the only legitimate aims of inquiry; and it is not only vain, but greatly culpable, to think of displaying the powers of the mind by their abuse, and their strength by the boldness of their deviations. Suppose it should occur, that a powerful talent can find no employment in vindicating settled opinions; this can be no justifiable cause for disturbing the acquiescence of mankind in their reasonable convictions. The talent which cannot exert itself as the auxiliary of truth, must be content with inactivity. It is the more necessary to restrain this propensity, because it naturally seeks an alliance with error. For the defence of error is more favourable to ingenuity than that of truth: it is also more propitious to literary ambition: the most admiring portion of mankind are the ignorant and the weak: and with them, the meretricious

ⁿ Πειρωμαι καινον τι λεγειν αι. Mem. l. iv. c. 4.

colours of paradox are more imposing than the modest raiment of soberness and truth. He who departs from received and established doctrines has too often a bribe from his own vanity, which whispers to him that he is able to think for himself, and that his understanding is not enslaved to the dogmas of his forefathers.

How injurious then must this disposition be as it affects theology! Here there is a mighty interest pending, and the case is far different from that of human science and philosophy; in which oftentimes the deductions of ingenious men may be either sound or fallacious without any material influence on the welfare of human life.

How mischievous it has been in its practical effects, must be known to every one who is in any degree acquainted with the troubles and dissensions which have in every age disturbed the peace of the church, and the multitude of deadly heresies which from time to time have been generated by the disappointed ambition of one and the successful ambition of another.

Consider, again, the same disposition in its essential principles and character. Fix upon any one leading principle of the Christian

faith: I say not one, whose truth or essential connection with the Christian scheme has never been controverted; for, alas, not one such there is! But fix upon any one of those leading principles of Christianity, which we, by our confession and conviction, recognise as indispensable to the covenant of salvation. Then reflect on the unspeakable love of God in the promulgation of it: for greater love there cannot be, than that which gave to mankind the Gospel, and this principle is an essential portion of it. Consider also the deadly peril of the souls of men, in being alienated from the way of eternal life: for this in fact they are, when they are deprived of any one principle belonging to the integrity of the Christian scheme. Consider, then again, the moral feeling of that man, who views such a principle as a subject for the display of controversial powers, or a path to distinction and honour. Are the lives and souls of men to be thus endangered by the vain ambition of man? "Our faith," says Tertullian, "depends upon a rule: it has a law for its government, and salvation for the reward of its obedience: but this exercise of the mind consists in vain speculation, and has nothing but applause for the prize of its ingenuity. Let wanton speculation then submit to the law

“ of faith, and let us sacrifice applause to salvation^o.”

VIII. While thus alive to the danger of infusing novelty into the representations of sacred truth, I am in some degree fearful, lest it be thought that such an attempt is involved in the present undertaking. For so numerous and so eminent are they who have sanctioned the principle which I purpose to dispute, that a departure from their sentiments may incur the suspicion of a wanton singularity.

But I shall effectually obviate this by what I am about to say. The view which I desire to maintain has not, that I am aware, hitherto been made the subject of any regular and extended disquisition. Nevertheless, that view presents no novelty in itself: it has been held by others, and it comes to us under the recommendation of various eminent theological writers. It is not my purpose to maintain any thing beyond what they have held; but merely to verify by proof the sentiments which they have expressed. This will appear from the citation of a few authorities, to which, in conclusion, I shall now refer.

The first of these is Arnobius: a writer to

^o Fides in regula posita est, habens legem, et salutem de observatione legis: exercitatio autem in curiositate consistit, habens gloriam solam de peritiæ studio. Cedat curiositas fidei, cedat gloria saluti. *Tertull. de Præscript. Hæret.* c. 14.

whose judgment, perhaps, on a point of Christian doctrine, no great deference may be due. But I allege his sentiments, because the expression of them, though full and strong, does not in my opinion carry with it any overstatement: and though it be adverse to a principle of some modern theologians, it is quite concurrent with the general judgment of the ancient writers of the church. “Shall it be said,” observes Arnobius, “that the Christian religion cannot maintain itself without the aid of men to vindicate its truth? Or, shall its truth be said to depend on the warranty and authority of man? No, Christianity is sufficient for itself in its own inherent strength, and stands firm upon the basis of its own inherent truth: it could lose none of its power, though it had not a single advocate. Nay, it would maintain its ground though all the tongues of men were to contradict and to resist it, and to combine with rage and fury to effect its destruction^p.”

^p Neque enim stare sine assertoribus non potest religio Christiana? Aut eo esse comprobabitur vera, si adstipulatores habuerit plurimos, et auctoritatem ab hominibus sumpserit? Suis illa contenta est viribus et veritatis propriæ fundamentibus nititur: nec spoliatur sua vi, etiamsi nullum habeat vindicem: immo, si linguæ

omnes contra faciant contraque nitantur, et ad fidem illius abrogandam consensionis unitæ animositate conspirent. Arnobius adv. Gentes, lib. III. c. 1. To the same effect is the following: Non æqualiter liberat [Christus] qui æqualiter omnes vocat? aut ab indulgentia principali quenquam repellit aut respuit, qui sublimibus, infi-

My other authorities will claim your respect for the intrinsic value of their judgment, and for their zealous and conspicuous orthodoxy. Of these I will first adduce the splendid name of the great Athanasius: who expresses himself briefly but fully to this effect: “The Christian faith carries within it-
“ self the discovery of its own authority, and
“ the holy scriptures, which God has inspired,
“ are all sufficient in themselves for the evi-
“ dence of their own truth ⁹.”

*mis, servis, feminis, pueris, uni-
formiter potestatem veniendi ad se
facit? PATET, inquit, OMNIBUS
FONS VITÆ, neque ab jure potandi
quisquam prohibetur aut pellitur.*
Id. *ibid.* lib. II. c. 64. “Does
“ not Christ, who calls all men
“ to him with equal regard,
“ bestow his liberty on them
“ with the same impartiality?
“ Does he repel any man from
“ the experience of his royal
“ clemency? Christ, I say,
“ *who, without respect to persons,*
“ *affords to high and low, to*
“ *slaves, to women and to chil-*
“ *dren, the power of coming to*
“ *him.* *THE WELL OF LIFE,* says
“ he, IS OPEN TO ALL: every
“ man has a right to drink there-
“ of, and no man is subject to
“ prohibition or restraint.” In
like manner Lactantius, (about
the commencement of the se-
venth book of his Divine Insti-
tutions,) speaking of the evi-
dences of Christianity, says, that
*to all men in whom vice does not
awaken prejudice, these evidences*

*will appear open, plain, simple,
true and irrefragable; but that,
generally speaking, they are mat-
ter of readier apprehension to the
poor than to the rich: inasmuch
as the poor are disengaged from
those possessions and attach-
ments which vitiate the under-
standings of the rich. And
again Clement of Alexandria,
speaking on the same subject,
and to the same effect, says:
Αυτοτελής και απροσδεής ή κατα
τον Σωτηρα διδασκαλια, δυναμι-
ουσα και σοφια του Θεου. “The
“ doctrine of our Saviour is
“ perfect in itself, requiring no
“ extraneous help, since it is the
“ power and wisdom of God.”
Strom. lib. I. c. 20.*

⁹ *Αυταρκεις εισιν αι άγιοι και
θεοσπνευστοι γραφαι προς την της
αληθειας απαγγελιαν. Orat. contra
Gent. c. 1.* The sense of this
illustrious Father on this subject,
in agreement with the princi-
ples maintained in these Lec-
tures, may be further gathered
from the 30th and 34th chap-

The second of these authorities is that of a prelate, who has signalized his learning and his argumentative powers in vindicating the same doctrine which had previously exercised the bright genius and noble constancy of Athanasius. "What," says bishop Horsley, "is the great foundation of proof to those who are little read in history, and ill qualified to decipher prophecy, and to compare it with the records of mankind? Plainly this, which the learned and ignorant may equally comprehend: the intrinsic excellence of the doctrine, and the purity of the precept." "This excellence of the Christian doctrine considered in itself gives to those who are qualified to perceive it that internal probability to the whole scheme [of revelation], that the external evidence, in that proportion of it in which it may be supposed to be understood by common men, may be well allowed to complete the proof." And again, speaking of the external evidence, with reference to that view of it in which it is capable of being presented to men in general, he says: "The general view of it, joined to the intrinsic probability of the doctrine, may reasonably work that determined conviction, which

ters of the same treatise, and from the two concluding chapters of his treatise *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*.

“ may incline the illiterate believer to turn a
“ deaf ear to objections which the learned
“ only can be competent to examine ; and to
“ repose his mind in this persuasion, that
“ there is no objection to be brought, which,
“ if understood, would appear to him suffi-
“ cient to outweigh the mass of evidence
“ which is before him^r.”

Such then is the nature of my design. I have stated the grounds of necessity, or at least of usefulness, which appear to me to demand an examination of this subject. I trust that the possibility of misconception has, at the same time, been obviated. I trust that the principle, which I purpose to maintain, though opposed to the judgment of many whom I would name with respect, will not be regarded by you as a seductive and perilous novelty ; but that it will, on the contrary, be found to embrace the sense, of scripture itself ; of the Christian church in her days of primeval purity ; and of individuals celebrated for their great wisdom and for the orthodoxy of their faith. Lastly, I trust that the reasons I have given will suffice to justify the introduction of this subject on the present occasion, and to vindicate the claims it may have to your consideration.

^r Horsley's Sermons. Serm. XLII. on John xx. 29.

And now, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified, may God of his infinite mercy give us a right judgment in all things, and direct our lives and actions agreeably thereto, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord: to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, three Persons and one God, let us, with praise and thanksgiving, ascribe all might, majesty, glory, and dominion, world without end.



LECTURE II.

ON THE GROUNDS OF FAITH WHICH SCRIPTURE ITSELF
AFFORDS.—THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE INQUIRED INTO
ON ABSTRACT AND GENERAL PRINCIPLES.

1 PETER iii. 15.

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

IX. **I**N my last Discourse, I stated to you the leading principle which I purpose to vindicate. That the evidence of the Gospel should be thought to depend, in a great degree, on the deference of ignorance to the testimony of learning: involves a view of the subject, respecting which I then declared my conviction, that it was both mistaken and injurious. It must now be my endeavour to substantiate that conviction for the satisfaction of others. I am to shew then, that the proofs of Christianity are not of this nature: that they do not, on the one hand, require those enlarged measures of knowledge which few can obtain; nor, on the other, any im-

plicit submission, on the part of those who cannot obtain them, to the authority of others: but that they are equally adapted to every condition of a reasonable being in the enjoyment of his reason, and that they demand not such external or acquired advantages as are inconsistent with any ordinary condition of society. In fact, my object is to shew, that the Gospel, not only in the tendency of its discoveries and its precepts, but also in the proofs of its authority; is fully and wonderfully adapted to the state of human life. This view I deem it necessary to maintain: such necessity arising, not only from the paramount obligation of vindicating truth, but also from a sense of the inconvenience which appears to me to connect itself with the principle to which I object. For if this latter principle be admitted, I fear it must follow as an inference, that the Gospel is not adapted to the state of human life: inasmuch as, while it requires the assent of all men, it displays its credentials only to a few; the rest being referred to that, which both Scripture and experience declare to be an unsafe and precarious ground of reliance; I mean, the credit and veracity of man.

For the accomplishment of this purpose, I intend to observe the following method. I

shall endeavour so to state the evidence of Christianity, as to shew while I do it, with respect to the various parts of which it consists, that it wants not the aid of this dangerous and uncertain auxiliary. It is not therefore my object to propound new arguments, where old and received ones are sound and valid ; but to shew that such arguments there are, as ought to suffice for the reasonable conviction of *all* men. Should they occasionally strike you as common and familiar, this ought not to derogate from their value : for the more common and familiar they are, the more they have been subservient to the general use of mankind ; the better they are adapted to confirm my position, *that the evidences of the Gospel are accessible to all conditions of mankind.* But it will be necessary to display a body of evidence, and to examine the various parts of it, for the purpose of shewing, that it does not in *any* part require an implicit recumbency on human knowledge, judgment, and veracity. This will be my apology, if I be thought at any time to detain you with representations suited to men of little education : I wish to shew, that the evidence of the Gospel may rest sure and immovable on reasonings deduced from representations *purely of that nature.* Where

I find that the common style of reasoning on this subject is apt to shelter itself under an appeal to the learned; there it must be my endeavour to shew, that the same point may, with stronger and more perspicuous evidence, be proved by other modes of argument. Having premised this exposition of my intended method of inquiry, I now proceed to state and to examine the evidence of Christianity.

X. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Christianity claims its authority on the ground of Divine Revelation. If then we have not ourselves been favoured with direct communication from God, the question is, to what source are we to go for the knowledge of his revelations? The answer is to this effect: They can in this case be known only from those prophets and teachers, whom God has commissioned and inspired for the instruction of mankind. The next question is, who these teachers are, and where their words are to be found? To which the answer is: They are the prophets and inspired writers of the Old and New Testaments, and their words are to be found in the canonical Scriptures.

The next stage of inquiry and of evidence embraces this point. How are we assured,

that these scriptures contain a true revelation from God. To this point we now address ourselves: only premising, that our attention will in the first place confine itself to the Scriptures of the New Testament. We are then to display the grounds on which we embrace the New Testament, such as it is now received among us, as containing the matter of a true revelation from God.

Now these proofs will in the first instance arise from the matters themselves contained in these writings. The doctrine is in itself worthy of God, and it is attested by the power of God. That Christ was himself authorized as a teacher sent from God, will appear from his miracles: for no man could do the works that he did except God were with him. Such were the healing of inveterate maladies, the restoration of the blind and the deaf, the resuscitation of the dead: and lastly, as the stamp and seal of God more expressly appealed to for that purpose, the resurrection of Christ himself. These facts were alleged by Christ in proof that he came from God: now God would not suffer his name to be vouched as an authority to a lie: he would not suffer the most stupendous miracles to be wrought, in order that a falsehood might go abroad to the world, clothed in the strong armour of

irrefragable proof. For the full statement of this proof, we are to observe, that Christ not only evidenced, by the means now alleged, his own mission and authority, but that he also imparted the power of miracles to those who were to teach his religion to mankind; and that these latter, namely, the apostles and first preachers of the Gospel, were thus enabled, not only to attest their Master's mission, but also to prove their own. It is also to be regarded as an essential part of the case, that the miracles alleged were such in their own nature, and so circumstanced, as to exclude all reasonable supposition of either mistake or imposture in the narrators of them: the notion of imposture being inconsistent with the dreadful evils and sufferings which their testimony provoked, and with the character of men, whose labour, self-denial, and fortitude, were exerted for the purpose of converting others to goodness and virtue: while that of mistake is excluded by their ostensible character of eye-witnesses, of the facts which they record or of miracles wrought for the proof of those facts. These narrators were, among a multitude of others, the apostles, whom Christ commissioned to teach his religion to the world, and whom he promised, that he would fit them for their work, by

sending to them the Holy Spirit of God for their infallible guidance to all necessary truth.

Thus much the New Testament itself declares: it professes to have the authority of its doctrine evidenced by the facts which have now been stated: and its doctrinal and preceptive writings are regarded by us, as the writings of those whom we have above described to have been commissioned by Christ to teach his religion. This, if not overthrown by powerful countervailing objections, will be found to present a strong case in support of the claims of Christianity. If the scriptures themselves be deserving of credit, it is not easy to resist the validity of those claims. The next inquiry then is this: *Are* the scriptures deserving of credit? In other words, do they present to us the testimony of credible persons? and do they present us with the doctrine of men, whom Christ really authorized to teach?

This being the state of the argument, there arises a necessity for the proof of three points: first, the authenticity of the writings; secondly, the sincerity of the witnesses; thirdly, the competence of the witnesses.

The question relating to the authenticity of the writings embraces in it the two fol-

lowing points: First, Can the testimony which the New Testament affords to the promulgation of Christianity, be identified with the testimony of real and actual witnesses? Secondly, Can its doctrines be identified with the doctrines of Christ, and of teachers authorized by Christ? We are to consider, that these writings come to us with the strong recommendations of personal knowledge and of infallible direction. If then we would ascertain, whether these advantages were really possessed, as far as it is alleged that they were: it becomes necessary to satisfy ourselves that the writers are really the persons whom they are commonly supposed to have been, that they were persons living in the age and under the circumstances commonly ascribed to them: in other words, that the writings are the genuine writings of those whom Christians regard as duly authorized and qualified, and that they are not the forgeries of a later age, composed by individuals who possessed not the needful qualifications, but personated those who did.

XI. You will now remark, that down to the present point of inquiry and of evidence, the arguments adduced are level to the means of knowledge and to the comprehen-

sion, of all men who have access to the matters contained in their Bibles. But now (in order to our satisfaction respecting that important matter of consideration which has just been stated) there arises a question concerning what is called, in the language of theology, *the Canon of the New Testament*.

Here it is that learned men appear peculiarly to delight in extolling, as necessary to the evidence of faith, the value of their own advantages. For it is declared, that without these advantages the canon cannot be determined; and that unlettered men must, as to this point, recline upon the judgment of others.

In this way is applied to the defence of Christianity that obnoxious principle of argument, to which I have already declared my strong objections. For the sake of presenting a distinct view of the principle itself, and also of preparing a way for the confutation of it; I will first advert to a learned disquisition upon this subject, which has obtained considerable credit and reputation: I mean Mr. Jones's Method of settling the Canonical Authority of the New Testament.

Among the passages of this work more immediately connected with my present subject, I will at this time notice the following.

It is declared, then, “that settling the canonical authority of the Books of the New Testament is a matter of the greatest consequence and importance ^s.” This position is fully established by the learned author: nor would I offer a single word to dispute the truth of it, or to extenuate the great importance which attaches itself to the settlement of the Canon. For it is plain that there can be no reasoning either upon the authority or the doctrine of a faith, which has no fixed and definite standard: here all must be uncertainty of fact and instability of mind. The very circumstances of a religion having no fixed standard of doctrine, must be one of the strongest presumptions against that religion itself: as indeed the want of such a standard is one of the strongest presumptions against the peculiar theology of the church of Rome ^t.

The following position is now to be viewed in connection with that which has been just noticed. It is, “That the right settling the canonical authority of the Books of the New Testament is attended with very many

^s Vol. I. p. 9. ed. 1798.

^t “There is, as yet, no possibility of knowing with certainty what are the real doctrines of the church of Rome, nor where, in that communion, the judge of religious

“controversies is to be found.” *Mosheim’s Eccl. Hist.* Cent. 16. sect. 3. part I. c. 22. See also, to the same effect, *Barrow on the Pope’s Supremacy, Introduction.*

“and great difficulties^u.” Again, says this same writer: “I declare with many learned men, that *in the whole compass of learning I know no question involved with more intricacies and perplexing difficulties than this*^x.” If this be a just view of the case, it may well awaken uneasiness and alarm in every lover of religion. I trust it will appear in the sequel, that the alarm is groundless; inasmuch as the representation is fallacious, and the estimate is false. Meanwhile we are to notice the method, in which the learned writer proceeds to dissipate the uneasy feelings which his declaration tends to excite.

The evidence of canonical authority is made by this writer, in conformity with the general practice of those who have treated the same subject, to rest on “the testimony of the primitive churches, still faithfully preserved in the writings of the ancient Christians^y.” But this, as he acknowledges, is liable to the following objection: “If it is by tradition, and searching the records of the ancients, that we are to have satisfaction as to the truth of the scriptures, then *the greater part of Christians, who are not capable of doing this, must be without satis-*

^u Vol. I. p. 2.^x Ibid.^y Vol. I. p. 57.

“*faction*”^z.” A serious objection indeed. Let us now remark the learned writer’s answer. It is as follows: “Though the bulk of Christians cannot themselves have recourse to these original evidences; yet there are many, who have with a great deal of diligence and impartiality made it their business to do it, whose testimonies they have, and may safely depend upon, as they neither can nor would deceive in a matter of such importance. Nor does it follow from hence, that their faith is ill-grounded, because it relies on the testimony of fallible men, and so is but a human faith: for this is no more than what equally follows from their not knowing the original languages, and so, being obliged to depend upon the veracity and judgment of others, for the truth and goodness of [a translation^a.”]

I will now offer a few reflections on the foregoing passages. The view which they

^z Vol. I. p. 57.

^a Ibid. The two last words of this citation are inserted in place of the word *it*, as it stands in the original author: that pronoun being, through inaccuracy, employed without any foregoing noun to which it refers. It is to be observed, that the author here (as appears from his own marginal reference) expresses himself in

concurrence with the sentiments of Baxter, as they are delivered in his “*Saint’s Rest*.” This latter writer appears to me to be equally censurable with Mr. Jones himself: for he is equally strong in stating, or as I should say, *creating*, the difficulty of the canon, as well as injudicious in his proposed method for the solution of that supposed difficulty.

contain has been delivered in the express words of an individual writer, because in such a case, definite and tangible expressions are always preferable to loose and general statement; whether such statement be taken at second hand from others, or whether (what is still more objectionable) it be framed in our own words: for it is always highly objectionable that a disputant should himself mould, and fashion the shape of the tenet which he resists. The author quoted appears to be a fair authority for a multitude of others who speak to the same effect: and a preference of regard may justly be given him, by reason of the approbation which his inquiry has obtained, not only in the learned world, but particularly in this university. I will add, that while I strongly feel the injurious tendency of this representation; and while I lament the pernicious character which I think to be inherent in the earlier part of the treatise referred to: I am not desirous in other respects to derogate from the merits of that treatise. Of its usefulness I shall have occasion to speak in the future progress of this inquiry.

But to proceed to the subject. The difficulties of the canon are here drawn up in a front of formidable display, and in a style

pregnant with most injurious effect. Whether this may in any degree arise from the vanity of an author, in seeking to enhance the merit, by amplifying the difficulty of a work, I will not pronounce. But concerning the difficulties of the canon I will at least state the impression of my own mind; for this is immediately connected with the business in hand: I will add, that if my subsequent remarks are convincing, it will be their manifest tendency to justify that impression. I will not hesitate then to say, that the difficulties of the canon appear to me to be indebted to the speculations of learned men for their existence, much more than they are for their solution^b. In examining this matter, we discover at one time the infirmity of the human mind, displaying itself in a way which is incident only to men of learning: of this, I think, an example presents itself in archbishop Wake, when he exalts the writings of the apostolical fathers into “an authoritative declaration of the gospel of Christ^c.” In

^b For a brief exemplification of this, (which may serve for the present,) I would refer the reader to that part of this same Mr. Jones’s work (part II. numb. xlii. c. 25—29.) which relates to the Gospel of the Nazarenes. He will here find (more especially in cap. 26.)

an exposure of great names in connection with great errors, groundless credulity, and dangerous application of erroneous assumptions.

^c Preliminary Discourse to his Translation of the Apostolical Fathers, chap. x. §. 11.

some degree also we recognise the danger of insufficient knowledge: for though it would be wrong to withhold from some divines who have treated this subject the general praise of learning; yet it may safely be asserted that their measure of learning *available to this purpose*, was not competent to warrant the decisions they have made and the assertions they have pronounced. At another time we discover a rash presumption of judgment, which could hardly have been exercised without an unseemly confidence in a man's own wisdom and attainments. Even the great names of Luther, of Calvin, and of Erasmus, will hardly avail to protect them from this censure^d. For it appears to me no less than presumption, that any man should, on the warrant of his own judgment, tear out of the volume of Scripture writings, which have been placed there by the general verdict of the Christian church and have maintained their

^d “Luther and several of his followers utterly reject the Epistle of James, not only as a spurious piece, but as containing things directly contrary to the gospel:” [that is, contrary to what he esteemed to be the gospel.] “Erasmus had a very mean opinion, and doubted the authority of the Revelations. Calvin, Cajetan, and the learned Kirstenius, had the same sen-

“timents of it.” *Jones on the Canon*, p. 8, 9. When men are for trying the canon of Scripture by such a principle, it would be well if they would bear in mind this expostulation: “Quis ferat, lectorem vel auditorem, Scripturam tantæ auctoritatis, facilius quam vitium suæ tarditatis, audere culpæ.” *Aug. cont. Faust. Man.* lib. xxxii. c. 16.

place by long acquiescence; that he should try and examine their right, after the unavoidable loss of the evidence on which it was first established; that he should, I say, try that right over again, when the circumstances of the case are such as to afford the strongest moral evidence, that such right never would in the first instance have been acknowledged, if it had not been clear and certain. But this presumption will appear greatly aggravated in its guilt, if it shall appear—as I apprehend to have been the case with Luther and some other Divines—that the canonical authority of a book has been denied on the ground that its contents did not square with those theological dogmas which men have thought proper to espouse; which is, in fact, measuring the infallibility of God by the standard of man's judgment. And what shall we think of this? That the authority of learning has been employed for the allegation of inconsistencies; that such alleged inconsistencies have been the ground of rejecting a book from the canon of Scripture; and that yet, after all, such alleged inconsistencies have had no existence but in the contemplation of men invested with the character of learning; whose learning, nevertheless, has been both deficient in measure,

and vicious in application? Yet such appears to me to be the true ground on which Luther expressed his dislike to the Epistle of St. James. On the whole, I would sum up my own view of the subject by stating, that the difficulties of the canon are imaginary more than real: that they have originated in wantonness, in the indiscreet use of learning, and in defective measures of it: that the mistakes and mistatements of learned men have furnished the most dangerous data for infidels to employ to their vile purposes: and that it would have been well for the Christian church, if the present unhappy confusion of the subject (beyond that small amount which infidels would ever have had the power of producing) had not been greatly augmented by the vanity and indiscretion of learned believers.

We will now, still having our eye to the same writer, advert to his method of solving the difficulties which he has stated. This consists in a reference to the authority of the learned. To this mode of cutting the knot I have already stated my general objections: but the language of this writer lays open a fresh one, and that of no inconsiderable strength: for the learned are here recommended as guides, on the ground of their being such as “neither

“ can nor would deceive.” Let this description, indeed, be verified, and then it is plain, that reason cannot demand more conclusive authority. The judgment of him who neither can nor will deceive must be irrefragably true. But this very author has produced abundant examples of learned men, who, as to the canon, have both been themselves deceived, and have thus become the innocent and unintentional means of deceiving such as have credited them. The great men thus referred to were plainly gifted with no infallibility; therefore they might err: their sincerity has not, like that of the first witnesses to the Gospel, undergone any painful test; therefore we have no security that they may not deceive. I wish not to impugn their veracity; but thus the case stands on an abstract view of it. Let us, however, come to facts. The Council of Trent have annexed to the canon of Scripture a collection of writings which we deem to be apocryphal. Why then shall we demur to their judgment? For upon this writer’s view of the subject, such judgment must be valid. Will it be alleged that there was a want of learning in the Tridentine Fathers? But how are unlettered men to judge of that? The writer proceeds to represent, that unlettered men may thus have as much security respect-

ing the canon, as they can have respecting the translation. But I shall take occasion to shew that the two cases are wholly different. The fuller illustration of this matter may fitly be postponed to a future stage of the present inquiry: I shall only state at present what will be the result of that inquiry: namely, that in the one case, an unlettered man may reach the fullest degree of moral certainty; but that in the other he will find nothing but doubtfulness, instability, and confusion.

I do not like to dismiss this part of my subject without offering a general caution, There are few general precepts more pregnant with mistake and danger than that which refers the ignorant to the learned, for decisions in matters of theology. The general use of the term itself is full of ambiguity. Many, with regard to the general extent of their knowledge, are highly learned: to these the ignorant are referred: yet of these men the learning may, as to the particular point in question, be very defective, or none at all: in which case, the learned man is in fact no better a guide than the ignorant man who is referred to his instruction. The praise of general learning, for example, would hardly be denied to archbishop Wake: yet there possi-

bly may be reason to suppose that his particular qualifications, in point of knowledge applicable to this subject, were somewhat inadequate. If there be a danger thus apparent, it is augmented by that prevailing infirmity of the human mind, which consists in an insensibility to the defects of its own knowledge, and which is naturally accompanied by a readiness to pass opinions on subjects not thoroughly understood. Take for example the great Episcopius. No man would think of separating the distinction of learning from this eminent name. Yet his learning in the ancient writers and history of the church is pronounced by Bull^e to have been glaringly defective. Nevertheless it was under the influence of a state so little qualified for a just comprehension of his subject, that he made his celebrated declaration respecting the practice and feeling of the early church towards those who disbelieved the Divinity of Christ. It is not impossible, also, that the danger may be again enhanced by an unregulated exercise of even our virtuous feelings: there may pos-

^e See the preface to his *Judicium Ecclesie Catholice*: from which it will also appear, that the confession of Episcopius himself respecting this matter, confirms the assertion of

Bull: who, [Def. Fid. Nic. Proem. §. 5.] pronounces him to be, *Theologus cætera doctissimus, sed in antiquitate ecclesiastica plane hospes.*

sibly be an excess of kindness, more inclined to concede than to contend, and ready, at an unguarded moment, to compromise truth for the love of peace: for it is to be observed, respecting the great man whom I have last named, that he himself believed the doctrine of the Trinity, even while he gave, in the way of historical report, respecting those who believed it not, the testimony which the learned Bull has shewn to be groundless. It deserves also to be considered, whether there may not be occasionally in learned men a propensity to magnify their own attainments, in a way more honourable to themselves than advantageous to the cause for which they declare so much learning to be necessary. I am not concerned in applying this to individuals: accusations of this nature so applied are uncharitable, and it is impossible for man to substantiate them. But of this I am sure, that in a matter of such great importance we have a right, among other securities against error, to calculate upon the possible existence of such a feeling. I am sure that human testimony is liable to be affected by all the infirmities of human minds, by all the irregularity of human motives. I cannot therefore but esteem it desirable that the canon of Scripture should be placed upon grounds of

evidence less objectionable, as well as more accessible to common understandings, than those on which Mr. Jones would place it. That it may be so placed, I will now proceed to shew.

XII. I say then, that the canon is demonstrable to ordinary minds on the most satisfactory grounds, independently of learned acquirement or research. And I will say, further, that such demonstration is in itself more irrefragable, as well as clearer, than that of which it is the peculiar province of antiquarians to furnish the materials. The proof of this assertion is the work to which I now proceed.

Let it then be considered, in the first place, that there are, among ordinary Christians, few questions that have been less agitated than this: Who are the writers authorized to declare to us the real doctrines of Christianity? Among the professors of that religion there is scarcely a single point of belief distinguished by such general agreement. To what is this owing? Shall we say that it springs from an implicit disposition to take up truths of this nature without inquiry? This supposition cannot for a moment be reasonably entertained: to bestow much attention upon it would be wasting the efforts of confutation: suffice it for the present to say, that its absurdity will be strongly apparent from the remarks

which I shall speedily, for another purpose, have to offer. The fact is, there has been little doubt, because there has been no reason to doubt. Unanimity has arisen from the absence of causes for dissension: and the unlettered believer of Revelation may naturally, in the soundest exercise of untutored wisdom, unite his own faith to a general concurrence which there has been so little occasion to disturb.

We are to observe that the books of holy Scripture are particularly distinguished from other books. There is a circumstance connected with them which operates as a powerful guard to purity, and consequently furnishes a strong proof of authenticity. Few things are more difficult than to forge, with any prospect of credit, the writings of any author whatever: because, in the attempt to do it, so many minute circumstances, relating to time, place, and contemporaneous history, must be compacted together into an artificial coherency. The task has almost invariably been found to baffle the utmost circumspection and ingenuity of man: and the slightest failure in any particular will lay open the fraud. Indeed we have the utmost reason to think, that it has seldom or never in any considerable instance been accomplished. The difficulty of such an imposture is a thing of

easy comprehension to an unlettered mind ; for, without having recourse to historical knowledge, the plainest reasons will suffice to evince it : and it may be illustrated by a reference to the difficulty of framing lying stories^f, especially such as, by reason of their

^f The following extract from the conclusion to the first part of Dr. Lardner's *Credibility*, will furnish a specimen of very satisfactory reasoning respecting the authenticity of the Scriptures, and the general truth of Christianity, and will be found clear of any particulars which cannot be alleged consistently with the general principle for which I contend : indeed I have so curtailed the original, as to exclude from the present citation the little that it contains of matter which is inadmissible on my own ground of reasoning. My desire to maintain the possibility of such reasoning will obviously justify my introducing so long an example of it.

“ Any one may be sensible, how hard it is for the most learned, acute, and cautious man, to write a book in the character of some person of an earlier age, and not betray his own time by some mistake about the affairs of the age in which he pretends to place himself, or by allusions to customs or principles since sprung up, or by some phrase or expression not then in use. It is no easy thing to escape all these dangers in the

“ smallest performance, though it be a treatise of theory or speculation : these hazards are greatly increased when the work is of any length, and especially if it be historical, and be concerned with characters and customs. It is yet more difficult to carry on such a design in a work consisting of several pieces, written to all appearance by several persons. Many indeed are desirous to deceive, but all hate to be deceived : and therefore, though attempts have been made to impose upon the world in this way, they have never or very rarely succeeded, but have been detected and exposed by the skill and vigilance of those who have been concerned for the truth.

“ The volume of the New Testament consists of several pieces ; these are ascribed to eight several persons ; and there are the strongest appearances, that they were not all written by any one hand, but by as many persons, as they are ascribed to. There are lesser differences in the relations of some facts, and such seeming contradictions, as would never have hap-

length, require a complicated attention to internal consistency and to congruity with exter-

“pened, if these books had
 “been all the work of one
 “person, or of several who
 “wrote in concert. There are
 “as many peculiarities of tem-
 “per and style, as there are
 “names of writers; divers of
 “which shew no depth of ge-
 “nius or compass of know-
 “ledge. Here are represen-
 “tations of titles, posts, beha-
 “viour of persons of higher
 “and lower rank in many parts
 “of the world; persons are in-
 “troduced, and their charac-
 “ters are set in a full light;
 “here is a history of things
 “done in several cities and
 “countries; and there are al-
 “lusions to a vast variety of
 “customs and tenets of per-
 “sons of several nations, sects,
 “and religions. The whole is
 “written without affectation,
 “with the greatest simplicity
 “and plainness.

“If it be difficult for a per-
 “son of learning and expe-
 “rience, to compose a small
 “treatise concerning matters
 “of speculation, with the cha-
 “racters of a more early age
 “than that in which he writes;
 “it is next to impossible, that
 “such a work of considerable
 “length, consisting of several
 “pieces, with a great variety
 “of historical facts, represen-
 “tations of characters, princi-
 “ples, and customs of several
 “nations, and distant coun-
 “tries, of persons of all ranks
 “and degrees, of many inter-
 “ests and parties, should be

“performed by eight several
 “persons, the most of them
 “unlearned, without any ap-
 “pearance of concert.

“If the books of the New
 “Testament were written by
 “persons, who lived before the
 “destruction of Jerusalem; that
 “is, if they were written at the
 “time, in which they are said
 “to have been written, the
 “things related in them are
 “true. If they had not been
 “matter of fact, they would
 “not have been credited by
 “any persons near that time,
 “and in those parts of the
 “world in which they are said
 “to have been done, but would
 “have been treated as the most
 “notorious lies and falsehoods.
 “Suppose three or four books
 “should now appear amongst
 “us in the language most ge-
 “nerally understood, giving an
 “account of many remarkable
 “and extraordinary events,
 “which had happened in some
 “kingdom of Europe, and in
 “the most noted cities of
 “the countries next adjoining
 “to it; some of them said to
 “have happened between sixty
 “and seventy years ago, others
 “between twenty and thirty,
 “others nearer our own time:
 “would not they be looked
 “upon as the most manifest
 “and ridiculous forgeries and
 “impostures that ever were
 “contrived? Would great num-
 “bers of persons, in those very
 “places, change their religious
 “principles and practices upon

nal facts. If, then, it be so difficult in the case of any indifferent writings, how must this difficulty be aggravated in relation to writings such as the Scriptures! Of other writings—those I mean of profane authors—it is a matter, generally speaking, of the most unimportant nature, whether they be genuine or not: the welfare of mankind is not very deeply interested in the question. Not so with regard to our Scriptures: they profess to deliver a doctrine on which the salvation of mankind depends, and which, on pain of eternal ruin, demands the obedience of all men. Such books would surely never get into currency, unless those who first received them were satisfied that they were written by persons duly authorized. In this case there would necessarily be exercised a caution and a vigilance, which in the case of other writings would have little incentive to exertion. It is one of the greatest absurdities in the world to think, that any number of

“the credit of things reported
 “to be publicly done, which
 “no man had ever heard of
 “before? Or, rather, is it pos-
 “sible, that such a design as
 “this should be conceived by
 “any sober and serious per-
 “sons, or even the most wild
 “and extravagant?”

“If the history of the New

“Testament be credible, the
 “Christian religion is true. If
 “the things here related to
 “have been done by Jesus,
 “and by his followers, by vir-
 “tue of powers derived from
 “him, do not prove a person
 “to come from God, and that
 “his doctrine is true and di-
 “vine, nothing can.”

persons could easily have been the dupes of a fraud in such a case as this. Suppose any man were at this day to try to pass off a counterfeit book as the work of St. Paul or St. John, what would be his success? And can we possibly imagine any time whatever, in which the task would not have been as much impossible as it is now? Or, to use a more familiar example, suppose any man should forge an Act of Parliament, and attempt to pass it off as having been enacted by the legislature: how many, think you, would submit to the imposture, and receive his forgery as the authentic law of the land? especially if his pretended law required from the subject any painful duties to perform, or considerable sacrifice of his interest and property. And does not reason assure us, that it would be an utter impossibility thus to forge the writings of the Evangelists and Apostles? since these require men to die to the world, to renounce its sinful lusts and profits, and to seek their happiness in an invisible and future kingdom. Whether you regard the Divine law, or the municipal law, the thing is an impossibility: but if you will reflect, I think you will find that a much stronger case of impossibility is made out with regard to the former than the latter:

inasmuch as the sacrifice would be greater, and the motive to vigilance proportionably augmented.

Let it be remembered, that the doctrines of the New Testament profess to be written or attested by men, endued with the power of miracles and prophecy, as the proof of their authority from God; and that they profess at the same time to be written for the instruction, in the first instance, of contemporaries. How then could they be first brought to light at a later age? or by persons who were not known to possess those powers which they alleged in proof of their authority? Especially when we consider, that these writings most strongly declare the perpetuity of their doctrine: therefore, the pretence of their having been a long time after the death of their supposed authors brought to light out of concealment, would obviously have been fatal to their reception. These considerations may suffice to illustrate the total impossibility of fabricating the scriptures of the New Testament under the name of those writers to whom they are now ascribed: and that these scriptures are the genuine production of the authorized teachers of our faith, is a fact of which we may allege the fullest confirmation, in the present state of the Christian church. For among all the various

subjects on which the judgment of mankind has been divided, how little difference of opinion do you find on this! What single point is there, on which the Christian world, however divided into communions and sects, however distracted by contentions; is more universally agreed, than it is respecting the canon of the New Testament? Where do you find a church or a sect which rejects any of the books which we receive, or which receives any book which we do not receive? How many sects, for instance, are there around us, who profess doctrines different from those of our church; and where do you find, that any of them appeal to scriptures different from ours? In the Christian world at large these sects are more numerous and more diversified: but here also you find the same agreement as to this particular. Though their doctrines vary from each other, the dispute is not respecting the authority of the books of the New Testament, but respecting the interpretation of them. Yet if there were any reasonable doubt respecting the authority of any of those books which we receive, or any reasonable pretensions in favour of others which we do not acknowledge; it can hardly be questioned, that such doubts would be started, and such pretensions ad-

vanced, in support of the various contending opinions of various sects and parties. But how little, how very little, do we, in the present state of the Christian world, hear of such doubts and pretensions alleged for this purpose!

There is, in fact, scarcely a single point on which the judgments of mankind have been more universally agreed, than those of the Christian world are on this very subject. So wonderful indeed is this agreement, that we can hardly regard it as less than a providential mercy afforded to mankind, for their assurance relating to the rule of their faith. And when we consider the impossibility which has already been stated, of successfully forging books under the names of the sacred writers of the New Testament; and, secondly, the notorious agreement of the Christian world in relation to those writings to which they ascribe canonical authority: we can hardly desire more for the assurance of a reasonable mind as to the fact, that the New Testament, as we possess it, contains the genuine writings of those, who at the time when the Gospel was published, were regarded as the authorized teachers of our faith.

Such, respecting the canon of the New Testament, is the degree of assurance access-

ible to all men. The value of it will be best understood from comparison: that is to say, if it shall be made to appear, that such evidence is far more strong and conclusive, than any evidence whatever, which, in proof of the same point, is enjoyed exclusively by the learned. For in what does this latter evidence consist? Why plainly in this: they find, in writings contemporaneous with, and subsequent to, the date of the canonical writings, passages, in which the canonical scriptures are quoted, and in which their authority is acknowledged. This evidence I do not wish to discard: it has its relative use, and particularly, if there be occasion for a controversy on historical grounds with infidels. But I do not depreciate its value when I say, that it is less sure and conclusive than the former. You allege the writings of the early Fathers to prove that the Gospels were not forged. And what then? Is this all that you have to do for the completion of your proof? Far from it. If you intend that your argument should be valid, you have then to evince, that the writings thus alleged were themselves not forged. After similar confirmation has been afforded to the latter writings, similar proof must again be adduced of the genuineness of those, which are thus al-

leged for *their* corroboration: and thus the series of proofs will go on for ever without coming nearer to an end. And now you must consider, that your proof is, after all, more dubious than the point you desire to prove. For instance, you would prove the genuineness of St. Matthew's Gospel. You do it by means of citations from that Gospel, or recognitions of its authority, which are found in Clemens Romanus, Polycarp, and the other apostolical Fathers. Now you are to consider, that the authenticity of the writings ascribed to the apostolical Fathers is of itself more difficult of proof than the authenticity of the Gospels themselves. For the Gospels profess to be authoritative as the rule of life and the way of salvation: as such, they would not be received by the early church without the most careful and anxious investigation of the proofs of their authority. But this is not the case with the writings of the Fathers. For these possess no authoritative character: therefore the difficulty of forging them in a subsequent age would be far less, than that of forging the Gospels under the name of the Evangelists §.

§ “ If we should in this particular,” says Daillé, “ take the same course which some writers of the church of Rome make use of against the holy

“ Scriptures, it would be a very easy matter to bring in question, and render doubtful and suspected, all the writings of the Fathers. For, when any

XIII. Observe now, in conclusion, the general impartiality of God in dispensing all need-

“ one allegeth the Old or New
 “ Testament, these gentlemen
 “ presently demand how or by
 “ what means they know, that
 “ any such books were truly
 “ written by those prophets and
 “ apostles, under whose names
 “ they go. If therefore in like
 “ manner, when these men urge
 “ Justin, Irenæus, Ambrose,
 “ Augustin, and the like, one
 “ should take them short, and
 “ demand of them, how and by
 “ what means they are assured
 “ that these Fathers were the
 “ authors of those writings,
 “ which at this day go under
 “ their names: it is very much
 “ to be doubted of, but that
 “ *they would find a harder task*
 “ *of it, than [that of] their ad-*
 “ *versaries in justifying the in-*
 “ *scriptions of the books of holy*
 “ *writ: the truth whereof is*
 “ *much more easy to be demon-*
 “ *strated than [that] of any*
 “ *[other] human writings what-*
 “ *soever.*” [On the Right Use
 of the Fathers, book I. c. 1.]

This remark will be greatly confirmed by an attention to the following facts and testimonies.

Of the writings ascribed to the apostolical Fathers, (which in questions of this nature ought justly to be preferred to those of later writers,) there is but a very small portion, if there be any, of which the authenticity has not been denied or questioned by respectable and learned critics. I do not now enter into the grounds, on which their judgment or their doubts have been

formed: but it is obvious, that in proportion as the authority of the remains of these Fathers is dubious, the testimonies derived from them must be inconclusive.

It further appears, that the practice of ascribing to the early Fathers supposititious works, and the interpolation of their genuine ones, were common with the ancient heretics: and that these heretics also forged supposititious writings under the names of the Apostles, thus endeavouring to gain for them the credit of canonical scriptures: but that their attempts in the former instance met with considerable success; while they were in the latter, as to the purpose of any lasting and established credit, vain and ineffectual.

There is an ancient Father of the church (I think it is Dionysius of Alexandria, but I cannot at this moment refer to the record of the fact) who speaks, respecting the heretics, to the following effect: “They have
 “ presumed even to interpolate
 “ and mutilate the sacred Scrip-
 “ tures themselves: how then
 “ can it be wondered that they
 “ should do the same with *my*
 “ writings.” Irenæus was remarkably anxious to guard the purity of his writings: and his feeling on this point seems to have been generated by the apprehension he entertained of their liability to heretical interpolation: for such interpolation is a common subject of complaint with the early Christian

ful blessings. Is there not, as to this point, a strong analogy between the temporal and

writers. It is curious to contemplate the measure he adopted for security against this evil. It was (according to the relation of Eusebius in the twentieth chapter of the fifth book of his Ecclesiastical History) the insertion at the end of one of his treatises of the following words: "O thou who shalt transcribe this book, I adjure thee, by our Lord Jesus Christ, and by his glorious coming, when he shall come to judge the quick and the dead, that thou collate what thou shalt have transcribed, and carefully correct it by this original, after thou hast transcribed it therefrom: and thou shalt also transcribe this adjuration, and place it in thy copy."

There is a passage to this effect in the thirty-eighth chapter of the ninety-third Epistle of Augustin. It will be found, in the quotations adduced by Lardner in his account of that writer. It illustrates at once the activity of interpolators; their success with regard to the Fathers; and their total failure with regard to the scriptures. "There are those who contend, that this passage was not written by Cyprian, but has been falsely ascribed to him by lying interpolators. For *there is not a single bishop, however illustrious, of whose books the purity and the general credit can have been so well guarded, as that of the canonical scripture has been,*

by its translation into so many languages, and by the order and succession of its constant use in the church. But yet there have not been wanting those, who, by forging supposititious writings under the names of the Apostles, have even attacked the purity of the scriptures thus guarded. *The attempt of these latter has indeed been fruitless, because the scripture is so well attested, so generally used, so universally known.* [Frustrum quidem, quia illa sic commendata, sic celebrata, sic nota est.] But how far such attempts may have been successful against writings which do not rest upon the foundation of canonical authority; may be understood from that wicked audacity, which has dared to confront even writings, whose purity is protected by so strong a rampart in the universal use and acknowledgment of the church." In like manner the same Father, in the sixteenth chapter of the thirty-second book of his treatise against Faustus the Manichee, insists upon the impossibility of falsifying books at a time, when they were in the hands of the whole Christian world. Here he insists upon a principle, which is obviously true and indisputably applicable to our present subject. "IF IT WAS THUS IMPOSSIBLE FOR YOU TO FALSIFY THESE WRITINGS, FOR THE

the spiritual mercies we enjoy? If you regard the provision which God has made for the worldly sustenance and comfort of his children, you will find that outwardly their lot is very various: but surely you must pause before you declare, that the difference is no other than that of happiness and misery. Look to the common gifts of nature; air, food, light, health, the charms of the creation, and the delights of social converse: these, every rank of men may have in com-

“SAME REASON IT WOULD BE
“IMPOSSIBLE FOR ANY MAN.”
(It is a principle indeed which applies to all times as well as to all individuals: *if it be impossible to do it now, it was equally so to do it at any time.*)
He adds, “that an attempt of
“this kind introduced into any
“interpolated copy of the scrip-
“tures, would be immediately
“detected by comparing such
“interpolated copy with other
“earlier copies.”

I cannot but think it a matter of pleasing interest, on a subject so momentous, to find the principles suggested by the common sentiments of human nature, and by the circumstances of the case, so exactly verified by historical facts. Particulars, similar to those now stated, are abundantly frequent in the early writers of the church: and a great variety of details, tending to confirm this representation, may be found

in the third chapter of Daillé on the Right use of the Fathers, and dispersed through the second part of Lardner's Credibility, but more particularly in those portions of it which relate to Augustin, and to the Manichees.

On the whole, then, history concurs with general principles of reasoning in leading us to this conclusion: That it was much easier to forge and interpolate the writings of the Fathers, than it was to vitiate the text of scripture, or to introduce supposititious materials into the canon of it; therefore the authenticity of the scriptures is in itself a thing of greater certainty than the authenticity of the writings ascribed to the Fathers; and the testimonies to the scriptures which are derived from the Fathers, cannot be so evident as the point itself is, which those testimonies are adduced to prove.

mon ; the possession of them is no distinction of the rich, nor the privation, of the poor. How great is the amount of these common benefits, in comparison with that of the showy trappings and the costly refinements, the elegance of life and elaborate sensuality, which distinguish the fortune of the rich ! For of these latter, however much they be objects of general desire, it may well be questioned, whether they have a lawful claim to be ranked among the constituents of happiness. Much may be said on both sides of the question : it is certain that experience does not yield any uniform testimony to their value : and wise and good men have felt encumbered by their presence. Compare this with the different measures allotted to mankind of *spiritual* advantage. All men are required to embrace the Gospel : all men are to believe it upon evidence. Judge then, which class has the better evidence. You have seen that of the learned, you have seen that of the poor : if I have truly represented the matter of our present consideration, the poor man's evidence is stronger, safer, and more obvious, than that of the learned. You may say, indeed, that the learned must have the advantage : for he enjoys the poor man's evidence in common with that which is pecu-

liarly his own. The distinction is admitted, the advantage is denied; for in truth it amounts to no more than this: here are two paths leading to the same point: the one, common to men in general, is clear, direct, and short; the other, peculiar to the learned, is dark and intricate and circuitous: for such in truth it is, if men will be at the pains of going up to the primary sources of information. Of a truth then may we conclude, that the Divine mercies are over all the sons of men; that the common Father of us all is equally benign to all his children; that he is no respecter of persons, but that in every state of life, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness shall be accepted of him.

LECTURE III.

THE CANON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT HISTORICALLY EXAMINED.

2 THESS. iii. 17.

The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle : so I write.

XIV. MY last Discourse was chiefly employed in laying down the principles, on which we may be enabled to vindicate the canon of the New Testament. Of such vindication it would be unreasonable to deny the utility : because, if the books of scripture are verified as the genuine writings of the authors to whom they are ascribed, and of persons writing under the circumstances professedly connected with the composure of those writings ; then, little further is in fact required, towards substantiating the fullest and the clearest proof of the truth of Christianity.

In like manner would I argue for the *necessity* of being provided with such vindication in every case where it is called for : in-

asmuch as till it is made, the whole state of the question appears to be loose and unsettled, and the apologist for religion is unable even to grasp the substance of that which he is bound to defend. You will also be sensible of the reasons which I have advanced, to display the importance of vindicating the canon by the employment of such data, as are accessible to the knowledge, not of the well educated only, but of mankind in general : for it is to them that the Gospel is offered.

I cannot, however, deny, that while I am fully satisfied of the validity of those principles which I have employed, it is possible that they may be assailed by an objection : and this objection is of such a nature, that I do not conceive it to be either expedient or reasonable to decline the encounter of it.

For it may be said : These principles are entirely of a general and abstract nature, regarding only the common influence and operation of the motives of human conduct : but if the matter be tried by a reference to historical facts, it will appear, that the canon was not by any means received and established in the way which, as you contend, affords the only reasonable account of its present existence and constitution.

Now it appears to me, that the objection thus stated, creates a reason for looking to some extent, into the historical account of the canon of the New Testament. At the same time such examination of it need not be carried further than is necessary to shew, that the state of the case, reviewed historically, does not invalidate those abstract principles which were applied to it in the last Discourse: in other words, that the fact agrees with the theory. For it is here, as it would be in a case of geometrical argument: if there lay a fallacy in the reasoning, few men might be able to detect it; but the test of experience would satisfy every man that such fallacy must exist.

Of the confirmation to be thus obtained to the authenticity of the canon, it is right that we should not overestimate the value, and certainly that we should not, for the satisfaction of men in general, insist upon the necessity. The justice of this remark will be established by the following considerations.

To illustrate the subject by a parallel. It would be deemed most unfair, to try the validity of any sublunary interest by the principles commonly applied to the consideration of the genuineness of the Scriptures. If an hereditary honour or estate were the point at

issue, who would think of questioning the title of the family in possession, by pretending a flaw in the original grant, at a distance of five centuries back? Who would think, at this distance of time, of calling for the evidence requisite to disprove the existence of such a flaw? Who does not see, that a title of this nature ought to be presumed to be good; that it would not have been admitted from the first, if its legality had not been fully proved; and that the evidence *must*, in the nature of things, have now perished, which formed its original basis? Why then desire to try over again, at this time, a question, the true grounds of which have unavoidably been swept away from human knowledge? Yet it is by such a process that we would try the authenticity of the canon of Scripture: this is what the enemies of revelation demand; and it is a demand in which the advocates for revelation are too ready most injudiciously to acquiesce. It would not, however, be difficult to shew, that such principles of investigation are more unreasonable when applied to this subject, than they would be in reference to any temporal interests: while the application of them to such interests would be unanimously resented by mankind, as an outrage upon reason and justice. For let us

suppose the case of any temporal dignity or estate: doubtless there would be many obstacles to prevent the establishment, upon any basis connected with an ostensible show of justice, of a false title to it: there would be opposing interests, vigilant to discover imperfections in the claim, and there would be a demand for a strong mass of evidence which it would be difficult to fabricate or to falsify. But how much more difficult would it be to gain credit to a writing, professing to come from a man, authorized by God, and carrying the credentials of God in the exercise of a miraculous power; while the injunctions of that writing were at the same time found to contravene the workings of nature, and to dictate such a change in the whole tenour of a man's life, as no man would submit to without a sure title to everlasting happiness as the reward of his self-denial? It cannot, I think, but appear that the caution of mankind would, in the latter case, be much greater than in the former, inasmuch as the pending interest would be greater also; the vigilance also would be infinitely more diffused: for a temporal estate would be a matter of interest to few persons; in this, few only are concerned: but with the gospel it is different; here a vigilant eye would be exerted by *all* men, for it is addressed to

all men ; and it demands of all men to surrender every thing, if duty call them to it, in order to secure the happiness of another life ; to deny the delights which are before them for the prospect of others, of which no man living can declare the experience, and the nature of which is, in general, very remote from our present appetites and capacities of enjoyment. I have already enlarged upon the difficulty of forging, with success and with credit, any literary work whatever : he that would procure credit for two pages of his own, ascribed to Cicero or to Plato, is a man of greater talent than the world probably has yet seen. Judge then of the total impossibility of procuring credit to any supposititious books passing themselves off under the authority of Christ and his apostles : and doing this at a time when, from the circumstances of the case, the means of detection must have been in the hands of every man, and when martyrdom would be the probable consequence of submitting to an imposture. You cannot in this case, as in that of a secular interest, say, that the title might be bad in the beginning, and gain a valid acknowledgment by length of time ; for at whatever time you would suppose the beginning of that fictitious title, whether in the apostolical age, or at any later

period, you will find your supposition contradicted by the most obvious principles of reason and of human nature.

You cannot but see, that these difficulties are inherent in the case; and you will find, that historical evidence will confirm their reality and display their operation. It was to be expected, that the early Christians would be remarkably suspicious of all pretensions to miraculous power, and equally vigilant against imposture with regard to books professing to contain the doctrines of their faith. It was not in human nature they should be otherwise. That man would naturally be vigilant against imposture, who, in consequence of the evidence which he admitted, or the book which he received, might be called upon to sacrifice his life to his conscience. The fact is, that they were so: with regard to the reality of miracles, their slowness of credit could be surpassed only by the incredulity of atheists; and the genuineness of their sacred writings was watched with equal suspicion. What other conduct can you expect from men, who might be called upon to attest, by death and by all the most excruciating pains of martyrdom, the convictions they embraced? We may reasonably suppose that this natural suspicion would produce the delay, which occurred previously

to the general recognition in the church, of some books of the New Testament: such books being undoubtingly received in some countries, where the proof of their genuineness was prompt and obvious, at an earlier period than in others, less favourably situated as to the means of verifying their authority. And thus it has happened, that the anxious care which guarded the church against the introduction of supposititious books, may have been the occasion of throwing unjust doubts on a portion of the present canon: whereas it ought, in truth, to be a ground of security and confidence with regard to the genuineness of the whole.

There is, then, much reason to complain of those, who demand the evidence on which any particular book was first received into the canon of Scripture. It must be obvious to reason, from the very nature of the case, that such evidence must, by this time, have perished: and it is most unjust to try over again a question, which could be fairly tried only by contemporaries: to try it over again now, I say, when the witnesses are dead, and the great bulk of auxiliary proofs has been destroyed.

If it be said, that it is too much to expect of us, that we should thus attach our faith to

the understandings of those who lived before us: I answer, first, that the nature of the case admits of no other proof; and, secondly, that it does not require it.

The nature of the case, I say, admits of no other proof. We ascribe the works to men whose authority is verified by miracles. How then is further evidence to be supplied? Shall fresh writings be continually set forth attested by fresh miracles? or shall the same writings be maintained by a perpetual and connected chain of miracles, wrought for the satisfaction of each succeeding age? No other mode can be imagined, of supplying the deficiency of evidence thus complained of: but neither of these two would, I conceive, be admissible; for they both of them suppose such a frequency and perpetuity of miracles, as would frustrate the purpose for which miracles were professedly given, and would thus deprive religion of the confirmation they are designed to yield.

Secondly, I say, that the nature of the case does not require any further proof. It is enough for us to know, upon the strongest moral evidence, that these writings never could have established themselves in the credit and character they now have, unless they had been what they profess to be. If you doubt

it, consider whether any man could, at this day, obtain currency for a spurious writing of his own, pretending to the character of a work written by the Apostle St. Paul? You will probably admit this to be impossible. I say, then, that the same impossibility will discover itself in connection with every previous age.

Let us compare this question with a similar one. In treating the necessity of a lawful call and ordination to the ministry of the church, we may justly insist on the necessity of a continuation and perpetuity (through the medium of a regular succession) of that commission which was first given by Christ to his apostles. This continuation we contend to flow in the line of episcopal succession from the foundation of the church down to the present time. But here it may be, and indeed it is, objected to us: how can you prove an unbroken chain of episcopal succession down to this day? How can you, with respect to those who now administer the episcopal function, prove, that there has not, in the course of so many centuries, occurred any instance, unknown to us, of an intruding bishop without ordination, or of some defect of the things needful to constitute a lawful appointment? Now to attest by eyewit-

nesses or records, the validity of every episcopal ordination through a series of eighteen centuries is plainly out of the question. But what then? Shall this avail to discredit, or to render dubious the validity of *their* appointment, who now act in the church as the professed and ostensible successors of the apostles? Certainly, in good reason, it ought not. For, not to insist now on the promise of our Lord's perpetual presence with the ministry of his church: not to insist, that if there were no lawful ministry, the promise would seem to have come to no effect; and that the scripture appears to recognise as lawful, no ministry but that, of which the power is conferred by those previously authorized for the purpose, and conferred in the way of an express and exterior and visible designation: not, I say, to insist on these things, there is one consideration which may set our minds at rest on the subject. Would it be possible at this day that any man, without lawful ordination, should procure himself to be received and credited as a person invested with that character, and thus succeed in usurping the administration of the episcopal office? Or would you not at once pronounce this to be a total impossibility? Let me then ask you: How could it be more possible in any age

which has elapsed since the first establishment of the Christian church, than it is now? In like manner let me put the question, Could any man at this day pass off, as an Epistle of the apostle St. Paul, a forged writing of his own? If it would not be possible now, why should it be more possible in any former age? Certainly, if you go up to the earliest period of the church, the difficulty must appear insuperable: for the vigilance of men against imposture would naturally be most alive, when the profession of the faith was attended with the greatest danger. If, on the other hand, you select any intermediate period, as the season for such an attempt: then, the very time of its first appearance would be to all men a palpable proof of its forgery. For the very tenour and profession of the book itself, and the authoritative character which it professes to have, will suffice to convince you, that if it were genuine, it could not have been lost: and that if writings thus essential to the Christian religion could thus fall into oblivion, the religion must have fallen into oblivion also. To cut the matter short, and make it plain to all men: If it be impossible at this day to forge a book of the New Testament, it was equally so at any former time; if it be

impossible for any man now living, it must have been alike impossible for any man living at any time.

Thus, in fact, it is that the case stands. A question has been decided by those who lived before us: we are quite sure, that it never would have been decided without the fullest possible evidence: that evidence, from the necessity of things, has unavoidably disappeared: and yet we would now try the question over again.

XV. On these general principles respecting the canon I insisted in my last Discourse. They are principles which come home to the understandings of all men: nor do they require any previous acquaintance with matters of deep and intricate research. Let us, however, now consider, whether it be possible that their validity may be shaken, by any allegation of facts historically connected with the formation of the canon. This inquiry is of no trivial importance: for the truth of principles cannot be sustained in defiance of such a test: nor can such principles be warrantably asserted, if, however suited to the conviction of simple and unsuspecting minds, we knew them to be hollow and deceptive. Pious frauds are equally contrary to morals and to expediency. If the salvation of all

mankind could be effected by propagating a single falsehood, the end would never sanctify the means; and the employer of such means would be subject to the eternal penalty denounced against every one that maketh a lie.

Towards opening the subject, it is necessary to premise the following remark. I desire at this time to vindicate historically the validity of those general principles which in my last Lecture I applied to this subject. Now for this purpose, the greater part of the books of the New Testament are so circumstanced, that they can create no difficulty: neither the names of these books, nor any circumstances relating to them, would ever be alleged to shake the validity of those propositions, which I have asserted for the vindication of the canon. It remains then, that I state the names of those books which connect with the present inquiry the necessity of more mature examination. They are the seven following: the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Epistle of St. James, the second Epistle of St. Peter, the second and third Epistles of St. John, the Epistle of St. Jude, and the Apocalypse. Respecting these I would prove from the books themselves, and from external circumstances, that if they had not been entitled to a place

in the canon, they would never have obtained it. If this can be proved, the general principles which I have previously applied to this subject may honestly be maintained. And thus concerning the entire writings of the New Testament, I would prove that they are authentic works.

Let us first then advert to the circumstance which has occasioned all the difficulty. It is this fact: that some of the books of the present canon were not received universally by the Christian church so early as others; the books thus distinguished from the others being those, which I have named. Hence then may occasion be taken to argue thus respecting the principles insisted on in the last Lecture: “Though such principles may appear
“conclusive in themselves, they are nevertheless fallacious, since they are contradicted
“by fact: some of the canonical books having
“been doubted of for about three centuries,
“and afterwards obtained a general reception:
“and it is plain, that the evidence of their
“authority could not, at the end of these
“three centuries, have been so strong as it
“was at the beginning: therefore they may
“have obtained a place in the canon, though
“not entitled to it: since those who decided
“in their favour could not, on this footing,

“ have been more competent than those who “ doubted of their authority.” Such is the possible objection : it has in effect been actually urged. Now if this objection be thought to invalidate the canonical authority of those seven books which I have just named, it will go far towards subverting the principles which I have advanced towards establishing the authority of the whole canon. Hence arises the necessity of historically examining the subject.

The objection is indeed very plausible : but I trust it will appear in the sequel, that it is only one of those numerous mistakes, into which men are liable to fall, when they give their opinions on subjects which they have not been at the pains to thoroughly understand. In fact, the objection proceeds on an assumption of what is false : when the matter is examined, there will be good reason to conclude, that those who lived at the end of the three centuries, were better judges of the question, than the majority of those who lived when the books were written.

Now, in order to bring this great question to a satisfactory adjustment, there are four leading points of exposition and of argument to which I would beg your attention.

I.

XVI. The first of these leading points regards the intricacy and confusion with which, in studying the records of the primitive church, this subject occurs to our notice. I shall therefore briefly represent the causes in which they have arisen: the doing of which will at the same time account in part for the comparatively late period at which some of the books obtained a general recognition, and contribute to present the general subject clearly to our view.

One of these causes is, the practice of the ancient church respecting the books publicly read in their assemblies. The authoritative scriptures were thus read, as books possessing an authoritative character: but other books were also read, in the character of works conducive to piety and to useful instruction. The former class of books are termed *canonical*; the latter *ecclesiastical*. Of this second description is the book of the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach. For though the council of Trent has received it into the canon, their forefathers seem to have annexed the word "Ecclesiasticus" to the title of it, as an express caution against their so doing^a.

^a A similar cause must, I think, have occasioned the application of the term *catholic* to the Epistles of St. James, St.

In this way, the Epistle ascribed to St. Barnabas, and the Epistle which is entitled the

Peter, St. John, and St. Jude. These books, or some part of them, were not so early authenticated (by a proper reference to the test which will hereafter be described) as some other canonical books. For the whole of these catholic Epistles, even those which were the subject of temporary doubts, were read in churches, as were also the Epistle of Clement and the Pastor of Hermas, and were thus in danger of being confounded with *ecclesiastical* books. But further: until their canonical authority was determined, there might be a doubt whether they might not be *supposititious*: for the name of an Apostle being in some cases prefixed to them, or his authority being claimed for them, it might seem, that no intermediate character could belong to them; but, that if they were not authoritative, they must have been forgeries. We may suppose then, that by those who had received the earliest proofs of their authenticity, the word *catholic* was inscribed on them for the sake of distinction, and for the guidance of others: on the same principle that the word *ecclesiastical* was inscribed on the Wisdom of the Son of Sirach. Thus the word *catholic* would, in this use of it, be synonymous with *canonical*, and would be opposed to *heretical* or *apocryphal*: these last terms having the same import, inasmuch as the apocryphal Scriptures were in almost all cases

forged by heretics. The propriety of the term may indeed apply to four only of the seven Epistles: for it was of these four only that doubts were entertained: but the term itself might naturally come to be applied to them all as a common name for *those of the epistles which were not written by St. Paul*. This explanation is confirmed by Casiodorus and Gelasius, who, in speaking of these Epistles employ the term *canonical* instead of *catholic*. As to the explanation of the term *catholic*, which is given by Leontius, as arising from the circumstance of these Epistles being addressed to all nations in general, and not to one in particular; this sense of the term is manifestly inconsistent with the superscriptions with which we find the greater number of these Epistles introduced.

There is a fact recorded in the early history of the Church (I am sorry I cannot at this moment give a particular reference to my authority) which may serve to confirm what I have here said, and to illustrate the general feeling of hatred entertained for apocryphal works, and the prompt condemnation of those which assumed the name of Apostles. One of the Fathers composed a work to which, as a title, he innocently gave the name of some Apostle or scriptural character: on the same principle that Cicero might prefix that of Cato or Lælius to

first of St. Clement to the Corinthians, were also publicly read in the churches; upon the same principle that the Homilies of the church of England, though not pretending to canonical authority, are now set forth to be read in our churches. This practice was not unreasonable in its origin. For, as the church might authorize some to *speak* in the public assemblies, respecting whom, nevertheless, it was not believed that they were infallibly directed in what they said: it might, on the same view to edification, attach a similar value to a *written* discourse, which, though not authoritative, might be considered as instructive and edifying. For example, it will be found that the Alexandrine manuscript (which critics have assigned to the fourth or fifth century) contains in it the two Epistles ascribed to Clement of Rome. On the other hand, it might from the same principle occur, that a book, acknowledged to be canonical, might be omitted in a volume containing other canonical scriptures: such

one of his treatises. This gives occasion to one of his friends to advise him to choose some other name for his book: *for that if he did not, he might expect that his work would come to be reckoned in the number of apocryphal forgeries.* It was indeed

natural, that every book which carried an authoritative name, and was not genuine, should no longer be regarded as an *ecclesiastical*, or even as an innocent book, but altogether condemned as an imposture.

omission being occasioned by the fact, that the same book was also omitted in the public readings of the church. Thus there is a canon^b of the council of Laodicea, directing what books are to be read in churches, and the catalogue of books thus prescribed does not contain the Apocalypse: it is not impossible, as a consequence of this canon, that some volumes of Scriptures, in which the Apocalypse was not contained, might be prepared for the use of churches. This might furnish a partial occasion for doubt respecting the authority of a book. But I trust it will fully appear in the sequel, that such doubt was capable of solution on clear and determinate grounds; and that, though some Christians of the early church may have been affected by this structure of their scriptural and liturgical books, it furnishes no just occasion of perplexity to *us*^c.

^b This canon is frequently alleged as containing a complete list of *canonical* books: but it really contains the names of those only, *which it directs to be read in churches*. We cannot wonder that the Apocalypse should be omitted here: since the practice of our own church is in this respect nearly agreeable to that prescribed by the council of Laodicea. It has been contended (see Michaelis, as referred to in the next note) that

this canon is not genuine: I know not the grounds of this opinion, but it plainly does not affect the use which I have made of it for the purpose of illustration.

^c Yet such it has been made. This, I think, is the tendency of some representations contained in archbishop Wake's Preliminary Discourse to his Translation of the Apostolical Fathers. [See more particularly ch. x. §. 11. and 25.] As the archbishop seems, at some

Secondly, the same matter may be partly accounted for on this footing. Of the ancient versions of the New Testament, some are of so early a date, that they appear to have been anterior to the time, when the latest of the books of the New Testament were composed. Of this description is the old Syriac version; from which the absence of the Apocalypse and of four of the catholic Epistles has been explained on the supposition, which is contended to be highly probable, that those canonical books had not been written at the time when the version was made^d. From this it appears that col-

times, almost inclined to enlarge the catalogue of canonical Scriptures, so professor Michaelis discovers an inclination to reduce it, and he, in like manner, employs this topic. Speaking (in the fourth section of his chapter relating to the Apocalypse) of the Alexandrine manuscript, he says, that "it contains the whole Bible, and with it the Apocalypse. But then," continues he, "the Codex Alexandrinus contains likewise other books, which are certainly not canonical: for instance, the first Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, and also several hymns. Consequently we cannot infer, that the writer of this manuscript considered the Apocalypse as canonical: for if we

"draw this conclusion of the
"Apocalypse, we must draw
"the same in respect to the
"first Epistle of Clement."
But to this I say, No: the two cases are widely different. The Epistle of Clement does not claim the character of a divine and authoritative book: it might therefore be read in churches, not for authority but for edification; not as canonical but as ecclesiastical. But the Apocalypse *does* claim the character of a divine and authoritative book: therefore if not esteemed canonical, it would have found no place in a collection of books to be read in churches, but would have been discarded altogether as a forgery.

^d "The old Syriac version
"has not in it the four catholic

lections of these writings were made, earlier than the whole of them were given to the world : and this circumstance might probably for some time cast a doubt on those scriptures, which were not contained in such received collections : for a collection *of all that had been published down to a certain date*, might naturally, from a mistaken veneration, be looked upon as a collection of the *whole*.

Thirdly, of our difficulties relating to this subject, another cause presents itself in the mutilated and interpolated condition of the writings of the ancient Fathers : respecting which writings, I have already proved, that we cannot have the same reasonable assurance of their genuineness and purity, that we have respecting the Scriptures themselves. This applies more especially to the *catalogues*

“ Epistles, (viz. the 2d of Peter,
 “ the 2d and 3d of John, and
 “ the Epistle of Jude,) nor the
 “ Revelation :—which I take to
 “ be a considerable proof of the
 “ antiquity of the version. For
 “ their being wanted must ne-
 “ cessarily proceed from one of
 “ these three causes, viz. either,
 “ 1, Because they were not
 “ written when this version was
 “ made : or, 2. Because the
 “ knowledge of them was not yet
 “ come to the Syrian churches,
 “ for whom this version was
 “ made : or, 3. Because they

“ were not yet received into the
 “ number of canonical books.
 “ Now, whichsoever of these be
 “ said, the antiquity of the ver-
 “ sion will be fully established.
 “ *But the first of these seems*
 “ *most probable* ; because, as I
 “ shall hereafter shew, the
 “ churches of Syria did both
 “ know and receive several of
 “ these books at least as cano-
 “ nical in the second century, as
 “ it is certain they do now.”
Jones on the Canon, vol. I.
 p 112.

which they contain of the Scriptures: for a catalogue, containing a long string of names, following each other without syntactical arrangement, furnishes one of the most probable occasions both for mistake and for fraud on the part of a copyist. Of this you may find an example in the list of canonical books of the Old Testament, which Eusebius has given us from Origen^e, and which is distinguished by the omission of the twelve minor prophets. Here the error is so flagrant, that it exposes itself: but it is not improbable that other catalogues may be vitiated in such a manner, as really to mislead us respecting the judgment of the writers of them.

A fourth cause, and one of no inconsiderable operation, presents itself in the confused statements, the mistakes, and misrepresentations, of learned men. Such was Eusebius among the ancients: and of the moderns, Lardner, Michaelis, and others, may properly be named, as having imparted a false colouring and an incorrect representation to the evidence and the testimony relating to this point, which are derivable from the works of early Christian writers.

^e Euseb. Hist. Eccl. lib. vi. c. 25. Lardner's Works, vol. v. p. 26. ed. 1788.

I would now proceed to lay down a fundamental principle, which I desire to establish by argument, illustrate by example, and apply to the solution of the various difficulties connected with this subject.

XVII. But before I do this, I feel it necessary for the information of the younger portion of my hearers, to explain certain terms, which, in the progress of these Lectures, I shall have occasion to employ, and respecting which it is necessary, in order to a right comprehension of my argument, that a very distinct conception should be entertained. These terms are *catholic* and *heretic*.

I would observe then, that the term *heretic*, as it is applied to the state of the early church, is a term very remote from that laxity of indiscriminate application in which it is now used ; and according to which it has become little else, than a term of angry reproach among religious parties. Previously to the Nicene council, the whole catholic church was, with the exception of the schisms of the Novatians and the Donatists, united in one body and in one communion. To the members of this undivided church, living under the government of bishops appointed by lawful succession from the apostles, the term *catholic* applies. But besides these, there were others,

professing to believe in Christ, but who were not included in the body of catholic believers: either because they wilfully separated from that communion, or else, because they were, by reason of their heterodox tenets, expelled from it and excommunicated. To these latter, in the early church, the term *heretic* properly applies^f. For there was at this time no confusion as to the question, who was and who was not a heretic: and the term itself, in the earlier period of its ecclesiastical use, simply denoted a fact, without any other expression of reproach, than what that fact itself, in the estimation of those who used the term, necessarily implied: as indeed the word *heresy* is found to be employed, in Scripture itself, in a way far from indicative of censure^g.

Having spoken of the Novatians and the Donatists, it remains that I add a few words

^f Lardner's definition of the word is perfectly unobjectionable. It is generally allowed, "that a heretic is *one who professeth to be a Christian, but is not supposed to be one of the church, having either separated himself from it, or been excluded from it by others.*" Hist. of Heretics, b. i. sect. 2. It is only necessary, for the avoiding of misconception, to explain the term *church* as it occurs in

this definition. It signifies the *universal church*, or, (as it is designated in the Apostles' Creed,) the *holy catholic church*: and consists of all Christian believers living in lawful communion under bishops who are legitimate successors to the authority of the Apostles.

^g Acts v. 17. xv. 5. xxvi. 5. The word in our translation is *sect*, but in the original it is *αἵρεσις*.

respecting the peculiarity of their case. According to the general sense of the ancient church, those communities would not, I think, be denied to form a part of the *catholic church*: I say this on the supposition, that they were governed by bishops and pastors of lawful ordination; for this is the ground on which I should deem them entitled to be regarded as a part of the universal church. But with regard to individual members of those communities, the term *catholics* would not be applied to them: that term being, I think, confined to those, who not only belonged to the *body*, but also maintained the *unity*, of the church; and being also found in use as a term of *distinction* from the members of these same communities of Novatians and Donatists. If therefore we would adopt an ecclesiastical term for the purpose of distinguishing them from both catholics and heretics, their proper designation will be that of *schismatics*.

II.

XVII. After this necessary explanation, I proceed to lay down the fundamental principle of which I spoke: and which forms the second of those leading points which I desire to offer to your consideration. That principle is as follows: *When it appears, that a book of the New Testament has, from the earliest times,*

been undoubtingly received as canonical by any considerable portion of the catholic church, this is good proof of the canonicalness of that book: but when, on the contrary, it appears, that such book was not at first received by some portion of professing Christians, this does not afford a valid argument for impugning the canonicalness of that book. Thus with regard to the Apocalypse: if it shall appear, that this book was, at an early period, received by the Roman church, and by numerous other churches in the west and east, this is a valid proof of its canonicalness: if during some time it was not received by the Greek and Syrian Christians, this is no proof to bar its title to the canonical character. In like manner respecting the Epistle to the Hebrews: if it was early and undoubtingly acknowledged by some churches, this is evidence of its being canonical: but though it should appear, that it was for some time doubted of, or at least not received by others, this is no evidence to set aside its canonical character.

The former member of this proposition rests on the following grounds. Under the circumstances of the early Christians, it was morally impossible that any book should obtain a canonical authority if it was not entitled to it. Christianity at all times demands such

renunciations of natural appetite and disposition, as men, without a strong security or a fixed persuasion of great and preponderating advantage, are unwilling to make. But this applies much more forcibly to the early Christians than to men in ordinary times. For in their case, the profession of the gospel was connected with the hatred of mankind; with the persecution of the ruling powers; with the loss of every worldly interest and delight; with the probable prospect of martyrdom and of torture, excruciating and protracted beyond all parallel. Men thus situated would not be the dupes of credulity with respect to books, professing to contain the substance of a doctrine, for which they might be called upon to abandon every thing and to suffer every thing. Now with regard to those books of which the first reception was not universal; it will nevertheless be found that the reception of them was extensive, and that it was obtained under circumstances incompatible with light credulity and inadequate proof.

I now proceed to the second member of this fundamental principle: which is, that the partial non-reception of a book is no valid ground for impugning its canonicalness.

For this non-reception is in a great degree

to be regarded, merely as the silence of a person on a subject unknown to him. Such silence is plainly different from the evidence of a decided judgment. One man can identify a document; this proves it to be genuine: another man cannot identify it; this does not prove it to be spurious.

To apply this to a case. It appears that the Epistle to the Hebrews was not received by Cyprian: for his remaining works contain no quotation from it, nor any reference to it. The same appears to have been the case with Novatus, a contemporary of Cyprian: and the silence of Novatus is the more striking, because that Epistle contains passages, of which it might be supposed that he would gladly avail himself, in order to justify the fundamental doctrine of the schism which he introduced into the church^h. I would say then,

^h The passages referred to are Heb. vi. 4—8. x. 26—29. “For
“ it is impossible for those who
“ were once enlightened, and
“ have tasted of the heavenly
“ gift, and were made partakers
“ of the Holy Ghost, and have
“ tasted the good word of God,
“ and the powers of the world
“ to come, if they shall fall
“ away, to renew them again
“ unto repentance; seeing they
“ crucify to themselves the Son
“ of God afresh, and put him to
“ an open shame. For the earth
“ which drinketh in the rain

“ that cometh oft upon it, and
“ bringeth forth herbs meet for
“ them by whom it is dressed,
“ receiveth blessing from God:
“ but that which beareth thorns
“ and briers is rejected, and is
“ ~~high~~ nigh unto cursing; whose end
“ is to be burned.” “ For if we
“ sin wilfully after that we have
“ received the knowledge of the
“ truth, there remaineth no
“ more sacrifice for sins, but
“ a certain fearful looking for
“ of judgment and fiery indig-
“ nation, which shall devour the
“ adversaries. He that despised

that this is a fact, which may be explained on the supposition, that the authority of that Epistle was not known to either of those two writers.

This fact, however, cannot reasonably be allowed to warrant a denial of canonicalness. For there are proofs still extant, that that Epistle had, at a much earlier time, been regarded as an authentic and authoritative book: since it is plainly quoted by Clement of Romeⁱ, a man contemporary with the apostles, and one who does on no occasion allege the authority or employ the language of any apocryphal book. It is also evident, that this Epistle was generally received in ancient times by the very numerous churches of the eastern Christians who used the Greek language; and there can be little doubt of its very ancient and undoubted reception by the Christians of Syria, Mesopotamia, and the adjacent countries. Such is the positive proof of its early and extensive acknowledgment.

“ Moses’ law died without mer-
 “ ey under two or three wit-
 “ nesses: of how much sorer
 “ punishment, suppose ye, shall
 “ he be thought worthy, who
 “ hath trodden under foot the
 “ Son of God, and hath counted
 “ the blood of the covenant,
 “ wherewith he was sanctified,
 “ an unholy thing, and hath
 “ done despite unto the Spirit

“ of grace?” The schism of the
 Novatians rested on an opinion,
 that the church had no power
 to pardon great and wilful sins
 committed after baptism.

ⁱ A doubt has been raised on
 this head, but I cannot think it
 a reasonable one. The reader
 may judge for himself by refer-
 ring to Lardner’s chapter on
 Clement of Rome.

Let us now revert to a principle of moral evidence which has been already asserted and applied to the canonical books in general: it cannot be denied that such principle is fairly applicable to this book in particular. The principle is this: That under the circumstances of the early Christians, a scriptural book could never have been acknowledged as canonical, if it had not been genuine. Though it appears then, that the reception of this Epistle in the first three centuries was not universal, yet it was sufficiently extensive to satisfy us, that the principle fully applies to it. The Greek and Syrian Christians, embracing many millions of persons, and those living at a time when they were competent to judge, and when fraud would have been of easy detection: they, I say, were sufficiently numerous and sufficiently qualified for the purpose of evidence; and the data, though not in this case so comprehensive as in some others, are nevertheless abundantly sufficient to warrant the conclusion. The number of witnesses is, in this case, quite equivalent, on the principles of moral evidence, to the whole of mankind.

If you allow this reasoning to be valid in its application to the Epistle to the Hebrews, it is to be observed, that it applies in an equal

degree to others of the seven books. Thus the Epistle of St. James, and the Apocalypse, are both of them among the books which for some time were only partially received: yet the evidence of this reception rises, in the case of them both, to the very highest antiquity which can be reasonably desired; it also fixes the reception among persons, eminently qualified to judge of their authority, and sufficiently numerous to warrant that conclusion, which, on the soundest view of moral evidence, I would deduce respecting them ^k. The Apocalypse, indeed, is *remarkably distinguished* by very early, and very conclusive, testimony. This is an important consideration to be balanced against the fact of a partial and temporary suspense. The doubt of some is accompanied by the decision of others: while the decision is grounded upon evidence, and the doubt occasioned by the want of it.

But now, it may naturally occur to propose the question: How did it happen that these books were ever doubted of at all? Of this I shall proceed to furnish an explanation.

It is undeniable, that some of our canonical books were not only doubted of, but

^k I say this, as far as the Epistle of St. James is concerned, on the ground of its being contained in the ancient Syriac version.

even rejected, by some Christians in the early ages. This applies not exclusively to the seven books with which we are now more particularly concerned, but to the canon of the Old and New Testament in general. By the heretics, some books were forged in the character of canonical writings: and of others, really canonical, the authority was denied: the apparent purpose of the proceeding being, in both cases, to favour the peculiar tenets espoused by the professors of any particular heresy. It is indeed common, in the history of early heresies, to meet with occasions in which, on a principle of consistency with professed opinions, we meet with both additions to the canon, and subtractions from it. In some, I think in a generality, of these cases, the supposititious books thus introduced, will plainly be found to want that confirmation which attaches to the canonical ones: I mean, that which arises from the evidence of sincerity on the part of those who received them. For while it was regarded by the catholics as an undeniable duty to sacrifice life rather than deny the faith; it was a common tenet of heresy, that it was lawful for a man to save his life by a denial of his faith. For example: Basilides is said to have forged a Gospel. Now if this Gospel was received by

his followers, such reception is no evidence of its being genuine: for Basilides is also said to have taught, that it was lawful to deny the faith in order to avoid martyrdom. A book therefore received by the followers of Basilides, is very differently circumstanced from one received by the catholics: it did not, in this case, form a part of that doctrine, which men were ready to attest by the sacrifice of their lives. It is plain then, that such books cannot possess any confirmation of moral evidence. This remark is one of extensive application: for almost all the apocryphal scriptures of the New Testament were the works of heretics: and it was a prevailing tenet of heretical doctrine, under various denominations and distinctions of sects, to deny the obligation of martyrdom. As to their *rejection* of books, there is not, I believe, one in the New Testament, which has not had its authority denied by some or other of the early heretics. But it will, I trust, sufficiently appear from the sequel, that *their* practice carries with it no weight, towards disturbing the minds of men respecting the present canon.

I now proceed to apply my explanation to the seven books with which we are principally concerned, and to the doubts and de-

lay which occurred respecting them among catholic Christians.

It was in the nature and necessity of things, that every one of these books must have been received *earlier* in some places than in others. Thus, on the supposition that the Epistle ascribed to St. James was written by the first bishop of Jerusalem; that Epistle would be received in Palestine and Syria earlier than it would in the western parts of the Roman empire: for the evidence of its authenticity would be more speedily communicated. Again, it was unavoidable that the *general* reception of some books would be earlier than of others: thus (waving the consideration of dates) the Epistle to the Romans, published at the capital of the civilized world, was, from the nature of the case, adapted to meet with a more speedy diffusion and acknowledgment, than the second or third Epistle of St. John, which are addressed to single persons in private life. Indeed the same may in truth be said of all St. Paul's Epistles when compared with the others: for this might be a natural fruit of his great celebrity, arising from his more abundant labour in the ministry, and from the greatness of the cities, such as Rome, Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus, at which he sustained a conspicuous character. In ge-

neral the earlier or later reception would be greatly influenced, by the means which were at hand of diffusing the proofs of authenticity¹.

¹ Towards explaining the progressive formation of the canon, the following remarks of Dupin are well deserving of attention. "It is no ways difficult to explain how, without a new revelation, the church might become more assured of the genuineness of a work than she was at first; the manner is as follows: When St. Paul, for example, wrote his letter to the Romans, it was at first known only to those to whom it was wrote, to those who saw him write it, or had heard from himself that he had wrote it: there were none but those that *could* be assured of it: by degrees it was published, many copies of it were wrote, it became more common and known, and more people were assured of it: in a word, it became so public, that St. Paul had wrote it, that nobody could be ignorant of it. But there was some time required to bring it to this. Let us suppose, that St. Paul did not set his name to it, as he did not to the Epistle to the Hebrews, and that he would not have been known to any but those he wrote to; it is certain people would have been longer in doubt of it; and that, nevertheless, in the close, they might have been certain of it, by the testimony of those to whom it was wrote, and of those to whom he had entrusted the secret. Let us suppose that the knowledge of this had not for some time reached a particular church, but had at last come to them: should the temporary ignorance of that church hinder the things becoming certain at last? Let us further suppose, that a letter be wrote to particular persons, as the two last Epistles of St. John: they could neither be so famous nor so speedily known, as those that were wrote to great churches: there must be time to multiply the copies; but when once they are public, there is no further doubt concerning them. In fine, let us suppose that some authors reject a piece, because they find extraordinary things in it that they do not understand, as in the Revelations; or, because they meet with something that offends them, as in the Epistle of St. Jude. If afterwards those difficulties be removed, and the antiquity of those monuments demonstrated, ought not that to remove the doubt? This may be explained by the example of other works which are not canonical. Though some contemporary authors have called in question the works of writers of their time,

If now we would estimate these means, we shall have occasion to consider the circumstances of the early church. These were far from propitious to the diffusion and authentication of Christian documents. For such purposes would naturally require correspondence and intercourse between those various cities and countries, very remote from each other, in which the several books were first published: tranquillity, freedom of communication, and uninterrupted access to persons and to records, would therefore be the appropriate facilities of the case. But such facilities were quite inconsistent with the persecuted and afflicted state of the primitive believers: during a period, when the intolerant spirit of the Roman laws was hostile to peaceable intercourse and society among Christians; when the possession of the Scriptures would probably be followed by loss of life to

“ or raised objections against
 “ them: yet afterwards they have
 “ received them, and been per-
 “ suaded that they were wrote
 “ by those authors, either by
 “ the agreement of style, by new
 “ testimonies they had of it, by
 “ manuscripts they discovered,
 “ or because the objections which
 “ occasioned their doubt were
 “ removed. It was very pos-
 “ sible, then, as we have de-
 “ monstrated, that some of the

“ Apostles’ writings, whereof
 “ some people doubted, and
 “ which some churches did not
 “ at first receive, were after-
 “ wards received and acknow-
 “ ledged by all the churches,
 “ and that subsequent testi-
 “ monies gave them a canonical
 “ authority, which they would
 “ not have had if the doubt
 “ had continued.” *History of
 the Canon*, vol. ii. chap. I. sect.
 9.

the owner ; and when Christians were careful to conceal their copies, not to save their own lives, but to save (what was far more precious to them) the sacred writings themselves from spoliation and burning.

During this period, doubts would naturally prevail respecting books which claimed a canonical authority. *Every* book of this kind *must* have been doubted of, so long at least as was necessary for reasonable satisfaction respecting its pretensions. For all prudent persons will doubt of every thing, respecting which they have not yet obtained adequate grounds for belief or disbelief. When a book was propounded, as containing a part of the doctrine for which men would probably be required to die ; when it was propounded, as a book of that class, respecting which they felt it their duty to die rather than surrender them : was it not natural for men thus situated to doubt till they were satisfied, and to regard every such book with the most wakeful suspicion ?

It is certain that this was, in fact, the feeling of the primitive Christians : and the long continuance of a suspended judgment concerning the seven books was a fruit of this natural sentiment. But independently of this cause, the practices of the heretics would

supply other excitements to the exercise of it. As they rejected some books, they might assign reasons for so doing, which, whether true or fabricated, might contribute to aggravate the doubts of the catholics. Then as to those which they forged: their efforts in this way were so assiduous, and their productions so numerous, so bold in pretension, and occasionally so pompous in the titles they give them; that it was a plain dictate of prudence to be extremely circumspect in guarding against imposition. Again, it might occasionally happen, that the title of one of their supposititious books would be the same with that of a canonical book, or very similar to it: here would be a fresh occasion for mistake, and a fresh necessity for vigilance. It was probably owing to such a circumstance, that the Apocalypse was so long doubted of: for it appears that a book under the same title was set forth by Cerinthus; and it is not improbable (from the account of it preserved by Eusebius) that the forgery of the heretic may have been inscribed with the name of St. John ^m. Indeed, the records of the early church bear witness to the great

^m Κηριθος ὁ δι' Αποκαλυψεων
ΩΣ 'ΥΠΟ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΟΥ ΜΕΓΑ-
ΛΟΥ ΓΕΓΡΑΜΜΕΝΩΝ—Caius a-
pud Euseb. Eccl. Hist. lib. iii.

c. 28. The supposition is fur-
ther confirmed by the words
cited in the same chapter from
Dionysius of Alexandria.

aversion entertained by the catholics for all apocryphal books, and to the suspicions thus occasioned respecting some that are canonical: for there are several of these latter which appear to have been suspected on the sole ground, of their being supposed to quote or refer to apocryphal books. It was on this ground, that very strong doubt was entertained respecting the Epistle of St. Jude: it is not improbable that the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the second Epistle of St. Peter, may have been affected by the same consideration: and it is upon record, that even an Epistle of St. Paul (namely, the second to Timothy) has had its authority called in question on the same ground ⁿ.

III.

XIX. I would hope that the foregoing considerations will warrant me in asserting, that the doubts of the early church respecting the canon were natural and reasonable: that they were unavoidably generated by the nature of the case: and that the character and incidents of the time, had a remarkable tendency to increase them. It is now fit that we should advert to the solution of those doubts: this is the third of those leading points to which my remarks are di-

ⁿ See the twenty-fifth section of Lardner's chapter on Origen.

rected. With reference to this particular, I trust I shall be able to produce satisfactory reasons for saying: That these doubts were not of such a nature that they must unavoidably last for ever, but that the progress of time, down to a certain period, would bring to light the surest means of dispelling them. I would thus encounter the notion, that the doubts respecting the authenticity of the books, must unavoidably gather strength in proportion to the length of time which elapsed from the composure of them: a notion which, in its application to ordinary books, (such for instance, as the Eikon Basili- like) may be tolerably correct; but which, when applied to the canon of the New Testament, is altogether paralogistical.

The evidence of this truth may fitly be introduced with a passage from Eusebius^o, “Even “ to this day,” says he, “ the bulk of the Chris- “ tian world are divided in their judgments “ for and against the authority of the Apo- “ calypse.” After which follow these remark- able words: “ Nevertheless this book also “ will in due time be decided upon by the

^o Της δ' αποκαλυψεως εφ' εκα-
τερον επι νυν παρα τοις πολλοις
περιελκεται η δοξα. ομως γε μην
εκ της των αρχαιων μαρτυριας εν

οικειω καιρω την επικρισιν δεξεται
και αυτη. Hist. Eccl. lib. iii. c.
24.

“testimony of the ancients.” He had been just before mentioning the doubts respecting the second and third Epistles of St. John : and his style of expression renders it manifest, that the expectation of a future decision, which he has expressed respecting the Apocalypse, equally applied in his own mind to those two Epistles. And indeed, with regard to the whole of the seven books respecting which he has recorded the doubts of the church, it cannot, on a collective view of his various representations relating to this subject, reasonably be questioned, that he entertained the same judgment : he regarded them all as books, concerning which a sure decision would take place at a future time. This language of Eusebius may reasonably be construed as an indication of the common sentiments of his contemporaries.

It appears then, with respect to a part of the present canon, that doubts were entertained : these doubts were confessed : but they were not regarded as bringing any discredit upon Christianity : and certainly they were not considered as doubts of impossible solution. The time, it was thought, for a final determination had not yet come : but Eusebius was well satisfied that it *would* come. Of the circumstance thus presented to your notice, I will proceed to

furnish an explanation ^p. In order to which, it will be useful to advert to the method adopted by the primitive Christians, for guarding the authenticity and proving the identity of their Scriptures. The passages of the Fathers which relate to this point are numerous and concurrent.

This method was as follows. The several books were kept as a sacred deposit, in the several churches to which they were addressed: the copies being well authenticated, and the custody of them especially confided to the bishops of the respective churches: while (from the circumstances of the case, and the proximity of the time to the first beginning of Christianity) the books might be clearly certified, and the apostolical succession of their appointed guardians might be distinctly traced up. Some of these books were not indeed addressed to particular churches: but it is natural that these latter should have been kept with equal fidelity, in churches, neighbouring to those individuals or classes of persons to whom they were primarily sent. On a similar view, we may suppose, that the Gospel of St. Mark would be authenticated as if

^p The above cited passage of Eusebius may serve to throw light on a similar expression of Jerom: who says, respecting St. James's Epistle, "*paulatim, procedente tempore, obtinuit auctoritatem.*"

it had been that of St. Peter; and that the writings of St. Luke would be alike verified by the authority of St. Paul.

Such being the practice of the churches in which the canonical Scriptures were first deposited: that of other churches, towards ascertaining the character of the books propounded to them, was, to *refer* to the churches in which the authentic and attested copies were primarily deposited⁹.

⁹ This point is well illustrated by Tertullian, in his treatise *De Præscriptionibus Hæreticorum*. In order to give a compendious view of his testimony, I will put together a connected representation of the substance of some passages in the twentieth, twenty-first, and thirty-sixth chapters of that work.

“ The apostles first bore witness to the faith of Jesus Christ throughout Judæa, and established churches in that country: then they went out into the world, and promulgated to the Gentiles the same doctrine and the same faith. With the same view they founded churches in every city: *from these churches, thus founded by the Apostles, all the other churches afterwards obtained, and every day continue to obtain, the scions of their faith and the seeds of their doctrine, that they may thus obtain the right constitution of a church for themselves. By this means, these latter churches also, as being the offspring of aposto-*

“ lical churches, have a title to be reckoned apostolical themselves.”

“ If our Lord Jesus Christ sent his apostles to preach, we have no right to receive or acknowledge any other preachers than those whom Christ has appointed. As to the substance of their doctrine, it is the same as what Christ revealed to them. And here I will insist on this point: **THE IDENTITY OF THAT DOCTRINE OUGHT NOT TO BE PROVED IN ANY OTHER WAY THAN BY THE TESTIMONY OF THOSE SAME CHURCHES WHICH THE APOSTLES, THROUGH THE MEANS OF PREACHING, NOT ONLY BY WORD, BUT ALSO BY LETTER, THEMSELVES FOUNDED.** All such doctrine is to be maintained without doubt, as that which the churches received from the Apostles, the Apostles from Christ, and Christ from God. All other doctrine is to be rejected as false, since it contradicts the truth of the churches, of

It is impossible that methods could have been adopted, more satisfactory to posterity. Now if you regard these methods, and look at the same time to the coetaneous state of the catholic church; you will find it impossible but that doubt and delay must arise. Opportunities could not now be obtained for ecclesiastical councils to settle a rule for universal practice. For the spirit of pagan intolerance vented itself in prohibiting and repressing all

“ the Apostles, of Christ, and
 “ of God. Such doctrine ought
 “ even to be prejudged and con-
 “ demned before it is heard.”

“ Take a journey through the
 “ several apostolical churches,
 “ *in which the very chairs of the*
 “ *Apostles, each in its proper*
 “ *place, are now occupied [by*
 “ *their successors], in which their*
 “ *authentic writings are now*
 “ *read, uttering their voice and*
 “ *renewing their presence. Do*
 “ *you live near Achaia? You*
 “ *may go to Corinth. If you are*
 “ *not distant from Macedonia,*
 “ *you may refer to Philippi. If*
 “ *you have the means of travel-*
 “ *ling into Asia, you may repair*
 “ *to Ephesus. If you belong to*
 “ *Italy, you may have ready ac-*
 “ *cess to Rome. It is from this*
 “ *last named church, rendered*
 “ *illustrious by the preaching*
 “ *and the sufferings of the Apo-*
 “ *stles Peter, Paul, and John,*
 “ *that we of Africa derive our*
 “ *evidence relating to this point.*
 “ *As they of that church, among*
 “ *the books which they acknow-*

ledge, combine the Law and
 “ the Prophets with the Gospels
 “ and the Apostolical letters, so
 “ do we.”

There are, in the thirteenth section of Lardner's chapter on Augustin, two quotations from that Father, which, if viewed in connection with the foregoing, will be found to confirm its testimony; but the original passages (cited at the bottom of the page) will serve this purpose better than the translations of Lardner, who does not, in these instances, appear to study exactness. It is, I conceive, on the testimony of the ancients, *thus transmitted to us*, rather than on the *authority of foregoing writers*, that Eusebius lays so much stress, as the test of canonicalness: if indeed his words may not admit of being construed to signify, the testimony of the *archives*: which latter construction comes still more to the point. This matter will be further illustrated in the next note but one.

Christian assemblies whatever: and it would no doubt occasionally manifest itself, as it did in the case of the emperor Licinius^r, in the special interdiction of synodical meetings. It is plain then, that while freedom of intercourse was denied, the adjustment of the canon must be suspended. It is also to be noted in particular, that the circumstances of some of the seven books, comparatively with those of most of the other canonical writings, were peculiarly unfavourable to the speedy diffusion of the proofs of their authenticity.

It must appear then, with regard to all the books of the canon, that they could, at first, be received only in those cities and countries, to which the primary evidence of their authenticity was known: from these cities and countries they would, with more or less expedition according to the circumstances of the case, be diffused and authenticated to the others. If you would demand that they should be universally received at once, this is the same

^r “Licinius enacted a law, commanding that the bishops should, at no place and in no way, hold intercourse with each other, and declaring it to be unlawful for any of them to go out of his own diocese to the church of a neighbouring bishop, and that they should have no synods nor deliberations nor discussions relating

“to matters of common use and benefit.” [*Eusebius de vita Const.* lib. i. c. 51.] The next lines of Eusebius’s text seem to be much mutilated; but he designates this measure of Licinius as an act of insulting cruelty [*επηρεια*], and says, *That the important affairs of the church cannot be put upon a right footing without synods.*

thing as to require that this primary evidence should be simultaneously known in all countries: and you will on the same ground be warranted in demanding, that such primary evidence should be equally known to all ages. These things are, in themselves, impossible: and the defect of them could only be supplied by a standing miracle: while this latter, from its constant and uniform manifestation, would probably make no more impression on the minds of men than the common operations of nature do.

We have now distinctly seen, what was the practice of the early Christians respecting documents of so much importance to their faith: we have seen the nature of the attestation of those documents, which was afforded by some churches and obtained by others. What then can we think of the representation of professor Michaelis^s, when we find him assuming, in

^s The sense of Michaelis, [see the 3d section of his chapter on the Apocalypse,] as given in bishop Marsh's translation, is as follows: "I must now propose the question: How is it possible that this book, if really written by St. John the Apostle, should have either been wholly unknown, or considered as a work of doubtful authority, in the very earliest ages of Christians? The other apostolical Epistles are ad-

" dressed only to single communities or churches: but the Apocalypse, according to its own contents, was expressly ordered by Christ himself, in a command to St. John the Apostle, to be sent to seven churches: and not only these seven churches were in that part of Asia Minor where Christianity was in the most flourishing situation, but one of them was Ephesus, where St. John spent the latter part

effect, that the authority of the Apocalypse was unsupported by this attestation? The

“ of his life, and consequently
 “ where every work of St. John
 “ must have been perfectly well
 “ known. If St. John then had
 “ actually sent the Apocalypse
 “ to these seven churches, and
 “ that too, not as a private
 “ Epistle, but as a Revelation
 “ made to him by Jesus Christ,
 “ one should suppose that its
 “ authenticity could not have
 “ been doubted, especially at a
 “ time when there were the
 “ best means of obtaining infor-
 “ mation.” To this I answer:
 If by *the very earliest ages of Christianity*, we may be allowed to understand, the period which elapsed from the composition of the book to a date later than the end of the second century: then, it will appear that the Apocalypse, during these ages, was not either unknown, nor yet considered as a work of doubtful authority. For the ancient testimonies to it are very numerous and remarkably strong: nor does it appear to have been ever questioned among Catholics, by any earlier writer than one Caius, a presbyter, supposed to have been of Rome, about the year 212: this Caius being possibly (if he was really the originator of the question) a man of rather a sceptical turn: for we find him to have been likewise distinguished by raising a question respecting the Epistle to the Hebrews. To this effect Dr. Mills, in his *Prolegomena*, [p. 27. ed. 1707.] intimates, *that it was not till the beginning of*

the third century that any catholics rejected this book from the canon. And Basnage, in his *History of the Church*, [b. viii. c. 7.] says distinctly, that “ the Apocalypse was at first received by the whole church as a Divine book, and as a revelation made to St. John the Apostle.” The commencement of a different sentiment he likewise ascribes to the above named Caius: supposing that a repugnance to this book was awakened in the mind of Caius, by the countenance which it afforded to a doctrine which he denied, namely that of the millennium. Basnage also supposes [see the sixth chapter of the same book] that Caius, in rejecting the Epistle to the Hebrews, was actuated by a similar feeling of hostility to the doctrines of the Montanists: whose severity towards the lapsed might claim the sanction of that Epistle.

The above remarks proceed on the supposition that Caius was really the first author of the doubts on this subject. But I have myself embraced the supposition of Mr. Jones, that the words of Caius (referred to in a former note) do not relate to the Apocalypse, but to a forgery of Cerinthus under that name. On this latter supposition, it will probably be judged, that the first appearance of doubts respecting the Apocalypse, is to be fixed at a later date than the year 212.

assumption is totally false and groundless. In the whole range of ecclesiastical records,

We see then how little reason the professor has for speaking of this book as being either wholly unknown, or considered as a work of doubtful authority in the very earliest ages of Christians. Not one word of this is true. In the earliest ages the book was well known, and it was a book of undoubted authority.

“If St. John,” continues Michaelis, “had actually sent the Apocalypse to these seven churches, and that too, not as a private Epistle, but as a revelation made to him by Jesus Christ, one should suppose that its authenticity could not have been doubted, especially at a time when there was the best means of obtaining information.” To this I answer as follows :

First, Its authenticity was NOT doubted. This is proved in the foregoing remarks. Secondly, St. John DID send the Apocalypse to the seven churches. This I am now to prove : in order to which, I will first quote the following passage from the fifth chapter of Tertullian’s fourth book against Marcion.

“If it be admitted that antiquity is a criterion of truth ; that the greatest antiquity is that which rises up to the beginning [of the publication of the Gospel] ; and that this beginning is found in the doctrine which the Apostles preached : then it must plainly follow, that *the doctrine de-*

livered by the Apostles is the same with that which has been preserved with sacred veneration by the churches. Let us see, then, what was that kind of milk which the Corinthians imbibed from Paul ; what was that rule according to which the Galatians were corrected ; what is read by the Philippians, the Thesalonians, the Ephesians ; what also are the readings of our neighbours the Romans, to whom both Peter and Paul have left a Gospel sealed even with their blood ?”

I quote on this occasion the more largely, for the sake of further illustrating the practice, already described, of the primitive church, towards obtaining security with respect to the authenticity of their books. The Gospels of Peter and Paul, here spoken of, must denote those of Mark and Luke. The words immediately following in Tertullian are these :

“WE HAVE ALSO CHURCHES OF WHICH THE INFANCY WAS FOSTERED BY JOHN. FOR ALTHOUGH MARCION REJECTS HIS APOCALYPSE, YET THE SUCCESSION OF BISHOPS TRACED UP TO THE BEGINNING WILL PROVE THAT JOHN WAS THE AUTHOR.” Habemus et Johannis alumnas ecclesias. Nam etsi Apocalypsim ejus Marcion respuit, ordo tamen episcoporum ad originem recensens, in Johannem stabit auctorem. The quotation might be further ex-

I do not believe that there occurs a single instance, relating to any one book of the

tended with advantage to the subject I am upon ; but I will briefly apply it to the point. Here are the churches, whose infancy was fostered by St. John, *Johannis alumnae ecclesiae* ; that is to say, the very identical seven churches, respecting which the professor takes it for granted, that St. John had not sent them copies of the Apocalypse : these churches are here specially referred to by Tertullian, as possessing those copies. For these seven churches, as it is well known, were immediately subject to the pastoral government of St. John during his abode at Ephesus.

But, independent of this proof from Tertullian, we have still extant, relating to several of these churches, very distinct and special evidence. Be it remembered, what has already been stated, that the practice of the early Christians for security relating to this point was, to refer the question of authenticity to the churches in which the attested (perhaps even autographical) copies were first deposited. Let this, I say, be carefully borne in mind, and let us now consider the case of several of these churches distinctly.

1. *Ephesus was one of the seven churches.* There must have been an attested copy of the Apocalypse here. For Justin Martyr plainly acknowledges the authenticity of it as a work of the Apostle St. John. Now Justin visited Ephesus : and the

time of his being there is probably within fifty years of the writing of the Apocalypse. If then no authentic copy had at this time been kept at Ephesus, Justin could never have been led to receive it as authentic.

2. *Smyrna was another of the seven churches.* There must have been an attested copy of the Apocalypse here. For Polycarp was bishop of Smyrna, and supposed to have been the very individual addressed in the Apocalyptic message to the angel of the church of that city. He was also the personal disciple of St. John, and was well known to Irenæus ; by whom the authenticity of the Apocalypse is distinctly acknowledged. If therefore no attested copy was kept at Smyrna, Irenæus must have known the fact : for he was, during the life of Polycarp, at Smyrna himself. If the book was not authentic, Irenæus could not but have known it from Polycarp, whose disciple he was.

In fact, both Justin and Irenæus must have known that John, by the mandate recorded in the book itself, was directed to send a copy of it to the seven churches : if no such copy had been sent, they could not but have known the omission : if they had known the omission, they could not have received the book as authentic.

3. *Sardis was a third of these churches.* There must have been an attested copy of the Apoca-

canon, in which we find so confident an appeal to this attestation, combined with such very strong evidence, possessed by us, of the most satisfactory means being at hand for the answer of it.

On this part of my subject I would only offer one more remark. In searching the testi-

lypse here. For Melito, bishop of this city, wrote a treatise upon it: and he lived so near the time of its composure, that he is by some supposed to be the very individual denoted by the angel of the church of Sardis, to whom another of the apocalyptic messages is addressed. Melito could never have acknowledged the authority of the book, if no copy had been sent according to the mandate which the book contains.

The present case may serve to illustrate the very delusive nature of the common methods of examining the question of canonical authority. Suppose that time had swept away the evidence which has now been adduced; the professor's ungrounded assumption might then have defied contradiction: yet it would not have been the more true on that account. Is this then a fit principle to warrant the denial of canonical authority to a book, which has been handed down to us by the church, with that character affixed to it? Or does it, because we are obliged to believe the Scriptures, therefore follow that we are entitled to demand the preservation of a passage in

Tertullian, in order to satisfy us what Scripture is genuine and what is not?

There are, in connection with the Apocalypse, two particulars which seem to me somewhat illustrative of the subject we are upon. The apostle is directed to send copies of his book to the seven churches: does not this confirm the testimony of Tertullian, already cited, respecting the general practice of the primitive Christians? a practice on which he insists so strongly as to suppose, that the Gospels of Matthew and John were confided as sacred deposits, simultaneously with the first formation of the churches to which they were given. [It is thus I interpret the words (occurring in the chapter against Marcion which has been already quoted) *cum ipsis ecclesiis dedicata.*] Again, we find towards the conclusion of this book very heavy denunciations on him who should add to or take from the contents of it. Does not this yield indirect evidence of the great efforts exerted by the heretics, in that age, to mutilate and interpolate the Scriptures?

monies of the ancient Fathers respecting the seven books, I think it will appear, that you will find their acknowledgments of these books, or their ignorance of them, or their doubts about them, to be proportioned to the facilities which their abode and other circumstances might afford for applying the test now described. For example: the Epistle to the Hebrews was received in the east and partially doubted of in the west. The Epistle of St. James in like manner obtained an early reception in Palestine and Syria. If my impression be correct, you cannot but perceive, that it imparts a new degree of coherency and of evidence to my representation.

IV.

XX. I now proceed to the fourth and last of those leading points which belong to the present examination. This will relate to the causes which operated to produce the settlement of the canon in its present form, and to the circumstances connected with the final adjustment of it.

The doubts relating to the canon were occasioned by the long continued persecution of Christianity: a state of things greatly unpropitious to intercourse between remote churches, and prohibitory of easy access to

proofs and muniments. Now it will be found, that when this persecution had once finally ceased, the doubts relating to the canon rapidly gave way. The council of Nice soon followed the secular triumph of Christianity over paganism. This splendid assembly embraced in it above three hundred persons, principally bishops, convened from every region of the Roman empire, and from other Christian countries which lay beyond its limits. Thus composed, it would no doubt greatly contribute to terminate that division of judgment, respecting a small portion of the canon, which had previously existed. We have at least good reason to think, that doubts on this point, if they existed at all among the Nicene Fathers, could not be very strong nor very general. For they met together, to judge the doctrine of Arius by the rule of Scripture: they must therefore have been agreed as to the question, what books they would receive as having that character. We do not find that any controversy was stirred on this point: we find indeed that one^t of those

^t This was the Epistle to the Hebrews: the words insisted upon were these; *the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person.* [chap. i. 3.] See the Epistle of Athanasius to the African bishops, and the

eighth chapter of the first book of Theodoret's Ecclesiastical History. It is plain indeed, that this Epistle must have been admitted in common by both the parties who were principally concerned at the council: for,

very books which had been previously controverted, was expressly alleged for the purpose of confronting the Arian blasphemy. And the great Athanasius, who was present at this council, has left us a catalogue of the canon of the New Testament, which exactly agrees with ours. I do not say, that after the time of this council no vestige of remaining doubt discovers itself in any subsequent writers: yet it appears that henceforth these

as it appears from Athanasius, the words of it were quoted by the Arians for the support of their tenets. [See the fifty-third chapter of Athanasius's first Oration against the Arians.] One might almost say, that the Epistle of St. James was alike circumstanced: for Athanasius, immediately after arguing from that Epistle against the Arians, employs words which might seem to identify the judgment of the Nicene Fathers with his own personal sentiment: οὕτω νοησαντες οἱ πατερες κ. τ. λ. [See the eighth and ninth chapters of Athanasius's Epistle to the African bishops.] But there is one thing remarkable as it regards the foregoing text from the Hebrews. The Nicene Fathers are said to have alleged it, βουλομενοι τας των γραφων [λεξεις] ὁμολογουμενας γραψαι, because they desired to write down the acknowledged expressions of Scripture. Now the word ὁμολογουμενος is

a *vox secunda intentionis*, a term of specific import in theology, to denote those books *respecting which no doubt was entertained*, as distinguished from others named *αντιλεγουμενοι*, respecting which doubts *were* for some time entertained: this latter class comprising those seven books with which we are now principally concerned. This remark applies specifically to the Epistle to the Hebrews: it applies, as we have seen, with almost equal force to the Epistle of St. James: does it not then, when we consider that Athanasius was present at this council, apply, in the way of fair inference, to the whole of his canonical list of the New Testament? Does it not incline us to suppose, that in the judgment of the council, the whole of these books had now become ὁμολογουμενοι, and that the character expressed by *αντιλεγουμενος*, had ceased to belong to any of them?

doubts insensibly and speedily subsided into a general unanimity.

The same point will, if I mistake not, receive elucidation, from a regard to the time during which miraculous powers continued to be frequent in the church.

If, with a view to a right construction of the design of miracles, we regard the general economy of Divine revelation, and the principles declared by Scripture; we shall have reason to acquiesce in this conclusion: that miracles are given for the introduction and establishment of a divine dispensation, and for the supply of extraordinary evidence at times when there is an extraordinary need of it: but not with a view to the permanent support of a dispensation after it has become established, peaceably embraced, and commonly submitted to. For the end for which they were given is then accomplished: especially if, as in the case of Christianity, the *existence* of that dispensation is in itself (inasmuch as its origin cannot on any other ground be reasonably accounted for) the evidence of a miraculous introduction. But it cannot be considered that the Christian religion had yet become firmly established, until the standard of its doctrine had become fixed and ascertained. Now if we will consult

those writers, who can supply the only competent testimony relating to this point, we shall find, that the cessation of frequency in these extraordinary manifestations was about simultaneous with the time, when the canon of the New Testament, in its present form and construction, began to be received with the general unanimity of the Christian world. Thus it will appear, that while the canon was in an uncertain state, there was an extraordinary providence to obviate any inconvenience which might thence arise; and that this extraordinary providence was not withdrawn till the present canon was embraced with general consent^u.

^u “ By the end of the fourth century, or thereabouts, there will appear to be almost an universal agreement concerning the canon, and what books should be received into it.” *Jones on the Canon*, part I. chap. iii. “ It has been sometimes said, that the council of Laodicea” (A.D. 363, according to Lardner) “ first settled the canon of the New Testament. But it may be justly said to have been settled before. At least there had been long before a general agreement among Christians what books were canonical, and what not.” *Lardner’s Hist. of the Apostles and Evangelists*, ch. iii.

The duration of miraculous powers in the church, is a subject which, when viewed in con-

nection with the settlement of the canon, carries with it a very deep interest. I may possibly resume it in the progress of this work. Meanwhile I will content myself with giving, in relation to this subject, two extracts which may be found in the chapters of Lardner’s *Credibility*, relating to the respective authors from whom they are taken. Junilius, an African bishop of the sixth century, in treating of the proofs of the divine authority of the Scriptures, says; “ Lastly, the continuance of miracles till the time when the Scripture itself was acknowledged by the Gentiles. Respecting which it suffices as the latest miracle of all, that the authority of Scripture is universally

This was about the end of the fourth century: after this time, if I mistake not, we meet with little or nothing of apocryphal gospels and heretical forgeries: previously to this time they had been frequent. The settlement of the canon seems to have barred the prospect of success to such fabrications: as on the other hand, the previously unsettled state of it, which was unavoidable, which was known to the catholic Christians, and not disguised by them; seems to have been the ground of encouragement to such attempts. For in such a state of things, it does not appear, that there was any unanimous judgment of the whole catholic church which could be alleged at once to condemn supposititious books on their first appearance. From this time, if my impressions do not mislead me, the principles of heterodoxical separation from the body of the catholic church and from the communion of an apostolical succession, seem to have sought their defence, not in the allegation of false scriptures, but in

“acknowledged.” My second author is Pope Gregory the great. “The church,” says he, “stood in need of the assistance of miracles as long as it was oppressed by persecution. But after it has subdued the pride of infidelity, it does not

“now require the outward signs of miraculous power.—
“After the generality of men have been converted to the faith; what further reason can there be for the evidence of miracles?”

peculiarities of interpretation affixed to canonical ones.

XXI. And now, to sum up this discussion. We have seen, that a part of our canon was once regarded with doubts: what then are we to infer? In a case where uncertainty was unavoidable; where the dictates of nature, and the dearest interests of heaven and earth would excite extreme vigilance and caution; where sure grounds of determination were for a time not to be had: was it not to be expected that such doubts would occur? But is this a reason for misgivings and anxieties to us? Surely it ought not in justice so to be: it is indeed a good reason for increased security, and it ought always to be alleged as such. It is, on a just view of it, one of our *strong reasons* for being sure of the authenticity of the canon. For while the fact bears witness to the great solicitude entertained by the early Christians; it may assure us, that they would make no mistake, and that their *determination* would be influenced by the same careful regard to evidence, which had been the cause of their previous *suspense*. What shall I say then, with respect to those general principles on which I formerly insisted for the vindication of the canon? I will admit, that if these principles are not true,

they must not be advanced, even though they may persuade: but having taken this review of the subject, I am the more convinced that they are sound and valid: and that the proofs of Christianity, as to this, as well as all other points, are capable of being presented in the most convincing form to the most ordinary minds. I also feel myself entitled to repeat my assertion, that the evidence, relating to this point, which all men in common may attain; is more satisfactory than any, which it is the privilege of the learned only to enjoy. This is indeed one of those matters of fact, respecting which archbishop King has well observed, that the vulgar often judge better than philosophers^x.

I must add what truth requires, but what it is painful to remark. There are few causes which have more powerfully operated to darken and confuse this subject, than the labours of learned men; for these labours have too often been conducted with a deplorable want of judgment, and have been followed by rash and hasty decisions, formed upon very inadequate measures of knowledge. My language may appear too bold: but it is far better that literary men should suffer in their reputation, than that revelation should

^x King's Origin of Evil, p. 323. ed. 1739.

be weakened in its power of defence; and the remark is the more necessary, inasmuch as these are the men to whom, as their legitimate and only guides, the ignorant are referred. But I will vindicate myself from the imputation of a bold singularity, by alleging the coincident opinion of a celebrated writer on this subject. He expresses himself to this effect: “I cannot but believe, that the disbelief and contempt of revealed religion, and the growth of profaneness, are very much owing to the *imprudent treatment*, which the sacred Scriptures have met with from many, who profess to believe their inspiration. *The many methods that have been taken, even by several of the Christian clergy, to render the canon of Scripture uncertain, have been among the unhappy means of causing many to reject revelation itself.* The *unguarded discourses of divers learned and ingenious men on those heads, have supplied the enemies of Christianity with arguments against it, and been many ways improved by evil minds to its dishonour. These are the weapons with which Hobbes, Spinoza, Toland, and the Deists have fought against revealed religion*.”

† Jones’s vindication of the former part of St. Matthew’s Gospel, preface.

Having quoted this learned writer, I think it will not be amiss to offer a few remarks, which will jointly apply to the canon of the New Testament, and to his celebrated work upon it.

It will, from my previous remarks, be sufficiently understood, what I consider to be the best and most satisfactory method of vindicating the canon. It is, by insisting upon general principles of moral evidence, and by requiring, as the groundwork of demonstration, no other data, than such as are, generally speaking, accessible to the knowledge of all men. Nevertheless, I have not denied the usefulness of those researches into ancient literature, which aim at confirming the authority of the canon. If Christianity is attacked on this quarter, it must be defended from this quarter. It is in this point of view that Mr. Jones's Treatise on the Canon will be found deserving of high commendation. For in the examination of a subject, unavoidably prolix and tedious, the method which he has adopted may be safely pronounced in its general character, remarkably simple, convincing, and judicious. I will add, that if it were lawful to connect our regrets with the appointments of Providence, we might find just ground to lament, that the termination

of his life was earlier than that of his labour, and that the latter has thus been deprived of the illustration, which his clear and sensible mind might have been expected to throw on that portion of the sacred books, concerning which there was not from the first an unanimous judgment of the church. To one great principle of that writer I have already stated my strong objection. On this I would say no more, than to add, that it deeply concerns every one, who desires to examine this subject by history and by particular evidence, to guard against the mistakes which learned men have made, and to preserve their minds uninfluenced by their injudicious expressions: for many such expressions have they dropped, not in any wilful disregard to truth, but under the influence of mistaken views and information, and with a strange insensibility of the mischiefs which their language was adapted to occasion. It will therefore concern every one who engages in this inquiry, to repair to the primary fountains of information, and to trust to no reports of secondary authority in any cases where higher authority is to be obtained. For it is inconceivable how much this subject is infested with vulgar errors, and how many things are implicitly taken up by later writers on the credit of

foregoing: which nevertheless, if traced up to the highest sources, will prove to be erroneous.

In fine, I would deduce from the foregoing review the following considerations. It is highly imprudent to rest the defence of the canon on the credit of other men. It would, I think, be wise in divines, if, in treating the evidences of the Gospel, they would, unless when they discover the existence of a sceptical feeling relating to this point, consider the authenticity of the canon among those fixed principles of settled and undisputed knowledge, which every ratiocination demands as the materials on which it is to work, and without which no argumentative discourse can proceed. It is indeed a point on which common minds seldom feel any doubt or uneasiness: nor is this seeming apathy to be justly regarded as any indication of a mind degraded by ignorance, but rather as a sentiment of nature, which is heedless of frivolous questions while bent upon paramount aims of important benefit. Indeed, if you will inquire into the causes of infidelity which have as yet discovered themselves in actual operation, how seldom will you meet with an instance of it, which has arisen from doubts respecting the canon!

How few among infidels have rejected the Gospel on the grounds of scepticism respecting the authenticity of the sacred writings! How many have been converted by reading them, whose minds were never disturbed by any scruples respecting their authenticity! Surely it is wasting our time, to employ painful efforts in the demonstration of a point, respecting which nature suggests no motive for anxious inquiry. But if, on the other hand, a case should arise, which calls for demonstrative proof of the validity of the canon: in such a case, I say, the best and most efficacious method is, to demonstrate the canon on a view of the general impossibility arising from the nature of the case, that any work could have been received into it which was not entitled to its place there. For this mode of reasoning does not require any degrading submission of the human understanding to the authority of other men: and it is far more conclusive than any evidence afforded by the testimony of Fathers and the decisions of councils: inasmuch as the latter depends upon writings, which are, from the nature of the case, more questionable than those, the authenticity of which they are designed to prove.

LECTURE IV.

THE CANON OF THE OLD TESTAMENT—THE EX-
TERNAL EVIDENCE.

JOHN iii. 1, 2.

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, 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.

XXII. **IT** will, I think, assist the right comprehension of our general argument, if we now look back to, and recapitulate, the foregoing parts of it. This is more particularly needful, by reason of the interval during which these Lectures have been suspended, and of the change which has taken place in the hearers of them: to many of whom this examination must be entirely new.

My leading purpose is to evince, that the truth of Christianity may be fully proved by

means of knowledge accessible to men in every ordinary station of human life: and that it is therefore unnecessary and inexpedient so to argue respecting it, as if its evidence depended upon facts, to be known only by the learned, and believed by others on their testimony.

In the pursuit of this design, my first step was, to state the evidences arising from the records which we find in the holy Scriptures themselves.

Hence it became necessary to shew, that these records are entitled to credit: and in order to the proof of their being entitled to credit, it was necessary to substantiate the authenticity of the writings in which we find them.

This introduced an inquiry into the canon of Scripture: and that inquiry has hitherto been limited to the New Testament.

In treating this subject, I argued, that the present canon of the New Testament may be fully and clearly proved, upon those general grounds of reasoning which I had previously declared to be sufficient for every purpose of Christian evidence. The leading principle which I employed was this: That if we regard the circumstances of the case, and the nature of the books, it is impossible that any

book should have been admitted into the canon, if it had not been entitled to be so.

But I was aware it might be objected, that this principle will, when the subject is viewed historically, be found untrue; and I admit that, if not true, it must not be employed even in the *cause* of truth. I therefore took an historical view of the formation of the canon, for the purpose of proving that the principle *is* true, and therefore that it may honestly be employed. The result of this view, if I am entitled to estimate it, was, that the history of the canon does not contradict that principle, but impart to it a greatly augmented evidence of truth and certainty.

It remains that I should so extend my reasoning, as to comprehend the whole body of the Scriptures which we now receive. And some further links of reasoning may also be required, before the authenticity of the Scriptures, in the state in which they are now presented to our use, is fully brought home to the understandings and convictions of the bulk of mankind.

These intermediate steps will engage less of our attention than has been bestowed on the canon of the New Testament. In thus proceeding, I shall be actuated by two principal reasons: first, because the things here

required have been satisfactorily accomplished by others; and, secondly, because such an inquiry, if pushed to its utmost extent, so as explicitly to satisfy every possible difficulty and objection, would embrace the whole, instead of constituting a subordinate part, of my appointed duty. It will not, however, be inappropriate to offer a few brief remarks, displaying, if not the expanded arguments, at least the topics of argument, which bear upon this subject.

XXIII. Many of the previous arguments for the genuineness of the books composing the Christian canon, are equally conclusive in their application to those of the Jewish. If you will only suppose, respecting these latter books, that they are *not* the works of the persons to whom they are ascribed; or, at least, of persons duly acknowledged as having authority for the promulgation of them: you will find the supposition entangled with absurdity in its unavoidable consequences. The actual reception of those books will, on this supposition, present you with an effect repugnant to the causes by which it must have been produced: for such it is, while it is repugnant to the whole tenor of human motives and conduct. Unless, for example, you admit the mighty hand and outstretched arm

of God, you will find an insuperable obstacle in all reasonable attempts to account for the recognition of Moses, as a lawgiver, or the reception of the Pentateuch as a code. Similar considerations will apply to the subsequent writings of the Hebrew canon: and the recognition of authenticity in the case of the Pentateuch, will greatly strengthen the evidence which applies to *them*. You cannot, on any footing of consistency, imagine the first reception of those books to have been unaccompanied with a regard to the authority of the writers. When were those books first promulgated? Was it in an age of faithful obedience to the Law? Then you are to observe, that there is, in that Law, no obligation more strongly declared, than the resistance and punishment of all false pretensions to revelation and prophecy: you are also to observe, that that Law itself furnishes a criterion by which pretensions of that nature are to be judged^a. Or was it during a season of idolatrous defection from the Law? In this case, the book must have been armed with such overpowering evidence as to defy contradiction, and to maintain itself against augmented vigilance and suspicion. Indeed, the ordinary motive to vigilance must at all

^a See the thirteenth and eighteenth chapters of Deuteronomy.

times have been great: for the acknowledgment of a false prophet was a defection from the Law, and cancelled the title of the Israelite to his temporal promises. Besides, the Pentateuch itself supposes the continuance of an extraordinary providence, with special interpositions and directions of God, for the government of the Israelites: if this state of things really prevailed, it must obviously have prevented the introduction of fundamental error or supposititious adulteration into the records of the doctrine, which it was especially designed to sanction and to guard. That it did prevail, will appear from this consideration: the Pentateuch declares it, foretells it, and grounds its authority upon it: if, therefore, it had not prevailed, the Law must have lost its credit: for time would have detected its want of authority. In treating of the Christian canon, I alleged the powerful motives and interests which would operate to guard its integrity: the Hebrew canon would enjoy the same protection: for the motives in this latter case, though not precisely the same, were sufficiently strong to insure a similar result.

Since the promulgation of the Christian Scriptures, the Hebrew canon, being connected with, and attested by the former, has

become a part essentially belonging to the integrity of one and the same system : from that period, therefore, its authenticity enjoys the same guard that the Christian canon itself does : and it has a special security, arising from the different conditions of Jews and Christians, presenting a repugnance of faith, and a concurrent recognition of the Law and the Prophets. Thus, the Hebrew canon being attested by the Christian Scriptures, the state of the Jewish people enables us to identify the canon which they receive with that which is thus attested. It would be impossible at this day to introduce into that canon, and establish among the Jews, an additional book. Imagine then any condition or time, belonging, to the real history of the Jews ; to the relation in which they now stand to the Christian church ; or to any possible circumstances in which they may have been placed : and you will find, from the character of the books and the nature of the case, that the successful fabrication of them would at all times have been as much impossible as it is now. The numbers concerned are too large for confederacy : the means of detection would be at hand : the motives to it would be awake : the imposture would be self-convicted.

XXIV. This question may be embarrassed by alleging the disagreement, respecting the canon, which exists between us and the church of Rome. But it will be found upon reflection, that such disagreement ought not, in reason, to affect the general evidence of the faith.

For, if you regard the case of a *Romanist*: it is plain that *his* mind cannot be perplexed by this disagreement; his *faith* is supposed to be already established, and the believed infallibility of his church at once defines to him the rule of his *doctrine*.

But suppose, on the other hand, the case of one who is *not* a Romanist. Then, it is plain and obvious for that man to understand the ground of difference between the Roman church and us: that the books declared by them, and denied by us, to be canonical, derive the acknowledgment of their authority from the belief, which *they* entertain, of the infallibility of their church. Thus, the disagreement is at once explained: the evidence of the Hebrew and Christian canons (agreeably to the view we have taken of it) remains unshaken: and the peculiarity of the Roman canon will stand or fall with the claim of infallibility.

We see then the difference of the two

cases. In the one, the moral evidence rises up, in point of time, to the publication of the books; that is, to an age competent to decide respecting them. In the other, it rises no higher than the council of Trent, or any other time at which the books may be pretended to have been canonized by an infallible authority.

This can never be regarded as a legitimate step to the proof of Christianity: for it is plain, that the *general* faith of the Gospel must, in the order of reasoning, be anterior to any recognition of principles relating to the authority of the church. Here indeed is a difficulty. But it is a difficulty to him only, to whom Christianity is presented in the garb of Romanism: it is a difficulty which not we, but the Romanist himself is bound to solve. If it be a rock of stumbling^b, it is one for

^b With respect to this point, namely, the settlement of the canon, bishop Cosin thus speaks of the council of Trent: "Now after all these followed an assembly of a *few men* at Trent,—that made a decree among themselves to control the whole world, and, as in sundry points besides, so in this, devise a new article of faith, for their own pleasure, whereof neither their own church, nor any other church of Christendom, had ever heard before. An assembly of

"men, such an one as it was, that by their magisterial and undue proceedings there, have done more hurt, and made a greater schism in the church of God, than all the malice of wicked and unpeaceful persons was ever able to do, since Christ left his legacy of truth and peace among his disciples, and foretold the *offences*" [that is, occasions of infidelity and sin] "that would afterwards arise." *Scholastical Hist. of the Canon*, ch. xviii.

which the church of Rome, and not the catholic church, or Christianity itself, is accountable. If it be a source of perplexity to the evidences of faith, it is so, only to the members of that communion, or to those who mistake for the true and essential and universal church of Christ, that which is, in reality, nothing else than a schismatical portion of it. To all others, it admits of a sound and perspicuous explanation, which leaves the genuine evidence of the faith firm and unimpaired. Of any objection, then, which may arise from this point of disagreement, the true amount is this; namely, that the evidence which proves *our* canon, does not avail for that of the church of Rome, and the proofs of genuine Christianity afford no defence to an adulterate form of it.

There is a further remark due to this subject. *Our* Scriptures have been proved by such evidence, that the dispute of their authenticity is found to involve absurd and unreasonable consequences. Not so, however, with the Romish canon, when it places the books of Maccabees and Ecclesiasticus on an equal footing with the Pentateuch. For, as the former books avowedly rest their canonicalness, not on moral evidence, but on the dogma of a council: it is plain that, on the

Romish principle, the books of undisputed canonicalness must rest upon the same authority.

Thus for example. If the books of the Maccabees were never declared canonical previously to the council of Trent: how can you allege in proof of the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark, that these latter books could never have been received into the canon if their genuineness had not been acknowledged during the lives of the writers? If the Maccabees were first canonized so many centuries after they were published: how can there be any intrinsic impossibility that the same was not the case with St. Matthew's Gospel?

We see then the tendency of the Romish Theology to undermine the essential foundations of the general faith. If the canonical authority of the Scriptures is to support itself on the infallibility of the Roman church; while that infallibility has no testimony, except its own, by which to support itself: then must the authority of Scripture, and the distinction of true from pretended Scriptures, depend, on the precarious determination of every successful pretender to the advantages of infallible direction, revelation, and prophecy: and we know that such characters, without any accredited commission, have often

been acknowledged by the credulity of mankind. If, on the other hand, we say, that no books but such as were authentic, could, from the nature of the case, have been received into the canon: if we apply this to the New Testament in the first place, and, in the next, to the Hebrew canon: then the matter is established upon evidence, which is both firm in itself, and capable of the readiest explication to every mind.

XXV. Though the remark be somewhat digressive, I may not improperly observe, that this is not the only point, in which the proper evidences of Christianity are supplanted by peculiarities of schismatical or sectarian doctrine. For example: There now exists an order of ministers, professing to derive their authority by succession from those immediately appointed by Christ: such authority being thus professedly grounded on the evidence, by which we establish the authority of the apostles themselves: the existence of such a ministry is, I say, one among the evidences of Christianity. For how did it begin? The present men succeeded their predecessors, and these latter took up their commission from those who went before them: but go up to the beginning of the series, and ask yourself, how did the *earliest* of them

procure their authority to be recognised? It cannot be pretended, that the earliest bishops first presented themselves in the tenth century, or at any other intermediate time since the first promulgation of Christianity, and pretended, while they did so, to have been appointed by men who lived many centuries before them: their appearance under such circumstances would at once have confuted their pretensions. If this matter be duly considered, it will be found to admit no reasonable explanation but one; namely, that the authority of the ministry, as well as of the doctrine, was primarily grounded upon miracles: every other supposition will, if I mistake not, be found entangled with great absurdity. But what becomes of this evidence, when you regard the case of those, whose ministry, pretending to no claim of outward appointment and of lawful succession, professes to be authorized solely by an inward call, of which no sensible proof is afforded to mankind? Surely, if this be admitted as a valid ministry, it takes away from Christianity one powerful argument of its truth.

If there be any weight in this remark, it claims a serious regard from those, whether belonging to the Romish schism, or to any of

the numerous sects who disclaim the necessity of an outward and regular ordination. If the one, by disturbing the canon under a pretence of infallibility; or the other, by discrediting and setting at nought the legitimate power of the ministry; shall thus inwrap with uncertainty and confusion, the clear dictates of reason in support of Christianity: what is this, but to place a stumblingblock in the way of faith? What is it but the very sin, of which we learn that the penalty shall be far more severe than any temporal destruction. “Whoso,” says our Lord, “shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!”

XXVI. There remains for our consideration one more topic relating to the authenticity of the Scriptures. The poor are to judge of the truth of Christianity from the intrinsic arguments presented by the Scriptures themselves: now they can form their judgment only from *translations*, not from the original

writings: how, then, may it be said, can they estimate the faithfulness of those translations? It is plain that this must be cleared up by a reference, to the concurrent acquiescence of multitudes, respecting a point in which the deepest interests are concerned; to the concurrent testimony of many, who are competent to estimate the value of translations, and who cannot, without absurdity, be supposed to have confederated together for the deception of mankind: so that the *agreement* of their report could not have been *possible* if the *report* had not been *true*^d. An argument of this sort is strong, if it presented only the general concurrence

^d “He,” [that is, Barclay,] “urges further, that there are many likewise, who, though they can read the Scriptures in their own language, have not yet a thorough knowledge of the original languages, and who, therefore, must depend upon the honesty and faithfulness of interpreters: which is very true again. And I think a man may, in the main, as safely rely upon interpreters, as he may upon his own eyes: unless he can be so mad as to suppose, either that nobody now understands the original languages; or, that those who do, are such arrant jugglers as to combine together to cheat all mankind but themselves. No, says he, the many

“corrections and amendments which have been made in our translations, do sufficiently declare how uncertain a thing it is to build our faith upon them. But he should have declared, where our translations are defective in any one essential point, i. e. he should have shewn that our translations are not exact enough for a man to know all that it is necessary for him to know, and then he had done something. But since this neither is, nor can be pretended, all that he has said, or that can be said, upon this head, will be nothing to the purpose.” *Stebbing on the Operations of the Holy Spirit*, chap. iv. §. 3.

of one numerous church, such, for example, as the church of England: but it becomes much stronger when it comprises the concurrence of various sects differing from it, and the recognition even of infidels; who, notwithstanding they deny the authority of the Scriptures, are nevertheless contented to take some popular version as a faithful and tolerably correct exposition of their words. And *popular* versions of this sort, may thus be advantageously vindicated in distinction from *particular* versions, which have been brought forward in alliance with the peculiar doctrines of any particular sect, but which have never obtained any reception *out* of that sect: as also, in distinction from garbled curtailments and mutilated copies, which have never maintained any authority except with some religious party. As to the variations of popular and generally received versions: it cannot be difficult to satisfy a candid mind, that such variations may well exist, consistently with perfect honesty of purpose on the part of translators; and yet that they neither do, nor can be reasonably thought to, affect the substance of the faith. With regard to the several popular versions now current in different Christian countries, I do not apprehend that their variations are

so considerable as to disturb any fundamental points of doctrine. But if we suppose the case of books *professing to be* translations, and yet containing, to any considerable extent, wilful adulterations or additions, such as really affect the essentials of Christianity: it is plain, that such books must partake of the nature of spurious Scriptures, and that the reasons, before entered into, which would operate against the reception of these latter, would alike secure the world from being imposed upon by false and unfaithful versions.

On the whole, I trust it will appear, that all these matters are capable of being reasoned upon and brought to a clear and satisfactory result, without demanding any blind submission to human authority. For we have at all times a right to maintain *that* to be a truth, of which the contradiction is an absurdity: and an attentive mind will, I think, discover absurdity to be an inseparable adjunct of every contradiction to those principles, which are needful for displaying to common minds the evidences of the Christian faith.

XXVII. With these remarks I shall dismiss the consideration of the canon of Scripture. We take it then, as a point duly ascertained,

that our Scriptures are genuine. I will now proceed to maintain, that if this be admitted: there can be no difficulty in displaying to the most ordinary mind, the fullest power of irresistible proof demanding his assent to the truth of Christianity. The matter has been clearly and convincingly argued by the learned Michaelis. The authenticity of the New Testament is, according to the representation of that writer, sufficient of itself to determine the great question at issue between the Christian and the infidel. I will state his argument, with little deviation from his own words.

“ The authenticity of the New Testament is
“ a fact of so much importance in determin-
“ ing the divinity of the Christian religion, as
“ to make it matter of surprise that the ad-
“ versaries of Christianity have not always
“ made their first attacks upon this quarter.
“ For if they admit these writings to be as
“ ancient as we pretend, and really composed
“ by the persons to whom they are ascribed:
“ an undeniable consequence of such admis-
“ sion is, *the truth and divinity of the reli-
“ gion itself.* For the apostles themselves in
“ their Epistles frequently allude to the gift
“ of miracles, as having been communicated
“ by themselves to the Christian converts, in

“ confirmation of the doctrine which they
“ had delivered in their speeches and writ-
“ ings : sometimes also they allude to mi-
“ racles which those converts had themselves
“ performed. *Now if these Epistles are really*
“ *genuine, it is hardly possible to deny those*
“ *miracles to be true.* Thus, for example, St.
“ Paul’s first Epistle to the Thessalonians is
“ addressed to a Christian community which
“ he had lately founded, but which a sudden
“ persecution had obliged him to quit before
“ it had attained a firm degree of establish-
“ ment. To them, who had thus received
“ the Gospel, but whose faith he apprehends
“ might waver through persecution, he alleges
“ the authorities and proofs of his divine mis-
“ sion : of which authorities, the first and
“ chief are miracles and the gifts of the Holy
“ Ghost. Now that he should under such
“ circumstances speak of miracles performed,
“ and of gifts of the Holy Ghost communi-
“ cated, if no member of the new society had
“ either seen the one or received the other :
“ this is what no man could have done with-
“ out forfeiting all pretensions to common
“ sense.

“ The same Apostle, in his first Epistle to
“ the Corinthians, refers in like manner to
“ spiritual and miraculous gifts, as having

“ been imparted to the church established
 “ among them. Now if this Epistle was
 “ really written by St. Paul to the Corin-
 “ thians, while the latter had in reality re-
 “ ceived no spiritual gifts and miraculous en-
 “ dowments : the proper place to be assigned
 “ to that Apostle would then be, not among
 “ impostors, but among men who had lost
 “ their understanding ^e.”

XXVIII. Thus stands the argument of Michaelis : I will now extend his reasoning to an auxiliary point. If you admit the authenticity of the New Testament ; you must not only admit the reality of the miracles which it records : (for this, as Michaelis truly states it, is an unavoidable consequence of the authenticity :) but you must also admit the suffering of death, and of other various persecutions, in attestation of those miracles. You must admit also, that the state of the world was such, as would unavoidably attach to the new converts a liability to all these ills : and, that the new converts themselves must have been fully prepared to meet them, as the probable, and in many instances, perhaps, the certain consequence of assuming their profession. You must gather from the writings themselves, such a view of circum-

^e Michaelis's Introduction, part i. ch. 2.

stances as will make it appear, that there could be, on the part of the witnesses to the Christian miracles, no want either of veracity or of competent knowledge: and we know, that testimony given under such circumstances, is indisputable. All this you may infer merely from the Scriptures themselves: for it must, on the principle of Michaelis, appear, that on any other supposition, those writings must have been the work of insane men.

The supposition of insanity requires little attention at this moment. Unreasonable in itself, as a great variety of considerations will evince, it is at once silenced by a regard to the miracles of those, who were themselves the first witnesses to the miracles of our Saviour. Thus, if (in defiance of all other circumstances which evince the contrary) it should be contended, that the witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus derived their conviction of *that fact* from a fanatical delusion: how can we account for miracles equally wonderful, by which these witnesses confirmed *their own testimony*? If insanity should cause a man to believe, that he sees one risen from the dead: there is no power of delusion so strong, as to give him the power of raising the dead himself. But this

subject will be more fully treated when I come to enlarge upon the differences between faith and fanaticism.

XXIX. Such is the present state of the argument. We have proved that the Scriptures are authentic : and that, if they are authentic, the miracles they record must be true, and the martyrdoms and sufferings, by which those miracles are attested, must be true also. With regard to the consequence thus arising ; it will be corroborated by the following considerations.

Though a man cannot now witness these miracles : though he cannot converse with the persons who attested the reality of them, and who sealed their testimony with their blood : yet will this circumstance create no defect in the reasonable certainty of his conviction. It may be useful, in the disquisitions of learned men upon this subject, to display the moral and political condition of the world at the time when the Gospel was promulged : and to deduce, from the prevailing opinions and policy of Jews and Gentiles, a satisfactory conclusion, that the Gospel, under such circumstances, could not (consistently with the nature of things, or with any reasonable estimate of moral possibility,) have gained its footing in the world, if it had not had the ad-

vantage of a miraculous introduction. These views are useful and edifying: but such evidence, as lying beyond the reach of common minds, is plainly inadmissible into this inquiry. While, however, I confess that it is inadmissible, I contend that it is not necessary. We need not, in treating of the sources of opposition to the Gospel, insist upon those which we know from history to have actually existed: it will be enough, that we insist on that opposition which, from the nature of things, and from the nature of man, we know, that such a religion *must*, under any circumstances, have encountered: and we may lawfully contend, that such opposition could not have been borne down, without the clearest evidence of the outstretched arm of God. Reason may assure us, that a religion so adverse to the will and humour of this world, never could have gained a footing in it *without* miracles: reason, from a mere acknowledgment of the *authenticity* of the Scriptures, may instruct us, that the first teachers of such a religion could not have been incited by worldly profit or pleasure; but that they must, on the contrary, have been obliged to encounter every sublunary evil. All this may be deduced by impartial reason, on a view of the Scriptures themselves, and on a know-

ledge of those simple facts of which no man living in the world can be ignorant. And a mind thus exerting itself, may also perceive the absurdity of supposing, that these Scriptures, containing so many appeals to the sufferings of its first preachers, could ever have been received with any credit in the world, unless those sufferings, at the time when the Scriptures were first published, had been of well-known reality, and of recent occurrence: that, consequently, the testimony of those preachers must have been true as to intention, since there could be no motive to deceive; and true also as to fact, since both the nature of the facts, and the description, both as to character and multitude, of the witnesses, was such as to exclude the possibility of mistake.

If you suppose, then, the reality of the miracles, there will arise an important consequence. If these miracles be proved to the conviction of *reason*, the inference arising from them is equally valid, as if they were obvious to *sight*. It is just that every accountable creature should be dealt with according to the faculties which it has received: man therefore is equitably to be regarded, in a future account, as a being gifted with different measures of apprehension from those

of a brute: and reason, in the just and honest use of its powers, is quite as secure from deception as the senses are. To this degree may then be established, on grounds obvious to every ordinary mind, the certainty of that miraculous attestation which we allege in proof of the Divine origin of our religion. But it will on various accounts be useful if I proceed to shew, that more than this cannot be reasonably desired.

XXX. The use of miracles is well understood. We may readily perceive the fitness of their application for the purpose of giving the required credentials to a Divine doctrine: and this fitness is understood as confining itself, generally, to those occasions when God has any new doctrine to declare, or a dormant one to revive; or when, as in the case of the Jewish nation during their settlement in the land of Canaan, the doctrine was of that peculiar nature, that it could not otherwise be supported than by the continuance of a miraculous dispensation. But there is, relating to miracles, another principle, which is, I think, not duly brought forward, nor placed in a light of sufficient importance. It is this: As their occasional application is a necessary and useful ground of credit to a new doctrine, so the continued repetition of them in

ages subsequent to the full establishment of that doctrine, would be hurtful rather than beneficial to its credit.

I cannot but think that this principle is susceptible of the strongest proof: at the same time it must appear, that if true, it cannot be otherwise than highly serviceable, as a principle of frequent and useful applicability to the system of theology. For if it be admitted, that a redundancy of miracles would hinder, rather than advance, the credit of Revelation: then it is obvious to conclude, that our faith ought not to be shaken by those religious difficulties, which, without miracles, it is essentially impossible to obviate.

It is now taken for granted, that the present existence of Christianity cannot reasonably be accounted for without the supposition of a miraculous origin. This proposition being evinced, the present evidence of the Gospel ought to satisfy every man. For God has thus given him that *evidence* which is suited to the *nature* he has given him: having endowed him with reason as well as with sight. To such a being, it must be the same thing to know that a miracle *has been* wrought, as it would that he should himself see it wrought. As his reason may suffice without the evidence of his sight, the repetition of a miracle would there-

fore be to him *unnecessary*. But would it not also be *hurtful* to him? Surely it would, if it was detrimental to the evidence of that faith which is given as the means of his salvation. Yet this detriment may reasonably be presumed, as the genuine consequence of an unnecessary frequency of miracles. Consider the expansion of a seed into a tree, and compare it with the resuscitation of a corpse. If the one were as common as the other, would it make any more impression? Far from it. The atheist cannot find a God in the one, nor would the deist find a Gospel in the other^e. If the one has his plastic nature or his pantheistic principle, the other also would have his modes of physical explanation: and each would solve his phenomenon so as to reject the principle which he likes not to admit. But in fact, if this were the case, we can hardly comprehend how a miracle could be:

^e It is thus that Athanasius reasons: "Those who reject Christianity, evince the same disposition as if they were unable to discover, from the works of the creation, that God is the Maker of them. For if, from the general evidences of his power, they were led to acknowledge his deity: they would acknowledge also, with respect to the works which Christ did

"in the flesh, that they were not human, but the works of the Word of God, who is the Saviour of all." Ὁμοιον γὰρ πασχουσιν, ὡς εἰ τις ἐκ τῶν ἐργῶν τῆς κτίσεως μὴ γινώσκῃ τὸν τούτων δημιουργὸν Θεόν. Εἰ γὰρ ἐκ τῆς εἰς τὰ ὅλα αὐτοῦ δυνάμεως ἐγνώσκον αὐτοῦ τὴν θεότητα, ἐγνώσαν ἂν ὅτι καὶ τὰ διὰ τοῦ σώματος ἐργὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, οὐκ ἀνθρώπινα, ἀλλὰ τοῦ παντῶν σωτήρος ἐστὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγου. De Incarn. Verbi Dei, c. 53.

for, to all appearance, nature and miracle would thus be confounded, and their several effects would be hardly distinguished. Human incredulity is very stubborn in rejecting all such evidence as men do not like to receive, and it is in an equal degree ingenious in vindicating its own obstinacy by the excogitation of reasons for disbelief. We may find this exemplified in Sacred Writ: and the appearance of it is perfectly agreeable to the workings of the human heart. But suppose that miracles were afforded with a degree of frequency, less indeed than the amount of our last supposition, but still surpassing the measure which God has actually dispensed: who shall decide the exact degree in which they would be useful, and beyond which they would be hurtful, to the cause of religion? Alas! who but God can decide this question? And who then can say, that God has not fixed the matter according to the surest dictates of wisdom and of love to man? Who can say, that he has not so regulated the measure of his miraculous dispensations, as to produce the utmost effect by their just proportion, and to avoid the counteraction of that effect by their excess? It is quite agreeable to human nature to suppose, that miracles, in proportion as man became familiar with them, would

become less striking, and would lose their power of conviction over his mind: and, when the nature of man is properly considered in this point of view, we shall have little reason to be surprised at those many remarkable instances, occurring in both the Old and New Testaments, in which we meet with a stubborn resistance to an authority, accredited by the most stupendous and repeated wonders. Thus, an undue frequency of miracles would in all probability be followed by a contempt for them: and the contempt thus entertained for miracles of daily occurrence, would recoil upon those connected with the introduction of our faith, and thus undermine the very foundations of that faith itself. In fact, the true state of the case seems to be this: Every dispensation of religion requires that degree of evidence which may satisfy a well disposed and reasonable mind: if this will not produce its due effect, neither would that effect be produced by any degree of evidence whatever, even though miracles were as thick as drops of rain: but, on the contrary, all redundancy would be counteractive, rather than promotive, of the purpose. We have therefore great reason to see the force of that benediction which is pronounced on those, who believe a miracle without having

seen it: "Thomas, because thou hast seen
 " me, thou hast believed: blessed are they
 " that have not seen, and yet have believed^f." We may likewise discover good reason for that declaration, which says in effect, that a miracle seen by a man's own eyes, would not convince him whom the Scriptures themselves do not convince. "If they hear not Moses
 " and the Prophets, neither will they be per-
 " suaded, though one rose from the dead^g." When again we find our Lord saying: "The
 " works that I do in my Father's name, they
 " bear witness of me. Believe me for the very
 " works' sake^h:" when, I say, we find him thus appealing to miracles as the proofs of his authority, and contrast these declarations with the foregoing: do we not find strong reason for that marked difference of provision which is thus adapted to the difference of the two cases? Do we not find an acknowledgment, that miracles are a matter of reasonable demand for the proof of a new doctrine; but not for the support of that same doctrine after it has become established, and after the character of it has become such, that without miracles it cannot reasonably be thought to have gained its establishment?

^f John xx. 29.^g Luke xvi. 31.^h John x. 25. xiv. 11

Are there not, even in the present state of the world, circumstances tending to confirm this representation? Look to the present condition of the Jewish people: the world hath never seen any thing parallel to it: no human causes nor ordinary principles can avail to account for it. If a man be unaffected by this, it is surely doubtful whether any further evidence would avail to impress and satisfy his mind. Perhaps even the unbeliever, if the phenomenon were not familiar to him, would declare hypothetically, that the production of such a case would at once remove his scruples. Look again to the fact that the Christian religion now exists and prevails in the world. To what was this owing? the effect must have a cause. If it began without miracles, then must its present existence be more miraculous than any of the mighty works alleged in proof of itⁱ. The

ⁱ St. Chrysostom argues to this effect: "If the infidel says, "that the apostles wrought no "miracles; I will answer him: "Then do you magnify the power of the Apostles and the "grace of God far beyond the "supposition which we embrace; inasmuch as you think "that the apostles could, without the aid of miracles, have "converted so vast a portion "of the world to Christianity: "this would be the greatest

"miracle of all: *μεγιστον ση-
"μειον και παραδοξον θαυμα.*" [See his 4th Homily in Princ. Actor. vol. iii. of his works, pages 92, 93. ed. Par. 1721.] The poet Dante has the same argument:

That all the world, said I, should
have been turn'd
To Christian, and no miracle been
wrought,
Would in itself be such a miracle,
The rest are not an hundredth part
so great.

Paradise, Canto 24.

fact is, that incredulity and credulity are concurrent vices: they always go together: the ebb at one point has a flow at another: slowness of belief in what is reasonable is, and must be, attended with a readiness of assent to the incredible. So it is in this case: for even in the present state of the world, miracles, though we see them not, are infinitely more probable, than the supposition, that the Gospel could, without them, ever have obtained its present footing among mankind. The demand of further evidence is, under such circumstances, not a healthy appetite, but a distemper: it cannot be satisfied, but requires to be healed.

XXXI. Little now remains to be noted in conclusion. Hitherto I have been concerned with that portion of the evidence of Christianity which is distinctively called the *external* evidence. This has been made to rest upon principles of remarkable simplicity. With regard to the authenticity of the Scriptures, and the settlement of the canon, I have hitherto declined to speak of their internal power of conviction: but I have rested the proof of their authenticity upon this principle, that writings of such a character could not possibly have been admitted into the canon if they had not been genuine. The fact then

of their being so admitted, combined with the principle now stated, and with the reasons on which that principle is founded, constitutes what I would call the *exterior attestation* to them. With regard to the proof of miracles, I have argued, that if the writings be genuine, it is impossible to evade the conclusion, that the introduction of Christianity must have been miraculous: I have also argued, that the present establishment of Christianity in the world cannot reasonably be accounted for without admitting, that its introduction was miraculous, and that the effect which we thus witness, in the existence of a visible church, must, from the nature of things, have sprung from this cause. Herein is provided a strong body of evidence: no matter of undisputed credit among mankind was ever so powerfully substantiated by proof: and the proof is capable of being unfolded in the utmost plainness of popular representation, so as to instruct and to convince, with perfect facility, every soul who is called upon to receive it. Yet still it may be argued, that a difficulty of belief might, even in a reasonable mind, connect itself with a scheme of religion thus powerfully attested. To illustrate this point, I will suppose a case. I receive, from a man of character well known to me, a written man-

date. I find this mandate stamped with his own seal, and it is delivered by his accredited messenger. This might satisfy me that the writing was no imposture. But I proceed to read the mandate. With respect to the supposed writer, I know him to be infinitely merciful and compassionate: but the mandate commands me to be cruel. I know the man to be remarkable for virtue and self-denial: but here it appears, that he enjoins me to indulge the utmost excess of licentious sensuality. I know the man to be anxiously desirous, by every possible means, to advance my happiness: but the mandate enjoins me to do such things as would surely be followed by total wretchedness. On this view, however the writing might be attested by outward marks, I might, to say the least, be greatly perplexed, and indulge reasonable suspicions of fraud. But let it be supposed—if the supposition be rather violent, it matters not: for hypothetical statements are not restrained by the laws of probability—let it be supposed, I say, that the mandate, when perused, contained such strong marks of wisdom and goodness, as afforded me the utmost reason to be convinced, that no other person existing in the world *could* have written or have dictated its contents. *Now* every doubt must be satisfied,

and every suspicion must be at rest: all further hesitation of credit would be incompatible with a sane understanding. Thus may we understand the value and importance of that which is called the *internal* evidence: which consists of those proofs which the Christian religion carries within itself of its own Divine authority: and from which the believer derives his convictions, not only that it is a scheme of doctrine containing nothing unworthy of God, but that it is moreover such a scheme, that no other being than God could have made and produced it. These remarks will serve to introduce the subject which, by God's help, I shall propose to your consideration on the next occasion of my addressing you.

LECTURE V.

THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE.

JOHN vii. 46.

Never man spake like this man.

XXXII. **T**HE course of argument requires that I should now speak of the *internal* evidence of Christianity. This part of the subject will naturally claim a high degree of importance in a disquisition, which proposes to illustrate the popular nature of the proofs of religion. For it is a species of evidence lying open to every man, who has access to the contents of a Bible. It shall then, in the present Discourse, be my purpose, so to treat of the internal evidence as to shew, its adaptation to common minds; its conclusive power; and its security from all objections which may aim at perplexing our use of it. With this view, I shall endeavour to accomplish a clear exposition of my subject, by drawing up my remarks under the three following heads. First, I will treat of the faculty which

embraces such evidence. Secondly, I will illustrate the nature of the evidence itself. Thirdly, I will consider the distinct nature of the subject from which such evidence may be properly derived.

I.

XXXIII. First, then, I am to treat of that faculty of the mind which embraces the internal evidence of the holy Scriptures.

It cannot be denied that the soul of man is gifted with a kind of intuitive power of discriminating objects. Whether it be simply a perception ; or whether there be combined with such perception, a moderate exercise of the reasoning faculty : is of little import to our present purpose. It will suffice that there *is* such a power, and that it is one of continual exercise and necessity for the purposes of life. You may take the following as examples of its operation.

In the visible works of creation there is not one of the most inconsiderable productions, such as a plant or an insect of the simplest form ; of which it is not easy to distinguish the reality from all counterfeit representations. Every eye can perceive the difference between the light that comes down from heaven, and that which is produced by

human contrivance. Thus it is throughout the whole universe of things. Nature is easily discernible from art: in other words, the works of God are easily discernible from those of man.

This discernment is true and exact, though it be not framed upon any communicable or definable reasons. Take, for instance, any animal or vegetable production. Who does not know when he *sees* it? Yet who is able so to *define* it, as to present a distinct image to the mind of him, who *never* saw it? Again: suppose any artificial imitation of a natural object. A very simple man might distinguish that imitation from the real object: yet a very wise one might, in some instances, be baffled in attempting to *explain*, on reasonable grounds, the distinction which he *feels*. For the resources of language are far from commensurate with all that variety of tints, and shades, and degrees, and modifications, which is cognizable by sensible perception. How, indeed, can it be otherwise, when the one are limited, and the other boundless? It will not suffice, then, with regard to this discerning power, that we should *therefore* question its existence or its availableness, because we cannot explain the principles by which it decides.

Such is the case with regard to those outward objects which strike upon the senses. We cannot deny that we possess a faculty, thus capable of separating, into their proper classes, the objects which fall under its notice.

If it be so with regard to objects of bodily perception: is it not reasonable to think, that there is also a faculty analogous to it, relating to objects of perception purely mental? such objects, I mean, as thought imparted, knowledge communicated, and matters propounded in order to be believed and assented to. And is it not also reasonable to think, that this faculty, whether by intuition or reasoning, may, in the case of a doctrine proposed as a revelation from God, be able to distinguish the essential characters of truth, from those of imposture? I mean, to distinguish them with such a degree of clearness and conviction, as may suffice for the reasonable satisfaction of the judgment?

XXXIV. To deny at once that we have, or may have, such a faculty: is to venture an assertion which cannot be proved, and which no philosophy can justify. The powers of the human mind, it has been well remarked, are never so feeble and uncertain, as when they look inwardly upon themselves. It far

exceeds the subtlety of the most refined metaphysics to determine the negative of such a supposed possibility: nor can any assertion to that effect be warranted, if it proceed not from the authority of Him, who created the human soul and imparted its endowments.

Now if it be only admitted, that the reality of such an endowment cannot be disproved: then it must follow, that it is impossible to falsify, by any conclusive reasoning, the convictions arising from the internal evidence of the Scriptures.

XXXV. But it may be objected, That it must in this case, for the reason alleged, be as impossible to prove, as to disprove, the reality of this faculty. To this I reply: We do not pretend to prove such reality by any process of metaphysical investigation: but if we will reason upon analogies, and upon outward effects and appearances, we shall find the strongest grounds for inferring the certain existence of this discriminative power. At the same time it must appear, that the *negative* proof is in this case impossible: for it would require a knowledge, unattainable to us, of the inherent powers, properties, and perceptions of the human soul.

The power of discriminating *objects of sen-*

sible perception, may justly be viewed as a part of the provision, which God has mercifully and wisely made for the ends and uses of our being. But these ends and uses are as much concerned with the apprehension of *objects addressed inwardly to the mind*. Thus, the subject of a future retribution has quite as much connexion with the present happiness of a moral and accountable being; as any of the objects among which he lives, and concerning which it is important to him to know, whether they are genuine or fabricated, salutary or hurtful. In the latter case, it seems to be acknowledged, that God has impressed upon things their differential marks, and imparted to the soul a power of perceiving their differences: so that there exists a mutual adaptation of sensible objects and of mental apprehensions. Transfer this then to the case of a doctrine coming from God and professing to teach the way of eternal life. Is it not reasonable to suppose, that the same merciful provision should operate here, in a case of far more moment than the last? Surely it is in the highest degree reasonable: and if so, it is only reasonable to think, that God, in offering a revelation to his accountable creatures, should both *impress upon that revelation*, the distinctive characters of his own wisdom and

goodness; and also *impart to man*, an adequate and adapted faculty of perceiving and discriminating those characters.

“If,” says a Greek father^a, “you have well considered the examples of bodily things, let us proceed to the contemplation of spiritual. Every nature requires to be nourished by food peculiarly suited to itself. But the proper food of a reasonable nature is the word of God.” To pursue this analogy of Origen: Shall we say that food is of more import than truth? If, in bodily matters, man is able, by his perceptive organs, to distinguish aliment from poison: shall we think it unreasonable, that he should also have received a discriminative power in the matter of religion? that he should thus be able to distinguish the proper sustenance of an immortal spirit and of a Divine life, from the principles of misery and death? Or shall we think that God, who has been so bountiful to

^a Si sufficienter rerum corporalium considerastis exemplum, nunc ab iis ad intelligentiam spiritualium veniamus. Omnis natura rationalis propriis et sibi competentibus nutrirī indiget cibis. Cibus autem verus naturæ rationalis sermo Dei est. [*Origenis in Numeros Homil. xxvii.*] The word *rationalis*, where it first occurs in the foregoing extract, seems to

me, from the sense of the passage, to have been introduced by the mistake of a copyist; and indeed its position (so near to the following words, *naturæ rationalis*) renders such a mistake very natural. But it is also to be observed, that this portion of Origen's works comes to us through the medium of Rufinus, who does not profess to be an exact translator.

the animal nature, has been less considerate of the spiritual, and less regardful of that part of us which displays the radiance of his own image?

XXXVI. Such is the nature of that faculty, for the existence of which I now contend: the faculty of clear apprehension and discrimination respecting matters of Divine knowledge. As for what Scripture teaches us respecting this matter, few will deny that we may learn from it thus much: namely, that man had this faculty in his time of innocence; that he has lost it since the fall; that he may now recover it by Divine grace; and that such grace is dispensed by God to all who are willing to receive it. But in order that the nature of this faculty, and its use, may be more clearly understood; it will be useful to attend to the following remarks.

In every science connected with practical results, there is an important principle to be borne in mind. Unless there be certain moral dispositions concurrent with the intellectual exercise employed upon them, those sciences cannot be cultivated to any profitable issue. Passion will disturb and fancy will seduce: the former must be subdued, the latter must be recalled from its excursions. You may see this exemplified every day, in the

different effects which arguments have on the minds of men. For it is obvious that the same argument must at all times carry with it the same logical value: and yet its influence upon the mind will be extremely different. The argument which convinces one man will not satisfy another. This distinction is happily recognized in the common phraseology of mankind: for it is common to say, that such an argument does not *strike* such a man: though we do not, by such an expression, mean to imply, that the argument, considered in itself, is inconclusive. Now this prevails so far, that the same argument will strike even the same individual at one time and not at another: and the difference will be found to arise entirely from the passions and feelings with which he is at those different times affected. Thus, with a young man, arguments for sensuality and licentious pleasure will perhaps be more striking, than those for religious sobriety and seriousness: with an old man, the latter will oftentimes be more striking than the former: and the same man, in different periods of his life, will be thus differently affected by the very same reasonings addressed to his understanding.

To reason further on the case we have supposed for an example. We may find in some

instances, that this difference of assent to the same reasonings will be found to prevail, notwithstanding there be entertained, at both the periods of life, a belief of future judgment and human responsibility. In this case, when the arguments of piety produce no effect, the *understanding* is plainly disordered by the *will*.

But there is still another influence of sinful propensities, in determining the regards which men bestow on religious arguments: it is worse than the last, and it oftentimes flows from it. It is this: men will sometimes throw off altogether the sense of future judgment and all other doctrines of religion, because they are led away by obstinate propensions to acts, against which the wrath of God is denounced. How comes this to pass? It is not that men have made up their minds to brave the dreadful judgments of God. No: it is because they are glad to disbelieve any thing which crosses the appetites they are determined to gratify. A mind thus disposed will be well prepared to reject good arguments and embrace weak ones: for, such is human nature, a fallacy concurrent with our prevailing disposition will be more striking, than a sound and valid reason which militates against them.

To speak then hypothetically. Only suppose, (as a thing which we do not yet regard as established by proof,) that the Gospel is true: Suppose also that its evidences are sound and convincing, and easy of apprehension. Yet notwithstanding this, it will be perfectly natural, that a man whose propensities are at war with the Gospel, shall be blind to its evidence. Nor is this any just matter for surprise: for long before the Gospel was given, Aristotle¹ had maintained the same principle, and had maintained it upon the same ground that we now apply to the Gospel: he had declared, that unregulated passions, inasmuch as they resist the dictates of morality, would always present an inaptitude for the study of it. But suppose again, the case of a man, who, in order to obtain the blessedness of a future life, is willing to subdue and mortify every sinful desire. It is clear that, in this case, the veil, which previously darkened the evidence of religion, is taken away; the truth which was concealed before may be obvious now. This is the frame of mind which, according to Scripture, enjoys the promise of knowing the truth: it is the only state of mind which fits a man for Divine illumination.

It cannot reasonably be objected, that this

¹ See the earlier part of his Nicomachean Ethics.

is taking for granted the thing to be proved. I have indeed alleged the authority of Scripture; but it must be borne in mind, that the truth of Scripture must be tried agreeably to the view which it gives of its own doctrines: for to try it otherwise, is to judge a case on a partial view of it. It must therefore be considered, as a principle essential to our present reasoning, that the representation of Scripture *may* be true. And this is enough for the present; while we contend for a mental faculty, qualifying men for the apprehension of its doctrines. We have before declared, that it is impossible to disprove the existence of such a faculty. For it is plainly a faculty which the abstract principles of metaphysics cannot reach: it is plainly also a case secure from the contradiction of experience. For there never was an instance of a man, who had fairly made good the required qualification, (of surrendering all his sins and all his inclinations to the will of God,) and yet was unable, when the Gospel was fully propounded to him, to satisfy his mind of its truth. And surely there are strong reasons for supposing, that such a man's convictions must be true. For, on the one hand, a mind undisturbed by sensual appetite is, in itself, better qualified for clear discernment, than one which is rent by the storm

and darkened by the clouds of passion. And again, if we consider what may reasonably be expected from God to his creatures, it may justly be thought, that the preference of his favour, as to every inward as well as outward blessing, will be *to the obedient*; and that, with regard, especially, to the revelation of his will, the secret of the Lord will be with them that fear him.

Nor will it avail to confound the clear impressions of such a faculty, with the workings of fantastic delusion and heated fancy. For the state of body, of mind, and of life, consequent upon this moral determination, is least of all adapted to the production of wild and foolish imaginations. And, if you refer to the outward proofs of sound and vigorous intellect, you will find them to be strong in favour of those who believe the Gospel: for these men are as clear and strong in the exercise of reason as any others: and they are, most of all men, exempt from those excesses and excentricities, which result from the predominance of a wanton fancy.

But I ought not at present to dwell upon this matter any further: because it will be the object of a separate Discourse to shew, that the convictions of Faith, in embracing the Gospel, are clearly distinguishable from

the deceits of fanaticism. It shall now be my purpose, to describe that condition of mind, to which, according to the tenor of Scripture, the knowledge of Divine truth is accessible.

XXXVII. It is a well known doctrine of our faith, that we are, in consequence of our fall from original righteousness, infected with various evil dispositions. Of these, one is, a total unfitness for the reception of Divine truth, and an innate repugnancy to the doctrines relating to the grace of God which bringeth salvation. The things of the Spirit of God are the proper subjects of a spiritual discernment: so that they cannot be received by the natural man, but are esteemed foolishness by him.

To this our evil condition it appears, that the grace of God has provided a remedy: the purpose and professed effect of which is as follows: To all who embrace this remedy, the way of everlasting salvation is laid open with such degrees of clearness and evidence, as are amply sufficient for the varying circumstances and wants of every man.

This remedy is of a character very remote from the learning and science of this world. So much so, that some men, conspicuously adorned with these advantages, have lived and died in unbelief; while multitudes of

simple and unlettered persons have attained that full assurance of faith, which no subtlety could confound, nor persecution subdue.

It was agreeably to this, that our Divine Master, speaking of the things relating to his evangelical kingdom, declared, that God had hidden them from the wise and prudent, and had revealed them unto babes^m.

Such is the grace which God dispenses through the ministration of his Holy Spirit. The character and efficacy of this blessing, may be understood from the promise of our blessed Saviour: “ I will pray the Father, “ and he shall give you another Comforter, “ that he may abide with you for ever ; even “ the Spirit of truth ; whom the world can- “ not receive, because it seeth him not, nei- “ ther knoweth Him : but ye know him ; for “ he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. “ I will not leave you comfortless: I will come “ to you. Yet a little while, and the world “ seeth me no more ; but ye see me : because “ I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall “ know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, “ and I in you. He that hath my command- “ ments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth “ me : and he that loveth me, shall be loved “ of my Father, and I will love him, and will

^m Matt. xi. 25.

“ manifest myself to him. Judas saith unto
“ him, (not Iscariot,) Lord, how is it that thou
“ wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto
“ the world? Jesus answered and said unto
“ him, If a man love me, he will keep my
“ words: and my Father will love him, and
“ *we* will come unto him, and make our abode
“ with himⁿ.” You see, that in these words,
the dwelling of God the Father and of Christ
in the soul through the abiding influence
and operation of the Holy Spirit, is spoken
of, as the means of manifesting the Saviour
of mankind to the believer’s soul. You
see also, the kind of character to whom this
blessing is promised; namely, to him who is
willing to forsake his sins: for so it is ex-
pressed, “ He that hath my commandments
“ and keepeth them.” Lastly, you see from
the tenor of the whole passage the solution
of that question: how the doctrine of Christ
can be evidently revealed to one man while it
is not to another: “ Lord, how is it that thou
“ wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto
“ the world?” The difference lies not in the
object, but in the visual power: not in the
object, for that is impartially displayed before
all men; but in the visual power, which, in
the children of the world, is left to its natu-

ⁿ John xiv. 16—23.

ral darkness, but in the children of light, is healed and restored by Him, who can cause the film to drop from the eye, and can give sight to the blind.

Thus far I have considered the *faculty*, to the contemplation of which the internal evidence of the Gospel properly belongs. I have shewn, that the faculty of distinguishing Divine from human, in words as well as in works, may reasonably be supposed to have belonged to the original constitution of our nature: I have shewn also how that faculty, though lost or greatly impaired, may now be restored: I have spoken of those advantages, in the way of Divine succour, which are needful to the healthy condition and exercise of it: I have also considered the human disposition which is required to be concurrent with it. This state of mind, these advantages, and this disposition, must be presupposed, as the requisite qualifications of him to whom the internal evidence of the Gospel is propounded: the question then is; Whether to a mind thus prepared and qualified, such evidence will be conclusive? Having said this, I now proceed to the second head of my Discourse, in which I proposed,

II.

XXXVIII. To illustrate the nature of the internal evidence itself.

There is, in an excellent work by a living writer, a remark to the following effect: “The words of God, now legible in the Scriptures, are as much beyond the words of men, as the mighty works which Christ did were above their works, and his prophecies beyond their knowledge^o.” Should this be the fact, it must surely be possible for a person gifted with that spiritual discrimination which we have above described, and of which the Gospel itself *supposes* the necessity: it surely, I say, must be possible for such a person, to discern in it those essential criteria, by which Divine truth is distinguished from human imposture.

By all who read their Bibles with purity and meekness, it will readily be felt, that the wisdom of that book is not the wisdom of this world: that the virtue which breathes in it, and which it breathes into us, is not the virtue of this world: that the doctrine which it teaches is a doctrine, which man could not invent: that the peace which it gives is a peace, which this world cannot bestow: and that the frame and character of the Scriptures throughout, are such, as infinitely to surpass the utmost human power of contrivance: that

^o Twopeny's Dissertations on some parts of the Old and New Testaments, which have been supposed unsuitable to the Divine Attributes, page 210. ed. 1824.

the character of Jesus Christ is a character, such as no man could feign: and that the display of such a character can have emanated from no other fountain than Him, in whom dwells infinite power, wisdom, and goodness.

These things any man may know, who, on the one hand, knows his Bible, and, on the other, his fellow creatures, their powers and moral propensities. By improving and pursuing such reflections, he will be able to trace upon the Christian revelation, God's own image and superscription: and he will be able to do this in a way, totally distinct from all the pleas which can be offered in favour of any false and pretended revelations.

Much of this will arise from the sublime morality of the Gospel, and from that merciful aspect of God to the forgiveness of man, which is therein revealed, and of which no impostor could have formed a conception. But there are other convictions, no less powerful, and perhaps even more grand, which result from the entire view of the whole scheme of revelation taken together.

The general argument for the authenticity of the Scriptures, has been already stated: such authenticity will then, in the present argument, be considered as a point taken for

granted. Look then to the holy Scriptures, as a work relating to one design, carried on by instruments whom it was impossible to confederate for that purpose: the writers of it living at different periods, through a space of fifteen hundred years: the several dispensations of it stretching through a period of more than four thousand: the subject matter of the entire revelation, surpassing the utmost powers of human thought: while the agreement of the detached parts of it, far transcends all possibility of human combination: the type and symbol of the Law corresponding with the reality of the Gospel, the prophet harmonizing with the evangelist, the priest in unison with the Messiah, the victim with the Lamb of God: thus indicating a perfect adjustment and agreement of parts remotely detached; while, through the progress and succession of those parts, there appears a train of providential arrangement marching onward from the rise to the consummation of the whole plan. Here the revelation itself must appear far beyond the power of man, and the agreement of remote agents beyond his contrivance.

Let this contemplation be opened to a mind duly prepared for the reception of it: and then consider (the authenticity of those

writings being already supposed) whether the Scriptures may be judged to comprise within themselves the evidence of their own Divine authority.

It is common for the proof of a Deity, to refer to his visible works. Should any one now allege that these works, embracing as they do, the magnitude, the sublimity, and the harmonious movements of the heavenly bodies, together with all the transcendent wisdom and matchless contrivance of animal and vegetable nature: that these works I say, were fabricated by art, for the sake of deluding mankind into the belief of a deity: would not the reason of every man revolt from this supposition?

Consider, then, in connection with this view, the nature of our spiritual faculties: and suppose them to enjoy that sound and healthy state, which shall fit them for contemplating, agreeably to reality and truth, the appropriate objects of spiritual apprehension. To a mind thus affected, will not the scheme of revelation, in all its grandeur, harmony, and unity of purpose, appear as much to surpass the contrivance of man, as the order of the visible world does? May it not thus impress a mind *rightly affected*, while to another mind it shall be wholly void of such effect?

I do not now propose to go through the detail of the internal evidence: but I have felt it necessary to adduce so much of it, as may be needful to illustrate its excellent and peculiar power. What we have seen of it will abundantly warrant this inference. In order to substantiate to ordinary minds the proof of Christianity, it is of the greatest use to exercise ourselves in meditations on the internal evidence. And the study of various treatises in which that subject has been judiciously handled, will obviously be valued by reason of their conduciveness to the same end.

But I would here remark, that the internal evidence of the Gospel is, in itself, an inexhaustible subject: that it affords materials adapted to every mind: and that it is of such a nature as to offer its suggestions spontaneously without the aid of a teacher.

If we had occasion to judge of the purity of a metal, we might perhaps hesitate on viewing that metal alone by itself. But if the genuine and the adulterate were placed together, and judged of by their comparative appearance and effect in operation: the distinct characters of the two would then become manifest. The true and the counterfeit would illustrate one another by the force of contrast.

It is not at all unreasonable to think, that the same should hold good with regard to moral and theological doctrines. He who can estimate the conduct and opinions of men, from whatever quarter he may view them, is enabled to feel the contrast which there is between the wisdom, the virtue, and the powers, of *man*, on the one hand; and those which, on the other hand, occur in the plan and structure, the precepts and sentiments, of the *holy Scriptures*.

This view is confirmed by facts. If we attend to the accounts of many remarkable conversions to the Christian faith: it will appear, that a great proportion of them have derived their occasion from the mere reading of the Scriptures: and it may be probably thought, that a reasonable faith does, in *most* instances, thus obtain the materials of its conviction. Why is this? Plainly because the mind discovers herein, plain characters of distinction from every thing human: while these distinctive marks are, at the same time, strongly evidential of perfect veracity and goodness.

Let us now view the matter in another light. Some have been brought up in the profession of Christianity, with such knowledge of it, as hath been afforded by esta-

blished and ordinary methods of popular instruction: but these methods have in their case unhappily been unproductive of conviction and faith. At length, some new scene of observation has occurred: this has been adapted to open to them, on the principle of contrast, a true view of Christianity. Thus, in one instance, the study of the Greek philosophy has been the occasion of opening the mind of an unbeliever to the acknowledgment of the Gospel: because he has thus had occasion to feel the blindness and imbecility of the human soul, when improved by the highest culture, but unaided by revelation. In another instance, you meet with the case of an eminent French scholar: respecting whose infidelity it may with great probability be supposed, that it was dispelled by witnessing the atrocities of the revolution in that country: for thus was another occasion supplied, of learning the nature of Christianity, from the genuine acts of those who rejected its authority^p. Men have thus be-

^p The person alluded to is Larcher, the celebrated translator of Herodotus. We have two editions of his translation. The first, published in 1786, abounds with notes which discover an obvious patronage of infidelity: it was prepared at a time, when Larcher was a friend

and coadjutor of those, who were labouring to accomplish the overthrow of Christianity. But after these machinations had produced the legislative abrogation of the Christian worship, and thus displayed, with some degree of danger and mortification to himself, the genuine

held, in a fresh view, the object, which, under the influence of familiar contemplation, had made no impression.

It is on this ground I would say, that the internal evidence of Christianity is boundless: because there is no end to that variety of accidents, in combination with which it may be seen; nor can any time exclude some new conjuncture of circumstances, which may serve, by force of contrast, to illustrate the wisdom that is from above, and to distinguish it from the wisdom of man.

XXXIX. I am led by this to notice the effects of Christianity on the human character. This I consider an additional evidence of its truth: and it is plainly one, which lies open to the understanding of every man. If it be

ferocity of men exempted from religious control; he viewed Christianity in a very different light: and his second edition, published in 1802, contains in its preface very strong expressions of contrite recantation. I should, however, add, that the conclusion which I draw from these facts is my own; I cannot say that the words of Larcher bear out the construction which I have put on the case. But still I will contend that my construction is a reasonable one. If the sense of religion was in this case excited, or awakened to an examination of the subject, by standing in the pre-

sence of a revolutionary committee, and by the terror of a guillotine: this was quite agreeable to the common course of things. The Psalmist says, [Psalm lxxviii. 34.] “When he slew them, then they sought him, and they returned and inquired early after God.” And a heathen poet painted from nature, if he did not from real fact, when he thus described the conduct of men in extreme peril and distress:

—Θεους δε τις

Το πριν νομιζαν ουδαμου, τωτ' ηυ-
χετο

Λιταισι. Æschyli Persæ.

not strictly a *part* of the internal evidence of religion, it is near allied to it: for, in fact, it is nothing else than a visible exemplification of its doctrines.

Example has been in numberless instances a powerful auxiliary to the Gospel. The early church derived from this influence a rapid enlargement of its borders. Men were melted and convinced by the virtuous purity, the innocence, the patience, the fortitude, the ardent love of God, the unextinguishable charity to the worst and cruellest of men; of which, in the lives and sufferings of the primitive Christians, they beheld undeniable effects.

If Christianity display its own evidence in its authentic writings, scenes like these unfold the same argument in living colours: they present it in a form which cannot escape remark: and they shew it forth under all circumstances, which admit of discriminating the principles of conduct.

To explain this matter, let us refer to particulars. Take then for example St. Luke's narrative of the death of St. Stephen: take a similar and most deeply affecting narrative given by Eusebius⁹, of the martyrdom of

⁹ Eusebius's account, (in his history of the martyrs of Palestine, under the persecution of Dioclesian,) is to this effect:

Paulus: take from the annals of the primeval church a great multitude of similar facts.

“As to the martyrdom of the thrice blessed Paulus, how can I worthily describe it? When his sentence was on the point of being carried into effect, he implored the executioner to grant him a moment of time. This being allowed, he then, with a clear and loud voice, so that his companions might join with him, uttered a prayer to God. And first, in behalf of his fellow Christians, he entreated, that God would be reconciled to them, and that they might speedily enjoy deliverance and peace. Then he prayed for the conversion of the Jews. Then he implored the same mercy for the Samaritans. Next he prayed for the heathens, that the darkness of their minds might be dispelled, and that they might be brought to embrace the Christian faith. Nor did he neglect the special commendation to God of the mingled crowd by which he was surrounded. After all these, O great and unutterable forgiveness! in the hearing of the executioner and of all the spectators, he implored the God of all things, *in behalf of the judge who had sentenced him to death, in behalf of the emperors, and of the very man by whose hand he was instantly to die, that God would on no account lay to their charge the fault they had committed against him.* Having thus prayed with a

loud voice, so that almost every one who beheld him was melted with compassion, and shed tears, regarding him as a man unjustly condemned: he prepared himself for execution, and presented his neck to the sword.”

If such displays of character illustrate in any degree the truth of Christianity:—and it cannot, at least, be denied, that they were greatly instrumental in obtaining for Christianity its triumph over the resistance of the world:—what can we think of the following? It occurs in a work of the late Mr. Joseph Milner, *which he has thought proper to designate, A History of the Church of Christ.*

Describing, *in a passage of which the tenour is manifestly eulogetical,* the defence made by Jerome of Prague, just before the atrocious condemnation of him by the council of Constance: Mr. Milner says, “*He declared that he hoped one day to see his accusers, and to call them to judgment before the tribunal of the sovereign judge of the world!*”

Fortitude, in defence of truth, is to be admired, and all human sufferings are to be deeply commiserated: but surely this language is, even in the commemoration of a martyr, no proper topic of *panegyric*. Such an incident, instead of inviting admiration, might with more propriety prompt the soul to ejaculate in the words of our li-

If you would see the point illustrated by *contrast*: look to the account transmitted by Eusebius, of the conduct of the Christians during the pestilence which desolated the city of Alexandria; and compare it with the account given by Thucydides, of the same calamity at Athens. You are to observe, that this kind of evidence arises out of every fresh occasion of remark, (whether afforded by books or by real life,) which shews the difference between the Christian and the worldly mind: we might think, therefore, that it never can be wanting, as long as both the Gospel, and the natural depravity of man, shall continue to exert and to display their opposite and conflicting powers.

turgy: "O holy and merciful Saviour, suffer us not at our last hour, for any pains of death, to fall from thee."

Which of the two cases, that of Paulus or of Jerome, is most adapted to convince the world, that Christianity is true? But, alas! Calvinism is too prone to attempt the construction of its own fabric, by demolishing the foundations of Christianity.

My complaint, be it observed, is against the *historian*. With regard to the *martyr*, no man who has examined the subject, can reasonably question, that his estimate of Christianity was very incorrect: and the circumstances of his conduct, when inquired into, may pos-

sibly justify a suspicion of that unhappy state of mind, which is not responsible for its acts. God, we trust, will reward the fidelity of his servants, and will not lay to their charge involuntary ignorance and infirmity. This sentiment we may properly indulge: but who would think of fixing on *such* a particular as that here noted, as the subject of *praise*? Yet it is plain that Mr. Milner does this: for the passage is manifestly panegyric: and Mr. Milner does not, in this account, occur to us, as a straight-forward narrator from authorities lying before him, but as one who selects and modifies circumstances to suit his own views.

And now, to reason upon these and similar examples. If you find them to be the peculiar fruits of Christianity, and distinct from all other moral influences: if you find them at once so salutary, and so remote from every thing of human culture and of earthly production: is it too much to think, that of such fruits the seed must have dropped from heaven?

Here we may not improperly notice, in alliance with the *tendency* of such scenes, the real effects and impressions they have produced. What then was the reflection of the centurion on witnessing the example of our Redeemer in his last agonies? Did it not carry an acknowledgment of something totally distinct from human virtue, and superior to it? "Truly this was the Son of God." In the case of St. James, it is upon record^r, that the accuser, who procured his martyrdom, was converted to Christianity, by beholding his demeanour at the moment of his sentence; and that he sustained the proof of his sincerity by immediate submission to the same death. Eusebius, in relating the behaviour of a Christian at one of these agonizing trials, declares the effect of it thus: "It manifested," says he, "to all men, that a Di-

^r Euseb. Hist. Eccl. l. ii. c. 9.

“vine power, mitigating their pains and con-
 “firming their fortitude, is undoubtedly at
 “hand to support those, who, for the sake of
 “piety, are ready to endure every possible
 “extremity^s.” Lastly, I would allege the
 authority of Constantine the Great; of Con-
 stantine, who was himself a convert, and a
 competent judge: and who thus describes, in
 connexion with his own case, the impressions
 produced on his mind by the spectacle of
 Christian virtues. He speaks to this effect:
 “No human discipline or institution was ever
 “available to the production of virtue in
 “man: all the excellent qualities of men
 “have been the gifts of God and the effects
 “of Christianity^t.”

If such incidents, and such views of them,
 were only to prompt inquiry, and to put the
 mind upon seeking a proportionate cause for
 the subjects of its observation: this would be
 much: for such a beginning of inquiry would
 not be far from the right conclusion. They
 present, however, not only a motive to in-

^s Εργοις ἀπασιν ὑπέδειξεν, ὅτι δη-
 θεια δύναμις τοις ὅτι ποτ' οὐν χαλε-
 πον ὑπερ εὐσεβείας ὑπομενοῦσιν, ἐπε-
 λαφρίζουσα τοὺς πόνους, καὶ τὴν προ-
 θυμίαν ἐπιβήρωννυσα, παριστάται. Euseb.
 de Mart. Pal. c. 2.

^t Ἐμῶν παιδεία μὲν ἢ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων
 οὐδεμία ποπότε συνηρατοῦ θεοῦ δε
 ἐστὶν ἀπαντα τὰ δωρηματα, ὅσα ἐν

ἡθεσι καὶ τροποῖς εὐδοκίμει παρα τοῖς
 νουν ἐχουσιν.—αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ σεμνη
 νικη, το δ' ἀληθες κρατος, το με-
 γιστον εργον καὶ ἀρμοζον, ὁ ταν συμ-
 παντων δημων σωφρονισμος· καὶ του-
 ταν σοι τα νικητηρια διδομεν ευφη-
 μουντες, ω σατερ ταν ὄλων. Con-
 stantini Oratio ad Sanctorum
 Cætum, cap. xi.

quiry, but a substantive part of the proper evidence belonging to the case. If we admit the real existence of that faculty for which in the earlier part of this Discourse I contended; you must surely allow, that such instances of conduct are proper subjects for the notice of it. It is at least certain, that the virtues of Christians are regarded in Scripture as a portion of the proper evidence of the Gospel: for it is on this principle that our light is to shine before men; that our good works are to be seen; that we are to adorn the doctrine; and that our demeanour is to be such, that they who are without the word may be won by the godly conversation of those who believe it.

Nor can it truly be urged, that if a good life is an argument for Christianity, a bad one must, for the same reason, be a valid objection to it. With regard to the latter, we know indeed its scandalizing effect, especially upon weak minds: we know the characters of deadly sin, belonging to every wilful act which may thus offend a weak brother, or obstruct the conviction of an unbeliever: we know also the threats of judgment to which such acts are obnoxious: and deeply does it behove every man to clear himself, as to this matter, of every ground for self-reproach before he

meets his God! But it is at all times easy to explain, that such influence does not justly belong to it: that Christianity is not a compulsory principle: that it is indeed no matter of surprise, if bad Christians, inasmuch as they sin against grace and illumination, shall become the worst of bad men: and that, on various grounds of reason and Scripture, the sanctity of one professing Christian is a confirmation of his creed, while the depravity of another, whatever unhappy influence it may have on human weakness, ought not in justice to detract from the evidence of truth: but that it does, in reality, attest and confirm it: inasmuch as Divine truth itself has taught us to expect, that the lapses of wilful defection will be worse, than the sins of the natural and unconverted man.

III.

XL. Proceeding now to the third head of my Discourse, I am to shew, What is the nature of the subject from which the internal evidence of Christianity is properly derivable. The effect of so doing will be to establish this point; namely, That the principles of reasoning applicable to the internal evidence of Christianity, are such as peculiarly and exclusively belong to those revelations of the Divine will which *we* acknow-

ledge; and that they are not capable of being *so* extended, as to yield their support to any religion opposed to Christianity.

To the previous matter of my present Discourse, an objection may be shaped in this form. “ These arguments are arguments to
“ him only that feels them to be such. In-
“ fluenced by such feelings, a man may re-
“ gard the writings of Solomon and those of
“ the Son of Sirach with the same convic-
“ tions: and a Mussulman may allege the
“ same assurance respecting his Koran, which
“ you do respecting your Bible. How then
“ can you distinguish? How can you prove,
“ that his convictions are delusive, and that
“ yours are valid?” Thus stands the objec-
tion: but it will soon be seen, that our prin-
ciples are not of that loose and indeterminate
character which is here ascribed to them.

With regard to those arguments which are so to him only that *feels* them: I would first observe, that it is very possible to go too far in the disparagement of them. For it may, with proper limitations, be truly said, that all the arguments in favour of Christianity are of this nature: and yet they are not, on that account, in any degree the less determinate. Light is none the less clear, because it cannot be perceived without vision: nor is it the less

valuable, by reason of those distorted and discoloured appearances, which spring from the distemper of the eye. It is a plain doctrine of Christianity itself, that the power of perceiving its truth is given to some, and withheld from others: that is to say, it is given or withheld, according to a man's willingness or unwillingness to obey its laws. This surely does not place mankind in any helpless state. True it is, that the needful blessing issues from God, and upon him must man depend for it: but then, the arm of God is not shortened that it cannot save. That which he dispenses to one, he may dispense to another: neither the greatness of his power is straitened, nor the riches of his goodness diminished, by the numbers whom they benefit. Nor can any man justly fear, that God's part will be wanting to his conversion, if his own be not. For God wills, that all men should be saved: nor is it consistent with his attributes, that he should desire the end as to all, but afford the means only to a part.

Nor again can it be said, that this gives any countenance to fanatical persuasions, or allies itself to the dangerous influence which such persuasions may exert in the delusion of mankind. For if after the manner now described, God speak inwardly to the soul of

man, it is to himself: and the same voice may utter its benign accents separately to all the children of men, as well as to any portion of them. Meanwhile, the man himself is effectually guarded against any dangerous delusion by examining himself, whether he discovers, in his moral dispositions, those qualities, which Scripture has distinctly noted as the proper fruits of Divine illumination and grace. But all this relates only to the man himself. As to any danger which may accrue to *others*, from delusive errors, which a man, under the pretence of Divine authority, may desire to communicate to them: here it is plain, that these latter are protected by his want of that miraculous power, which Revelation has provided as an exterior attestation of a doctrine coming from God.

This same consideration lays open a short way of extricating ourselves from any confusion, which may be thrown upon the subject, by attempting to place other writings upon the same footing of internal feeling with the holy Scriptures. The scheme of Revelation provides an *exterior attestation* as well as an *internal evidence*: it fixes a stamp of outward credentials on the doctrine which it requires men to embrace. If these external credentials be wanting, then there is not, properly

speaking, any subject provided, on which the sense and feeling of mankind may properly apply itself for the discovery of an internal evidence. Hereby is afforded an effectual provision, by which reason is enabled to guard itself against mistaking for the genuine characters of Divinity the mere fancies and imaginations of men. If the doctrine proposed to us enjoy no miraculous attestation, it belongs not to the cognizance of that faculty which employs itself in examining the internal evidence of religion. On this ground, the Koran is clearly distinguishable from the Gospel: it neither enjoys, nor pretends to, the evidence of miracles. And again, with respect to another point of external proof: here also Mahometanism stands in a strong light of contrast with Christianity. The martyrs of the Gospel attest the resurrection of Jesus and the miracles of the early ages: the martyrs of Mahometanism (for it pretends, I believe, to a few) *can* attest nothing but the sincerity of their own belief. On our present principles of reasoning, therefore, the Koran must be laid entirely out of the question. Again, on these same principles the case of Ecclesiasticus is clearly distinguishable from that of the Proverbs of Solomon. The canon of Scripture enjoys a strong and

sufficient degree of exterior attestation: the nature of that attestation I have already largely entered into and fully explained. Of this canon, thus attested, the Proverbs of Solomon forms a part, the book of Ecclesiasticus does *not* form a part.

I would not, however, have it inferred, that I regard as incapable of supplying an internal evidence, every book which is not contained in the canon. So far as such books contain a faithful portraiture of the real doctrines of revelation; so far it may reasonably be contended, that we may discern in them the traces and lineaments of Divinity. The light reflected from the mirror is the same which first emanated from the sun. It does not then at all militate against my doctrine, if it should appear, that the book of Ecclesiasticus contains those representations of Divine things, which a mind rightly disposed may estimate as discoveries, properly attributable to God only as to the first spring of their derivation. The same may be said of many treatises of the Divine life, and of other pious and devotional books: and more especially, when it appears, that such books do not claim any canonical authority, but plainly refer you to the fire which came down from God, as that from which their own was kindled.

XLI. Such books indeed possess a peculiar and distinct usefulness: not to supply the need of Scripture, and to supersede the study of it: (far be from us the impiety of the thought!) but to do what human instrumentality is permitted to do, towards promoting its effect. For Scripture itself is an unchangeable rule: we must not alter its dictates, or modify its structure. But these works may be adapted to changes and circumstances: they may combine into one view, and for one purpose, various detached points of scriptural testimony: and thus may they be so framed, that while they maintain a rigid conformity to the unbending nature of Divine truth, they shall at the same time be suited to the varying tempers and knowledge and conditions of men, and fitted to encounter their ever changing inclinations^u.

^u And this consideration may shew to us the advantage of a practice which has always prevailed more or less in the church, and of which the more extensive adoption might be in some degree conducive to the welfare of its weaker members. That is, the practice of reading in the congregation certain books subservient merely to the instruction of life and the correction of manners, in addition to the public reading of those canonical Scriptures from which only any doctrine can be legiti-

mately proved. For the structure of Scripture must be unvarying and uniform: whereas, such writings, while in perfect harmony with Scripture, and the echo of its doctrines and laws, may be particularly accommodated to times and circumstances: and may be so, with more authority and weight while they speak the public voice of the church, than when issuing from the private and varying discretion of each individual minister.

XLII. I would only desire to draw a brief inference. The internal evidence does in itself warrant a reasonable conviction of the truth of Christianity. I have, however, admitted, in my late remarks, that it is not of such a nature as to warrant a decision respecting the question, what books are canonical and what are not. But it must be remembered, that every case is to be reasoned upon, with full view of all the particulars which it embraces. In the present case, if the Scriptures themselves, and even other books, shall be found to carry with them a conviction of the Divine origin of Christianity: this will greatly avail, on a sound and intelligible principle, to clear up difficulties and doubts, which may arise relating to the genuine transmission of the writings or the legitimate succession of the ministry. For if you suppose a mind thus far convinced: that mind has a right to presume on the providence of God: for this is a truth plainly belonging to the case. It has also a right to presume, that this Providence would not be wanting to the guard and security, as to essential points, of the church which he founded: and he will know, that both the authoritative writings and the authorized ministry of the church are among such essential points. He finds

both the one and the other received and acknowledged; you may explain to him the exterior attestation which both enjoy: you may shew the validity of this attestation: you may shew, how it is, by moral considerations, secured from mistake and imposture in all former ages as much as it is at this day. If now a doubt shall still remain, you may insist on the providence of God as an advantage which, as to such essential points, would manifestly have been afforded to a religion which God introduced, and afforded on points to which a man's personal knowledge could not extend, but which nevertheless were greatly important to the valid reception of the doctrine. This, I say, you may do, without any assumption of principles not yet proved; for as I have shewn, the proof of Christianity arising from the internal evidence may be perfectly valid before you have proved the exact accuracy of the canon.

LECTURE VI.

—◆—

THE FOREGOING VIEW VINDICATED FROM THE
CHARGE OF ENCOURAGING FANATICISM.

—◆—

ACTS xxvi. 25.

*I am not mad, most noble Festus ; but speak forth
the words of truth and soberness.*

XLIII. **AT** the present point of inquiry, it is proper to revert to a leading principle of the foregoing Discourses: for this principle has been most injuriously and dangerously misunderstood.

I have largely insisted on those evidences of truth which Scripture contains within itself: I have also maintained, that the influences of the Holy Spirit are the necessary and sufficient means, of qualifying the human soul for discerning the grounds of conviction thus presented to it.

While this principle is regarded as nothing more than a common doctrine of the orthodox faith: it will nevertheless be acknowledged, that it is one, to which fanaticism,

for the defence of its own extravagances, is prone to ally itself.

How needful it is that I should advert to the subject, will plainly appear from the matter of my last Discourse. For I therein spoke of perceptions, which may be true, and not definable: of reasons, which may be sound, and yet not exactly communicable: and of arguments, which may be perfectly valid of themselves, but of which the force may be perceived by one man and not by another. These admissions may be abused by an impostor, for the credit of his pretensions; by an infidel, for the discredit of rational evidence; and by a fanatic, for the countenance of his vain imaginations.

Now the evils of fanaticism are in themselves so mischievous, as to justify any methods, consistent with Christian meekness and moderation, which may be employed to counteract them. But with these, in general, I have at present no concern. There is, however, one mischievous tendency connected with them, which is calculated to obstruct the purpose of these remarks, and which therefore demands attention.

I have been arguing for the reasonable conviction of a religious mind, blessed with the holy influence of Divine grace: this I con-

tend to be an adequate foundation for the faith of a Christian. Herein is provided a sufficiency of means for all men to become wise unto salvation: for all men have reason, and God will not deny grace to them that ask it. But it is plain, that various principles and systems of doctrine have gone forth to the world as the fruits of Divine illumination. Now to examine these in detail, and to pronounce upon any of them with severity, is unnecessary to the present design. One consideration may suffice: if we view the whole of them, or even all of which we have obtained any notice, we cannot but acknowledge, that they are very inconsistent with each other. Thus they cannot all be true; and therefore the pretension of Divine illumination must, in some cases, be either fanatical or dishonest.

Now, with regard to such pretensions, and to all professions of religion in general, what would be the inferences of that man, who is an enemy of all religion whatever? Plainly these. When such pretension is found connected with palpable wickedness of life, and the doctrine is alleged as a sanction to it: he would here resolve the pretension into an imposture. If the morals were generally correct and amiable: he might perhaps view the

doctrine as a fond and flattering persuasion; and might, with philosophical condescension, even deign to pronounce it useful and salutary, though delusive. But in the case of its being accompanied with a belief of Divine grace, and a reliance upon it: he would then consider it, as one of the many various forms of fanaticism which have appeared in the world; and the less it was accompanied by the power of literary and historical investigation, the more confidently would he pronounce this decision. For it would presently, in this case, occur to him to put the question: How could this man come at his convictions *by any rational inquiry?*

With regard, then, to that sound religious persuasion which I have vindicated as the possible attainment of every man: it cannot be otherwise than useful, if I shew, that it stands distinguished, by the strongest marks and characters, from every fanatical persuasion, and from all the various and possible workings of a disordered mind. To this endeavour I will now proceed.

XLIV. Fanaticism has been not unaptly represented by a Jewish writer^a, as the natu-

^a Maimonides. *More Nevochim*. p. ii. c. 37. pag. 297. ed. Basil. 1629. He says of fanatical persuasions: *Ista proveni-*

unt ex nimia facultatis Imaginatricis fortitudine et facultatis Rationalis imbecillitate.

ral disposition of a mind, in which the imagination is strong, but the reason weak. Indeed, we shall not perhaps greatly err, if we suppose, that of these two faculties, the strength of the one will often be proportioned to the weakness of the other: the two acting upon each other by a mutual causation. By the power of an ardent fancy, the images which play before it, are seen, in such a vivid colouring and corporeal aspect, that reason is too weak to discriminate the picture from the reality: the judgment is enervated by the charm of the delusion: and the ideal influence, strongly fixed upon the mind, becomes mistaken for an actual sensation.

But surely it is not *every* kind of religious persuasion, to which this description will apply: and in particular, it has no congruity whatever with those religious convictions, which we have contended for as being reasonable and certain.

XLV. Let us see how this matter stands with regard to the primary foundations of our faith. Look back, then, to the evidence afforded in connection with the first beginning of the Gospel dispensation. You will find this evidence to have been so ordained by God, as to exclude all supposition of fanaticism.

“When the Comforter is come,” says our Lord, “whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, *he* shall testify of me: and *ye also* shall testify, because ye have been with me from the beginning^b.”

You cannot but see the force which arises from this *combination* of testimony. The apostles are chosen to testify, because they had been with our Lord from the beginning; therefore they were men of competent knowledge: they testify our Lord's miracles by the endurance of death and other dreadful sufferings; therefore, they must have been sincere: the Holy Spirit testifies in conjunction with them, enabling them to do even greater miracles than their Lord had done; therefore their testimony could not have been the fruit of delusion: for a man's delusion, however it may work within him, can produce no effect without: delusion could never produce those mighty works by which the Holy Spirit confirmed the testimony of the Apostles. You are sure that the miracles of the Apostles were real and not deceptive: for had they been deceivers, they would not have suffered death in proof of sincerity.

^b John xv. 26; 27.

This evidence is plainly peculiar to its own subject: it cannot be paralleled by any other case. For example: Lucian's history of his false prophet Alexander, presents us with lying wonders, which might have deceived, if it were possible, even the very elect: but here we have no proof of sincerity, for the pretensions are followed by no martyrdom, but were the occasion of wealth to the impostor. On the other hand, if it be said that the doctrine of Mahomet may have had its martyrs: in this case, there was no pretension to miracles either attested by those martyrs, or confirming their testimony: such martyrdoms, then, can only prove the *convictions* of those who suffer them. The former case wants the confirmation of sincerity: the latter wants security against the possibility of delusion.

Such is the evidence of Christianity from the very beginning. And this evidence is valid *to us also*. For, by virtue of the reasoning which I formerly pursued^c, it must appear certain, if we admit the authenticity of the New Testament, that the Apostles testified the resurrection of Jesus, and that their testimony was confirmed, both by miracles

^c See chapters xxvii. and xxviii. of this work.

and by their own sufferings. Now these facts, thus attested to us, go to the full extent of the description, just cited from our Saviour's words, of the kind of testimony provided by him for the evidence of his doctrine.

XLVI. We see, then, that fanaticism cannot reasonably be suspected of any connection with the first promulgation of the Gospel. We will remark, in the next place, that it cannot, with reference to the present or any other period, be reasonably imputed to the convictions of a Christian faith. I speak with reference to my previous description of fanaticism, as *an aptitude to mistake imaginary for real objects and perceptions*.

Now it cannot be said that religious convictions are therefore fanatical, because the objects of them are *unreal* and *impossible* to exist: so that the belief of them *must* be delusive.

Take for example the doctrine of the being of a God. Every theist regards this principle as a truth clearly discovered: the atheist would contend that it has not been *discovered*: but should the latter dogmatically assert, as from his own knowledge, that the being of a God is an *impossibility* in the nature of things; in this case it is plain, that

his assertion would be beyond his knowledge. In like manner, let us refer to the doctrine of grace: by which I mean, the notion conveyed to us when we are taught to pray, that God would cleanse our hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit, and that by God's holy inspiration we may think those things that are good. Respecting this also, it is quite absurd to say, that the principle of it embraces an impossibility. If it be objected, that here is an influence believed in by many who acknowledge, that they cannot discover it by any perceptible sensations: the same may be said of many processes of nature which work in our corporeal frame, of which, though their reality is undeniable, no man understands any thing by actual sensation, and only a small part of mankind, from any other source of knowledge.

XLVII. Thus the charge of fanaticism, if it regards the belief of things which *cannot* exist, is unsustainable: for the future, then, we consider this charge as restricted to the imputation of believing things which are possible, but not real; which *may* exist, but *do not*.

If you argue the matter on this footing, it will appear that no presumption against revelation in general can be maintained, unless it

proceed on a supposed assurance, that God hath willed it otherwise. But this is what no infidel can say: since he cannot pretend to have searched the mind of God, and thus obtained the knowledge which God would not willingly impart. I say *willingly* impart, because this forms a part of the supposition.

As to the general probability of the case, there is far more on the side of a revelation than against it. For we believe that God does nothing in vain: if then he be adverse to the disclosure of his will, why has he implanted in man a moral sense? For of what use can this feeling be, without laws of conduct, rewards, and punishments, upon which to exercise itself? It is plain, then, that if the believer of revelation is called fanatical, it can only be, on the supposed ground of his mistaking that for a revelation which is not really one.

XLVIII. If the charge be put upon this footing, it follows that we should next inquire: on what ground can it be sustained against the believer of the Scriptures? Where are his symptoms of fanaticism? Is there any thing of light credulity about him? Is he one, who gives himself up an easy prey to impostors and designing persons, eagerly

crediting every story that is told him? Is he like a man of heated fancy, yielding himself up to singular persuasions in which no one concurs with him? Is he distinguished by the marks of a disordered mind, by melancholy, or by extravagance of general conduct? Does he, when he believes the Gospel, believe in a message unworthy of God? or does he believe it, without requiring those credentials whereby God is able to verify his own authority? Is the common demeanour of that man noted for weakness of intellect, or for the predominance of ardent passions?

These are the symptoms which indicate a fanatical mind. But these are as far remote as possible from the general aspect of a Christian believer. And if any of them, in any slight degree, are found to mix themselves up with his faith: they are not the fruits, or the appropriate concomitants, of the doctrine he believes, but of his own errors respecting its true character.

With regard to the proper credentials of a Divine revelation, we cannot imagine any, which even God himself could provide, more decisive, than those which, in support of Christianity, have certified the truth of the Divine interposition: I mean, the credentials of miracle and prophecy. Nor can any man give

a reasonable explanation of the origin of the Mosaical and Christian dispensations, without admitting their supernatural introduction. It cannot then be said that the faith of a Christian is fanatical, as a persuasion resting upon internal feelings unsupported by sensible and exterior proof.

Nor can the insinuation of a disordered mind be supported, by alleging the *matter* of the revelation itself, as unworthy of reasonable credit. That Christianity, beyond any other moral system, must needs strengthen the interests of mankind: may readily be perceived, by the force which it imparts to all the obligations, of truth, justice, benevolence, and self-command. If it be contended, that we now assume more than we have a right to claim, the answer is: experience will confirm this assertion, and the confession of adversaries will support it. This tendency cannot be unworthy of the Divine goodness: nor is the Divine wisdom dishonoured by ascribing to it the choice of means, so powerfully conducive to the virtue and welfare of mankind.

XLIX. It is obviously unfair to argue, that because a man is religious, therefore he is fanatical: for this is, in fact, to presuppose that religion is false, and thus to take for granted the point at issue. If indeed the falsehood

of religion be presupposed: then the charge of fanaticism may be colourably sustained against those who receive it. But till that is done, the charge must be either sustained or repelled, by a reference to *other* points of conduct and principle belonging to the characters of those who embrace the faith.

If the matter be tried by this test; it deserves consideration, whether the charge is not fairly cleared away from the believer so as to recoil upon the man who accuses him.

In order to see this matter clearly, it is requisite we should consider, what description of conduct, being most agreeable to reason, may therefore be considered most indicative of a sound mind. On this point we need not waste much time. It is such a conduct, as is most marked by piety and obedience to God; by justice and benevolence to man; by the suppression of all vain and hurtful passions; and by the just regulation of those which are lawful. We may consider this as a right and reasonable conduct: since it coincides with the purposes indicated by an observation of our nature.

Now if we consider the conduct of sincere believers, and judge them by this test: it will appear, that their lives are as remote as possible from all wildness of imagination, and

most agreeable in every thing to rigid sobriety and calmness of understanding. We shall find, that the more sincere has been their belief, and the more full their comprehension, of the faith they professed ; the more has their moral demeanour, beyond that of any other class of men, abounded with the tokens of an undisturbed mind.

This conduct will be found to shine with the brightest radiance in those times and under those circumstances, which were most unfavourable to insincerity of profession. Such were the earliest ages of Christianity: when the lives of men might be seen, not only realizing the brightest heathen notions of morality, but displaying also, those transcendent forms of goodness, which heathen morality had never prescribed, because they were too sublime for its contemplation, but which, when thus displayed, philosophy immediately recognised as belonging to the obligations of virtue. Thus may we best discern the true moral effects of Christianity, at a season, when hypocrisy was frightened, by the gibbet and the rack, from a counterfeit profession of it.

Nor let it be alleged, that the examples of the primitive Christians furnish in themselves an evidence of fanaticism : inasmuch as the

tortures and privations they endured, evinced a resistance to nature and to reason. The conduct of the martyr was no departure from reason, but a conformity to it. His practice was accordant with his faith, and carried with it that proof of a reasonable mind, which consistency always supplies. If he cheerfully encountered death and persecution, he did it in obedience to a command which he believed to be Divine: had he, with this belief on his mind, shrunk back from the trial; then indeed, his conduct, being inconsistent, would have furnished the proof of a weak, if not a disordered mind. He would see nothing unreasonable in the belief, of its being a command of God that he should thus suffer: for he must have seen, that such command was needful for the attestation of the faith, which God designed to introduce to the world, and which could not, without such suffering, be adequately verified. His promptitude and constancy naturally resulted from the prospect of that bright crown, which God had annexed to his triumphant testimony. And the same feelings would be the more reasonable, from his belief (for that also formed a part of his faith) of the power, with which God had promised to support, under every extremity, those whose duty called

them to suffer for the Gospel. So unreasonable is it to accuse of fanaticism those heroic virtues, which were essentially needful, in order to supply to succeeding ages, the strong proofs and confirmations of a reasonable faith.

L. But let us regard more particularly that specific doctrine, from whence, more than from any other, men have taken occasion to accuse of fanaticism the believer of Christianity. If I mistake not, a just consideration of this point will supply a triumphant confutation of the charge.

The sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit has always been a generally received doctrine of the church. By multitudes it has been strongly cherished. They, after the language of St. Paul, have considered their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit; temples, which they were bound by careful vigilance to preserve from every defilement of sin. They have been anxious to avoid the acts, by which they might grieve, resist, quench, or do despite to, the Spirit of Grace. They have prayed, that God would cleanse their hearts by his inspiration. They have regarded him as the spring of all good deeds, the support of virtue: and, looking upon him as the author of all acts and dispositions which may qualify man for eternal joy, have been supremely fearful of

forfeiting, as the penalty of an impure and disobedient life, his holy guidance and his blessed comfort. Such, in relation to this point, has been the general feeling and persuasion of all good men in the Christian church: and it is plain, from the nature of the principle itself, that it is not one of mere speculation, but that, when sincerely entertained, it must be influential and practical. In a word, it cannot be denied, that the Christian virtues of good men have been, in an eminent degree, prompted by a regard to this principle of their faith.

What shall we say then? We consider, as we stated it before, a virtuous conduct, as the best criterion of a sound mind. We find here a principle, eminently productive of those very deeds, which form the evidences of sanity. It must surely then be unreasonable to think, that the principle itself can be fanatical, while all its practical consequences are marked with sobriety and wisdom. It cannot be thought, that goodly and wholesome fruits could thus be gathered from the thistle and the thorn: or that men, whose lives are sober and temperate throughout, should be affected by insanity, with regard to a leading principle which pervades and animates their whole conduct. If this be not an absurdity, what is?

The life of every sincere and well-instructed Christian bears witness to a character of sobriety and truth: if, therefore, it warrant any inference, it must favour the presumption, that his belief as to this point is not delusive but reasonable.

LI. But it will contribute further to vindicate the reasonable character of our religious persuasions, if we will observe, that there are certain strong methods employed in the very scheme itself of the Christian Revelation for suppressing all indulgence of a fanatical spirit.

We are to reflect, then, that the fruits of the Holy Spirit are distinctly specified in Scripture; and that they strictly accord with that kind of demeanour, which we have considered as affording the best indication of a sound mind. These fruits are the criteria by which a man is to judge, whether his heart be influenced by the sanctifying Spirit. He is to look to his outward conduct: he is to look to his inward motives, as the springs from which his actions must, in the sight of God, derive their acceptable quality. There is no danger of mistake in such an inquiry: the matter is not one of communication to others, or of evidence to be afforded to others: it is a thing private and personal to himself: he

may understand the state of his soul with sufficient clearness and confidence for all the purposes of his salvation: if he be deceived to his own final detriment, he must have deceived himself. If, for example, he should find, that he has been mixing bigotry with his faith, or rebellion with his zeal, or mistaking sensual passion for the fervours of holy love: then will the word of God soon remind him, that he knoweth not what manner of spirit he is of; that these are not the fruits of that pure and peaceable wisdom which cometh from above. And then also will he, if he yield to the guidance of God's word, be restrained, by the danger of his situation, from all the false persuasions of an evil life. For he that hath not the Spirit of Christ is none of his: that is, he is separated from the grace of God and from his everlasting reward. Surely a strong security is thus, by the doctrines of our religion itself, provided against the dangers of fanaticism.

LII. But something may yet further be done, towards illustrating the difference between faith and fanaticism: and let it be observed, that I here speak of a faith, supposed to originate, according to previous description, in the contemplation of the holy Scriptures. History and experience will confirm my view:

they will evince, that such a faith is wont to be accompanied by the strongest evidences of a sober understanding.

We have many well authenticated and credible narratives of conversions from both pagan delusion and philosophical incredulity: of these, a large proportion will be found to have arisen, from the convictions suggested by the reading of the Scriptures. A few examples will not be uninteresting. Athenagoras, for instance, a great master of reasoning, and a philosopher by profession^d, was, if we may credit the account which has come down to us, converted by reading the Scriptures at a time, when he was so employed for the purpose of finding matter of accusation against Christianity. Who, in reasoning on a case like this, can find the tokens of a fanatical mind? If you look to the works which, after his own conversion, he composed to aid the conversion of others: you will find all the characters of a powerful intellect, clear in its perceptions, strong in its energies, of quick discriminative power, and least of all susceptible of false and delusive impressions: you will find them marked by an absence of every thing which bespeaks

^d See a fragment of Philip Sidetes in the Appendix to Dodwell's Dissertations on Irenæus.

the predominance of fancy, or the weakness of reason.

A case little less remarkable occurs in Victorinus; a man renowned for learning, for philosophy, and the power of disputation; a man, whose pagan wisdom had been adorned by the brightest honours, the most splendid fame; once a zealot for the idolatry of ancient Rome, afterwards a meek disciple of Christ, wearing his master's yoke, despising the shame of the cross, and the reproach of the Gospel; a bold assertor of the faith, an intrepid champion of it, and a writer in its defence. "O Lord," says St. Augustine, "thou
 " who didst bow the heavens and come down :
 " thou who didst touch the mountains, and
 " they did smoke : by what means didst thou
 " obtain a way into that man's soul? He
 " read, says Simplicianus," (from whom Augustine received the account), " he read the holy
 " Scriptures, and diligently studied all the
 " Christian writings : and he said to Simplicianus, Know that I am now a Christian ^e."

^e O Domine, Domine, qui inclinasti cœlos et descendisti: tetigisti montes et fumigaverunt: quibus modis te insinuasti illi pectori? Legebat, sicut ait Simplicianus, sanctam Scripturam, omnesque Christianas literas investigabat studiosissime et per-

scrutabatur; et dicebat Simpliciano, non palam, sed secretius et familiarius: Noveris me jam esse Christianum. *August. Confess.* lib. viii. c. 2. The case is in many other particulars very remarkable, and well worthy of attentive consideration, in the

In modern times we have upon record many examples, in which the Scriptures themselves are found to have accomplished a similar triumph over infidelity. Witness the case of the celebrated earl of Rochester. In the character and conduct of that nobleman, there was (so far as extreme and unaccountable depravity may be allowed to wear that character) much that looked like insanity, and which charity would gladly thus explain: but all this was previous, not subsequent, to his conversion. It was the change of his opinions which first elicited in his conduct the marks of a sober and rational temperament: and, towards the production of that change, the

form of which it is fully related to us by Augustine. However, it may be thought that it is not a case in point; inasmuch as it appears that Victorinus had studied not only the *Scriptures*, but *all the Christian writings*. But it seems to me that the latter form of expression may be, in St. Augustine's intention, little else than a varied signification of the meaning expressed by "holy Scripture:" as if he had said, "he read the holy Scripture and all writings which Christians receive as sacred and authoritative:" or it might be, "he read the Scriptures and all writings of authorized and ecclesiastical use." On the lowest estimate, it will hardly

be thought that St. Augustine did not intend to include the notion, of the power which the Scriptures themselves exert in producing the conversion of men. From the character in which Victorinus is depicted to us by St. Augustine, as a zealous defender of paganism in its struggle against Christianity: it seems improbable, that he should have been led to study the Scriptures from any other motive than that already ascribed to Athenagoras: namely, as a pleader, desirous of providing himself with materials of accusation and invective.

Some of the works of Victorinus, as a Christian writer, are still extant.

words themselves of Scripture were chiefly instrumental^f.

^f I think it plainly appears from Bp. Burnett's narrative, that the first ray of conviction shone upon his mind from the sacred page itself.

"He was," says the bishop, "very anxious to know my opinion of a death-bed repentance. I told him, that before I gave him any resolution in that, it would be convenient that I should be acquainted with the circumstances and progress of his repentance.

"Upon this, he satisfied me in many particulars. He said, he was *now* persuaded both of the truth of Christianity, and of the power of inward grace: of which he gave me this strange account. He said, Mr. Parsons, *in order to his conviction, read to him the fifty-third chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah, and compared that with the history of our Saviour's passion, that he might there see a prophecy concerning it, written many ages before it was done: which the Jews, that blasphemed Christ, still kept in their hands as a book divinely inspired.*"

In the *intention of Mr. Parsons*, thus described, there was no doubt some regard to the external evidence; but the *impressions* excited in the mind of the penitent bear the fullest witness to the effects of that evidence which is purely internal. The narrative proceeds thus:

"*He said to me, that as he heard*

it read, he felt an inward force upon him, which did so enlighten his mind and convince him, that he could resist it no longer. For the words had an authority, which did shoot like rays and beams in his mind; so that he was not only convinced by the reasonings he had about it, which satisfied his understanding, but by a power which did so effectually constrain him, that he did ever after as firmly believe in his Saviour as if he had seen him in the clouds."

Who will say that all this is fanatical? No man *can* say it, except him, who will beg the question, dogmatize without argument, and say, that *all religion* is fanatical. The narrative of Burnett attests, as subsequent to these convictions, the soundest exercise of reason, and the clearest recollection of memory. But we will again take the bishop's own narrative.

"That this lord, after the scene now described, was either mad or stupid, is a thing so notoriously untrue, that it is the greatest impudence for any that were about him to report it; and a very unreasonable credulity in others to believe it. All the while I was with him, after he had slept out the disorders of the fit he was in the first night, he was not only without ravings, but had a clearness in his thoughts, in

Indeed, if you will carefully consult facts and examples, you will find reason to acquiesce in these conclusions: first, that the Scriptures themselves, by their native and intrinsic power, have been greatly instrumental in multiplying converts to the faith: and, secondly, that the moral conduct subsequent to that conversion, and produced by it, has been such, as to countenance a presumption, that the change was not allied to insanity, but that it was the offspring of reason and the victory of truth.

LIII. We may then conclude by admonishing our adversaries to take heed, lest the charge of fanaticism recoil upon themselves. "If our Gospel be hid," says St. Paul, "it is hid to them that are lost: in whom *the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not*, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them^s." For, in truth, who are they, that may feel themselves entitled to accuse Christians of fanaticism?

"his memory, in his reflections on things and persons, far beyond what I ever saw in a person so low in his strength. He had a vivacity in his discourse that was extraordinary, and in all things like himself.—By no sign but

"his weakness of body, and giving over discourse so soon, could I perceive a difference between what his parts formerly were, and what they were then."

^s 2 Cor. iv. 3.

Shall this accusation come from the pagan devotee, who venerates the priest of bacchanalian orgies and of human sacrifices, and whose prophet was supposed to declare the future only in seasons of avowed insanity? or from the champion of Gentile philosophy: which, according to the confession of one of its brightest ornaments, has suffered every possible folly to go abroad to the world recommended by its patronage^h? or shall it be heard from the modern atheist, yelling, amidst the revolutionary storm, portentous sounds of liberty and reason; while his life outvies the cruelty of a wolf and the appetites of a swine? or shall it come from the deist, while he maintains the dignity of reason by appropriating the discoveries of Revelation, and forgets, that it is Revelation only, which has made the difference between himself and the savage of the Pacific Ocean? or shall it, as it may regard the doctrine of sanctifying grace, come from that class of Christians, who, while they designate themselves by an epithet of distinctive rationality, make it plain, that they identify their own dogmas, formed under the unavoidable frailty and weakness of man, with the rule of eternal

^h Nescio quomodo, nihil tam dicatur ab aliquo philosopho-
absurde dici potest, quod non rum. *Cic. de Div. lib. ii. c. 58.*

and perfect reason : and who forget, that the conduct of their own adherents has been, in point of morals, (the best criterion of reason) as much disfigured by deflexions and deformities, as those of any Christian sect whatever ⁱ?

ⁱ With regard to general morals, Unitarians do not, I believe, *profess* to be better than men of other denominations : but I think it will not be denied, that they claim the honour (a very bright one, if the claim be just) of being more *rational* and more *liberal*; and that they take peculiar delight in presenting themselves to the world, as the *patrons of religious liberty*.

But the love of religious liberty (like many other good qualities) may perhaps be found to prevail most where there is least talk about it. If our judgment is to be formed upon facts, I think it will appear, that no sect were ever more intolerant, or less able to separate the enjoyment of power from the exercise of religious persecution.

The Arian emperor Constantius is exhibited to us by history, as a man more cruel in the persecution of the catholics, than the pagan Dioclesian had been in the dreadful havoc which he made of the church.

Mutual intolerance is one character of the great struggle of the fourth century between the Catholics and the Arians : but it seems to be acknowledged by Dr. Lardner, himself an Unitarian, that the latter were worse than the former. He thus

reports, as testimony credited by himself, the representation of Socrates: “Valentinian encouraged the men of his own principles without being at all troublesome to the Arians: but Valens, desirous to promote Arianism, grievously intreated those that were not of that opinion.” [See the chapter of Lardner’s *Credibility relating to Arius and his Followers*.]

Modern times present us with the case of Faustus Socinus, who is charged with having persecuted, even to death, Francis Davidis : a man partaking of his own sentiments, but obnoxious to him by reason of his deducing from Socinus’s doctrine, a consequence, which Socinus himself would not admit. [See *Ashwell de Socino et Socinianismo*, chap. 30 and 38.]

Our own days have beheld Dr. Priestley as the leader of the Unitarian denomination : and this gentleman, speaking of the English clergy, describes them, as vermin *on whom he would have no mercy!*

I fully partake of the greatest abhorrence for religious persecution : I will even admit the practice to be worthy of none but a madman : I concur also in all due praises of religious liberality. But what is the *meaning* of this liberality? Does

Look, I pray you, to the lives of those who have been converted by their Bibles: look to the conduct which has followed in cases, where you have reason to believe that the conversion was sincere: will you say that this is fanatical? or will you not rather concur with Origen, who, while he alleged the fruits of Christianity; its visible power in changing the lives of pagans who embraced it; and the avowed dissimilarity, from every thing human, of the moral appearances connected with it: boldly appealed to his adversaries, whether such appearances could display themselves without a Divine energy upon the souls of men? If, therefore, any presumption may be indulged on the subject: it would rather be, in favour of the reality of those Divine influences, to which we ascribe the Christian virtues of good men, than it would warrant a denial of them.

it mean any thing more, than allowing a man the liberty of thinking exactly as you do yourself? If it does, then the facts which I have alleged may prove to all men, that it can never form the peculiar glory of Unitarianism.

After stating facts, I think it not improper to propose questions. I ask then: Are there not, in this kingdom, and at this day, two or three wealthy and powerful corporations, go-

verned by a kind of *conventional* test act, which excludes from the body corporate, or from the direction of its affairs, all persons who do not profess an Unitarian creed? If this be the case, are such persons entitled to stigmatize as bigots, those (*of whom I was not one*) who resisted the abrogation, lately enacted by parliament, of the *legislative* test and corporation acts of this kingdom?

On the whole then we conclude, that the life and temper generated by Christianity, are as wide as possible from all essential characters of fanaticism. To this fact experience bears ample testimony. This temper has in it no frantic delights, nor irrational hatreds. It does not, like insanity, court the objects of natural aversion: it has no repugnancy to pleasure which is innocent and expedient. It reckons not among its adherents the suicide, nor the miser, nor the lover of conquest and of carnage; nor those who pant for unsubstantial and unsatisfying forms of glory; nor those who impetuously pursue their object with a heedless disregard to its value; nor those who labour in accumulating the means of gratification which they have no inclination to employ. It is able to give a reasonable account of all its aims: to shew, their subserviency to its own happiness; and their agreement with all dutiful regards, of piety to God, and benevolence to man. Its social influence displays a beautiful harmony with the benignant purposes of God; with the instructions of reason; and the dictates of sublime virtue. In the political state, it is the parent of genuine liberty: for liberty cannot exist among men without knowledge and goodness; without the knowledge of moral obligations,

and the will to respect them. That knowledge revelation only unfolds, that goodness God infuses in connection with revelation. It is thus only that the rights of men can be understood: it is thus only that they can be maintained. It is this which restrains the oppression of the powerful: changes the terror of a tyrant into the love of a parent: infuses into subjects a willing and glad obedience: and tinctures all the relations of civil life with equity and kindness. As to any exorbitances which may sometimes be found intermixed with the religious character: they may be plainly shewn to be mere incongruities; not the fruits of faith, but repugnances to it. In a word, in all its essential principles, its outward deportment, its influence on a man's self, and its influence on the world: it wears the aspect of soberness and truth, and discovers the strongest dissimilitude to all that is wild, disorderly, fanciful, wilful, and turbulent, in the conduct of men.

LECTURE VII.

THE USES AND ADVANTAGES OF LEARNING IN THE
STUDY AND TEACHING OF CHRISTIANITY.

I TIM. iv. 15.

Meditate upon these things ; give thyself wholly to them ; that thy profiting may appear to all.

LIV. **I**T has been my principal design, to shew, that the evidences of Christian truth have been dispensed with an impartial regard to the general use of mankind : that as they are proposed to *all* men, so do they not require those previous qualifications, which the state of the world will afford only to a *few* ; nor demand of the multitude, a blind and perilous submission of their understandings to the authority of others. The nature of the principles employed for this purpose appeared to me exposed to the danger of fanatical perversion, on the one hand ; or, on the other, of an attempt to confuse religion with fanaticism : it was therefore the special effort of my last Discourse to obviate that danger.

I will now advert to another deduction, which some perhaps may be disposed to draw from them. They may infer that, if the case be so, human learning can be of little use towards advancing the purposes of revelation.

Whether, among those who thus judge, some may be actuated by the love of sloth; whether others may yield to the suggestions of pride, in thinking themselves, without the toil of theological industry, qualified to take a rank among the ministers of the Gospel, superior to those who have undergone such labour: I will not say: God knoweth. But we surely have a right to calculate, when contemplating the decisions of men, on the possible influence of that depravity, from which we know that no man is by nature exempt.

I will however maintain, in contradiction to such a judgment, that the disesteem and disparagement of human learning are things greatly injurious to the cause of the Gospel. And while I sustain this view, I shall endeavour at once to confirm and to explain it, by displaying a view of the splendid and rich advantages, which literature affords to the propagation of sacred truth. This view can be but partial: because the present time

and purpose are far from commensurate with the amplitude and greatness of the subject.

LV. To this end our attention will, in the first instance, be profitably directed to the words which introduce this Discourse. Here it is proper to remark, that the version would have been more exact, if, instead of the expression, “meditate upon these things,” our translators had employed the words, “exercise thyself in these things.” Among the things thus prescribed for the habitual practice of a Christian pastor, one is contained in those words of the 13th verse, “give attendance to reading.” With application to this, among other things, the Apostle is to be understood as saying, “exercise thyself in these things, give thyself wholly to them, that thy proficiency may appear to all :” or, “that thy proficiency may appear in all things.”

“Give attendance unto reading.” Here, some would restrict the meaning of the Apostle, to the reading of the holy Scriptures. The words, it is plain, do not convey this restriction of their own purport : but it is needless to dispute the matter, and it is always desirable to avoid useless questions. For be the meaning one way or the other, it must come to the same point. If you

suppose St. Paul exhorting Timothy to be earnest in the *reading* of the Scriptures: you can hardly doubt, that there is implied in this instruction, a recommendation of all such branches of learning, as are subservient to the right *understanding* of them. For it cannot be denied, that some parts of human learning, which have in them this subserviency, were among the attainments of this Apostle: and that he himself employed them towards advancing the purposes of his ministry. Witness his acquaintance with heathen literature: which he has manifested by quoting, for the confirmation of his reasonings and the illustration of his views, no less than three Greek poets. You may also take into the account that learning, which, as the disciple of Gamaliel, he had acquired in the doctrines and traditions of his own nation: concerning this last, you can hardly doubt, that it must have greatly assisted the just comprehension of the subject he treats, when he lays himself out for the conviction of unbelieving brethren, and the confutation of Judaizing Christians. When these things are considered, we can hardly satisfy ourselves, that the import of the precept was any thing less, than to counsel the sacred expositor of God's word, that he should give most atten-

tive heed, both to that word itself, and to every source of knowledge available to a right explication of it. If this was needful in an age, when the church was specially illuminated by frequent and miraculous revelations afforded by God to its pastors and to its members: it is plain, that no ordinary circumstances can dispense with it.

LVI. Let it be remembered, then, that though I have maintained the advantages of learning to be by no means needful for general believers, in order to the reasonable evidence of their faith: yet it has not been asserted, that such attainments are useless in the ministers of the church. The two cases are widely different. With regard to the former class, the state of society will not admit their attainment of those advantages: hence then it would appear, that if such advantages were needful to them, the Gospel would be ill adapted to their condition. But with regard to the latter, here no confusion can arise, no disturbance of established ranks, and orders, and duties: in this case, it is not the attainment, but the want of learning, which is most liable to disturb the world. Yet it must plainly appear, that this ministerial order is instrumentally appointed by God, for the conversion and salvation of mankind.

While then, we argue upon the supposition that it is so; we assume nothing more than belongs to the case: while we contend that men of this order ought to be learned, we demand nothing pregnant with social inconvenience, nothing more than Scripture itself enjoins.

LVII. Let it then be considered, What is the particular advantage of learning towards displaying the evidence of the Gospel? My answer is in general: It consists in the guidance, by which the learned are enabled to assist the ignorant: it must therefore be eminently useful to all who are zealous for religion, and especially to the pastors of the church.

But here it may be objected, that this is to violate the great principle hitherto insisted upon. I answer, that the benefit thus contemplated accrues, not from any deference to authority, but from the right use of reason: of reason framing its determinations under the assistance, which one man's knowledge may yield to another man's judgment. A guide may, by his experience, render valuable service, though the confidence of his follower be not perfectly blind and indiscriminate. You may plainly see this in the case of other sciences and attainments. Sup-

pose one man should undertake to teach another geometry, or some foreign language : it is plain, that these things may be learned more easily with, than without, the aid of one previously instructed in them. Now if the teacher did this faithfully, he would greatly assist the learner ; while at the same time his own duty would be practicable and easy. But suppose that, in professing to teach geometry, he should make it his purpose on every occasion to lay down false principles, and draw absurd conclusions ; or suppose that, in professing to teach a language, he should render every word, by a word exactly contrary to its meaning, or translate every sentence by a sentence of quite contrary purport : you must plainly perceive that such a proceeding would not wear the slightest colour of coherency and truth, and consequently would not obtain the slightest credit. We see plainly, then, that one man's superior knowledge may be available to another man's guidance, without offering the least violence to his reason. This holds good with regard to him, who would apply the benefit of learning to the exposition of the Bible. While his attempts were reasonable, they would satisfy the mind ; but when they were absurd or wicked, the understanding would

revolt from them. In fact, I intend, while treating this subject, to bring out to your view, solely, those advantages of learning in the teaching of theology, which may be recognised on the supposition, that the persons instructed submit only to the conclusions of which their own reason dictates the necessity.

To this point we now proceed. I say, then, that the benefits of human learning, as an auxiliary to sacred truth, may be discovered in two ways, corresponding with the influence which it has on the evidence of the Gospel: that influence being either *direct* or *indirect*. Both of these I intend to treat in their order.

LVIII. Its direct influence is seen thus. Objections are grounded upon scriptural difficulties, and such difficulties are in a great degree solved by the application of learning. No theological student needs to be instructed how far this is available. He must himself have felt the value of it. He must remember the time, when, in an earlier stage of his inquiries, he was struck with difficulties, with obscurities, and with apparent contradictions. He must be sensible, that as his knowledge advanced, there were numerous instances, in which darkness was dispelled, difficulty re-

moved, and dissonance harmonized. He must even remember instances, in which a specious topic of scepticism has, by virtue of a solution which learning afforded, been changed into an argument for revelation: for such, in fact, is the case with a vast proportion of Scripture difficulties. These difficulties spring, from the unacquaintance of one age and country with the habits and usages of an age and country very remote from them. When this ignorance is removed, the difficulty is solved. But the benefit does not stop here: for the solution thus afforded, yields a proof, that the writer expressed himself in a way, perfectly agreeable to those circumstances of time, place, and person, under which he professes to have written: and thus, the authenticity of Scripture is confirmed by an additional proof^a.

^a Such remarks are generally best understood by examples. I will therefore adduce one for the illustration of the present matter.

St. Mark's Gospel has the following passage: "Have ye not read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungred, he, and they that were with him? How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shew-

bread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him?" Mark ii. 25.

This passage presents a difficulty: for the narrative of the book of Samuel, here referred to, represents Ahimelech, and not Abiathar, to have been high priest at the time of this transaction.

Let us now attend to the solution. It appears from the practice of the rabbins, to have

It is true, that an unlearned man is not able to ascertain the exact *truth* of such expositions; but it must not therefore be said, that this dictates the necessity of giving an implicit credit to the learned. It may suffice that a man is satisfied that such explanations are *reasonable*. That which is reasonably explained is no inconsistency: the explanation *must* be reasonable if it is founded upon real facts; otherwise, probability would

been usual with the Jews to refer to the Old Testament, according to a division of it into certain portions: which portions were named from some principal word occurring in them. On this principle, the name *Abiathar the high priest*, appears to have been given to the portion, containing the narrative of David and the shewbread. Thus it would appear, that the passage of Mark, without referring to *the days* of Abiathar, refers to *a passage of Scripture denominated after him: the days* being words introduced, only for the sake of giving, what our translators *conceived to be* the sense of the passage.

This mode of citation appears to have been not unusual among the oriental nations: for with the Mahometans, the Koran is divided and referred to in the same manner.

I have taken the foregoing example from Michaelis. [See chap. iv. sect. 5. of his Introduction to the New Testament.]

He has fortified this exposition by adducing two similar instances of construction. [See, in the Greek, Mark xii. 26. and Rom. xi. 2.]

If the difficulty be thus solved, it is also to be considered, that the authenticity of the writing is at the same time confirmed. For the style of speaking evinces a connection with Jewish usages and manners: and it is plain that no man, personating the character, and pretending the circumstances, of the evangelist, would have *affected* a style, of which the characteristic propriety is thus made to appear, by an acquaintance, not very common, with a remote department of learning.

This may serve at once to evince the utility of a branch of study now deplorably neglected. I mean, that of the Rabbinical and Talmudical writers: since these are the only literary sources, available for the right elucidation of many scriptural passages.

be at war with truth : and the knowledge of facts thus applicable, is the fruit and benefit of learning.

LIX. It is highly important to pursue this subject further. It is to be observed, that when the teacher of religion has proceeded thus far, he has obtained a ground of reasoning highly advantageous for the establishment of ulterior and valuable principles. This will appear from the following argument.

When a *portion* of Scripture difficulties have been so cleared, as to make it obvious, that such difficulties consisted only in the want of knowledge needful for their solution : it is obvious to infer, that such *may be* the case with those remaining difficulties which continue unexplained. The greater the number of such solutions, the more the contemplation of such possibility must reasonably be entertained. And when to this contemplation is added, an admission of the direct evidence of Christianity : the case will obviously justify this inference ; namely, that *all* the difficulties of revelation derive their force solely from the imperfection of our knowledge. Nor ought it in any degree to prejudice the cause of revelation, that no provision has been made for totally obviating

this imperfection. It may be said indeed: If revelation demand the assent of all men, why suffer the characters of Divine authority to be thus obscured? The answer is: Because the thing cannot be otherwise, without totally supplying the imperfection of human knowledge: but the very notion of this latter implies essential impossibility, contradiction, and absurdity. We cannot treat the subject at large: but we will take a single example to reason upon.

Many objections against revelation derive their whole force from our unacquaintance with the usages of other times and nations. How is this to be obviated? Would you demand that the knowledge requisite for that purpose, should have been providentially handed down? This would have required miracles, multiplied to such degrees of continuance and frequency, that they would have ceased to be miracles: literary records provided, in some instances, among men to whom writing was unknown; and, in all instances, provided for the information of posterity, by persons, who could not, without infallible direction, foresee, on what points posterity require elucidation: all these means of knowledge must have been provided in a form, accessible and available to all men

And now, even if all this were done: unless some violence were so applied to the human will, that men should be disposed to avail themselves of the stores thus provided: it would be to no effect. For there are many now, whose cavils are grounded upon their ignorance, and who, even as to those points, in which their objections might be removed by their own diligence, will take little pains to improve their knowledge. Thus, many Scripture difficulties are difficulties, only when insulated from the rest of Scripture: look at them as the parts of a whole, or the members of a body, and then, no difficulty remains. Nevertheless, there are probably in the world, not a few, who, on a view of such obscurities and seeming inconsistencies, will suffer their minds to be disturbed and perplexed, rather than they will be at the pains of reading their Bible through from beginning to end. With respect to a part, then, of the difficulties of Scripture, the case is plain: the proper remedy for them is to be found, not in any further provision of God, but in the industry of man: and the want of industry would, if further provision were actually made, operate to make it unavailing.

But let us go into this matter a little

deeper. The question is : How are the difficulties of Scripture to be obviated, so as to clear away the occasions of scepticism and the topics of infidelity? Would you have it so, that Scripture should carry with it its own elucidation of its own obscurities? Then, if you will only consider the nature of the thing you demand, you cannot but at once see its palpable absurdity : for the volume of revelation must have been enlarged to such a measure, as to have afforded a continual remedy, and an universal remedy, to the ignorance of mankind. All nations and all ages, (however their peculiar ignorance may be diversified, so as to render various points and degrees of information needful to them,) must have found in the Scriptures a satisfactory elucidation of all obscurities, arising from manners and circumstances, which have now vanished from human knowledge : the book must have been adapted to every country which is, or ever will be, inhabited by man, and to every age in which man shall exist : and thus in effect, the Scriptures must have filled a bulk, such as the greatest length of human life would not suffice to peruse.

Or would you have the Scripture itself to become varied from time to time, and from country to country, so as to adapt itself to

the understandings and the knowledge of all men? But the plain effect of this would be, that all the characters of authenticity would be effaced from the Divine word, and that the structure of it would be such, as to wear a most suspicious appearance of human contrivance and of priestcraft. But what if, after all, the thing itself be essentially impossible? Would it, think you, be possible to write a book, suppose it to be only of the length of one of our four Gospels, fully comprehensible to men of all those ages, circumstances, varieties of education, and ways of life, which characterize the various conditions of men to whom the blessing of revelation is offered? The thing never was done yet: nor can it be done, without changing those circumstances of mankind to which revelation is adapted, and which render revelation needful.

In fact, whatever scheme you hit upon, you will find it, when viewed with relation to the state of fallen man, to involve contradiction, and impossibility. But there is one principle which runs through the whole of such schemes, namely, that they involve the necessity of a standing miraculous power: a provision, which, as was shewn in a former Lecture, would be full of inconvenience, and destructive of the necessary evidence of religion.

On the whole, then, we may truly regard, as inseparable from a written revelation, all those difficulties which arise, from changes of speech and of habit; from the partial corruption of manuscripts; and from a variety of causes which could not have been obviated without a miraculous provision. The too frequent application of that provision would have been hurtful to revelation: the due measure of it can be understood only by God.

Combine, then, with these principles, the use of learning in solving the difficulties of revelation. It must appear, that the existence of such difficulties is plainly unavoidable: that it could not be otherwise without a remedy, more detrimental than the primary inconvenience: that some, and even a large proportion, of these difficulties, are solved by the proper application of human knowledge: and that there arises, therefore, a just and strong presumption, that the whole of them would be cleared up, but for the ignorance, sometimes voluntary and sometimes unavoidable, of man. In this way of strengthening the evidence of the Gospel, the learned may do much for the ignorant: since many things which are difficulties to the latter, are no difficulties whatever to the former.

LX. But there is also a certain indirect ap-

plication of learning to the advancement of the same end: I mean, that of convincing man of the truth of the Gospel. To this we will, in the next place, turn our attention.

I have already dwelt on the internal evidence of Christianity. Now this evidence must of course be stronger, in proportion as the Scriptures are better understood. For it plainly arises from contemplating the real character of revelation: it must, therefore, be aided by a true, and impaired by a mistaken, estimate of it. Thus, for example, if *transubstantiation* be one of those tenets which shock the faith of mankind: it must surely aid the evidence of the Gospel, if, by ascertaining the true sense of its language, you can prove, that transubstantiation is not in it. It is but right that every thing should be judged of according to what it really is, and not according to mistakes or misrepresentations.

In order that this principle may be the better understood, the remarks belonging to it shall relate to the following subjects: namely, the clearing of obscurities; the right interpretation of Scripture language; and the right comprehension of Scripture doctrines.

If the Scriptures carry with them the evidence of their own authority: then it must

be highly desirable to clear up their obscurities. For so far as these obscurities exist : so far, it is plain, the evidence cannot be discerned, and the genuine aspect of Scripture becomes like that, of any corporeal object shrouded from the eye. Thus, if the Scriptures were to be found only in their original tongues, they could afford no internal evidence to any man ignorant of those tongues : here the obscurity would be total. And, in proportion as the obscurity was greater or less, so would the internal evidence be weakened or augmented. The interpretation and the doctrine must be affected in the same way. If the former be erroneously framed, or the latter erroneously deduced : then, not the object itself, but a disguise of it, is proposed to our judgment : the thing is seen in a wrong shape and colour : and the characters of divinity, however conspicuous in its genuine features, must be rendered indiscernible, in proportion as the object has been disfigured and discoloured. Who, for instance, could recognise the hand of Phidias under a deep incrustation of some foul material ? or distinguish the marble of Paros under the disguise of paint ? or be pleased by the most beautiful forms of nature, when seen only in connection with exterior provo-

cations of disgust and ridicule? Is it fit that the blessed word of God should be contemplated under similar disadvantages? No. It is here that the learned expositor may become a powerful instrument of vindicating the sacred cause. Surely you cannot consider it a light or an inconsiderable service, which is thus rendered to the evidence of the Gospel. We cannot doubt, that a defection from Christianity has often been prompted, by a doctrine falsely attributed to the Christian scheme. Thus, one man may have been driven from the fold, because he has been taught to regard the decrees of Calvin, as an essential part of the Gospel: another, because he has viewed in the same light, the corruptions of popery: while a third, perhaps, may be found sliding, by an easy transition, from the school of Socinus into deism; because the Socinian tenets obscured those true principles, which display, in the doctrine of redemption, a wisdom and a love beyond the power of human excogitation. How can it be wondered that a man should recoil from Christianity, if he considers as parts of its legitimate practice, the popish inquisition, with many other usages, both cruel and degrading, which some men have represented to be agreeable to it? To him who thus de-

clines the yoke of Christianity, how desirable is it, that you should be able to say: “ You fly from the Gospel by reason of a doctrine which shocks your belief: but that doctrine forms no part of Christianity, and the Scriptures know nothing of it.”

If this be the case, it cannot be otherwise than beneficial, that every divine should have the power of substantiating by reasonable explanations so salutary a distinction. For such explanations, derived from the stores of learning, will often, by the native evidence of truth, establish their own validity.

It is remote from the present purpose to go through the whole subject before us: and there are ample sources of information respecting those branches of learning and of science, which, being subsidiary to the elucidation of Scripture, are therefore subsidiary also to the proof of its authority. It will, however, be desirable to explain the principles, on which the utility of those studies is evinced.

LXI. Such is the universal nature of human speech, that the simplest declarations, if viewed without a careful regard to the circumstances under which they are spoken, are liable to great misconception. To frame propositions affording, by virtue of their intrin-

sic force and structure, an exact and unambiguous enunciation of truth: this is the business of logicians and of scientific men: it is adapted and needful to the purposes of science: but it is remote from the general character of language, and totally unsuited to the common purposes of social communication.

It is agreeable to this general style, that all works of ordinary literature are framed: and Scripture itself is conformable to it. "The language of holy writ," says Tertullian, "has in no case such an universal and unrestricted application, that you are entitled to insist upon the mere import of the words without regarding their aim and purpose^b." And surely this can be no rea-

^b Nulla vox divina ita dissoluta est et diffusa, ut verba tantum defendantur, et ratio verborum non *constituatur*. [*Tertull. de Præscr. Hæret.* c. 9.] He had just before remarked: All the sayings of our Lord are propounded to all men. They were first spoken to the Jews, from whom they are transmitted to us: *but very many of these sayings, having been addressed to individuals, do not impose on us any specific obligation, but only serve to illustrate the character of our religion.* Omnia quidem dicta Domini omnibus posita sunt. Per aures Judæorum ad nos transierunt; sed pleraque

in personas directa, non proprietatem admonitionis nobis constituerunt, sed exemplum.

On the same subject Athanasius expresses himself admirably. His words are to the following effect: "In every interpretation of Scripture, it is fitting and necessary that you have a regard to the occasion, the person, and the object contemplated by the writer or speaker. If the reader have not these things in view, he will wander from the true sense of the words. This was properly felt by the eunuch, when he thus questioned Philip: 'I pray thee, of whom

sonable ground of objection to the structure of scriptural language : for, as it is addressed to men, it is wisely adapted to their understandings. Whereas the other style, I mean that of logical precision, would appear strongly objectionable as a medium for communicating Divine truth. For it would, in the first place, occasion an intricacy and perplexity of periods, which common men could not understand, and which would require, even from the more intelligent, a painful degree of attention : it would have the additional disadvantage, of being utterly remote from that cast of language, which is adapted to strike and to captivate the mind : as it would also, for this reason, be discarded by all the rules of eloquence and good writing. If a conviction of this were wanting, you

“ speaketh the prophet this ?
 “ of himself, or of some other
 “ man ? ” Athanasius proceeds to illustrate the subject by further examples. To the disregard of this principle of interpretation, he ascribes the error of the Thessalonians, respecting the day of judgment ; of the Galatians, respecting circumcision ; of Hymenæus and Alexander, respecting the resurrection ; and of the Jews, respecting the Messiah. He speaks of the doctrine of Arius in particular, as being founded on that false interpretation of Scripture, which re-

gards the abstract sense of words, without adverting to the subject and circumstances to which they apply. Lastly, he lays down this general remark : “ When a man has obtained a “ due knowledge of such cir- “ cumstances, he then enjoys a “ right and salutary contempla- “ tion of the faith : but when “ he understands any of these “ scriptural passages in any “ other way, immediately he “ falls into heresy.” [See the fifty-fourth and fifty-fifth chapters of his first Oration against the Arians.]

might refer to the exemplification of such a style, as you find it adopted by the practice of all civilized nations, in legislative acts and legal instruments and covenants. Who would think such a style as this, adapted to the purposes for which Scripture was given? And, after all, it deserves our consideration, whether, by burying the sense under a heap of words, and by perplexing it with endless clauses of limitation, it would not be ineffectual to its designed use? Again, we are to consider, whether the accomplishment of this use would not, by reason of the unavoidable flux of language and progressive variation in the sense of terms, be absolutely impossible? For we must in this case regard not only him who works, but the material which he has to work upon; not only the wisdom of the one, but also the susceptibility of the other. This at least is certain: it has always been found impossible to man. It has always been found impracticable, to frame a human law with such accuracy of words, as exactly to meet every exigency for which you desire to provide. Of this fact, we find abundant testimony in the practice of litigation; in the power of pardon, which is allowed to remedy the occasional harshness of the criminal law; and in the

administration of equity, for the correction of anomalies arising out of the laws relating to property.

Agreeable then to the general principles of language and of human nature, is the construction of *Scripture* language. Many propositions relating to faith and duty are not abstract, but relative. In many cases, the proper extent and application of precepts cannot be understood, without a knowledge of the circumstances under which they were given. In many cases, where those circumstances cannot be known by us, we shall incur the risk of dangerous error, if we interpret Scripture without contemplating the possibility of those circumstances, and of *our* ignorance respecting them. This will especially be the case where one part of Scripture seems to contradict another. Respecting such cases, you cannot but admire the principle expressed by Justin Martyr to this effect: “^c If you allege one passage of Scripture which seems contrary to another, I will never admit that the Scripture contradicts itself: but I shall satisfy myself, that it is my own ignorance only, which prevents me

^c See the sixty-fifth chapter of his Dialogue with Trypho. The whole chapter may be read with advantage to the present subject.

“ from discerning the agreement of the two “ passages.”

In the common usage of mankind, propositions and general precepts are delivered without stating the exceptions belonging to them: these exceptions being not specified, because it is understood, by both the speaker and the hearer, that there *are* such exceptions. Rules of conduct and declarations of truth are therefore to be construed, not according to the principles of the dialectical art; but with a restrained application to the whole of *those* cases only, which were in the contemplation of both the speaker and those whom he addressed. In the precept, for instance, “ Thou shalt not kill ;” the cases excepted from the law would be well understood: and it was greatly desirable, in a code given for the purposes and uses of the Decalogue, to avoid prolixity.

We see, then, that the style of Scripture is in this respect similar to the common style of mankind: it does not aim at guarding its meaning by *expressing* limitations which common sense may *supply*. “ Perfect love,” says St. John, “ casteth out fear^d.” *What* fear? may we ask. “ All fear whatever,” says an expositor, “ even that of God’s judgment and fu-

^d 1 John iv. 18.

“ ture punishment.” Then how, may we ask, will this accord with the duty elsewhere strongly inculcated, of fearing God? But suppose the Apostle to have an eye, in this place, to the pains and torments attendant, in his time, on the profession of the Gospel; suppose him to have had in view the evils inflicted, not by God, but by man: then will his words exactly harmonize with those injunctions, that we should love God with all our might, our soul, and our strength, and that we should not fear him, who can do no more than kill the body. So that the fear, expelled by love, is the fear, not of God, but of man: and the love which expels it, is that, which animated the martyr to witness a good confession in the face of death^e. If this be the

^e Thus Tetrullian understands this passage in his *Scorpiacum*, chap. 12. “ John,” says he, “ exhorts us, even to lay down our lives for the brethren, telling us, that there is no fear in love; for that perfect love casteth out fear; since fear hath punishment, [πῶναμ: in the Greek of St. John *κόλασις*,] and he who feareth is not made perfect in love. What fear does he mean, except that which prompts a denial of the faith? What perfect love does he mean, except that which banishes fear and animates to martyrdom? What punishment does he mean, but that ap-

“ pointed for him who denies the faith, when he shall be destroyed, both body and soul, in hell?” I do not think there is any single writer of the early church, who ever thought of affixing to this text a different meaning. Phileas, whose words are quoted by Eusebius, [*Hist. Eccl.* lib. viii. c. 10.] thus speaks of the Alexandrine Christians under the persecution of Dioclesian: “ The martyrs who had put on Christ, earnestly desiring the more excellent graces, endured not once, but many of them also a second time, every distress and every imaginable torture: and, when the

true sense of the Apostle, consider, I pray you, how dangerous it must be to construe Scripture without a regard to the aim and circumstances of the writer? What has this passage to do with Calvinistic assurance?

There is also a doctrine of *sinless perfection*. The abettors of it would gladly fortify themselves with these words: "Who-soever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he *cannot* sin, because he is born of God." But suppose it should appear (and I think it cannot reasonably be doubted) that the Apostle, in these words, had a special regard to the foul and loathsome doctrines of the Gnostic heresy. (For this heresy had, in his time, been already vented by Simon Magus: and it is, in the way of countenance to our present supposition, fully developed in the accounts given by Irenæus, Clemens Alexandrinus, and others, of the tenets of Simon himself, of Valentinus, Basilides, and Carpocrates.) Suppose it should appear, that he expressed himself with a special view, in the choice of his terms, to the positive contradiction of that blasphemous heresy. Suppose it should ap-

" soldiers vied with one another
 " in the fury of their threats, ex-
 " pressed, not in word only, but
 " also in act, they firmly main-

" tained their purpose, because
 " *perfect love casteth out fear.*"
 ' John iii. 9.

pear, that his design was to condemn those, who claimed for their own elect, a liberty of sin and an exemption from the moral law. Suppose that his words, having this special regard, denote not any *physical inability* to sin, but a *denial of all lawful liberty* to do it. Suppose that St. John, in this place, is only declaring the total repugnancy between sin and the professions of a baptized Christian: for, if he does so, his language is no stronger than that of St. Paul^s, when he declares such *moral* repugnancy to be as strong, as the *physical* repugnancy, which exists between the state of a dead man and the acts of a living one: while the latter Apostle plainly manifests himself to instruct us, not that we *cannot* sin, but that we *ought not*. Suppose all this to be the case, and yet that a man will insist upon regarding St. John as a teacher of sinless perfection: does not this illustrate the great danger of construing words without a regard to the aim and circumstances and contemplation of the writer? Does it not display the mischief of disparaging those explanations which learning may afford?

If the principles of general speech are inattentive to the statement of limitations which

^s See the sixth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans.

common sense may *supply*: still less are they careful of guarding, by express limitations, against misconceptions which common sense would *exclude*. For example: “Flesh and blood,” says St. Paul, “cannot inherit the kingdom of God^h.” It might be thought that St. Paul, in the midst of a discourse powerful in eloquence and argument, of which it is the professed object to *prove* the resurrection of the body, would have been secured from the misinterpretation of *denying* it: yet this very text was alleged by the Manichees to that effectⁱ. In like manner, when we find our Saviour declaring, “All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers^k:” it is natural to think that the meaning is limited to some particular subject. Nevertheless, these words, without any restriction of sense, were applied by certain of the ancient heretics to Moses, and alleged to justify their rejection of the Law and the Prophets^l.

But we will avail ourselves further of examples for the illustration of this momentous subject. (Pardon me, I pray you, if I seem too didactical: many of my audience, whose benefit I am bound to consult, are only in

^h 1 Cor. xv. 50.

^k John x. 8.

ⁱ See Augustin. cont. Adimant. c. 12. and Lardner's chapter on the Manichees, sect. vi.

^l Hieronymi Comm. in Isai. lib. vi.

their progress to that maturity of learning which others enjoy.) I would refer, then, to that precept of our Saviour: "Swear not at all." The tenor of this precept, if construed by the logical rule, would be equivalent to this: All oaths whatever, on all occasions, whether solemn or trivial, and every form of words denoted by the word *oath*, are unlawful and forbidden by God. But every man who believes that Christ did no sin, may readily see that this interpretation is wrong: for Christ himself answered upon his oath before the high priest. Now the style of language may be easily explained by a reference to the usage of the Jews: namely, that of *requiring* a man to speak upon his oath, so that the person thus adjured gave his evidence, if he gave any evidence at all, under the sanction of an oath. When the matter is thus explained, it seems only natural to suppose, that our Lord limited his prohibition to such oaths as were voluntary: and that oaths connected with the administration of justice, inasmuch as they were imposed by authority, were remote from his contemplation.

This example is adduced chiefly for the purpose of reasoning upon it. Be it considered then, that the present is one of those

many cases in which Scripture provides a solution of its own difficulties. But the case might very possibly have been otherwise: few men would suppose, that the high priest's adjuration, and our Saviour's answer, were recorded for the express purpose of solving the difficulty of his precept against swearing. Suppose, then, the case of precepts and declarations, in which Scripture has afforded *no* materials for its own elucidation. Many such cases there are: what shall we say of them? That such cases should never occur, I have endeavoured to prove impossible. Suppose then again, that such difficulties, though not solvable by *Scripture* itself, are so from *other literary sources*. Who, that has a zeal for the honour of God, the salvation of souls, or his own acquittance at his awful account; would grudge the trouble of *going* to those sources, if, by thus illustrating the reasonableness and consistency of Scripture, he could aid the vision of divine glory in the manifestation which God has given of himself by his holy Word?

Now this is not mere supposition, but fact. For there are many scriptural passages of which the just comprehension is greatly facilitated, by illustration derived *extraneously* from the Scripture: that is to say, from the

general history of the world; from the profane history of periods contemporary with those of Scripture; from authors who treat of the condition of the Jews, their connection with other nations, their habits, opinions, and prejudices: nor, as to this point, will physical science and natural history be wholly barren of utility.

To instance in one striking particular. It is universally agreed, that the Epistles of St. Paul contain much obscurity: and it cannot be denied, that even the learned themselves, if they have not gone to peculiar and appropriate sources of illustration, can do little more than unlettered persons towards clearing up the obscurities of these sublime writings. Though the language be Greek, yet Greek will in such cases be of little more avail than the plain English translation. These obscurities greatly arise from the Apostle's unavoidable reference to Jewish doctrines and opinions: the passages are obscure, because the doctrines and opinions are not known: when these doctrines and opinions are known, the darkness is dispelled, and the difficulty solved.

Of such difficulties the proper elucidation is to be sought in those writings, which illustrate the characteristic doctrines of the Jews

and Judaizing Christians of the apostolic age. And, as you will find that many things are cleared up by a knowledge of the Mosaical law: so will it appear plainly that all are *not* so cleared up. For that the Jews cherished a regard for an oral, as well as for a written law, is quite undeniable: that they made this oral law paramount to the written, may seem incredible; because the written law itself does not in the slightest degree recognise the authority of the other. But it is plainly declared in the Scriptures of the New Testament that they did so; and the fact is abundantly confirmed by their own writings: which thus, at the same time, shed a ray of confirmation on the authenticity of the New Testament itself.

We see, then, that the traditional doctrines of the Jews are the only source of human information, available towards the solution of this portion of Scripture difficulties. These may be obtained, in a secondary way, from modern works: but if we will go to the most authentic sources of knowledge, this will demand an acquaintance with the Talmudical and Rabbinical writings.

LXII. I beg you to observe, respecting this subject, what is highly important, but has, I think, been little remarked. The bulk of

Jewish doctrine thus displayed to us is readily identified with that which, under the name of traditions, existed in the time of our Saviour and his Apostles. This is proved, first, by its agreement with the light which Scripture itself affords: and, secondly, by the date of the writings which contain it. For, as these traditions had previously existed only in the speech of men; so were they first put into writing, in the work called the Mishna, about 150 years from the Christian era: at a time, when the whole of our Lord's Apostles had not long been dead, and multitudes of apostolical men, their coevals and companions, were still living.

You cannot then but see, how great a power of illustration is thus thrown over the sacred pages. We meet with scriptural difficulties, arising from a reference to Jewish traditions, and to customs connected with traditions: the passages cannot be understood unless the traditions and customs are. Now such traditions and customs are fully explained by the application of Talmudical and Rabbinical learning.

Aided by these materials, the theological student will find an easy and rational method of disentangling himself from much of the mischievous confusion, which so strong-

ly characterizes the innovations of modern theology. He will thus see the falsehood and danger of confounding the notion of faith, as it stands opposed to infidelity, with that other notion in which it stands distinguished from practice: he will also see, that the *works* of which St. Paul speaks, as void of all quality acceptable to God, are so far from being the same with the good works springing from Christian faith and charity, that they are, on the contrary, entirely repugnant to and subversive of them.

I have said, that the Talmudical and Rabbinical doctrines are readily identified with the Jewish traditions of our Saviour's time: I will add, that they may with equal facility be identified with the peculiar tenets of the modern Jews. The state of the case is as follows: The Jews believe, that the Law of Moses is never to be changed, enlarged, or abrogated. By the Law of Moses, as the terms are here employed, are understood, not only the written but the traditional law. This latter, namely the traditional, is contained in the Mishna: the Mishna being explained and commented upon in the Gemara. The Mishna, or text, and the Gemara, or commentary, form the two component parts of the Talmud: and the commentary is regarded as no less au-

thentic and authoritative, for the standard and proof of Jewish doctrines, than the text. It is to be observed also, that the Jews will not allow the written law to speak any other meaning than the Talmud affixes to it: so that in fact, the Talmud, and not the Pentateuch, is the standard of Jewish faith^m.

LXIII. Now the value of these facts, in their bearing upon the evidence of Christianity, can hardly be disputed. It must make it plainly evident what book that is, whose authority restrains the Jew from the obedience of faith: that this book is not the Old Testament, but the Talmud: and that it was the same doctrine which, from the beginning of the Christian era down to this day, has excited the repugnance of the Jewish nation to the Gospel. Now if it appears that the *written* law does in no way acknowledge the authority of that which pretends to be an *oral* or *traditional* law: if it thus appears, that the Talmud has in truth no

^m With regard to the later Rabbins, whose doctrines are subsequent to the compilation of the Talmud: their use may thus be explained. Though not authoritative, like the Mishnical and Talmudical doctors, whose tenets their own writings are in a great degree intended to elucidate, they are nevertheless il-

lustrative of the subject, and the required knowledge is thus obtained in a more accessible form: just as the doctrines of the Romish church might be gathered from a popular divine of that church, in addition to other more authentic and authorized expositions of it.

legitimate authority whatever: how groundless must be that rejection of the Gospel which thus leans upon human traditions! upon traditions so far remote from any agreement with the genuine word, that they do, as was truly said of them, make the word of God of none effect.

Consider the matter in another point of view. We know the writings of the prophets. If a man should profess to discover in these writings the characters of divinity, he may well, as I have already endeavoured to evince, vindicate his judgment from the imputation of any wild and distempered influence on the mind. And thus much every reasonable man must confess: that the nation, governed by this code, must, as a wise and understanding people, have surpassed all their Gentile contemporaries, as far as sublime and salutary theology surpasses superstitious, cruel, and lewd debasement. Look now then to the change, and inquire the cause. Examine the Talmud, and go through the cabalistical learning of the Jews. There do you find a style of writing, different from every thing else which occurs in the whole range of human literature: a style characterized, as to its *manner*, by the utmost gravity of authoritative wisdom, but little superior, in point of *matter*,

to the incoherent and idiotical discourse of a drunken man: a style well accordant with the condition of a people, whose understandings are judicially cursed and blasted by the Almighty, who have tasted the cup of his wrath, and swallowed it to the very dregs"!

This will appear to you the more considerable when, on viewing the general character of Rabbinical literature, you find, that the marks of mental degradation are more than usually conspicuous in their *theological* disquisitions. For there may among the Rabbins be named some, who, on general subjects, might be allowed to hold a respectable rank as philosophers and literary men. But whenever they handle theology, their peculiar cast of intellect almost invariably discovers itself: here nothing is to be seen but the impotence of the withered arm. May God hasten the day when that arm shall be restored and made whole!

LXIV. It remains that I should speak of the *doctrines* of the Scriptures: for the Gospel is to be judged of as it *is*, and not as ignorance or corruption may have *represented* it. I am, then, to shew the advantage of learn-

ⁿ Athanasius thus reflects on the penalty incurred by the Jews. Εχουσι της αρνησεως τα επι-

κειρα της επιτιμιας: απωλεσαν γαρ συν τη ΠΟΛΕΙ και τον ΛΟΓΙΣΜΟΝ. 2 Orat. cont. Arian. c. 42.

ing towards ascertaining the true doctrines of the Gospel. This advantage will be viewed independently of that which arises from the simple interpretation of words. For the words of one language may be rendered by equivalent terms of another, and still there will remain, grounds of dispute respecting the doctrines they express.

The branch of learning to which, for this purpose, I shall chiefly refer, is that which embraces the history of the Christian church, and the study of ecclesiastical writers; especially of those who lived nearest to the first beginning of the church. I say, then, that this study is eminently useful towards enabling the mind to discriminate between the real doctrines, and the corruptions, of Christianity.

Advert, then, to the many varieties of doctrine which have marked the different eras of Christian history. Many of these you will find to have been unknown for many centuries after the first erection of the church: that is to say, you will find the strongest moral evidence that they were so. In the midst of copious remains of the Christian literature of preceding ages, you will find not a single vestige of them. What shall we say then? Shall we think that such doctrines are

really contained in the Scriptures, and yet were never during all this lapse of time, deduced from them? Shall we suppose, that the Scriptures were given under the disadvantage, of so great an inaptitude for the developement of their own meaning? Or, if they do labour under such an inaptitude, shall we suppose that the lapse of many centuries would confer fresh means of elucidation? that time would sharpen the sagacity of Christians? that it would place the later generations on a better footing than their predecessors? than those who lived nearer the date at which the Scripture was written? than those who lived immediately after the Apostles? than those who conversed with the Apostles themselves? View it as you like, most men will agree in this: If a doctrine was never known in the catholic church for a thousand years after the Gospel was published, such doctrine cannot be contained in the Gospel. This very principle will at once clear away from Christianity a vast number of supposititious doctrines: doctrines which have been topics of accusation with the infidel, and occasions of falling to the believer; which have occasioned many to be shocked at the religion which was thought to contain them; but for which, in truth, the Gospel is

no more answerable, than it is for the polygamy of Mahomet or the transmigration of Pythagoras.

But if we were even to wave the question relating to the *truth* of such doctrines, still it must appear, that they cannot be very *important*. For what can we think of all the Christians, whose day was anterior to the introduction of them? Shall we think, that the primitive martyrs; men who, according to the word of Christ, have obtained the crown of their calling by suffering for the testimony of Jesus: shall we think that these men perished for an ignorance of doctrines never known till centuries after they were deadⁿ?

ⁿ Tertullian strongly insists upon this argument against heresy. In his treatise *De Præscriptione Hereticorum* [chap. 29 and 30.] he argues to this effect: "Did error reign till heresy arose? Did truth remain enthralled till Marcion and Valentinus sprung up for its deliverance? And was it, in the meantime, a wrong Gospel, which was preached and believed; of which the sacred offices were administered; which was supported by extraordinary gifts of God; and attested by martyrs? Where were the doctrines of Marcion and Valentinus before the reign of Antoninus?" In his book against Praxeas

[chap. 2.] he expresses himself in a similar style: "This rule," says he, "has been handed down to us from the very beginning of the Gospel; it is anterior in date to the earlier heretics, and much more so to Praxeas, a man of yesterday: this will appear from the comparatively late origin of the other heresies, and particularly from the upstart appearance of the Patripassian doctrine. By which principle we are in like manner justified in condemning all heresies whatever: that doctrine must be true which was the most ancient, and that must be adulterate which is of late introduction."

Yet, to all who have studied the history of theology, these facts will be certain: first, that many tenets, which have been insisted upon as scriptural truths, were wholly unknown to the church till many ages after the scripture was given; secondly, that these tenets have, by the maintainers of them, been invested with such an importance, as if the salvation or perdition of men depended upon them. I wish it were not too true, that they have on many occasions been connected with such strong expressions of rancour and hatred towards those who reject them, as even wilful heresy itself will not justify in the sentiments of man towards man: what shame, then, and remorse, ought it not to excite, when it is considered, that such venomous effusions have been directed, against what? Not against wilful error; not against error of any kind; but against a resistance to the corruptions and innovations of men. For such, if you admit the principle by which I propose to try them, must be the true character of these tenets.

LXV. It deserves also to be noticed, that the *occasions* and *causes* which have originated certain theological dogmas, will frequently, when historically and chronologically viewed, display their erroneous quality.

But I will proceed to illustrate this matter by examples.

In what then originated the denial of the cup to the laity? or the choice of a wafer for the symbol of Christ's body? These peculiarities of the Roman church took their rise as consequences flowing from the doctrine of transubstantiation. For when it was once believed, that the matter of the eucharist had become substantially the flesh and blood of Christ: it was thought irreverent to suffer the profanation, of allowing the crumbs accidentally to fall on the ground, or the fluid to be defiled by any accidental foulness, proceeding from the bodily infirmity of the communicants.

If, then, the denial of the cup be founded on the doctrine of transubstantiation, on what basis does that foundation itself stand? Surely, that can hardly be thought a genuine doctrine of the Scriptures, which was never esteemed such for a thousand years after the Scriptures had been given. What then is the first authority for an article of faith, thus late emerging into the acknowledgment of the church? No other than that of an audacious and arrogant pontiff, dictating, in the thirteenth century, his own decisions, and proclaiming those decisions to the world un-

der the name and sanction of a general council°!

The supremacy and infallibility of the bishop of Rome involve principles, which, if founded in truth, are strong enough to support any doctrine, however detestable, to which they may be applied. Now when did *these* doctrines originate? Were they known to the first three centuries? Were they known to the Nicene Fathers? Were they known to those primitive saints, those apostolical men, those martyrs and confessors of the rising church, to whom the church of Rome even now ascribes the fulness of joy in the beatific vision of God? The farthest from it possible! The fifth century may perhaps be thought, by portentous symptoms, to indicate the subsequent parturition of these monsters. But the small beginnings of papal supremacy are little earlier than the seventh century: the first slight pretensions to this elevation were advanced by a bishop, not of Rome, but of

° The ninth century may be thought to discover some approach to transubstantiation: but here it presents itself to us as a strange and novel doctrine. In the tenth century we find this doctrine stillly maintained by RATHERIUS bishop of Verona. But it never was acknowledged as an article of faith, nor was the word *transubstantiation* known,

till the fourth Lateran council, held in 1215 by pope INNOCENT the Third: who himself drew up certain ecclesiastical canons, including that relating to transubstantiation, and presented those canons to the Lateran fathers: who never debated the subjects thus propounded, but whose silence was construed as an approbation of the canons.

Constantinople: and these pretensions were, on that occasion, denounced by a bishop of Rome, as being *antichristian, blasphemous, infernal, and diabolical*^p.

Again, ecclesiastical history serves to substantiate the characters of falsehood, by a regard, not only to the introduction, but to the progress, of heterodox opinions. This point may be illustrated by a reference to the doctrine of Arius.

The first principle of this doctrine presented itself in the supposition, “that there “was a time when the blessed Son of God “did not exist.”

Now it has truly been remarked, “that the “consequences of an opinion may be so bad, “that this may be a good reason to reject it “without any further consideration^q.” Let us look then to the consequences, which spring from this fundamental principle of the Arian creed. These are truly described by Athanasius to be such; so full of manifest and self-convicted blasphemy; that a Christian is naturally prompted by horror to close his ears when they are pronounced^r. For thus it is

^p See the Life of Gregory the Great in Bower's History of the Popes; and also the epistles of Gregory, relating to this matter, which are there referred to.

^q Clagett. See the thirteenth chapter of Stebbing's Treatise on the Operations of the Holy Spirit.

^r Athan. Orat. I. cont. Arian. c. 35.

argued, that as the Son of God is a creature, so is he, like other rational creatures, corruptible, peccable, and liable to extinction.

When we hear such propositions, can we believe that principle to be true, of which the consequences, to every unsophisticated believer of Scripture, will appear so false and so horridly blasphemous? If the leading principle of Arianism be admitted, it is not easy to see how its consequences are to be resisted. And we are to remember, that we are not now drawing consequences from the positions of our adversaries, which those adversaries would gladly deny: but viewing the subject historically, we find, that the consequences thus springing from their cardinal tenet, are consequences of their own deducing, which they avowed, and in which they gloried.

The great Athanasius frequently reproaches the Arians with the novelty of their doctrine, as an indication of its falsehood^r. And has this doctrine no origin more ancient than the time of Arius? Yes truly: it is found very near the beginning of Christianity. But where? Among the vile brood of Simon Magus, the loathsome Gnostics, in connection

^r See particularly the thirty-fourth and fortieth chapters of his second Oration against the Arians.

with every kind of disgusting folly, wickedness, blasphemy, impurity, and hypocrisy^s. And now, will it not be admitted, that this historical regard to any particular doctrine, and to the forms and circumstances under which it has appeared in the world, must in some degree contribute to illustrate the value of its pretensions?

Guided by the same chronological regard, what can we think of various other dogmas, which have at times been magnified by the abettors of them, almost as if they comprised the very essence of Christianity? In what light, for instance, can we regard the absolute decrees of Calvin, which were never known in the church before the time of Augustine^t? What can we think of the modern

^s Athanasius (in his second Oration against the Arians, chapter 21.) speaks of the Arians holding a similarity of tenets with Valentinus, Marcion, and Basilides. Abundant evidence of this point will be found in the first chapter of the third section of Bull's Def. Fid. Nic.

^t It is very amusing to see Mons. Daillé enumerate, among those undeniable errors which ought to destroy the credit of the ancient Fathers, the fact of their having known nothing of *absolute predestination*. [See his Right Use of the Fathers,

book ii. chap. 4. last paragraph.] Would it not be more natural to infer from this fact, that the doctrine of absolute predestination does not express the true sense of Scripture? For these Fathers, some of them contemporaries of the Apostles, must have been more likely to understand those Apostles, than Calvin or even Augustine. This doctrine was one of the topics of accusation brought by Celsus against Christianity; and Origen, in his Reply to Celsus, declines to notice the charge, otherwise than by speaking of the doctrine as one palpably

notion of regeneration, lately the subject of hot and uncharitable controversy, but never recognised among the tenets of any Christian community, earlier than the sixteenth century? Were the Scriptures, during all the anterior centuries, so deplorably defective in the explication of their meaning; were the whole of God's elect people so blind to the true discernment of their faith: till the great men arose, who first propagated these novelties? On the same principle, in what light can you regard the attempt to place upon one common footing, the doctrine of the blessed Trinity and that of transubstantiation? when you find, with regard to the former, the sense of Scripture attested by primitive doctors and apostolical men; by an unbroken succession, and an overwhelming multitude, of catholic writers and churches: while the latter presents itself to you as the fruit of papal excogitation in the thirteenth century. What can you think of those distinctive peculiarities of the Calvinistic theology, which were never known to primitive Christianity, except among the tenets of heresy? and of which the modern enunciation

heretical, maintained by the Valentinians, but disowned and condemned by catholic Chris-

tians. [*Orig. cont. Cels.* lib. v. p. 271. Cantab. 1677.]

bears so close a resemblance to the recorded doctrines of Gnosticism, that they seem to have been almost copied from the accounts of those doctrines, transmitted to us by the ancient Fathers?"

Such are the benefits derivable from the study of Christian history and antiquity, and especially of the ancient Fathers of the church. Of these latter, the value and the proper application have been much disputed: but if you would fix the very lowest estimate of them, you can hardly dispute that measure of utility, which has been assigned to them by a writer, little disposed to amplify their merit; and which, if admitted, will fully entitle them to be regarded as proper objects of diligent and industrious attention. "The authority of the Fathers," says Daillé, "is of very great use to the church, and serveth as an outwork to the Scriptures, for the repelling the presumption of those, who would forge a new faith^x." To the same effect,

^u The general subject of this paragraph is well illustrated in a tract by the great Mr. Leslie, entitled, "A Dissertation concerning the Use and Authority of Ecclesiastical History. In a Letter to Mr. Samuel Parker, on his Abridgment of Eusebius." It is contained in the first volume of the folio edi-

tion of his works.

^x See the last chapter of his work, page 190. ed. 1675. He had just previously expressed himself, most admirably, in the words which follow, and which I am sorry to have been precluded, by my prescribed limits, from inserting into the body of my Lecture. "There sometimes

the just and rational observation of archbishop Potter, may properly be applied to illustrate the great benefit which, even on the most restricted admission of its usefulness, this department of study is calculated to afford. “A great difference,” says that prelate, “must be made between the *reasonings* “ of the ancient Fathers and their *testimony*. “ In the former, we have full liberty, upon a “ candid and impartial examination, to follow “ their conclusions or to reject them, as we “ find them well or ill grounded. But in “ the latter, since we look on them as men of “ probity, and such as would not willingly “ deceive us, we cannot deny them our as- “ sent, when they relate things done in their

“ arise such troublesome spirits, “ as will need broach doctrines, “ devised of their own head, “ which are not at all grounded “ on any principle of the Chris- “ tian religion. I say, therefore, “ that the authority of the an- “ cients may very properly and “ seasonably be made use of, “ against the impudence of these “ men: *by shewing, that the “ Fathers were utterly ignorant “ of any such fancies, as these “ men propose to the world.* “ And if this can be proved, “ we ought then certainly to “ conclude, *that no such doc- “ trine was ever preached to “ mankind, either by our Sa- “ viour Christ, or by his Apo-*

“ *stles.* For what probability is “ there, that those holy doctors “ of former ages, from whose “ hands Christianity hath been “ derived down to us, should “ be ignorant of any of those “ things, which had been re- “ vealed and recommended by “ our Saviour as important and “ necessary to salvation?—*That “ they should all of them have “ been ignorant of any article, “ that is necessarily requisite to “ salvation, is altogether impos- “ sible.* For, after this account, “ they must all have been de- “ prived of salvation: which, I “ suppose, every honest soul “ would tremble at the thought “ of.”

“ own times, or in the times of those with whom they conversed. They who refuse to allow them this authority, may, with the same reason, reject all history whatever.”

It is obviously impossible that I should, at this time, enlarge upon the general use of the study of the Fathers. But I may briefly remark, that it aids the evidence of the Gospel, in the same degree as it furthers the right comprehension of words and doctrines. For the evidence of Christianity properly applies to its true doctrines, not to any scheme of doctrine which may at any time have been passed off to the world under the name of it: the doctrine being the very essence, of the subject to which the *external* evidence applies, and of the materials from which the *internal* evidence is derived: nor can any form of proofs be properly applied to Christianity, which does not regard a pure estimate of its theology and precepts. The internal evidence of the Gospel is also aided, by a kind of strong representations, abounding in the Fathers, but not found in the writings of later divines: for the lustre of truth is more discernible by contrast: and the impressions made upon *their* minds by

^y Discourse on Church Government, in the second volume of his works, [*Oxford*, 1753.] pp. 158, 159.

the comparison between Christianity and paganism, were naturally more vivid, at a time when paganism was flourishing, than they can be to us, after its extinction. Yet these representations may well be serviceable to the cause of the Gospel: for the colours thus obtained towards painting the state of man, when separated from revelation, will readily, by their proper force, discover themselves to be those of reality and nature. And though the early Fathers may be little valued as critical expositors of the sacred text: yet their indirect contributions to its elucidation are of no mean value: since they traditionally discover to us the sense in which it was understood at a time, which, being little remote from that of the writers, and even in some cases coetaneous with it, affords little probability of the true meaning having been forgotten.

Every code must be best understood by the men nearest to the date of its promulgation, and best illustrated by the practice immediately subsequent. A law enacted at this day, must be more intelligible now than it can be eighteen centuries hence. Should the interpretation of that law be questioned at that remote period: what better materials of elucidation could be provided, than a know-

ledge of the practices and opinions immediately consequent upon the passing of it? Should any man say, that such a law might be better understood on an abstract construction of its words, than it would under the advantage of historical light, thus thrown upon it: would that man be deemed a wise expositor of law? Little better than this is that theology, which, dismissing all regard to the primitive Christians, to their manners, their practices, and their construction of the Divine oracles; professes to regard our vernacular translation of the Bible as a book, to which no stores of extraneous elucidation can profitably be applied.

But if you admit the principle of discarding learning from the support of religion, to what will it lead? Can a greater absurdity be imagined? For, at this rate, the teacher of religion can neither enjoy the benefit of a translation of the Scriptures, nor any knowledge of the original tongues: such assistance and knowledge being plainly a part of the advantages of learning. Then again: if learning be at all admitted, what *kind* of it is most available? This ought to be particularly weighed by those, who, while they disparage the ancient Fathers, entertain no such con-

tempt for recent theological systems and expositions. If Greek and Hebrew may be studied for the construction of the text: why may not history be applied to a discovery of its meaning, and to the explanation of the subjects to which it relates? Were not Polycarp and Irenæus more likely to understand St. John, and Clemens Romanus to understand St. Paul; than any Lutheran or Calvinistic divines? whose writings, nevertheless, are highly appreciated by many, who express great contempt for the study of the Fathers.

LXVI. But to what use is all this subservient? Is it intended that a pastor, in his discourses to unlettered people, should allege as proper topics of popular evidence, the authority of Fathers and of councils? Far from it! His arguments must proceed upon data known in common to his hearers and himself. But it does not therefore follow, that the reproach of total uselessness is to be affixed to every branch of knowledge, which is unfitted to the purpose of vain and unedifying display. He is to appeal to reason, and his approaches to it will be the more successful, in proportion to the enlargement of his own knowledge and the improvement of his

own mind. The more he is master of his subject, the better must he be qualified for teaching it. His facilities towards a true understanding of Scripture, must be facilities towards a true representation of it: and the more true the representation, the more the work of reason must be assisted in tracing upon it the characters of Divinity. An ordinary man may judge of such representations, though he might be quite incompetent to set them forth: as he might know the genuine quality of any material substance, though he had not dived into the abyss, or traversed the desert, in order to obtain it.

This also will greatly aid the purpose of consistency in our expositions of Scripture. I need not again dwell upon the force of argument arising, from the wonderful harmony, far beyond all power of human production, which characterizes the written dispensations of God. But it will be worth while to consider, in what way learning may be made conducive to this important benefit.

Suppose, then, for example, it be the object of a divine to shew, that Calvinistic predestination is not the doctrine of Scripture. I have already dwelt on those historical facts, which plainly evince, that Scripture was never, for ages after it was in the possession of the

Christian world, understood to express that doctrine. To insist on such facts for the conviction of *common minds*, might be objected to, as inconsistent with the great principle which I have throughout maintained: but it will nevertheless be a considerable advantage, if the teacher of religion shall, by such historical elucidation, be able to convince *himself*. For he will thus be spared the mischievous industry, of perverting the whole volume of Scripture, so as to make it harmonize, not with St. Paul, but with that which he ignorantly thinks St. Paul to mean. This surely must yield much support to the internal evidence. For, when the whole form is distorted and discoloured, who can descry the lineaments, and proportions, and complexion, which indicate a Divine hand? A man, thus instructed, will be the more inclined to lay to the account of his own ignorance, many obscurities and seeming contradictions of Scripture: he will gather the tenor of the Divine will, relating to any particular point, from those declarations of it which are least obscure and most numerous: and will avoid that pestilent interpretation, which proceeds, from an ignorant dogmatism respecting the sense of obscurities, to force the accommodation of plain and simple de-

clarations to an unnatural harmony with its own conceits^z.

On the whole, then, the general subserviency of learning to the evidence of religion stands thus. It is not that men are to be called upon, to believe facts on the simple credit of those who declare them: but it is, that the advocates of religion, in proportion to the extent of their own knowledge and observation, will be better enabled to place their arguments and representations in the light of nature and of truth. They will demand no submission except to reason: but they will thus better understand the methods by which reason may be successfully appealed to: they will be enabled to treat their subject with those advantages, which, in order to a sound determination, reason would desire.

Every branch of learning and science which aids the comprehension of scriptural language and doctrine, carries with it a corresponding measure of support to the evidence of truth. I might substantiate this point, by going

^z Similar to this was Cicero's reproof of some ancient philosophers: Vos autem cum perspicuis dubia debeatis illustrare, dubiis perspicua conamini tollere. [*De Fin.* iv. 24.] Irenæus supplies the true principle relating to this matter: Omnis quæstio non per aliud quod quæ-

ritur habebit resolutionem, nec ambiguitas per aliam ambiguitatem solvetur, apud eos qui sensum habent, aut ænigmata per aliud majus ænigmata: sed ea quæ sunt talia, ex manifestis, et consonantibus, et claris, accipiunt absolutiones. [*Adv. Hær.* ii. 10. ed. Grabe.]

through the various subjects, of ancient versions; of various readings; of the Hebrew and other oriental languages; of Greek and Roman learning; of pagan mythology; and of a vast multitude of other studies. For what department of human knowledge does not thus supply contributions to theology? But it must suffice to lay open to view those spacious and fruitful fields, which there is not now time to explore. There is however one branch of science, respecting which I am tempted to offer a brief remark.

Clement of Alexandria^a has asserted the usefulness of logic as a protection against the attacks and deceits of heresy: and surely, a very slender acquaintance with theological controversy, and with the proper application of the dialectical art, will suffice to verify this estimate. Reflect on the false and pestilent doctrines which have been paralogistically deduced from the ambiguity of words: such

^a Ἡ διαλεκτικὴ [συνεργεῖ] πρὸς τὸ μὴ ὑποπιπτεῖν ταῖς κατατρεχούσαις αἵρεσεσι. The words following are not unsuitable to the subject I am upon: Ἀποτελεῖς μὲν οὖν καὶ ἀπροσδεῆς ἢ κατὰ τὸν Σωτῆρα διδασκαλία, δύναμις οὐσα καὶ σοφία τοῦ Θεοῦ· προσῆνσα δὲ φιλοσοφία ἢ Ἑλληνικὴ, οὐ δυνατωτέραν ποιεῖ τὴν ἀληθειαν, ἀλλ' ἀδύνατον παρεχούσα τὴν κατ' αὐτῆς σοφιστικὴν ἐπιχειρήσιν, καὶ διακρο-

μην τὰς δόξας κατὰ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐπιβουλὰς, φραγμὸς οἰκείος εἰρηταὶ καὶ θρηγκὸς τοῦ ἀμπελωνοῦ. [Strom. lib. i. c. 20.] The same author has this striking remark: Though the Greek philosophy were useless, it is by no means useless that you should be authorized to pronounce it such: Εἰ καὶ ἀχρηστος εἴη φιλοσοφία, εἰ ευχρηστος ἢ τῆς ἀχρηστίας βεβαιώσις, ευχρηστος. [Ibid. c. 2.]

words for example as *faith, works, good works, free grace, regeneration, church, law, gospel, priest*. But there is none of these more remarkable than the word *catholic*, when you regard it as a distinctive appellation, given to the schismatical adherents of an Italian bishop. The very misapplication of the term itself is pregnant with concessions, than which the Romanist himself could not demand any, more favourable to his cause. For it implies a confession of heresy, or at least of schism, on the part of those who thus designate their adversaries: it implies also a confession of falsehood in the doctrine which themselves profess, and a confession of being themselves excluded from the pale of the evangelical covenant^b. Such remarks are indeed com-

^b This is not intended to countenance the introduction into controversy of angry and reproachful terms. If the term *papist* be offensive, it may well be abandoned: but it cannot in candour be expected by any religious party, that they should be designated by their adversaries in a way that implies, on the part of those adversaries, a confession of wilful error as to points in dispute. The term *Romanist*, or *member of the Roman church*, being inoffensive, might properly be employed to supersede the wrong use of the term here objected to. "Every party," says Dr. Wall, "while

" the matter continues in dispute, ought to give and take such names as cast no reproach on themselves or their opponents, but such as each of them own." [See the History of Infant Baptism, part ii. c. 5.] This sensible remark relates to the question of infant baptism. Those who deny its validity are not to be called *anabaptists*, because they disown the practice of twice baptizing: they are not to be called *baptists*, because that name casts a reproach upon those who differ from them, and implies that the latter do not baptize at all. The proper term is *antipædobaptists*. Surely those

monly represented as involving nothing more, than a contention about words. But the same censure might with equal truth be applied, if you were to complain of transposing all the names of the different articles contained in a medical dispensary: this truly would be nothing else than a contention about words. And such a transposition, however mischievous, would be far less so, than the misapplication of theological terms has been. What, for instance, can be more dangerous, than teaching a man to speak of himself, as if he were *not* a catholic? If he understands the term and the doctrine which he professes to believe: he must know that, if he is not a catholic, he cannot be safe as to the point, in which it most of all concerns him to be so. Again, I might advert to the many dangerous fallacies which have been constructed on the principle, of deducing universal principles from scriptural passages of particular and circumstantial regard: a principle which, if it be allowed, will give the fullest establishment and countenance to every possible variety of false doctrine, heresy, and schism. The art which confers facility and skill in the detec-

who call themselves *evangelicals*, ought to be contented with the term *Calvinist* or *Wesleyan*: whether they *are*, or *are not*,

evangelical, is the very question at issue between them and their opponents.

tion of such sophisms, must be useful to every man, who would repel error and propagate truth: and especially ought it to be valued by him, whose voluntary obligation obliges him “to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrines, contrary to God’s word^c.”

I will only, in conclusion, briefly notice a possible objection to what has now been said. Are these extensive acquirements, it may be asked, needful to every pastor? By no means: but any degree of progress in them will manifestly be useful towards enabling a man the better to discern, in the faith which he teaches, those characters of truth which he is bound to display; towards enabling him, by methods of address suitable to reasonable beings, to clear obscurities, to solve difficulties, and to silence misrepresentations: and the measure of benefit will be proportioned to the proficiency. But perhaps it will appear, that in this case, as in regard to many of the best objects of human enterprise, the difficulty of the task is much exaggerated; and perhaps also, the true amount of it might be greatly reduced, by judicious efforts to simplify the study of theology, and by abridging the time commonly devoted to preparatory learning.

^c Office for the Ordering of Priests.

At all events, I am most anxious to resist the conclusion, which, from the simplicity of the Christian scheme, and from its native power of conviction, would deduce an apology for ignorance and a vindication of sloth. I would also strongly condemn the notion, that because the bulk of mankind cannot acquire extensive learning, therefore their pastors are exonerated from it: and I would equally reprobate that pretension to superior veneration for the Oracles of God, which would establish itself on the neglect and disparagement of knowledge, useful and subservient to the right understanding of them.

LECTURE VIII.

ON THE THINGS REQUIRED IN ORDER TO QUALIFY
MEN FOR THE BENEFIT OF GOD'S PROMISE RE-
SPECTING THE MANIFESTATION OF HIS TRUTH.

ΕΥΧΟΥ ΣΟΙ ΠΡΟ ΠΑΝΤΩΝ ΦΩΤΟΣ ΑΝΟΙΧΘΗΝΑΙ ΠΥΛΑΣ· ΟΥ
ΓΑΡ ΣΥΝΟΠΤΑ ΟΥΔΕ ΣΥΝΝΟΗΤΑ ΠΑΣΙΝ ΕΣΤΙΝ, ΕΙ ΜΗ ΤΩΙ
ΘΕΟΣ ΔΩΙ ΣΥΝΙΕΝΑΙ ΚΑΙ 'Ο ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΥΤΟΥ. Apud Just. Mart.
in Dial. cum Tryph. Jud. c. 7.

JOHN vii. 17.

*If any man will do his will, he shall know of the
doctrine, whether it be of God.*

LXVII. **T**HE promises of God, relating to
the manifestation of Divine truth, are quite
impartial: and the light of the Gospel, like
that of the heavens, is as much designed for
the peasant as for the philosopher.

Of proofs evincing the truth of Christiani-
ty, the most popular are the most conclusive:
while others, of a more recondite nature, are
proportionately embarrassed. Thus, the poor
man's grounds of faith are the most impreg-
nable: and it is chiefly upon these that the
learned, in common with the ignorant, must
establish their hopes.

But these promises are not unconditional: and therefore, in order to the benefit which they offer, it is greatly important to review the terms which they impose.

These are various. But they are summed up in one comprehensive stipulation: namely, that we should in all things submit our own will to the will of God. A man thus purposed shall be enlightened from above: he shall thus be enabled to discern the evidence of things not seen, and to grasp the substance of things hoped for. But we are to remember, that this purpose must be without reserve: the surrender must be total. There must be an entire suppression of every imperious lust, of every unholy appetite, of every desire that rebels against God. There must be no compromise with evil habits, however inveterate: no declining of duties, however arduous; nor of any privations or sufferings which duty may enjoin. Less than this will not satisfy the condition, on which God has promised to manifest himself to the soul. The terms may be thought hard: and it is foreign to my present purpose to vindicate their merciful character. But, in order to obviate the offence of the cross, I will just remark, that the rigour of them is such, only to our inconsiderate regard: that they do, in truth, involve

the great secret of happiness: that they forbid no pleasure that is innocent: that they forbid nothing, but occasions of grief and punishment: that they require us to embrace the least possible measure of evil that human life will admit, and the largest possible measure of good which God's paternal love can bestow: that they call upon us to exchange folly for wisdom, and danger for safety: that they bestow an unconquered freedom, and place the world, with all its powers of inquietude, under our feet: and that every plan of happiness which excludes them, is nothing better than a desperate contradiction of reason and of God.

This condition applies to every man on the supposition, of the Gospel being now for the first time propounded to him. But the same condition applies also to his continuance in the faith. He may be to-day a believer, and to-morrow an infidel: for the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him: and a blind understanding is the penalty of a sinful heart. Natural genius and sagacity, however useful in other matters, will not avail here: the light of our understanding is the gift of God: and the dispensation of this gift, though not arbitrary, is however conditional: though it

has no respect for persons, it has for their qualities.

LXVIII. Subordinate to this one general condition, which reaches to all the acts, the thoughts, and sentiments of man: there are various particulars which require to be distinctly noted.

Be it considered then, that Christ has constituted a Church; and that all his evangelical mercies are stipulated only to the members of it. He has likewise instituted a ministerial order: and it is, by his appointment, to the members of that order, and to them only, that belongs the power, of admitting into his church, and of transacting, on behalf of God, the covenant between God and man. He has also appointed sacramental ordinances, to be the outward means of solemnizing his covenant, and of admitting men to his evangelical mercies.

Respecting the ministerial order thus appointed, we are to notice the words, in which their commission is declared and their functions are defined.

“As my Father,” says our blessed Lord, “hath sent me, even so send I you.”

Again: “Whose soever sins ye remit, they

^a John xx. 21.

“ are remitted unto them : whose soever sins
 “ ye retain, they are retained^b.”

Again: “ He that receiveth whomsoever I
 “ send receiveth me ; and he that receiveth
 “ me receiveth him that sent me^c.”

Again: “ All power is given unto me in
 “ heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and
 “ disciple all nations, baptizing them in the
 “ name of the Father, and of the Son, and of
 “ the Holy Ghost : teaching them to observe
 “ all things whatsoever I have commanded
 “ you : and, lo, I am with you alway, even
 “ unto the end of the world^d.”

It appears then, that Christ transmitted to this ministerial order, the power, which had been given to himself by God the Father : that the covenanted mercies of the Gospel are afforded only in connexion with their ministry : that this ministerial order must be lawfully appointed : and that none can be lawfully admitted into it, but those, whose authority, by legitimate succession, is derived from them to whom Christ first gave it. For they whom Christ sent, must have had the power of sending others : otherwise, we cannot imagine how it can be said, that he transmitted to them the power which himself exercised. We are also to consider, that their

^b John xx. 23.

^c John xiii. 20.

^d Matt. xxviii. 18—20.

appointed work was not to terminate with their own lives: nor was it to be carried on by persons unauthorized.

It must also appear, that the legitimate powers of this ministerial order carry with them an obligation upon the consciences of all men. A resistance therefore to this power, when lawfully exercised, annuls all title to the mercies of the covenant: of which mercies, the grace of faith is one. In fact, the resistance of that power can be justified only by the unlawful exercise of it: and a case of such exercise, if it occur, must, in the present world, be decided on by every man's conscience; and must await the final judgment of him, who will weigh all things in a just and impartial balance.

With respect to the two sacraments; these are not to be regarded as matters of optional compliance. Of both, the necessity is plainly declared: of the one, to be received once for admission to the covenant; of the other, to be repeated often for the renewal of it. How often this repetition should be; is no matter for extended consideration at this time. It is a question, indeed, rather for those who are to administer, than for those who are to receive. For the lawful call and injunction of a lawful pastor is at all times binding: it

cannot be disobeyed without resisting an authority constituted by God. He who, by disobeying, even in one instance, the call to the holy table, resists such authority, has plainly broken the conditions of God's promise: for he refuseth to hear him whom Christ hath sent in his own name. Nor will the customary excuses avail. For the act itself, being a transgression, involves an equitable forfeiture of covenanted privileges: and the unfitness which is alleged, discovers a confessed infringement of the very terms, on which God has promised to manifest his truth. The man who pleads that unfitness, declares himself to be one, excluded by his own act, from the proper intention and application of the divine promise.

LXIX. Let us now review the proper qualifications for the benefit of that promise.

It is required then, that there be an entire readiness, in all things to fulfil the law of God: that there be a total surrender of the human to the Divine will: that every unholy lust be subdued by habitual discipline: that no painful or arduous duty be declined: that no evil propensities, nor wanton imaginations, be indulged: that the heart be pure, as well as the life innocent: that the affections, as well as the outward demeanour, be swayed by

an entire prevalence of obedience and charity. It is required, that this be the habitual tenor of life: and that every occasional lapse of frailty be followed, on the return of reason, by a speedy recovery of the fall, and a remembrance of the first works. It is required, that there be an intense regard for heavenly and spiritual things, and a corresponding disesteem of all that is worldly and carnal. It is required that there be a fervent love, and an unwearied study, of the Divine word. It is required, that there be a constant observance of all sacramental ordinances and means of grace. Lastly, it is required, that the love of divine truth should outweigh every secular aim, and that the desire of an eternal inheritance should far surpass all the cares of this mortal life.

Suppose then the case of a man, whose life and temper are of this complexion: was it ever known that such a man should say, that he had not been able to attain, or to keep alive, a reasonable conviction of the truth of Christianity? No: that man was never known. You are at the same time to observe, that if his moral standard fall below this description, the gospel does not profess to yield him the grounds of conviction: nor, on a view of human nature itself, is it reasonable to expect,

that his understanding will acquiesce in truths, to which his heart is repugnant. You cannot, in this case, impeach the promise of God: for that promise is only to the obedient. Nor can you throw a doubt over his mercy: for the convictions of faith would be plainly unprofitable to the man, who will not be reformed.

LXX. I have contended, that the evidence of the gospel does not demand any advantages, which the state of human life will not allow. This, however, does not require us to abandon any of those provisions, which are essential to Christianity itself. There is one of these which calls for further remark. I refer to the subject of an authorized ministry.

It is of the utmost necessity that this matter, as a point of Christian instruction, should be fully explained, and prominently enforced. The pretensions of an authorized ministry must be fixed and ascertained. For it is to the acts of *such* a ministry, and not to those of any who may think proper to assume their functions; that the sanctifying and illuminating graces of preaching and of sacraments are annexed.

Now it is to be observed, that the authority of the ministerial order is a matter of easy proof, and of clear explication.

Here I would have it understood, that in speaking of the ministerial order, I do it with a chief and primary regard to the order of bishops, as to those, in whom only the plenary power of the ministerial order dwells: while men of inferior rank in the ministry are to be regarded, only as persons deputed and delegated, with restricted powers, to fulfil their appointed portion of the proper functions of the episcopate. So it is truly stated by archbishop Potter. "The plenitude of power," says that prelate, "which is communicated to inferior ministers by parts, according to their respective orders, is wholly and altogether lodged in the bishop^e."

My reason for thus proceeding is as follows. The maintenance of the episcopal order, possessing the separate power of ordination, and the power also of extensive government over the church, has effectually maintained the clear evidence of legitimacy in the ministerial succession. If the episcopal and the presbyterial offices and powers had been one and the same, and had thus from the earliest time been administered by ordinary pastors, remote from the public eye of the church: I see not how some degree of confusion could have been avoided, or how we could have an as-

^e Discourse of Church Government, p. 208. Oxf. 1753.

surance, that the succession had never been vitiated. As the case stands, we see the great difficulty that error should arise by intrusion into the inferior ministry: if it do arise, we are sure that it cannot proceed far: should it at all occur, we reasonably hope, that the default of ignorance, unaccompanied by wilful neglect or presumption, on the part of those who may comply with an unlawful ministration, will not, by the God of mercy, be accounted as a bar to salvation.

To state then the true grounds of ministerial authority. The beginning of this ministerial order cannot reasonably be explained otherwise, than as having been introduced by that miraculous attestation, which forms the introduction of Christianity itself: and the continuance of it cannot be otherwise accounted for, than by admitting a legitimate succession. For the case of an intruding bishop would, in any age of the church, have presented the same moral impossibility which it does at this day.

Thus, the present existence of this ministry, and the circumstances connected with it, furnish an exterior attestation of its authority. Every ministry which claims the submission of men, must be thus attested. It must be attested, either by the present evidence of mi-

racles, or by its derivation from a beginning miraculously accredited.

But is it not possible that a man, without any external and visible ordination, may be inwardly moved by God, to take upon him this ministry?

In order to a right view of the case thus proposed, it is needful that we should discriminate between the inspiration of a prophet, and the ordinary sanctification of all the elect people of God.

It is not to be doubted, that the souls of God's elect people are inwardly moved by him: and the experience of these heavenly influences may be fully understood, with all such degrees of clearness and assurance, as are needful for salvation. But with regard to these ordinary communications, it is to be remarked, that they are communications to him only to whom they are afforded. If there be alleged any divine communications, carrying with them an authority over the souls of other men: then, in proof of such authority, men have a right to demand the evidence of miracles. For they cannot reasonably submit to any ministry, or to any promulgations of a new doctrine, of which they are not persuaded, that its origin was miraculously attested. Nay more: not only can

they not reasonably do it, but, as they have the fear of God before them, they *must* not acknowledge any such unaccredited pretensions. These positions will be found to rest upon the strongest arguments.

The very employment of miracles implies a recognition, that such credentials are needful for the security of men. Otherwise why should God employ them? Why should he thus verify the authority of Moses, of his prophets, and of his only begotten Son? Why should he demand no submission to any authority, which is not thus attested? It must be plain impiety to acknowledge the authority of God, where it is not: for this is transferring to another the obedience, due to him only. Yet it is obvious, that miracles only can enable us to judge, whether this authority does, or does not, belong to him who claims it.

It must appear from Scripture, that God does not require the submission of men to any claim of Divine authority, which is not thus enforced. Miracles are expressly given as the ostensible warrant of those whom he has delegated. Thus in the case of Moses, the prophet reluctates in these words, against the appointment of himself as a Divine messenger: "Behold, they will not believe me,

“ nor hearken unto my voice : for they will
 “ say, The Lord hath not appeared unto
 “ thee.” How is this objection met? by promising a power of mighty wonders, for the conviction of those to whom he is sent : “ that
 “ they might believe that the Lord God of
 “ their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God
 “ of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, had appeared
 “ unto him ^f.” Again, in the case of the nation to whom Moses is sent : observe the expostulations of God on account of their rebellion. What is the ground of such severe reprehension? Is it not partly this? that their disobedience to the prophet had been manifested, in resistance of miraculous evidences? Lastly, as the most decisive of all testimonies : is it not declared by our Lord himself, that if his mission had been unsupported by miracles, the Jews would have incurred no guilt in rejecting him? “ If,” says he, “ I had not done among them the
 “ works which none other man did, they had
 “ not had sin ^g.” It is plain then, that we are not by God’s word *required* to admit any unaccredited pretensions to Divine authority.

But not only is this not required : it is *forbidden*. What else can be the import of

^f See the fourth chapter of Exodus.

^g John xv. 24.

those censures and judgments, which we find pronounced against the adherents of false prophets? Where is the criterion, by which we are to distinguish the false from the true pretension? Surely there must be such a criterion: otherwise it would appear, that God requires what is impossible. This criterion can be no other than that, to which Elijah appealed, for the decision of the question at issue between himself and the prophets of Baal.

A very remarkable illustration of this point is furnished in the history of the man of God, who prophesied against the altar at Bethel. For, in this instance, the Divine word is plain and declaratory, respecting the purpose and reason of the visitation which it records: the heavy judgment of God was provoked, by the very act of submitting to an unaccredited pretension of Divine authority.

This man had received a clear and positive injunction by immediate revelation from God. Such an injunction must be binding till God revokes it. Now, if God actually did revoke it: how could this be known? There could be but two ways. Either the injunction must have been recalled in the same way of immediate revelation in which

it was given : or else, it must have been recalled by the ministry of another man, verifying his authority by some exterior credential. But this prophet is met by another, who alleges a Divine authority to revoke the injunction, but gives no credential. “ He
 “ said unto him, I am a prophet also as thou
 “ art ; and an angel spake unto me by the
 “ word of the Lord, saying, Bring him back
 “ with thee into thine house, that he may
 “ eat bread and drink water. But he lied
 “ unto him. So he went back with him, and
 “ did eat bread in his house, and drank water.
 “ And it came to pass, as they sat at the
 “ table, that the word of the Lord came unto
 “ the prophet that brought him back : and
 “ he cried unto the man of God that came
 “ from Judah, saying, Thus saith the Lord,
 “ Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the
 “ mouth of the Lord, and hast not kept the
 “ commandment which the Lord thy God
 “ commanded thee, but camest back, and hast
 “ eaten bread and drunk water in the place,
 “ of the which the Lord did say to thee, Eat
 “ no bread, and drink no water ; thy carcase
 “ shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy
 “ fathers ^h. ”

^h 1 Kings xiii. 18—22. Sic stola [cap. iv. ver. 1.] Nolite dicitur prima Johannis Epi- omni spiritui credere, sed pro-

LXXI. If these principles be admitted, it will be found impossible to deny their obvious utility, towards vindicating true, and nullifying false, pretensions to religious authority.

Among the affirmants of such pretensions, there are some who, though they recognise the Divine mission of Moses and of Christ, have nevertheless left behind them books, professedly authoritative, declaring their own agreement with anterior revelations, but wearing, to the understandings of ordinary men, the clearest proofs of contradiction to them. Of this class are Mahomet and Swedenborg. Now whether you regard such persons as the promulgators of a new theology, or as the expounders of an old one : this, at least, is con-

bate spiritus, si ex Deo sint ; quoniam multi pseudopropheta exierunt in mundum. Sed iste vir Dei poterat incidere in periculum mortis, et violationis præcepti Divini, si consentiret comedere in Bethel : ideo debebat nimis circa hoc cogitare, et non faciliter condescendere. Item patet hoc potissime : Quia Deus locutus fuerat ipsi viro Dei, quod non comederet in Bethel ; ideo non debebat credere contrarium, quousque tam clare constaret sibi, quod Deus dixisset istud, sicut constabat sibi, quod Deus dixerat, quod non comederet in Bethel. Sed illud constabat sibi per re-

velationem manifestam : ergo, quousque constaret istud per similem revelationem, non tenebatur credere. Item, populares, qui audiebant verba prophetarum, non obligabantur credere illis, nisi prophetæ ostenderent signa : Ergo, a fortiori, cum iste Propheta audisset a Deo, quod non deberet comedere in Bethel, non debebat credere, nisi ostenderet manifestum signum propheta senex, qui loquebatur ei. Sed ille nullum signum ostendit, nec iste petivit, sed immediate credidit. Ideo peccavit credendo, et propter hoc occidit eum leo. Tostatus in loco.

fessed : they profess to have had their doctrine by revelation from heaven. The case then is one of easy determination. The principles which establish the authority of the Prophets and Apostles, do *not* establish the pretensions of these men : for it is plain that no miracles are alleged in support of those pretensions.

Thus also may we adjust the claims of lord Herbert of Cherbury. He also professes to have had a revelation from heaven. Now if you suppose the possibility of the fact, it concerns not us. For his pretended revelation was to himself only : the pretence carries with it no visible evidence of obligation upon others : no sensible proof is afforded to accredit and to verify it.

In the next place, limiting our regard to the Christian world : we are thus enabled to discriminate the proper character of a lawful ministry from all unauthorized assumptions of the ministerial office.

On this footing it will appear, that the constitution of presbyterian communities can never maintain its validity. We admit the claim of authority arising from the *continuance* of a ministerial order of which the *beginning* must have been miraculous : in this light do we regard the apostolical suc-

cession : but the presbyterian ministry is not of this nature. For this system proceeds, upon a supposed equality or identity of bishops and presbyters. But respecting the presbyters by whom this discipline was first established, it cannot be denied, that they never received, by ordination, any power of transmitting to others the authority which themselves possessed : their commission was restrained to the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments : it gave no power of sending labourers into the Lord's vineyard : this latter power being, by the terms of their appointment, exclusively vested in the order of bishops. From a ministry thus unauthorized, it is plain that the covenanted blessings, which God has connected with the functions of a lawful one, cannot warrantably be sought.

Lastly, there are sectaries of many denominations, whose peculiar doctrines and worship are maintained without any apostolical ministry whatever ; and who have among them either no ministerial order, or one which does not even pretend to an apostolical succession. Now it is plain, that if you admit those principles which, in relation to this subject, I have sought to establish : then you cannot reasonably allow any pretensions, which can

under such circumstances be advanced, to the power of administering Divine ordinances. All such administrations, being unauthorized, must be invalid; and, being invalid, they must be wholly unavailing to the purpose of giving a title to God's covenanted mercies.

Of unaccredited pretensions to spiritual authority, both in kind and in degree, the world has beheld a vast number and a monstrous diversity. Let the case then speak for itself. If I am to believe a man armed with a Divine commission, while that commission is not verified by any thing more than his own word: then, *whom* am I to believe? Why shall I believe *one rather than another*? And *how many* shall I believe? For in this instance great multitudes claim my submission: the ground of their claims is, in all cases, exactly the same: while the several doctrines which they propound are dissonant and contradictory. On this ground the Mussulman requires me to embrace his Koran, and the Swedenborgian exacts my reverence for the doctrines of his new Jerusalem. The Calvinist alleges an inward light for the proof of his absolute decrees: and the Wesleyan, for the proof of the contrary. The bishop of Rome has a variety of doctrines which rest upon no basis but that of a pretended infalli-

bility. The Arian, for believing the blessed Word of God a created being, pleads a special revelation of the Deityⁱ. Socinus professes, from the same source of infallible discovery, to have been instructed, that the existence of the Son of God was not earlier than his incarnation^k. The names, so modestly assumed, of Gnostick, in the days of primeval heresy, and of Evangelical, in these times; discover a fond alliance to the same preten-

ⁱ See the proofs of this point in the Epilogus of Bp. Bull's Def. Fid. Nic. page 293. ed. 1703.

^k Our Saviour says: "Before Abraham was, I am." [John viii. 58.] Lælius Socinus thus expounds these words. "Before Abraham can be the father of many nations, I am." Faustus Socinus positively declares that his uncle obtained this exposition by special revelation from God. While vindicating it, he thus demands the submission of his controversial opponent: "Veritati concedat, et Deo nos plurimum debere agnoscat, qui viro illi," [sc. Lælio Socino] "per quem omnium primum nostra ætate sententiam, quam de Jesu Christi persona amplexi sumus, exponi voluit, hunc non minus appositum atque adeo necessarium, quam egregium et verum in Christi verbis sensum, olim patefecerit. Quod tamen non sine multis precibus, ipsius Jesu

"nomine invocato, impetravit ille. Ut quædam etiam verba indicant, quæ aliquando in hunc locum commentans, cum verum ipsorum sensum se nondum assecutum esse nosset, tandem scripsit; *Si Christus, inquit, præsens esset, ridicula ista omnia dissolveret; sed nos quædam nubes opinionis humanæ male vexat. Et credo hujus loci explanationem aliquam facillimam esse, sed quæ mihi nondum appareat. Jesus nos erudiat, et liberet.*" F. Socii Opp. tom. ii. pag. 678. ed. Ire-nop. 1656. Magee on Atonement and Sacrifice, vol. I. page 82. ed. 1812. As I would not have any man's opinions derive an appearance of absurdity from my representation of them: I add, that the vindication, *rationaly* considered, of the foregoing exposition (which my present business does not require me to enter upon) will be found in connexion with the passage here extracted from Socinus.

sions. Even Deism has not abstained from it. For it is thus that Lord Herbert presents himself, as a man authorized to proclaim to the world, that Christianity is false.

In short, when was there any system of religious error, which did not thus attempt to supply the want of rational evidence? Possibly you will find scarcely one, except Atheism: which, by its own hypothesis, is precluded from recourse to this subterfuge.

LXXII. You will readily perceive, how these remarks bear upon my leading design. We have already examined the Christian dispensation, with a view to display its *inherent powers of conviction*. We now regard it, with reference to the *promise of God*: who has declared, that he will manifest the truth of it to the souls of men. The question then is: Who are they that are entitled to this promise? Who are they that come within the terms of it? And, in particular: If the promise be connected with the ministrations of a certain order of men, who are the individuals composing that order? On this view, it cannot be immaterial whether a ministry, professing to administer the appointed means of grace; of grace to illuminate, as well as to sanctify: whether such a ministry be authorized or not.

LXXIII. But the magnitude of this consideration appears to me to have been much obscured, by an unwarrantable latitudinarianism of certain divines. For it is too common to notice the expression of sentiments, which seem to be grounded on a notion, that it lies in the power of man, as a matter of private judgment and inclination, to relax or to straiten the terms of God's covenant. Such is the loose style in which forms of church government are spoken of, as if they were matters, of indifference with God and of arbitrary selection with men; and as if no rule, relating to this point, had been determined by supreme authority¹. Thus, there are those, who will themselves hold to our own doctrine and ecclesiastical polity: while they will, at the same time, maintain, that a member of a presbyterian community, or of an independent congregation, is as much within the Christian covenant as themselves. Now if the foregoing

¹ In this style of speaking it is common to say, that sectarian differences are of little moment, *provided that a man loves the Lord Jesus in sincerity*. The remark is plausible, and it may enjoy the credit of being *liberal*. But surely we are to learn from our Saviour himself, what is the nature of that love which he demands. "If," says he, "ye love me, keep my com-

mandments. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." If we desire to know what, as to this particular, is our Saviour's commandment, we can hardly be perplexed when we read such passages as these. "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me."

principles are sound and well established: this view of things must be false. And, if it be false: can it be otherwise than dangerous and deadly? Does it not countenance a contempt for the way in which God has appointed his blessing, and the preference of another way, which has no Divine promise, nor warrantable hope?

Again: the subject has derived some degree of confusion from the terms which have been used respecting it. Thus, some opinions relating to this matter are occasionally praised as being *liberal*, while others are, in like manner, without any reference to the proper grounds of determination, stigmatized with the reproach of a *narrow mind*. But what, in a case of this nature, can such language signify? Terms like these have no argumentative import. They relate to matters of private taste and variable feeling; but are quite irrelevant to questions of truth and falsehood, and to all matters, which, like the present, come to us determined by obligation and law. The only questions respecting such a matter, for any reasonable man to entertain, are these: Has God determined the case? If so, what rule has he ordained?

As to harsh sentiments relating to those, who, according to our doctrine, come not with-

in the covenant of God: such sentiments can by no means be justified. Much less can it be endured, that man should sit in judgment upon man, and that he should, speaking as an individual and with regard to individuals, pronounce on their eternal state. The principles of such conduct are not only uncharitable, but false. For all scriptural condemnations of infidelity and error, proceed upon the supposition; that the grounds of conviction and the evidences of truth have been duly propounded. The case is very simple: it admits no imputations upon God: it allows no uncharitableness of censure, nor power of discretionary relaxation, in those who are to declare his will. If error be not wilful, it will not be punished: if it be wilful, then, like all other wilful delinquencies, it is proper to be punished. We have no right to limit the mercies of God to those, who stand within the pale of his covenant. His covenants are binding upon us, but they impose no restriction on him. He may pardon and accept whom he will: and, we have scriptural grounds to believe, that some will enjoy the bliss of his everlasting presence, who never were favoured with access to his sacramental covenants. But this is for him, and not for us. We are the stewards of the

mysteries of God, and it is required of stewards, that they be found faithful. We must not go beyond the word of God to do more or less.

LXXIV. Nor let us fear, lest by such fidelity, we should make our ministry an occasion of offence. This danger, were it real, would never justify a temporizing conduct: it would never warrant us to make, under pretence of charity, those concessions which are forbidden by truth. We are to do the will of God, and to leave the event to him. But it may be well considered, that all anticipation of evil, as the result of such proceeding, is totally groundless. However remote another man's religious judgment be from our own; though we regard his sentiments as ever so heterodox, or even heretical: it still remains for us to feel towards that man the utmost kindness, and to exhibit the most undoubted proofs of it. From this line we have, indeed, no right to swerve. The church has no power of secular judgment over the consciences of men. It is not for us to precipitate our judgment of him, for whom the long-suffering of God is still waiting; nor to reprobate him, whom it may be that God will one day convert and take to his everlasting reward. Our Divine Master came not to

condemn the world, but that the world through him should be saved; and the judgment of him who receiveth not the words of Christ, is not for this present life, but for the last day^m.

It is a great mistake to think that we can recommend religion, by compromising truth in order to assimilate opinions. For truth is inflexible, nor are we permitted to disguise it: and the lustre of charity is never brighter, nor doth it ever exert a stronger power over the affections, or one more auxiliary to the Gospel; than when it is seen, that kindness is not impaired by variance of judgment. This power could never be felt, if all men were from the beginning of the same mind: nevertheless, it has a blessed tendency to bring them to it. That Divine precept of charity: "Go and do thou likewise:" has a pointed regard to men, not of the same, but of a different faith. This is the doctrine of God our Saviour, which we are commanded to adorn: but how can he do this, whose benevolence, however ardent, is restrained to his own communion? What shall we say then of that which, in a religious sense, is called *liberality*? If the word mean any thing allied to reason and to moral rectitude: it is

^m John xii. 48.

so far from dictating a forced conformity, or a flexible accommodation, of opinions ; that it plainly *supposes* a contrariety of them, and enjoins the conduct which ought to be observed towards each other, by men, among whom that contrariety exists. Where such contrariety is not, there this virtue cannot be. Let a man then exercise this good disposition, by the sacrifice of his substance, of his time, of his trouble, of his secular interests ; but not by the sacrifice of truth. Let him thus manifest every kind affection to men of a different creed, and evince, on all occasions, a disposition to think the best that he possibly can of all men. But let him not surrender convictions, in order to harmonize with that, which he believes to be error : nor represent as unessential to salvation, any matters, which he believes God to have determined otherwise : nor indulge the perilous presumption, of attempting to modify, or to accommodate, agreeably to inclination or convenience, the terms of God's covenant.

LXXV. Having now brought to a close my projected examination : it remains that I should submit to you a representation of the amount, the value, and the proper application, of the conclusions at which I have arrived.

It has appeared that the Gospel is unencumbered by any obstacles to an universal diffusion of its truth.

It requires indeed concurrent dispositions on the part of man : but these dispositions are to be found in all who are willing, to obey God and live virtuously. It requires also a concurrent blessing from God : but this blessing may be had by all who ask it ; and its proper effect can be frustrated, only by the rebellion of the human will.

It may also be said with truth, that the propagation of the Gospel may be assisted, or impeded, by causes dependent on the human will : such, for instance, as the good or bad lives of Christians, and the zeal or indifference, the fidelity or negligence, the learning or ignorance, of pastors. But all this involves nothing impracticable or unattainable. It demands nothing which human life will not admit ; nothing which confuses the ranks, disturbs the obligations, or interrupts the humblest employments, of the political community. It does not demand historical knowledge and speculative talents in those, to whom God has denied them : nor again does it require of such men, that they should prostrate their own understandings before others,

to whom fortune and philosophy have been propitious.

If the Gospel be thus powerful in its own resources : if it require no concurrence of unattainable means or impossible conditions : then it must appear, that the cause of piety is capable of being advanced on easier terms than is commonly supposed ; and consequently, that the narrow extent of the family of believers, is an evil, not attributable to the want of a remedy, but to the neglect of applying it.

On this view, it can hardly be thought, that the conversion of pagans is obstructed, by any impossibility inherent in the nature of Christianity. By many, however, the notion of such impossibility has been deeply imbibed, and by many it is industriously disseminated : and thus, in effect, it happens, that proposals towards furthering that good end, meet with little more attention than is due to the projects of insanity. If you acquiesce in the reasonings which I have submitted to you, I think you must admit, that such a persuasion is false.

But it is not on abstract reasonings only that I will rest the evidence of this position. Let us look to facts : let us consult expe-

rience and history. They will tell us, that this is no unattainable object; and that it may be brought to good effect, by God's blessing on the employment of those ordinary means which are common to every age of the church. For I speak not now of those ages, which enjoyed the sensible evidence of miracles: I speak with reference to efforts, which do not profess to have had that advantage. What then has been the result of these efforts? In the whole compass of ecclesiastical history, you can scarcely mention one—I think you cannot mention even one—which has been conducted agreeably to evangelical truth, and charity, and prudence; and which has not eventually led, to the effectual planting of Christianity in a new country.

Such a fact ought strongly to recommend that particular department of learning, which illustrates the prospects and facilities of success, in the holy enterprise of evangelizing the unconverted world. Ecclesiastical history may satisfy us, that it is vain to extenuate, as to this point, our neglect of exertion, by pleading the want of miracles. True it is, that the church could not have been at first founded without the attestation of miracles: but the fabric standing on this foun-

dation, is capable of being expanded to any dimensions, which are agreeable to the will of God : and these are, nothing less than the comprehension of all mankind. If we have not the power of miracles, we have the power of reasonable proof, to shew, that Christianity could not have gotten a footing in the world without them : so that, in fact, if we have lost the *sensible*, we still retain the *rational*, evidence of miracles : and facts substantiated by reason, afford as strong a testimony, as those which are manifest to the eye.

It is the zeal of a Divine charity, and a holy ardour for the purposes which brought the Son of God from heaven : this, I say, is the great thing wanting towards the conversion of the world. Let us see the day, when this object is prosecuted with the same energy, which mingles with schemes of human policy. The gain of a slight commercial advantage, or the territorial comprehension of a barren rock or desert island ; have often been regarded as adequate causes, for an immense waste of treasure and of life. Let the same zeal be displayed for the salvation of mankind. Till it has been, this foul reproach must lie upon Christendom : it is the want of charity which prevents the extension of its borders. The children of this world are, in

their generation, wiser than the children of light.

But here again it is to be remembered, that this work requires the blessing of God as well as the labours of man: and that the blessing of God has been by himself connected with the ministerial acts of evangelists and pastors, authorized by him. What can we say then, of those efforts for the conversion of the heathen, which, slender as they are, we find in actual employment?

In some instances, we find these enterprises conducted by preachers, who can give no reasonable account of their own mission. Now the apostle asks, "How shall they preach except they be sent?"¹ So also may we ask: How shall they expect God's blessing on their work, if they be not sent with his authority? And again: to whom has this authority been given, unless to the apostles and their successors? If the ministrations of these men be unauthorized, can the promise of God be truly applied to them? Again: How can such evangelists be provided with the needful resources for their own work? If they have not the power of miracles, how can they verify their mission? how can they evidence their authority to administer the sacraments? What

¹ Rom. x. 15.

can they allege for this purpose, more than any impostor may allege as well as they? It is not for me to condemn the work of these men: to their own Master they must stand or fall: but I will say, respecting such methods of conversion, that I do not see how sincere and well informed members of an apostolical church, can rest satisfied with them.

With regard to these latter: here also is just matter of reproof. We maintain the necessity of an episcopal order to the true constitution of a church. How does our practice agree with our principle? How many are, and have been, the cases, in which the outward establishment of religion has denied all access to episcopal ministrations? Have not large clusters of islands, and vast continental tracts, covered, in some instances, with a dense population; been suffered to lie beyond all reach of any effectual government and administration of a bishop? Are such arrangements consistent with the spiritual sustenance and edification of the church? If a personal profession of the faith be required in adult persons, in order to ratify sponsorial obligations, and to qualify men, as living members of Christ's body, for ulterior means of grace: if none but the authorized ministers of Christ,

are empowered to transact the things belonging to his covenant: how can any church properly maintain itself without the presence and activity of bishops? For it is plain, that inferior ministers have never been empowered and authorized to act in this matter. It is much to be lamented, that the neglect thus noticed, has been, in a great degree, occasioned by a perversion of the pure and simple notion of episcopacy: I fear also, that such perversion has been much countenanced, by weak and injudicious methods of defending the necessity of that sacred order.

Let us now advert to the practical influence of the gospel on the state of societies into which it has been already received. The power of Christianity in the correction of moral evil is great: but unless there be a conviction of its truth, this power must be inoperative. Observe then, how the state of social life must be affected by the principles we adopt. If it be admitted, that a reasonable conviction of Christianity is unattainable by the generality of men; that the poor of every country must, in point of religion, take things as they find them, and embrace, with passive minds, that form of it which has come down to them from their fathers, and which they find ready prepared to their hands: on this

view of things, how can you expect that the Gospel will operate the correction of social disorders? But if, as I have contended, this conviction is attainable by all men: then it will appear, that a mighty obstacle to moral reformation has been removed: a prejudice, calculated to paralyse all our exertions, has been obviated. We no longer feel ourselves, while pursuing this end, as men impeded by unsurmountable obstructions: but we *ought* to feel ourselves placed in a sphere of duty, of which God requires the fulfilment, and under the encouragement of a hope, fully adequate to excite and to justify our utmost zeal.

We live in an age, distinguished by great pretensions to advancement in wisdom and knowledge. It may be doubted, whether this estimate is true. It may admit of a doubt, whether a generation of men may not be affected in a way similar to individuals: among whom, self-conceit is commonly found to accompany defective intellect and scanty information.

Among the characteristics of the present generation, the following, when judged by men remote from contemporaneous feelings, will possibly be regarded as no indication of remarkable sagacity.

Theories are afloat, which profess to aim at obviating, by means of legislative arrangements, the possibility of civil corruption.

Now it is not denied that the end is good. It is not denied, that legislative measures ought to be adapted to circumstances, and that circumstances are continually changing: they lie, therefore, under a constant necessity of conforming themselves, by progressive modifications, to those alterations in the state of things, which, from time to time, will certainly arise.

Yet still, it cannot reasonably be doubted, that all human legislation which aims at the production of a moral influence, will, if it proceed upon a sole regard to its own intrinsic force and unassisted power, disappoint the hopes of such as rely upon it.

Every scheme of political reformation, if it lay not the chief stress upon reforming the moral principle of individuals, must be vain and delusive. The mass of society must be amended, by the care which is employed to amend the separate members of it. To think of so classifying and arranging men, that they shall not have the power to be corrupt if they will; is a project, little superior in value and dignity to the speculations of children. Your fabric may display a grand conception, and a

beautiful symmetry : yet this will be of little avail, if its component materials are unsound and worthless : that fabric will not endure.

If, on the other hand, you desire to counteract the principle of corruption in the human soul : then your endeavour can never be hopeless, so long as Christianity shall be applicable to the state of man. This method of reformation demands only honest purposes and sincere efforts, directed by that wisdom, which God denies to none that will ask him, which issues from his gift, and is inscribed in his holy word.

Many are the individual cases, known to us all, in which the due culture of early life has been followed, by a golden fruitfulness of Christian piety and moral worth. Is it not plain that this culture may be applied to one case, as well as to another ? and that the most extensive application of it demands only augmented measures of diligence and charity ?

Is it not plain, that the principles of duty, when they have grown up from the beginning of reason, have kept pace with the increase of its power, and been progressively confirmed by habit ; will be strong enough to overpower the unruly appetites of manhood ? while the same principles, when first instilled at a mature period, may be too feeble to struggle

against a mighty opposition, or even to take root in a neglected soil? Does not experience teach us, that these principles, so indispensable to all personal happiness and social welfare, if not taught in childhood, will probably never be learned at all?

In other matters, we can readily perceive the reasonable course. If a wild and unprofitable stock is in one instance reclaimed, the same husbandry is patiently applied to any multitude of instances in which the same result is desired. Such a proceeding, in a secular concern, is viewed as a mere act of common sense: in a case of duty, of charity, and of religious obligation, it is too commonly regarded as wild, romantic, and utopian.

I need not dwell on the particular application of these last remarks. If, according to the view which I have endeavoured to substantiate, there be not, in the generality of mankind, any inaptitude or incapacity to weigh the evidence of religion, and to perceive its conclusive power: then it cannot be a desperate enterprise to produce, in the mass of society, the proper fruits of religious conviction. If the mass is to be purified, it must be purified chiefly by this means. To frame any arrangements of society, which shall take away from human depravity the means and

opportunities of action, is a task far surpassing the utmost stretch of political wisdom : but it is quite feasible, in the use of methods which God has provided, to repress the outward acts of crime, by counteracting that evil principle of nature which prompts the commission of them. Christianity must be the basis of every moral reformation : and the materials on which it is to work, ought to be placed within its influence, before they have become untractable and stubborn.

I would not close these discourses without a brief suggestion which peculiarly applies to us as an academical body.

We have seen that the evidence of Divine truth is greatly obscured by the misrepresentations of ignorance : and that the learning of the ministerial order forms the appropriate remedy to this inconvenience. If this be thought to establish the great value of theological studies : may it not justify a doubt, whether that value is sufficiently recognised in our present arrangements ? I doubt not that many, who rightly estimate the importance of knowledge subsidiary to such a purpose, may feel themselves impelled, by a conscientious zeal, to the proper sources of illustration to the pure doctrines of Christianity. But it is to be considered, whether

this ought to depend wholly on a voluntary sentiment? Or whether it be not rather a just principle of education, to further so great and good a purpose, by specific direction and encouragement? We cannot but admit the great necessity there is, that the future pastors of the church should be fitted for their evangelical work, by the diligent use of every means, contributory to a right comprehension of the sacred word, which they will be bound to dispense, to expound, and to vindicate. Can any season of life be more propitious to such pursuits, than the years passed at a place, where all the facilities of learning are brought together? If these pursuits be neglected now: is it not probable, that they will be wholly excluded by the unavoidable cares and active duties of subsequent life? May it not also deserve your consideration, whether, by encouraging to its present extent, the cultivation of preparatory learning; we do not in effect, by this alienation of the time applicable to theology, discountenance and exclude the necessary attention to it?

While I have felt it my duty to submit to you these remarks, I have not been apprehensive that they would be subject to any construction of offence. The state of human

life continually brings forth fresh occasions and demands for improvement: and every movement towards that end must begin somewhere. A suggestion of this nature may be thought, perhaps, not wholly unbefitting the office of which I am fulfilling the duties. If it should be thought unsuitable to the person: I am sure you will agree with me, that every such suggestion ought to be tried according to its own intrinsic qualities, apart from every adventitious consideration. In a matter so important, *non disputantis auctoritas, sed disputationis ipsius veritas, requiritur*^o: At all events, it must be understood, that my words have not been unaccompanied by those sentiments, which are due to men, whose stations and whose characters demand the reverence of those intrusted to their charge, and the honourable estimation of the world: while their conscientious and enlightened zeal for the application, to their legitimate and best uses, of the institutions and endowments of this place, may well confront the boldest accusation.

To conclude. The consequence of the foregoing examination must effectually silence one great plea, which might be alleged to extenuate the remissness of our efforts in

^o Minucius Felix.

the cause of religion. It has been seen, that the evidence of the gospel is not of such a nature, as to involve any demand of impossibilities. It does not demand, that men should surrender their understandings : or that they should embrace convictions without reasons : or that they should be versed in historical monuments which they cannot read ; or endued with philosophical talents which they cannot attain. But it does require, that they should forsake their sins : that they should profit by the light which God affords them : that they should embrace the appointed means of grace : that they should fulfil, without reserve, all obligations of piety and obedience ; and allow the proper force to all arguments, adapted to their own knowledge and comprehension. The poor man who does this, shall not want the heavenly light : the learned man who does it not, shall not enjoy that light. It is on this view we are to contemplate our obligations, respecting the propagation of Christian truth. Our duty is not impracticable : it will not disturb the world, but maintain its peace, and establish its order. Lastly, we are to remember, that the part assigned to us is not optional, but imperative : that our labours are to keep pace with our facilities : and that the solemn account of a fu-

ture day will carry with it, an awful regard to the means and opportunities we enjoy, of extending the dominion of our blessed Redeemer. To whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, three Persons and one God, let us ascribe, as is most due, all glory and goodness, majesty and dominion, now and for ever.

APPENDIX.



ADDITIONAL NOTE

ON

LECTURE V.*

THE following quotations are placed together, because, when thus viewed, they illustrate, by an impressive contrast, the peculiar influence of Christianity on the characters of men. The two cases here described, are, in their external circumstances, exactly concurrent; and both are of such a nature, as to call forth the undisguised expression of real feelings: the difference of them being entirely moral, and created by the difference of religious sentiment. The latter of the two representations may, in the noble contempt of death which it portrays, be thought to discover something of excess: but it is to be considered, whether, in any possible state of man, we are warranted in expecting, to find even the most sublime virtue unaccompanied by a tincture of human infirmity.

I. A description of the plague at Athens: from Thucydides.

Thucyd. lib. ii. cap. 47.

Dr. Bloomfield's Translation.

XLVII. Του δε θερους ευθυσ
αρχομενου Πελοποννησιοι και οι

XLVII. Immediately on the
commencement of the spring,

* See page 202, line 2.

ξυμμαχοι, τα δυο μερη, ὡσπερ και το πρωτον, εσεβαλον ες την Αττικην· ἡγειτο δε Αρχιδαμος ὁ Ζευξιδαμου, Λακεδαιμονιων βασιλευς. και καθεζομενοι εδηουν την γην. και ουτων αυτων ου πολλας πω ἡμερας εν τη Αττικη ἡ νοσος πρωτον ηρξατο γενεσθαι τοις Αθηναιοις, λεγομενον μεν και προτερον πολλαχουσε εγκατασκηψαι, και περι Λημνον και εν αλλοις χωριοις, ου μεντοι τοσουτος γε λοιμος ουδε φθορα ούτως ανθρωπων ουδαμον εμνημονεуетο γενεσθαι. ουτε γαρ ιατροι ηρκουν το πρωτον θεραπευοντες αγνοια, αλλ' αυτοι μαλιστα εθνησκον ὄσω και μαλιστα προσηεσαν, ουτε αλλη ανθρωπεια τεχνη ουδεμια· ὄσα τε προς ἱεροισις ἱκετευσαν η μαντειαις και τοις τοιουτοις εχρησαντο, παντα ανωφελη ην, τελευτωντες τε αυτων απεστησαν, ὑπο του κακου νικωμενοι.

the Peloponnesians and their allies, as before, with two-thirds of their forces, made an irruption into Attica, under the command of Archidamus, son of Zeuxidamus, king of the Lacedæmonians; and after encamping, laid waste the country. And when they had not been many days in Attica, the pestilence, which afterwards so much afflicted the Athenians, made its appearance, and which was said to have previously spread its ravages in other parts; as at Lemnos and elsewhere. Be that as it may, so great a pestilence, and so sweeping a mortality of the human race, had never elsewhere been known in the memory of man. For at first not even the physicians, through ignorance of the disorder, were able to devise any effectual remedy for it (nay, they themselves, from their nearer approach to the sick, died the fastest); nor did any other human art aught avail. And as to supplications at the temples, or consultations of oracles, and other religious rites, all were alike vain and useless; insomuch that, overcome by the violence of the calamity, the people at last wholly discontinued them.

XLVIII. Ηρξάτο δε το μεν
 πρωτον, ὡς λεγεται, ἐξ Αἰθιο-
 πιας της ὑπερ Αἰγυπτου, επειτα
 δε και ἐς Αἰγυπτου και Λιβυην
 κατεβη και ἐς την βασιλεως γην
 την πολλην. ἐς δε την Αθηναίων
 πολιν ἐξαπιναιως ἐνεπεσε, και
 το πρωτον ἐν τῷ Πειραιει ἤψατο
 των ἀνθρωπων, ὥστε και ἐλεχθη
 ὑπ' αὐτων ὡς οἱ Πελοποννήσιοι
 φαρμακα ἐσβεβληκοιεν ἐς τα
 φρεατα· κρηνη γαρ οὐπω ἦσαν
 αὐτοθι. ὕστερον δε και ἐς την
 ἀνω πολιν ἀφικετο, και ἐθνησκον
 πολλῶ μαλλον ἤδη. λεγεται μεν
 οὖν περὶ αὐτου, ὡς ἕκαστος γι-
 γνωσκει, και ἰατρος και ἰδιωτης,
 ἀφ' ὅτου εἰκος ἦν γενεσθαι αὐτο,
 και τὰς αἰτίας ἀστίνιας νομίζει
 τοσαυτης μεταβολης ἱκανὰς εἶναι
 δυναμὶν ἐς το μεταστῆσαι σχεῖν·
 ἐγὼ δε οἶον τε ἐγγιγνετο λέξω, και
 ἀφ' ὧν ἂν τις σκοπων, εἰ ποτε
 και αὐθις ἐπιπεσοι, μαλιστ' ἂν
 εἶχοι τι προειδὼς μὴ ἀγνοεῖν,
 ταυτα δηλώσω, αὐτος τε νοση-
 σασ και αὐτος ἰδὼν ἀλλοὺς πα-
 σχοῖτας.

XLVIII. The contagion is
 said to have had its origin in
 that part of Æthiopia, which
 is situated beyond Egypt, and
 from thence to have passed
 into Egypt and Libya. After
 spreading over a considerable
 part of the king of Persia's
 dominions, it at length broke
 out suddenly at Athens, and
 made its first attack in the
 Piræus, where it was reported
 that the Peloponnesians had
 thrown poison into the wells ;
 for as yet there were no foun-
 tains there. Afterwards it ex-
 tended itself to the upper city,
 and then the mortality rapid-
 ly increased. And now I leave
 every one (whether physician
 or other) to pass his own opin-
 ion concerning it, pointing
 out from whence it was like-
 ly to rise, and what causes he
 thinks sufficient to produce
 so entire a change of the con-
 stitution of the human body.
 For my own part, I shall
 merely relate the manner of
 it; and, having been myself
 sick of it, and seen others af-
 flicted, I shall point out those
 symptoms of the malady, from
 a consideration of which any
 one may have some previous
 knowledge of it, and not be
 altogether ignorant of its na-
 ture, should it ever again make
 its appearance.

Here follows a medical description; which, being irrelevant to the present object, I omit.

L. Γενομενον γαρ κρεισσον λογου το ειδος της νοσου τα τε αλλα χαλεπωτερωσ η κατα την ανθρωπειαν φυσιν προσεπιπτεν εκαστω, και εν τωδε εδηλωσε μαλιστα αλλο τι ου η των συντροφων τι' τα γαρ ορνεα και τετραποδα, οσα ανθρωπων απτεται, πολλων αταφων γιγνομενων η ου προσηει η γευσαμενα διεφθειρετο. τεκμηριον δε των μεν τοιουτων ορνιθων επιλειψις σαφης εγερετο, και ουχ εωρωντο ουτε αλλωσ ουτε περι τοιουτον ουδεν' οί δε κυνες μαλλον αισθησιν παρειχον του αποβαινοντος δια το ξυνδαιτασθαι.

LI. Το μεν ουν νοσημα, πολλα και αλλα παραλιποντι ατοπιασ, ωσ εκαστω ετυχανε τι διαφεροντωσ ετερω προς ετερον γιγνομενον, τοιουτον ην επι παν την ιδεαν. και αλλο παρελυπει κατ' εκεινον τον χρονον ουδεν των ειωθοτων' ο δε και γενοιτο, εσ τουτο ετελευτα. εθνησκον δε οί μεν αμελεια, οί

L. For as this was a kind of disorder which baffled all description, nay, even exceeded human nature, in the virulence which it exercised on the sufferers, so in the following respect it plainly evinced itself to be something wholly different from any of the ordinary distempers. For though there were many unburied corpses, those birds and beasts which prey on human flesh, either approached them not, or, if they tasted, perished. A proof of which was seen in the total disappearance of all birds of prey, which were found neither about the carcasses, nor elsewhere. But the dogs, from their domestic habits and familiar intercourse with men, afforded a more manifest evidence of the thing.

LI. Such, then (to omit many other cases of peculiar virulence, each having some symptoms differing from those of others) was the general nature of the disorder. And none of the usual or endemic maladies made their attacks during its continuance; or, if they did, soon

δε και πανυ θεραπευομενοι. εν τε ουδεν κατεστη ιαμα ως ειπειν, οτι χρην προσφεροντας ωφελειν· το γαρ τω ξυνευεγκον, αλλον τουτο εβλαπτεν. σωμα τε αυταρκες ου ουδεν διεφανη προς αυτο ισχυος περι η ασθενειας, αλλα παντα ξυνηρει και τα παση διαιτη θεραπευομενα. δεινοτατον δε παντος ην του κακου η τε αθυμια, οποτε τις αισθοιτο καμνων(προς γαρ το ανεμπιστον ευθυσ τραπομενοι τη γνωμη πολλω μαλλον προιεντο σφας αυτους και ουχ αυτειχον,) και οτι ετερος αφ' ετερου θεραπειας αναπιμπλαμενοι, ωςπερ τα προβατα, εθνησκον· και τον πλειστον φθορον τουτο ανεποιει. ειτε γαρ μη θελοιεν δεδιωτες αλληλοις προσιεναι, απωλλυντο ερημοι, και οικιαι πολλαι εκενωθησαν απορια του θεραπευσοιτος· ειτε προσιοιεν, διεφθειροντο, και μαλιστα οι αρετης τι μεταποιουμενοι· αισχυνη γαρ ηφειδουν σφων αυτων, εσιοντες παρα τους φιλους, επει και τας ολοφυρσεις των απογιγνομενων τελευτωντες και οι οικειοι εξεκαμνον, υπο του πολλου κακου νικωμενοι. επι πλεον δε ομως οι διαπεφευγοτες τον τε θνησκοντα και τον πονουμενον φκτιζοντο, δια το προειδεναι τε και αυτοι ηδη εν τω θαρσαλεω ειναι· δις γαρ τον αυτον, ωςτε και κτεινειν, ουκ επελαμβανεν. και εμακαριζοντο τε υπο των αλλων,

terminated in this. The sufferers, moreover, died, some under neglect, others with all the care and attention possible; nor could any one remedy be devised, whose application would be certain to do good; for what benefited one was prejudicial to another. Moreover, no constitution, whether in respect of strength or weakness, was found able to cope with it; nay, it swept away all alike, even those attended to with the most careful management. But the most dreadful part of the calamity was the total dejection of mind which overwhelmed those who felt themselves attacked; (for falling at once into despair, they the more readily gave themselves up, and sunk without a struggle;) and that they dropped, filled, like diseased sheep, with infection communicated by their attendance on each other. That circumstance, too, occasioned most of the mortality; for if men forbore, through fear, to visit the sick, they died, forlorn and destitute, for want of attendance, and thus whole families became utterly extinct: and if they ventured to approach, they met their death; and this was especially the fate

και αυτοι τῷ παραχρημα περι-
 χαρει και ες τον επειτα χρονον
 ελπιδος τι ειχον κουφης, μηδ' αν
 ὑπ' αλλου νοσηματος ποτε ετι
 διαφθαρηται.

LII. Επιεσε δ' αυτους μαλ-
 λον προς τῷ ὑπαρχοντι πομφ και
 ἡ ξυγκομιδη εκ των αγρων ες το
 αστυ, και ουχ ἡσσον τους επελ-
 θοντας. οικιων γαρ ουχ ὑπαρ-
 χουσων, αλλ' εν καλυβαις πνι-
 γηραις ὥρα ετους διαιτωμενων ὁ
 φθορος εγιγνετο ουδενι κοσμῳ,
 αλλα και νεκροι επ' αλληλοις
 αποθνησκοντες εκειντο, και εν
 ταις ὁδοις εκαλιδουντο και περι

of those who aimed at any
 thing like virtue; since they,
 ashamed of selfish caution,
 were unsparing of their own
 lives in attending on their
 friends; for at last even their
 servants, overcome by the
 excess of the calamity, were
 wearied out with the groan-
 ing and lamentation of the
 sick and dying. Those, how-
 ever, who had survived the
 disorder, were the more com-
 passionate to the dying and
 the afflicted; both as know-
 ing by experience what the
 disorder was, and being now
 themselves in safety. For it
 never attacked the same per-
 son twice; so, at least, as to
 be mortal. And such per-
 sons were felicitated on
 their escape by others; and
 they themselves, amidst their
 present joy, nourished a sort
 of light hope for the future—
 that they should never hereaf-
 ter be destroyed by any disease.

LII. Besides the present
 calamity, the reception of the
 country people into the city
 had occasioned much annoy-
 ance, and especially to the
 new comers. For as they had
 no houses, but were com-
 pelled to lodge, during the
 height of summer in stifling
 huts, a horribly confused mor-
 tality occurred, insomuch that

τας κρηνας ἀπασας ἡμιθνητες, του ὕδατος επιθυμια. τα τε ιερα, εν οἷς εσκηνηντο, νεκρων πλεαην, αυτου εναποθνησκουτων· ὑπερβιαζομενου γαρ του κακου οἱ ανθρωποι, ουκ εχοντες οτι γενωνται, ες ολιγωριαν ετραποντο και ιερων και οσιων ὁμοιως. νομοι τε παντες συνεταραχθησαν, οἷς εχρωντο προτερον περι τας ταφας, εθαπτον δε ὡς ἕκαστος εδυνατο. και πολλοι ες αναισχυντους θηκας ετραποντο, σπανει των επιτηδειων δια το συχρους ηδη προτεθναναι σφισιν· επι πυρας γαρ αλλοτριας, φθασαντες τους νησαντας, οἱ μεν επιθεντες τον ἑαυτων νεκρον ὑφηπτον, οἱ δε καιομενου αλλου ανωθεν επιβαλοντες ον φεροιεν απηεσαν.

corpses lay stretched out one upon another as they had died; and half-dead corpses were seen tumbling over each other, both in the streets and about every fountain, whither their rage for water had hurried them. The very temples too in which they had huted, were full of the corpses of those who had expired there. For as the violence of the calamity exceeded all bounds, and men knew not what to have recourse to, they fell into a neglect alike of sacred and social duties. All laws, too, and customs which had been in force respecting sepulture, were confounded and violated; men burying just where and how they could; and many, for want of funeral necessaries, (so many deaths having before occurred in their families,) had recourse to very indecorous means for the interment of their friends. For some resorting to funeral piles which were raising for others, would, before they were completed, lay their own corpses thereon and set them on fire. Others, when a corpse was burning, would toss upon the pyre another which they had brought with them, and go their way.

LIII. Πρωτον τε ηρξε και

LIII. This pestilence too,

ες ταλλα τη πολει επι πλεον
 ανομιας το νοσημα. ρρον γαρ
 ετολμα τις, ἂ προτερον απεκρυπ-
 τετο μη καθ' ἡδονην ποιειν, αγχι-
 στροφου την μεταβολην ὄρωντες
 των τ' ευδαιμονων και αιφνιδιος
 θνησκοντων και των ουδεν προ-
 τερον κεκτημενων, ευθυς δε
 τᾶκεινων εχοντων. ὡστε ταχειας
 τας επαυρεσεις και προς το
 τερπνον ηξιουν ποιεισθαι, εφη-
 μερα τα τε σωματα και τα
 χρηματα ὁμοιος ἡγουμενοι. και
 το μεν προσταλαιπωρειν τῷ
 δοξαντι καλω ουδεις προθυμος
 ην, ἀδηλον νομιζων ει πριν επ'
 αυτο ελθειν διαφθαρησεται· ὅτι
 δε ηδη τε ἡδὺν και πανταχοθεν το
 ες αυτο κερδαλεον, τουτο και
 καλον και χρησιμον κατεστη.
 θεων δε φοβος η ανθρωπων
 νομος ουδεις απειργε, το μεν
 κρινοντες εν ὁμοιῳ και σεβειν
 και μη, εκ του παντας ὄραν εν
 ισῶ απολλυμενους, των δε ἁμαρ-
 τηματων ουδεις ελπιζων μεχρι
 του δικην γενεσθαι βιους αν την
 τιμωριαν αντιδουναι, πολυ δε
 μειζω την ηδη κατεψηφισμενην
 σφων επικρεμασθηναι, ἡν πριν
 εμπεσειν, εικος ειναι του βιου
 τι απολασαι.

in other respects, gave rise to
 that unbridled licentiousness
 which then first began to be
 prevalent in the city; for now
 every one was readier to ven-
 ture openly upon those grati-
 fications which he had before
 dissembled or indulged in
 secret, when he saw such
 sudden changes—the rich
 hurried away, and those who
 before were worth nothing,
 coming into immediate pos-
 session of their property: in-
 somuch that men were will-
 ing to snatch the enjoyment
 of such fugitive delights as of-
 fered themselves, and to live
 solely for pleasure, regarding
 their lives and their possessions
 as only held by the tenure of a
 day. As to bestowing labour
 or pains on any pursuit which
 seemed honourable or noble,
 no one cared about the mat-
 ter, it being uncertain whe-
 ther or not he might be
 snatched away previously to
 the attainment of his object.
 In short, whatever any person
 thought pleasurable, or such
 as might in any way contri-
 bute thereto, that became
 with him both the honour-
 able and useful. No fear of
 the gods, or respect for hu-
 man laws, operated as any
 check: for as to the former,
 they accounted it the same

to worship or not to worship them, since they saw all alike perish; and as to the latter, no one expected that his existence would be prolonged till judgment should take effect, and he receive the punishment of his offences; nay, they supposed that a far heavier judgment, already denounced against them, hung over their heads; and before it fell upon them, they thought it right to snatch some enjoyment of life.

II. A description of the plague at Alexandria in the third century: by Dionysius, bishop of that city.

Eusebii Eccl. Hist. lib. vii.
cap. 22.

Translation.*

Μετα ταυτα λοιμικης του πολ-
λεμον διαλαβουσης νοσου της τε
εορτης πλησιαζουσης, αυθις δια
γραφης τοις αδελφοις ομιλει, τα
της συμφορας επισημαινομενος
παθη δια τουτων· “ τοις μεν αλ-
“ λοις ανθρωποις, ουκ αν δοξειε
“ καιρος εορτης ειναι τα παρον-
“ τα· ουδε εστιν αυτοις ουτε
“ ουτος, ουτε τις ετερος ουχ
“ οπως των επιλυπων, αλλ’ ουδ’
“ ει τις περιχαρης, ου οιηθειεν
“ μαλιστα. νυν μεν γε θρηνοι
“ παντα· και πενθουσι παντες·
“ και περιηχουσιν οιμωγαι την

1. When the noisome in-
fection had overtaken these
civil wars, and the feast of
Easter now drew nigh, he [i. e.
Dionysius] wrote letters unto
the brethren, and mentioned
those lamentable afflictions in
these words. “ Other men
“ may think these times not
“ fit for any feast: no more
“ are they indeed. Yet such
“ a reflection applies not to
“ this occasion only, but to
“ every other. For, on this
“ view [so just, at all times

* I had at first directed this column to be filled from Dr. Ham-
mer’s translation: but, on seeing the Greek and English placed to-
gether, I felt the necessity of making considerable alteration in it.

“ πολιν δια το πληθος των τε-
 “ θνηκοτων και των αποθνη-
 “ σκοντων ὄσημεραι.

“ Ὡς γαρ ἐπι των πρωτοτοκων
 “ των Αιγυπτιων γεγραπται, οὐ-
 “ τως και νυν ἐγενηθη κραυγη
 “ μεγαλη. ου γαρ εστιν οικια,
 “ εν ἣ ουκ εστιν εν αυτη τε-
 “ θνηκως· και οφελον γε εἰς·
 “ πολλα μεν γαρ και δεινα και
 “ τα προ τουτου συμβεβηκοτα.
 “ πρωτον μεν ἡμας ηλασαν· και
 “ μονοι προς ἅπαντων διωκο-
 “ μενοι και θανατουμενοι, ἔορ-
 “ τασαμεν και τοτε· και πας ὁ
 “ της καθ’ ἑκαστον θλιψεως το-
 “ πος πανηγυρικον ἡμιν γεγоне
 “ χωριον, αγρος, ερημια, ναυς,
 “ πανδοχειον, δεσμωτηριον. φαι-
 “ δροτατην δε πασων ηγαγον
 “ ἑορτην οἱ τελειοι μαρτυρες
 “ ευωχηθεντες εν ουρανῳ· μετα
 “ δε ταυτα πολεμος και λιμος
 “ επελαβεν, ἅ τοις εθνεσι συν-
 “ διηνεγκαμεν, μονοι μεν ὑπο-
 “ σταντες, ὅσα ἡμιν ελυμνηναντο·
 “ παραπολαυσαντες δε και ὧν
 “ αλληλους ειργασαντο τε και
 “ πεποιθασι.

“ are the grounds of sorrow
 “ to sinful man, that] not only
 “ the mournful periods of life,
 “ but even those which we
 “ may esteem the most pros-
 “ perous, are unsuitable to
 “ joy. Now all is replenish-
 “ ed with lamentations: every
 “ man doth nothing but mourn
 “ and howl throughout the
 “ city, by reason of the multi-
 “ tude of corpses and the
 “ daily dying.

2. “ As it is written of the
 “ first-born of the Egypt-
 “ ians: so now, a great cry
 “ is heard. There is no house
 “ where a dead body is not
 “ found: and oh! that I could
 “ say, there is only *one* in
 “ every house. For the cala-
 “ mities which happened be-
 “ fore were many and griev-
 “ ous. First, they expelled
 “ us [Christians from the
 “ city.] And we alone, though
 “ persecuted by all men, and
 “ being delivered over to
 “ death; yet nevertheless,
 “ even at that time celebrated
 “ the feast. And every place
 “ of several afflictions, was
 “ used by us, as a church, for
 “ our holy assemblies: the
 “ field, the wilderness, the
 “ ship, the inn, the prison.
 “ But the most joyful feast of
 “ all, was that, which those
 “ [of us] did celebrate, ban-
 “ queting in heaven, whose

“ Και τη Χριστου παλιw ενη-
 “ φρανθημεν ειρηνη, ην μοιουc
 “ ημιν εδωκε. βραχυτατηc δε
 “ ημων τε και αυτων τυχουτων
 “ αναπνοηc, επικατεσκηψεν η
 “ νοcουc αυτη· πραγμα φοβου
 “ τε παντου φοβερωτερου εκει-
 “ νοιc, και cυμφοραc ηcτινοc-
 “ ουν cκετλιωτερου. και ωc
 “ ιδιοc τιc αυτων απηγγειλε
 “ cυγγραφευc, πραγμα μονου δη
 “ τηc παντων ελπιδοc χρειcουc
 “ γενομενου· ημιν δε ου τοιουτο
 “ μεν, γυμνασιου δε και δοκιμιου
 “ ουδενοc των αλλων ελαττου.
 “ απεcχετο μεν γαρ ουδε ημων·
 “ πολλη δε εξηλθεν ειc τα εθνη.”
 τουτοιc εξηc επιφερει λεγων·
 “ οι γουν πλειcτοι των αδελφου
 “ ημων δι’ υπερβαλλουcαν αγα-
 “ πην και φιλαδελφιαν αφει-
 “ δουντεc εαυτων και αλληλων
 “ εχομενοι, επιcκοπουντεc αφυ-
 “ λακτωc τουc νοcουνταc, λιπα-
 “ ρωc υπηρετουμενοι, θεραπευ-
 “ ουτεc εν Χριcτω, cυναπηλ-
 “ λαττουτο εκεινοιc αcμενε-
 “ cτατα· του παρ ετερων ανα-

“ martyrdom was perfected
 “ [in this persecution.] After-
 “ wards there ensued war and
 “ famine, which we endured
 “ in common with the hea-
 “ then: while we suffered
 “ alone their injury towards
 “ us, and endured a share of
 “ the evils occasioned by
 “ their hostility towards each
 “ other.

3. “ Again, we were che-
 “ rished with the peace which
 “ Christ sent: this was to our-
 “ selves only. But after that
 “ they and we had breathed a
 “ very little time, this pesti-
 “ lence befell: a thing, unto
 “ them, more terrible than
 “ any terror, and more lament-
 “ able than any calamity: and
 “ (as a certain historiographer
 “ of their own reported) which,
 “ beyond all other things, far
 “ exceeded the imagination
 “ of all: yet of us not so
 “ counted, but as an exercise
 “ and trial, inferior to none of
 “ all the others which had be-
 “ fallen us. For it spared not
 “ even us: but it raged with
 “ great violence against the
 “ heathens.” Again, after a
 “ few lines he writeth: “ Most
 “ of the brethren, by reason
 “ of their great love and bro-
 “ therly charity, sparing not
 “ themselves, cleaved one to
 “ another, visited the sick

“ πιμπλαμενοι παθους, και την
 “ νοσον εφ’ εαυτους ελκοντες
 “ απο των πλησιον, και εκοντες
 “ αναμασσομενοι τας αληθο-
 “ νας.

“ Και πολλοι νοσοκομησαντες
 “ και ρωσαντες ετερουσ, ετελευ-
 “ τησαν αυτοι, του εκεινων θα-
 “ νατον εις εαυτους μεταστησα-
 “ μενοι, και το δημωδες ρημα,
 “ μουνης αι δοκουν φιλοφρο-
 “ συνης εχεσθαι, εργω δη τοτε
 “ πληρουντες, απιοντες αυτων
 “ παντων περιψημα. οι γουν
 “ αριστοι των παρ’ ημιν αδελφων
 “ τουτον του τροπον εξεχωρησαν
 “ του βιου, πρεσβυτεροι τε τινες
 “ και διακονοι, και των απο του
 “ λαου λιαν επαινουμενοι· ως
 “ και του θανατου τουτο το ει-
 “ δος, δια πολλην ευσεβειαν και
 “ πιστιν ισχυραν γινομενον, μη-
 “ δεν αποδειν μαρτυριου δοκειν.
 “ και τα σωματα δε των αγιων
 “ υπταισ χερσι και κολποισ
 “ υπολαμβανοντες, καθαιρουντες
 “ τε τους οφθαλμουσ, και στο-
 “ ματα συγκλειοντες, ωμοφορ-
 “ ουντες τε και διατιθεντες,
 “ προσκολλωμενοι, συμπλεκο-
 “ μενοι, λουτροισ τε και περι-
 “ στολαισ κατακοσμουντες, μετα

“ without weariness or heed-
 “ taking, and attended upon
 “ them diligently, administer-
 “ ing to them in Christ, and
 “ most gladly died with them.
 “ For, filling themselves with
 “ the grief of the others, they
 “ took the infection of their
 “ neighbours, and translated
 “ of their own accord the sor-
 “ rows of others upon them-
 “ selves.

4. “ And many, after hav-
 “ ing cured and confirmed
 “ other sick persons, died
 “ themselves, transferring to
 “ their own persons the deaths
 “ of those whom they had
 “ saved: thus fulfilling, in
 “ practice, the common say-
 “ ing, that only friendship is
 “ always to be retained; and
 “ departing this life, they
 “ seemed the offscouring of
 “ others. In this sort the
 “ best of our brethren depart-
 “ ed this life: whereof some
 “ were presbyters, some dea-
 “ cons, and others laymen,
 “ held in great reverence: so
 “ that this kind of death, for
 “ the great piety and strength
 “ of faith, seems to differ
 “ nothing from martyrdom.
 “ Moreover, they took the bo-
 “ dies of the departed saints
 “ into their uplifted arms and
 “ breasts, wiped their eyes
 “ and closed their mouths,

“ μικρον ετυγχανον των ισων·
 “ αει των ὑπολειπομένων εφ-
 “ επομένων τοις προ αυτων.

“ Τα δε γε εθνη παν τουναν-
 “ τιον· και νοσειν αρχομενους
 “ απωθουντο, και απεφευγον
 “ τους φιλτατους, και ταις ὀ-
 “ δοις ερριπτουν ἡμιθνητας· και
 “ νεκρους αταφους απεσκυβαλι-
 “ ζουντο, την του θανατου δια-
 “ δοσιν και κοινωνιαν εκτρεπο-
 “ μενοι, ἦν ουχ ην και πολλα
 “ μηχανωμενοις εκκλιναι ῥα-
 “ διον.”

“ carried them on their shoul-
 “ ders, and laid them out :
 “ they embraced them, and
 “ clung to them, washed
 “ them, and wrapped them in
 “ shrouds : and shortly after,
 “ these persons obtained the
 “ same kind offices from
 “ others : for the living con-
 “ tinually traced the steps of
 “ the dead.

“ But among the heathen
 “ all fell out on the contrary.
 “ They drove the sick out of
 “ their houses, as soon as the
 “ first symptoms of disease
 “ were observed : they shun-
 “ ned their dearest friends
 “ and relations : they threw
 “ out the sick, half dead, into
 “ the streets : they threw
 “ their dead, without burial,
 “ to the dogs : thus did they
 “ endeavour to evade partak-
 “ ing in the general fate, which
 “ nevertheless, notwithstand-
 “ ing the many expedients
 “ they used for that purpose,
 “ they could not easily escape.

ADDITIONAL NOTE

ON

LECTURE VIII.*



AS it is of little avail, in a practical business, to throw out loose suggestions, unaccompanied by any tangible proposal: I think it proper to connect some further remarks, with those I have already offered, relating to our academical pursuits.

The following question is not unfrequently put: Why do theological studies occupy so small a space in the examination for our first Degree?

The vindication of the present practice is, I believe, commonly stated to this effect. It is alleged, that Theology is no specific object of the first Degree, nor of the faculty of Arts: that the studies of that faculty are, on the contrary, of a *preparatory* nature, and designed as a groundwork for the higher pursuits, belonging to the faculties of Theology, Civil Law, and Medicine. It is also a consideration, justly due to the vindication of the present system, that the academical discipline of under graduate-

* See page 348, line 24.

ship, is marked by a sedulous enforcement of attendance on religious ordinances; and that the prescribed duties of that period, require considerable attention to the Scriptures, and to the grounds and doctrines of the Christian Faith.

Having stated this vindication, I must remark, that I have done it, only according to the best knowledge and understanding of the subject which I possess: and that such statement cannot claim any sanction of *authority*.

I will further remark, that I consider the matter of the foregoing vindication to be entirely true: that I admit the necessity of a course, *preparatory to those studies which peculiarly belong to the learned professions*: I admit, that the present course is, in its leading particulars, well adapted to the end proposed: and that it is, if not eminently subservient to theological learning, to which it does not specifically or properly relate, conducive to personal piety and religious edification. I say, that this course does not properly relate to theological learning: because one thing must be learned before another, and *preparatory* learning must obviously have a priority in the order of time. When I speak of the ends to which this course is conducive, I speak with reference to public rules and institutions, their design, and their tendency: whether such rules and institutions are actually ap-

plied by individuals, to their own improvement and that of others, must at all times depend upon themselves.

Nevertheless, I think that this system labours under a great practical mistake, and involves an oblivion of the state of things, regarded by those, who lived before us, and from whose constitutions the basis of our present system, relating to academical Degrees, has been derived.

At the date of those constitutions, and for centuries afterwards, the time of life contemplated for the first Degree, was much earlier than that, with which, in the present practice, it is usually connected. Eighteen, or even sixteen years, was, if I mistake not, in those times, a customary age for the attainment of this honour: at the present day, twenty-three years is no uncommon age for receiving it with honourable distinctions: and those distinctions have, I believe, in some instances been attained at an age still more advanced.

If this be the fact, it may naturally occur to us, that a course of *preparatory* study ought to terminate at some definite time: that a system well adapted to sixteen, may be disproportioned to twenty-three: and that the system which now, in practical operation, applies to the more advanced age, must necessarily ex-

clude, with little prospect of subsequent reparation, the appropriate studies for the intermediate years. A fixed age ought, I think, to be declared, beyond which, no encouragement, in the way of honourable distinction, to the preparatory cultivation of classical learning and physical science, should be holden out.

In conclusion, I wish it to be observed, that the present remarks are offered with the utmost distrustfulness of the judgment from which they proceed, and with the most respectful confidence in that of the learned body, to whom it belongs to decide upon the subject of them.

THE END.

By the same Author.

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