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A

VIEW OF THE USE AND DESIGN

OF THE

OLD TESTAMENT:

FOLLOWED BY

TWO DISSERTATIONS,

I. ON THE CAUSES OF THE RAPID PROPAGATION OF THE GOSPEL AMONG THE HEATHEN.

II. ON THE CREDIBILITY OF THE FACTS RELATED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

BY

WILLIAM ROWE LYALL, M.A.

ARCHDEACON OF COLCHESTER;

CO-DEAN OF BOCKING; AND RECTOR OF HADLEIGH, SUFFOLK.

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THE FOLLOWING

COMMENTARY UPON THE EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY,

IS, WITH ALL RESPECT, INSCRIBED,

AS A TRIBUTE

OF ADMIRATION FOR HIS PUBLIC CHARACTER,

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IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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BY HIS GRACE'S

MOST DUTIFUL AND DEVOTED SERVANT,

WILLIAM ROWE LYALL.

ADVERTISEMENT.

The general argument, embodied in the volume here presented to the public, was sketched out by me some ten or twelve years ago, and formed the subject of a series of discourses preached in the Chapel of Lincoln's Inn, for the Warburtonian Lecture. I have not described them in my title-page by this name, because, although they form the subject, they can hardly be considered as the substance of the Lectures then delivered. Many things will be found in this volume, which I did not preach; and some things there are, which I had formerly written, but have seen reason since, either to alter or omit.

By the terms of Bishop Warburton's will, it is stipulated, that the Lectures delivered under its foundation, shall be printed and published. I have hoped, that in giving to the public these commentaries upon the same argument as I had chosen for the Lectures which were preached, I shall be considered as having sufficiently fulfilled the spirit of the testator's will, though I have not complied with the letter of his injunctions.

Of the delay which has taken place in the publication, it is hardly necessary to give any account. Many causes have conspired, and among others, the duties and avocations of a large and laborious parish. But the chief has been the hesitation felt by me in consequence of the apparent novelty, both of the general view which I have taken of the Evidences, and of many particular questions connected with them. New lights are commonly very unsafe lights to trust to, even in matters of minor importance; but in religion they require, for the most part, to be known, only that they may be avoided.

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LECTURES,

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LECTURE I.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

If we examine attentively the facts related in the New Testament, we cannot fail to observe, that if they really happened, they must have been generally known and believed at Jerusalem and elsewhere, in the age to which they are ascribed. A difference of opinion may have prevailed, as to the real author of the miracles, or as to the purpose for which they were wrought; but if we suppose any doubts to have existed generally among the people of Judæa, as to the reality of the transactions themselves, this would be a legitimate reason for questioning the truth of the history; inasmuch as it would entirely destroy its credit, were we to suppose that the knowledge of it was confined, to the immediate followers of Christ.

Accordingly, upon opening the volume, one of the most striking features which it offers, is the absence of all controversy about the facts related in it. In no part of it, do the writers enter upon any argument, to show the truth of their statements. These are assumed, as relating to events which were notorious and familiarly known. It is plain, that if the history be true, such must necessarily have been the case. Any attempt to prove the facts, would have been a ground of suspicion; while, on the other hand, the absence of all anxiety, on the part of any one of the writers, about the credibility of their story, considering what that story is, affords a negative evidence of authenticity, stronger, perhaps, than any positive testimony, that could have been devised. Connecting this evidence with the rapid success of Christianity in the world, it amounts almost to a moral demonstration.

This part of the subject, I shall have occasion to examine more at length, hereafter; but in the mean time, I shall take that for granted, which the narrative assumes; and suppose the belief of the facts, by the Jews, to be conceded. It is plain that in the time of the Apostles, the inquiry was confined to an *explanation* of the facts: How did they happen? For what end? By what power or authority?

The Jews, in general, appear to have accounted for the miracles, on the supposition of spiritual agency. It is probable, that some may have ascribed them to forbidden arts; others, it may be, to fraud and collu-

sion; but there is no indication, leading us to suppose that the facts themselves were called in question by any party. Time however has effected a wide change in this part of the argument. No one, in the present day, who believes the facts related in the New Testament, is found to doubt the divine authority by which they were wrought. This is supposed to follow, by necessary consequence, if the history be true. Accordingly when we consult the works of Lardner, or Michaelis, or Paley, or of any of the more popular writers upon the Evidences, we find that the whole of the reasoning, is directed to the proof of the genuineness of the four Gospels, and the credibility of the writers. The question whether, if the events described really happened, any other explanation may be offered, is never so much as raised. If in the present day a writer were to enter upon a formal dissertation, to prove that the miracles wrought by Christ, were not the effect of magical arts, nor of diabolical agency, it is probable that the reader would only smile at his simplicity. Either they were the work of a divine authority, or the whole was the effect of mere fraud and delusion: no middle hypothesis is now ever entertained. If Christ performed the actions ascribed to him by his disciples, the religion which he preached was divine; if not, not.

But upon turning to the reasoning of St. Paul and the other Apostles, as exhibited in the Acts and Epistles, we shall find that instead of ending here, in

their hands, the discussion only begins at this point. On what proof do they rest the argument? Is it on the wonderful actions ascribed to Christ, and the impossibility of accounting for them, except on the supposition of his divine authority? So far from it, they scarcely allude to his miracles at all; and never in the way of proof, to show that what he said was to be believed, as if from God. This is pointedly illustrated by Paley, who has written a chapter on purpose to explain the probable reason of so great a peculiarity. It is plain that St. Peter had been present at many miracles wrought by Christ; and in the Acts, many are related as having been performed by himself. Yet out of six speeches attributed to him in this last writing, in two of them only, is reference made to the miracles of Christ; and never but once does he refer to his own miraculous powers. The speech of Stephen contains no reference to miracles, though it is said of him by St. Luke that he did great wonders and miracles in his own person.

Again, though various miraculous actions are attributed to St. Paul, at many of which the historian himself was present, yet in the several addresses which are given, as having been spoken by him, the appeals, either to his own miracles, or to any miracles at all, are rare and only incidental. In the thirteen letters which he wrote, there are only three indubitable references to the miracles which he wrought; and to the miracles wrought by Christ himself,

there are in his Epistles no direct allusions whatever.

The circumstance here adverted to, is explained by Paley, on the ground that the truth of the facts was notorious. "The silence of the Apostles," says he, "in this view of the case, is a proof, not that the miracles were not believed, but that the truth of them was a thing admitted." This supposition explains, no doubt, why the Apostles did not enter into arguments, to prove that the facts really happened: that would certainly have been superfluous, to persons who had been witnesses of their truth: but it does not explain why, having to prove, not the facts themselves, but the divine authority of the religion which they preached, they did not distinctly allege those facts in their argument, if it rested in their minds, as it now does in ours, on that particular evidence. The data of a proposition may often be tacitly assumed, but not the proofs; this would turn the argument into a mere assertion. Now it is as proofs, and not simply as historical facts, that we are at present considering the miracles.

We see that the topic, which in modern expositions of the evidences of Christianity, is exclusively considered, the Apostles either assume, or only dwell upon incidentally. But then, as if to balance the scale, we find the argument on which the Apostles rested their proof, is passed over with as little notice, by writers in the present day. In the speeches put into the mouths of the Apostles,

in the Acts, as well as in the Epistles which have come down to us, the single authority to which they appeal, is the Old Testament. Whatever be the immediate subject of their reasoning: whether it be the divinity of Christ, or his propitiation, or his exaltation as head over his Church, or the calling of the Gentiles, or the rejection of the Jews, or more generally, the truth of the tidings which they proclaim: be the subject of their preaching what it may, the storehouse, from which they draw their proofs, is the "Law and the Prophets." With very little limitation, the same remark will apply to our Saviour's own teaching.

It is very common, however, to see it stated in books, and still more to hear in conversation, that the proof of the Old Testament now rests on the authority of the New. We meet with this opinion in books written expressly on the Evidences; but even when the position is not formally laid down, it is always tacitly assumed. In Paley, for example, Prophecy is counted only among the "auxiliary evidences" of Christianity; and the whole subject is discussed in a single chapter, in which one prophecy only is referred to, and dismissed immediately without any comment.

Now it is not to be supposed that the Apostles did not understand the real grounds, on which the truths, which they were commissioned to preach, had been placed by God. It is much more likely, that we, in the present day, have committed a mistake, in passing over so lightly, an authority, on

which they reposed so confidently; and not only so confidently, but, as the event has declared, so successfully. A closer examination of the argument however, will, I think, satisfy us, that neither the one nor the other made any mistake in the reasoning; but that the question which we, in the present day, have to consider, instead of being the same question which was argued 1800 years ago, is one prodigiously more easy of solution.

However difficult it may be, to speculate upon events beforehand, it is often quite easy to specify the causes from which they proceeded, after they have happened. It requires no extraordinary sagacity in an historian to discern, that the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks, was one main cause of the revival of literature in Europe; and that this last, was that which really produced the reformation of religion, in the fifteenth century; but a person who should have foreseen these results when Constantinople fell, would have exhibited a degree of penetration that would have seemed miraculous. Just so it is in the case before us. It is not difficult for us, who witness the establishment of Christianity in the world, and observe the effects which have followed from the facts which we read in the New Testament, to demonstrate the end, for which they were exhibited, and the authority, from which they must have proceeded; but this proof was quite another thing in the days of the Apostles; when that which they proclaimed, and which we now witness and experience,

must have been accounted by many, as no better than a dream. They had to assign the cause and intention of the miracles, before the event; and, moreover, to bring mankind to adopt their explanation, at a time when its truth was altogether a matter of conjecture. A very little reflection will show us, that the task which was thus imposed upon the first preachers of Christianity, was not only more difficult than ours: it was totally and absolutely different; it belonged to a different department of reasoning; and from the necessity of things, required an entirely different mode of proof. This would seem to be plain upon the mere enunciation of the case; but an example will, perhaps, assist us to understand the logical difference of the two arguments.

The circulation of the blood is now a well-known and established fact, in the science of the human frame; and it is easy for an anatomist to demonstrate the cause on which it depends; to point out, that is, the contrivance, by which this important function is performed. But at a time when the phenomena were unknown and unsuspected, the genius of Harvey was able, by reflection upon the parts, as they lay in an inanimate mass before him, to deduce the fact, *à priori*, from the mere inspection of the cavities and ventricles of the heart. This, we see, was arguing, not from *effects* to *causes*, but from *causes* to *effects*: a process of reasoning which, in the case of *contingent* events, is next to impossible; but

which, even in physical events, where effects follow from causes with stated and undeviating certainty, is so difficult and uncertain, that the instance here mentioned is said to be the only one, of any discovery in experimental science having been so made.

This example exactly illustrates the nature of the reasoning in the case of Christianity, before and after its establishment. Assuming the truth of the facts related in the New Testament:—and supposing the question to be only as to the authority by which the miracles were wrought, and the end for which, on a supposition of their divine authority, the regular course of nature had been suspended:—the commonest powers of reasoning can now assign the answer. The establishment among mankind, of those precise truths which he, who worked the miracles, declared that he was sent into the world to proclaim; the disappearance of idolatry, from all the more civilized portions of the globe; the beneficent effects, which have followed directly out of the belief of mankind in the facts under consideration;—these point at once to the solution. No one who believes in the providential character of the facts, will raise a doubt upon the question; as no one in the present day, who believes in the facts themselves, will ascribe them to any other than divine power.

In how different a form, did the truth present itself to the understanding of mankind, in the days of the Apostles! When we reason upon the miracles, we

assume that our hearers are acquainted with the leading principles of natural philosophy; that they would be affronted if we supposed them to believe in the reality of magical and forbidden arts; or in the power of any subordinate spirits, to control the laws, either of the physical or moral government of the world. We take for granted that they are imbued with a sense of the great truths of natural religion; of the unity and attributes of God; of his truth and justice, no less than of his infinite power. Reverse these assumptions, and the argument from miracles becomes a rope of sand in our hands. This, however, is precisely what we must do: we must assume just the contrary of every one of the conditions I have mentioned, if we mean to place ourselves in the position of the Apostles, and of those with whom they had to reason.

But even supposing this difficulty to have been overcome; and that their hearers had conceded that no power not divine could have been the author of the works ascribed to Christ: yet how improbable an explanation of the facts, must that event which we now witness with our eyes, have seemed to mankind, at the time when it was first proposed to their belief! An interpretation more incredible, than that the existing religions of mankind were thenceforth to be abolished, by divine authority, and that the worship of one, who in the eyes of men had seemed only a humble Jew, was to be substituted in their place—could not easily have been put upon any

events; nor one less likely to have been embraced by mankind, if it had rested only on the opinion of the Apostles; or on any reasoning, built by them, merely upon the wonderful character of the facts:—for no facts could be so wonderful, as their explanation would, in such a case, have seemed. It is not without an effort of the understanding even in the present day, when Christianity is established, that we can appreciate the true character of this great event; but viewed in the abstract, and before it came to pass, no language can convey a full statement of its antecedent improbability.

As this proposition lies at the bottom of the argument, which I propose to discuss in the following Lectures, it is important that the difference between the proof of Christianity, as the question now stands and as it stood in the days of the Apostles, should be, not merely admitted as a fact, but exactly understood. Before I proceed, therefore, to examine the evidence on which the Apostles rested their reasoning, it will be expedient to say a few words, respecting the ground, upon which the truth of their conclusions is commonly placed in the present day.

In every work with which I am acquainted upon the Evidences of Christianity, its divine authority is considered to rest immediately upon the miracles. Such a way of speaking is sufficiently correct for popular use; but in strictness of reasoning, the miracles are merely the premises of the argument and not the proofs. In the New Testa-

ment itself, they are always so adduced. They are there spoken of as "signs;" as visible demonstrations of God's mind, leading mankind to expect that the things which he had promised, were about to be fulfilled; but not as the antecedent causes, of the things which should come to pass, nor as being at all connected with them by any moral or physical dependence. "The times of man's ignorance," St. Paul tells the Athenians, "God had in past times winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent. Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."

Assuming, now, all this to be true:—that God had forbidden mankind to worship idols of stone, and that thenceforth they were all commanded to acknowledge him in the way which the Apostles preached:—for that he would no longer wink at the ignorance and wickedness of his creatures, but called them every where to repent, and to believe in him whom God had sent into the world and raised from the dead, as a sign or assurance to mankind of his coming again to judge all the children of men:—assuming, I say, all this to be true, yet it was not matter which St. Paul could prove by general reasoning; as little could he prove it on oath, or by offering to submit himself to any test to which his sincerity could be subjected. Humanly speaking, it

could be determined no otherwise than by the event. If God had indeed raised Jesus from the dead, as a sign or assurance to mankind of all these things being true: in that case, the word, which God had declared by the mouth of the Apostles, would come to pass; if not, not. The language of Gamaliel, as recorded in the fifth chapter of the Acts, was not only the language of humanity, but of the plainest good sense. "Refrain from these men, and let them alone; for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it."

That such was the view taken of the miracles by the Apostles, might be shown from abundance of other passages; but it was also the true and logical view, as will readily appear if we examine any popular work upon the Evidences. For example:—in the work of Paley the whole argument is made to rest upon two propositions: first, "*That there is satisfactory evidence that many professing to be original witnesses of the Christian miracles, passed their lives in dangers, labours, and sufferings, voluntarily undergone in attestation of the accounts which they have delivered;*" and secondly, "*That there is* NOT *satisfactory evidence that persons pretending to be original witnesses of any other similar miracles, have acted in the same manner, in attestation of the accounts which they have delivered.*"

Now assuming this to be proved, yet it is plain that these propositions, are merely the data of the

argument:—the real proof of the conclusion which he draws, is built, not upon the miracles themselves, but upon the effects which they are supposed to have produced; that is, upon the event, of which they were the stated signs, having come to pass. That the case is so, may easily be shown, by merely reversing the hypothesis of the argument. The evidence of the above propositions will be the same, whether we suppose the labours of the Apostles to have been crowned with success or to have miscarried; but it is plain, that on the last supposition, the conclusion, now built upon the miracles, will fall to the ground. Whatever explanation of the facts might be proposed, it would be certain that the Apostles had mistaken their true meaning and intention, however great the labours, and dangers, and sufferings which they underwent, in confirmation of the accounts, which they delivered.

We see, then, what the proof is, on which the *present* belief of mankind, in the divine authority of the miracles of Christ, is founded. It is not on the wonderfulness of the actions which he performed, that this belief ultimately rests; nor in the purity of the precepts which he delivered; nor on the reasonableness of the doctrines which he preached; nor on the testimony of the witnesses whom he left behind, to all that he had said and done: All this is true, and may be proved; but all this is not enough:—that which the proof now rests upon, and without which the whole edifice would crumble to the ground, is the *suc-*

cess of his religion. It is upon the fact that, agreeably to the declarations of God's purposes, as proclaimed by the Apostles, idolatry has been subverted; and a form of religion substituted in its place, which is certainly composed (whatever may be our opinion of it in other respects) of the self-same verities which he who worked, and they who attested the miracles, declared from the beginning that they were commanded to make known.

Explain the miracles themselves as we please, the *establishment* of Christianity cannot have been the effect of collusion; still less of magical arts, or of the influence of subordinate agents of any kind, either human or spiritual. Any such supposition is stamped with absurdity on the very face of it. It would imply, not that God had permitted a temporary invasion of the laws of his material creation, but that he had thrown the reins of government from his hands. Neither does it seem to me, that we should much improve the matter, by supposing the event to have been the effect of chance. Such an hypothesis does not indeed involve an absurdity; but it is excluded in this case, not only by the character of the event, but by the history. If the establishment of Christianity was the chance result of promiscuous causes, then were the solemn declarations of the Apostles, of the constraining force which was upon them to announce the Gospel to mankind, nothing more than the effects of delusion; the mere waking dreams, real or pretended, of a few heated imagina-

tions. But does experience teach us to believe it credible, that on such a supposition their solemn declarations would have come true? We know no instance of any event in history, even of the commonest kind, which madmen had foretold, having come to pass; much less such an event, as the rise and establishment in the world, of a new system of religious belief, to consist of principles and doctrines, both of faith and practice, each of which had beforehand, point by point, been formally specified and explained.

But if the establishment of Christianity be a part of the evidence, on which the belief of its divine authority now stands,—and so important a part, that if it were removed the chain of proof would fall to pieces in our hands,—how, it is obvious to ask, are we to account for its successful propagation? The more improbable we suppose the doctrines of which it consists, so much the stronger the evidence required; the more incredible the event may have seemed, before it happened, the greater must have been the difficulty, of bringing mankind to entertain that antecedent belief, on which its success was founded. For if a large portion of mankind had not been persuaded of the divine authority of the Gospel *before* it was established, it would seem impossible to understand, how it could have been established at all.

The Apostles then must necessarily have been provided with evidence of some sort, good or bad,

over and above the facts which are preserved in the New Testament; and that evidence, as we have seen, must have rested upon grounds, entirely different from any of the data, on which the reasoning in the present day depends. It must also have been evidence apparently of a very irresistible as well as peculiar kind; as the proposition to be proved, was one much more difficult to demonstrate, than that which the argument now requires. For when *we* speak of Christianity, we speak of a fact, and not of a mere probable opinion; of a dispensation which we say God has established, and under which we actually live. There is no question here about the thing itself, but only about the true explanation of it. But in the time of the Apostles, the thing itself was the very point which it was required to prove. The duty imposed upon them, was to convince mankind beforehand of the *intention* of God; the intention, be it observed, of establishing in the world a new system of religious belief; and one, so remote from common apprehension, that many persons cannot believe it, even now that it has become the faith of every civilized country in the world. I need say no more to shew the peculiar nature, as well as the superior difficulty of the task which was placed upon the Apostles; the only question would seem to be, as to the means by which they were enabled to accomplish it.

In a summary way this question is easily answered. We have only to take up the Acts, or read any one of St. Paul's Epistles, and we shall immediately see,

that the proof employed by the Apostles, to demonstrate the divine authority, of the actions and instructions of the Founder of Christianity, was uniformly taken from the Old Testament. This, as I have before observed, was the document to which they appealed; and, as far as we have the means of judging, this was the evidence by which mankind were originally converted.

On the other hand, when we examine the ground, upon which the proof of the divine authority of the Christian miracles now depends, we see that it was ground which, for obvious reasons, it was impossible for the Apostles to occupy. Accordingly that which I shall endeavour to show in these Lectures, is the following proposition:—namely, that the place which the actual establishment of Christianity now holds in the argument, in the time of the Apostles was supplied by the Old Testament.—I shall not confine myself to the proof of this proposition, as a mere historical fact; but I shall endeavour to explain the reasons, on which the necessity of a preparatory dispensation was founded. In the discussion of these reasons, I shall be obliged to touch upon many topics, philosophical and historical as well as theological, which have not heretofore been considered in connection with the Evidences of Christianity; but in the result I hope to be able to demonstrate, that without the preceding belief of mankind in the Jewish, or in some scheme of prophecy, the difficulties which the Apostles had to

contend with, would have been insurmountable. I shall show that their success, if not impossible, (as my own opinion would incline me to believe,) would at least have been, except on this hypothesis, inexplicable, on any known and acknowledged principles of the human mind.

LECTURE II.

ON THE ANTECEDENT CREDIBILITY OF A DIVINE REVELATION.

We have seen the important change which circumstances have introduced into the Evidences of Christianity, since the time when it was first published; and that the reasoning on which the proof now depends, was not and could not be employed by the Apostles. Let us then dismiss this reasoning from our minds, and suppose ourselves to be examining the evidence, not of an old established religion, but of one offered for the first time to our consideration. With this view the simplest course will be, to put aside, for a time, the particular case of Christianity, and to look at the subject in the abstract.

Suppose then a miracle to happen in the present day, how could we demonstrate that it was wrought by God? Or, supposing a company of men, in the present day, to have received, in the same manner as the Apostles, a commission from God, to spread

abroad the tidings of a revelation from heaven: what is the evidence which they would be required to produce?

Let us begin with answering the first of these questions: assuming all the facts of the case—that a miracle had been publicly and notoriously wrought—and that no question was raised about the credibility of the witnesses:—how could they demonstrate, that it was the effect of a divine interposition? To do this, what is it that they must prove?

A belief in the permanency of the laws of nature seems to be so inseparable from the human mind, that some metaphysicians have considered it as an original principle in our nature. But in fact it is nothing more than a necessary conclusion of reason; and one, which is identical with the well-known maxim, that whatever is, will continue to exist in the same state—a body in motion to persevere in a state of motion—a body at rest to remain in a state of rest—until the presence or withdrawal of some cause, to interrupt the existing state of things. This truth is laid down by Newton, as is well known, among the axioms upon which he has explained the system of the universe.

Now as the supposition of a miracle, directly contradicts this principle of our nature or our reason, call it which you will, we see at once what truth it is, which really lies at the bottom of that incredulity, with which every sensible man listens to stories pretending to be miraculous; namely, the truth just mentioned,

that the course of nature will continue without interruption, until the presence or withdrawal of some cause to interrupt the existing state of things: an inference which, though referred by metaphysicians to an axiom of philosophy, might just as properly be called a maxim of common sense. *Quidquid oritur*, says Cicero, *qualecunque est, causam habeat a naturâ necesse est: ut etiamsi præter consuetudinem extiterit, præter naturam tamen, non potest existere. Causam igitur investigato in re novâ et admirabili, si potes; si nullam reperies, illud tamen exploratum habeto, nihil fieri potuisse sine causâ.* I shall not enlarge upon this point, because it is one, I imagine, on which all reasonable men, whether philosophers or not, are practically agreed. That which Cicero here applies to heathen omens and prodigies, is applicable to every fact pretending to be miraculous: "In every new and surprising phenomenon, inquire into the cause; and even if you should discover none, yet be certain that no fact can have happened without a cause; and that this cause, even though it may seem contrary to experience, yet cannot really be contrary to the laws of nature."

To go back then to the case of an asserted miracle, as just now stated: the question we see, is as to the sufficient cause. Demonstrate this, and the mere wonderfulness of the fact, has no weight whatever in the argument. Neither does it matter what the cause may be; if we are sure of its reality

the most miraculous effect may be just as credible, as the commonest occurrence which falls under the notice of our senses.

To take an example: the disappearance of the moon from our solar system, would justly be deemed as improbable an event as could be mentioned Nevertheless, if it had been predicted by Sir Isaac Newton as one which, from astronomical calculations not liable to error, would necessarily take place in a certain stated year; that is to say, supposing him to have demonstrated the sufficient cause of this event, as clearly as he has demonstrated the law of nature, by which the heavenly bodies are now retained in their orbits: it would not be deemed incredible. On the contrary, every one who understood the reasoning, and was satisfied of the correctness of the principles, on which the calculations were grounded, would confidently expect them to be verified. Moreover, when the event did happen, he would have no doubt in his mind, that the causes of it were the same, as had been previously laid down.

As the present is a question in religion, and not in natural philosophy, let us then correct the words of Cicero; and when he says, that whatever happens, must have its cause "in nature," let us substitute another term in the place of nature, and say that whatever happens must have its cause in the 'will of God;' (which I presume to be the real meaning of the word) and we shall at once have an exact idea, of what it is that we have to do, when we endeavour

to prove that a fact was miraculous. If the course of nature is founded upon the will of God, a miracle implies a *change* in this will. This is the cause which we have to demonstrate. Take any case, then, and reason upon it, as in the example I just now proposed. Suppose that we could demonstrate, *à priori*, not the mere *possibility* of this or that design being in the mind of God; but the actual *fact* of some fixed design on his part, the consequence of which, whatever it was, would necessarily and inevitably entail, *pro hac vice*, a deviation from the course of nature; so that a large number of persons knew beforehand, and were daily expecting, a divine dispensation which involved the supposition of miracles of some sort: it is plain that in this case, mankind would not, any more than in the case I just now spoke of, dispute about the credibility of the miracles, merely because they were wonderful, and implied a suspension of the laws of nature; nor, supposing them to have happened, would they dispute about the cause. The antecedent knowledge and expectation of mankind, would silence all objections drawn from mere general reasoning. It would do so, as I showed, when the question related to matters pertaining to natural philosophy; and there can be no reason for supposing, that it would not do the same in a matter connected with religion.

It is evident that in the above cases, the difficulty of the supposition consists, in the apparent impossibility of conceiving such an antecedent knowledge of

God's designs, as the argument requires. If we were supposing an opinion built only upon the unsubstantial fancies of mankind, and not on any assignable proof: whatever might have been the nature of the previous expectation, it never would have been realized. This is certain: nevertheless, assuming such a case to be possible, if we could prove the fact of a previous expectation, on the part of large numbers of mankind, of some miraculous dispensation, we should be at no loss, in case that expectation was fulfilled, to understand the reasons on which their subsequent belief was founded. The only difficulty would be, how to account for the supposed previous expectation.

In the preceding remarks I have had in view the case of a single miracle; we now come to the second case which I proposed for consideration: that of a revelation—which is also a miracle indeed, but of a peculiar and more comprehensive kind. Here we have to prove, not simply that a fact was the immediate act of God; but to show that the purpose of it was to make an authoritative declaration to mankind of certain stated truths. It is easy to suppose a case, where no doubt might exist as to the divine *authority* of the miracle, but in which it would be impossible to offer any conjecture, as to the *end* for which it was wrought.

Let us then assume this last to have been communicated, by a divine illumination, to the minds of twelve, or any stated number of individuals: In

what way, could they convey the supernatural conviction of their own minds, to the understanding of others? Here a moral reason is alleged for a fact purely physical; there is therefore no natural connection between the premises and conclusion. Neither is it the agency of God, which is in question — that is assumed; but it is the purpose in God's mind; and this, while that purpose is a matter only in speculation; something not actually carried into effect, but to be executed hereafter. We are not speaking of the proof of facts, but of propositions, which I am supposing to be new to the apprehension of mankind, and merely propounded for their acceptance. Admit all the facts of the case; assume the divine authority of the proposed truths; still it may be asked, What legitimate evidence can be suggested, by which those who were commissioned to spread the knowledge of them abroad throughout the world, could certainly show of such facts, however confessedly miraculous, that the demonstration of those particular truths, was the object for which they had been exhibited?

It is evident that in proportion as the truths are supposed to be, in themselves, more or less easy of belief, more or less conformable to our existing notions of God and of his government, the proof required will be more or less strong. If we assume the doctrines propounded to be without any antecedent probability; to be startling and unexpected, and to transcend any thing that human reason would

have presumed: the evidence must be proportionably weighty. If on the other hand, we suppose nothing more to be in question, than an authoritative publication of opinion and notions, which had already been anticipated in the traditional belief of the vulgar, or the reasonings of the learned: lighter proofs will satisfy the conditions of the argument. Let us then take the least improbable case that can be stated: that which Paley has chosen, in his refutation of Hume.

The belief of mankind in the hope of another life, however derived, has prevailed so extensively in all ages and nations, that it would seem to have its root in some original principle of the human mind. *Nisi cognitum comprehensumque animis haberemus, non tam stabilis opinio permaneret, nec confirmaretur diuturnitate temporis, nec una cum sæculis ætatibusque hominum inveterare potuisset.* The reason of this widely-spread conviction, this *sæculorum quasi augurium futurorum*, as Cicero elsewhere terms it, is not the question; but only the fact of its existence. Another life, however, being supposed, it would seem to be not unnatural for mankind to infer, from the tendencies of virtue and vice, to produce happiness or misery in the world which we now live in, that in the next, the same principle will be more perfectly developed; that those manifold exceptions to the rule, observable in the fortunes of mankind here below, will hereafter be rectified, and all present inequalities made even.

That there is nothing incredible in this doctrine, nothing in it, contrary to the common sense and reason of mankind, seems to be indisputable. And it will not, I think, be denied, that supposing it to be *true* (which it might be, and yet we not know it) the authoritative publication of its truth, on the part of God, would afford a motive and reason sufficient to constitute the hypothesis of a revelation. The language of antiquity on the subject will certainly prove so much. There is a well-known passage in the Alcibiades, in which Socrates is made to intimate, not only his belief of a future life, but his expectation that some future divine communication will, in process of time, be made to mankind respecting it.

Now an opinion put into the mouth of Socrates, and that by Plato, must not be treated as incredible and absurd. It cannot with any decency be otherwise regarded, than as a strong testimony to show, that there is no *philosophical* improbability in the hypothesis of a revelation. Socrates was no dreamer; and neither he nor Plato had any thing, except the abstract probability of the hypothesis, to create the expectation of such an event, in their minds.

But let us for a moment put the case that Socrates had pretended to be that messenger whom he speaks of; that θεῖος τις, whose future appearance in the world, he did not deem an unreasonable hope. We will also suppose certain facts to have been alleged,

in proof of his divine commission; and the question to have been raised, after his death, as to the true character of his pretensions.

Under these circumstances, it is probable his followers would have appealed to the doctrines which he taught; and more particularly, perhaps, to this great doctrine of a future life. "Suppose the world we live in to have had a Creator," they might have said; "suppose a part of the creation to have received faculties from their Maker, by which they are capable of rendering a moral obedience to his will, and of voluntarily pursuing any end for which he has designed them; suppose the Creator to intend for these, his rational and accountable agents, a second state of existence, in which their situation will be regulated by their behaviour in the first state; suppose it to be of the utmost importance to the subjects of this dispensation, to know what is intended for them: suppose, nevertheless, almost the whole race, either by the imperfection of their faculties, or the misfortune of their situation, to want this knowledge:—these," they might have argued, "must be admitted to be probable suppositions, and may be *true* ones; and in this last case, was not a revelation to be expected at the hand of a wise and beneficent Being? Suppose him to design for mankind a future state, can you be surprised that he should acquaint them with it?"

This is the reasoning employed by Paley against Hume; and I am now supposing it to have been

employed in the imaginary case, of the scene of the argument being at Athens, as just stated. We see at once what would have been the answer.

It would have been said, "We are inquiring, whether certain stated doctrines, are to be received as of divine authority: and instead of proving the fact, you are only showing, that the supposition is not absurd or incredible. The data from which you have drawn your conclusion, are not grounded upon any direct proofs of a design, on the part of God, to make a revelation of his will; but upon a general consideration of God's attributes on the one hand, and of the condition of human nature on the other. These are reasons which were just as true in the time of Deucalion, or in the age of Homer, as when Socrates was born. No change has taken place, that we are able to detect, in the intervening periods, as to the position of mankind, with respect to the present question; nor, if we may trust to our experience, in the rules of God's moral government. Great indeed is the ignorance which prevails in the world, as to the true nature of God, and of the worship which ought to be paid to him; great is the need we have of some divine instructor, in case God's human creation, are to be held responsible in another life, for all the follies and immoralities they are guilty of, in this: but all this was as certain a thousand years ago, as it is now. Mankind are not more ignorant or more wicked, than in other ages of the world; why then was the blessing of a revelation so long kept back?

The more clear you consider the necessity of a revelation, on the supposition of a future state of rewards and punishments being true, the stronger surely the presumption becomes, of the doctrine not being true, from the fact of so many millions of human beings, having been permitted to live and die in every age of the world, in ignorance of a dispensation, which if true, it would so deeply have concerned them to have known."

I see not how this reasoning was to have been met by speculative assumptions of any kind, even supposing the discussion to have regarded only the general probability of *some* revelation. But in the case, where we suppose the question to be, the divine authority of a certain *stated* revelation, one, asserted to have been actually *made:* here the inquiry is plainly into a matter of fact; and in these circumstances, the rules of reasoning require that speculative arguments should be excluded from the evidence. It is the interposition of some reasons, which have not always been in actual operation; of some change in the position of mankind, or in the divine economy of the world, calling for a corresponding change, in the knowledge possessed by mankind, of their relation to God, which, in this case, we have to demonstrate; a change not inferred after the event by probable guesses, but which was, or might have been, known beforehand, from principles of reasoning, such as would explain the actual expectation, on the

part of mankind, of some divine communication being about to be made to them.

This, or something like this, is the only kind of evidence which I am able to conceive, on which the antecedent probability of any *particular* revelation could be demonstrated. So far is certain, that such an hypothesis as I have here indicated would remove every difficulty. Had mankind, at the time when Socrates lived, been looking for the appearance of some divine ambassador: the question of the truth of his pretensions to such a character, would have been of easy determination. Where and what were his credentials? If, in reply to this inquiry, he had been able, under the circumstances I have been stating, to perform such actions as have been ascribed to Christ, no one, I think, would have been surprised, if the same effects had followed from his preaching.

Let us then, for the sake of argument, put the case here supposed; and imagine for a moment, that some such persuasion as we are speaking of, existed in the public mind, at the present time; that there was among ourselves, a widely dispersed expectation, of some new dispensation of things about to arise, under which an important alteration would be promulged to mankind, relating to the divine government. In what way, we suppose the knowledge of this intended dispensation to have been communicated to mankind, is not material. In fact, it will

not affect the argument, even if we suppose it to have no assignable foundation. I am at present only endeavouring to trace the effect which such an opinion, whether well or ill founded, would produce upon the disposition of men's minds. Let the expectation, if you please, be an opinion derived from mathematical calculations, such as men build upon, when they expect a comet to appear: or let it be only a strong persuasion, drawn from merely accidental data: let it be confined to the breasts of a few philosophers and learned men, or be entertained by the vulgar and unlearned alone: let the origin of it be viewed in every different light, some considering the reasons to be certain, and some only possible, and others regarding them as absurd:—take any supposition we choose, yet have we only to put the case, that the opinion prevailed beforehand; that it had been commonly talked about; that mankind were gazing in expectation and looking to the event, some with earnest belief, others with doubt, or it may be even with ridicule; all this will matter nothing in the result:—If the event should correspond with the popular expectation; if a revelation should be announced: if facts, apparently miraculous, should be wrought in testimony of its truth: if thousands and ten thousands should immediately enrol themselves among its followers; and in the course of a few years, all nations and languages of mankind should acknowledge its divine authority:—such a case, if real,

would be deemed demonstrative. Higher evidence to prove a revelation to be from God, cannot, perhaps be proposed;—at all events, mankind both learned and unlearned, would agree to think it certain.

But it will of course be said, that the hypothesis which I have been framing, is a mere philosophical dream; a case which could never, under any conceivable circumstances, have been realized. It presupposes a sort of knowledge, to which evidently the human understanding cannot possibly attain. For how, it may be asked, could mankind, under any circumstances whatever, know what were the intentions of God? Mankind indeed are liable to delusions of all sorts; and we may, therefore, conceive the case of such a delusion, as the expectation of a messenger from heaven; and assuming such a delusion to exist, it is precisely that sort of delusion, which would be likely to realize itself. But it is plain, that the thoughts and the designs of God, are known only to himself; they could never have been divined beforehand, by the utmost stretch of the human understanding. Such an expectation as that just now supposed, could not have been built upon solid reasons of any sort, except we suppose, that the secret of his counsels had been revealed to mankind, in some miraculous manner; a supposition, it may be thought, which would remove one difficulty by the substitution of a greater. But extravagant

as the hypothesis which I have just stated, may seem, yet I hope to show, that it represents with perfect exactness the supposition, on which the belief of mankind in Christianity was founded. Their belief must have had some foundation, good or bad; —I am simply proposing to show what that foundation was. This is a matter of historical fact, which may be capable of demonstration. The truth of Christianity is an entirely distinct question. Persons might differ upon that point, and yet agree in their account of the supposed causes, from which the belief of its truth originated.

LECTURE III.

EFFECT OF A PRECEDING EXPECTATION IN THE EVIDENCE OF DIVINE REVELATION, EXAMINED.

STATE the case as we please, it is impossible to frame any hypothesis of divine revelation, such as that the denial of its truth, shall involve a disputant in a philosophical absurdity. And accordingly, provided he can demonstrate, that there is any philosophical absurdity, in the conclusions to be established, he is at liberty to reject the proofs; and would still be so, were we to double or treble their amount; because this amount can never be so great, as to justify us in believing, that any facts could have God for their author, if the declared purpose of them, was confessedly adverse to human happiness, or subversive of any of the great principles, either of reason or morality. Therefore it is, that all writers of the present day, when proving the truth of Christianity, lay so much stress upon this part of the argument. Until it can be shown, that there is no sufficient reason for considering the

hypothesis of its divine origin, to be absurd or incredible, it would be labour thrown away to prove the truth of the facts.

But we have seen, that in the case of a new religion, it is not enough to show that it contains nothing contrary to reason—nothing unworthy of God, or inconsistent with his attributes;—it must be shown to be antecedently probable; and so probable, as that the revelation of it was an event, which might actually be *expected*. On the other hand, as a revelation must be attended with miracles of some sort, it follows, that if we could show from reason or on any certain grounds of belief, that God, at some given period, would change his usual course of dealing with his creatures,—there would be nothing incredible in the idea of any act or manifestation of power, necessarily consequent upon the end which we knew beforehand that God intended to work. The miracle, in such a case, would be merely the proof, that God had carried his foreknown purpose into execution. All that is presupposed in this reasoning, is the belief that a revelation of some kind was to be made. No one, who had entertained such a belief, would reject the revelation, if it was proposed, merely because it was attested by miracles; or reject the miracles, merely because they were not such facts, as fall within the ordinary experience of mankind.

It is plain that in the supposition here made, we have little or nothing to do, as I remarked in my

last Lecture, with the *cause* from which the persuasion may have arisen. I will suppose a total ignorance of that: the postulatum of the argument is the matter of fact:—that the event was *expected* by mankind.

There are some kinds of events depending so certainly on pre-established causes, that the expectation of their happening would lead to no conclusion. But that is not the general character even of the commonest historical facts; and certainly a divine revelation is not a fact of that sort, but one quite beyond the province of any ordinary means of calculation. This then is the single limitation required. If the event in question be but of a kind, which no human wisdom could have conjectured, and which no combination of human art or power, could have brought about: its coming to pass, under such circumstances, agreeably to the explicit hope and belief of any large number of mankind, would in the case of a revelation demonstrate its divine authority. And it will be easy to show this, by taking the very cases, which Mr. Hume brings forward, as instances in which the proof of a divine interposition, would *not* be possible.

"Suppose," says he, "all authors in all languages agree, that, from the first of January 1600, there was a total darkness over the whole earth for eight days: suppose that the tradition of this extraordinary event is still strong and lively among the people: that all travellers who return from other countries

bring us accounts of the same tradition, without the least variation or contradiction:—it is evident that our present philosophers, instead of doubting the fact, ought to receive it as certain, and ought to search for the causes whence it might be derived. The decay, corruption, and dissolution of nature, is an event rendered probable by so many analogies, that any phenomenon, which seems to have a tendency towards that catastrophe, comes within the reach of human testimony." In this passage we may observe, that Hume grounds the credibility of the solution he mentions, upon its antecedent probability; and he prefaces the passage in the following words: "I beg the limitations here made may be remarked, when I say that a miracle can never be proved, so as to be the foundation of a system of religion. For I own that otherwise there may possibly be miracles, or violations of the usual course of nature, of such a kind as to admit of proof from human testimony, though perhaps it is impossible to find any such in all the records of history."—That is to say, that violations of the usual course of nature may happen, and may be proved on human testimony; only they cannot be made the foundation of any religious belief; and that, if they should happen, such causes as he assigns would, in all cases, be more antecedently probable, than the supposition of their having been intended to answer a divine purpose.

In order to try this point,let us assume a divine purpose; and suppose it to be an authoritative declaration

from God, that, after the year 1600, "*He would no longer be worshipped in temples made with hands;*"—we will also suppose, that there was a belief prevailing among mankind, the origin of which could not be traced, that in the year named by Hume, as a sign of this divine purpose, a darkness such as he describes was to happen. Put the case, then, that proof could be adduced, showing that at the exact time when this extraordinary event was to take place, thousands of persons in different countries of the world, were all upon the tiptoe of expectation, earnestly watching the event; and that while this state of things was at its height, the sun and moon had gradually ceased to give their light, and had continued veiled in darkness, for the very time which the foreboding belief of mankind had oracularly indicated: let me ask whether Hume would still have persisted in his opinion, that "a miracle can never be proved so as to be the foundation of a system of religion?" Or supposing that from the year 1600, many nations had actually entertained a belief, that God had commanded them to worship him under the open canopy of heaven; would he deem this opinion, so derived, a superstition?

But Hume proceeds to state another case, and one more incredible than that, which we have here considered. "Suppose," says he, "that all the historians who treat of England should agree that, on the first of January 1600, Queen Elizabeth died; that, before and after her death, she was seen by her

physicians, and her whole court, as is usual with persons of her rank; that her successor was acknowledged and proclaimed by the parliament; and that, after being interred a month, she again appeared, resumed the throne, and governed England for three years:—I must confess that I should be surprised at the concurrence of so many odd circumstances, but should not have the least inclination to believe so miraculous an event. I should not doubt of her pretended death, and of those other public circumstances that followed it. I should only assert it to have been pretended, and that it neither was, nor could be, real. You would in vain object to me the difficulty, and almost impossibility, of deceiving the world in an affair of such consequence; the wisdom and solid justice of that renowned queen; with the little or no advantage she could gain from so poor an artifice. All this might astonish me; but I would still reply, that the knavery and folly of men are such common phenomena, that I should rather believe the most extraordinary events to arise from their concurrence, than admit of so signal a violation of the laws of nature."

I incline to think that Hume has rightly expressed what, in the circumstances he has stated, would be the conclusion of most persons of sound understanding. But let us try what would be the effect, if we connect the events which he has stated, with a supposed antecedent opinion among mankind.

And first, let us amend the case, as here imagined. Queen Elizabeth is supposed dying in her bed, privately, surrounded by her physicians and court;—that is, by her friends and dependents. But instead of Queen Elizabeth, let us substitute the name of Charles the First; whose head was cut off before thousands of spectators, and whose executioners were his bitter enemies, or at least men who had a direct interest in his death. This alteration of the circumstances of the case, will bring it nearer to the one, which not improbably, was in Hume's mind at the time he was writing. Moreover, it renders the fact, to all appearance, more unequivocally miraculous; and therefore, no doubt, more impossible in itself, and more difficult to consider as having really happened.

The case being thus assumed, let us suppose mankind in general, in the year 1648, though otherwise enlightened and highly civilized, yet in the matter of religion, to have been immersed in ignorance, as dark as that which prevailed throughout the world, in the days of Augustus. Suppose, further, that one nation there was, very numerous in itself, and individuals of which were to be found in almost all parts of the world, professing a purer form of religion; among whom a rooted opinion was well known to prevail, that in the very generation we are speaking of, a revelation would be made to mankind by God, the effect of which would be, to subvert idolatry in the world, and to introduce a

new religion, in which the worship of the one true God, would form the leading feature. Let us suppose, finally, that when the surrounding people had inquired, what was to be the sign, by which the arrival of this epoch was to be known? they had received for answer, that when the time had arrived, mankind would know it, by the king of England being put to death by the public executioner, and afterwards rising from the grave and resuming his throne.

The question now is, whether, if this fact had happened; or (which is nearly the same thing for all the purposes of the argument) if all mankind had believed it to have happened; and if, dating from this belief of mankind, paganism immediately had begun to stagger, and had thence rapidly declined, and the worship of the alone true God had immediately begun to spread itself, by a simultaneous dispersion, over all the nations of the world, so as to have become, in the course of two or three generations, the predominant faith:—the question, I say, is whether, in these circumstances, Hume would think "the knavery and folly of mankind" the most probable explanation of the phenomena? For my part, I feel inclined to think, that in such a case as has here been supposed, the most sceptical reasoner that ever lived would look about him, for some very different solution; and whether he found it or not, at least he would admit, that mankind in general would be content to receive the facts, as marked by the hand

of God. Whatever may have been the incredulity, or even the contempt, with which the majority of persons in the world, would probably have regarded the expectation, on the part of a particular nation, of events so apparently impossible, as the rising of a person from the grave, and a consequent change in the religious opinions of the world:—whatever, I say, may have been the feelings, with which this persuasion might have been regarded *beforehand*: yet, exactly in proportion to the previous incredulity of mankind, would be the effect which its fulfilment would produce; stamping the fact which Hume considers, and, in the circumstances stated by him, justly considers, as incredible, not only with the character of truth, but with the signature of divine authority.

In fact, the supposition of a religion suddenly rising up in the world, out of a concurrence of such events as I have been assuming, without God's express permission, would be almost as unintelligible, as the theory of those ancient philosophers, who endeavoured to account for the creation of the world, by the fortuitous concurrence of atoms. On a supposition, that the existence of a Supreme Being, had been demonstrated to be a thing *impossible*, such a theory might perhaps claim to be heard; but only on this supposition. In like manner, supposing the idea of a divine revelation to have been convicted of absurdity, the hypothesis which would ascribe the origin of such an expectation, as I have been speaking of, to chance, and afterwards explain its fulfilment, by

the same cause, might perhaps be as likely as any other: but the previous proposition, that the common opinion involved a philosophical absurdity, would surely first require to be demonstrated. For, except a divine revelation be impossible, or (which is the same thing) incapable of proof by any evidence, the supposition of its truth, in the case just now stated, would unquestionably be attended with far fewer difficulties, and be less diametrically contrary to our experience, than any other supposition that could be framed.

LECTURE IV.

EFFECT AND USE OF PROPHECY, AS CONNECTED WITH THE EVIDENCE OF DIVINE REVELATION.

In forming our judgment of the future, there are many events which we can foresee as credible and probable, which it would yet be very unwise to expect. We have, indeed, certain general rules and principles, upon which we may in some degree calculate, but they do not apply to contingent events. We know in what way the passions and interests of mankind will influence their conduct in various particular circumstances; but, speaking of that class of facts which do not depend upon the human will, or upon human motives, but solely upon the will of God: here, it is not often that men speculate at all upon the future; or if they do, it is merely as an exercise of their thoughts; their hopes and wishes stop far short of expectation.

We saw, in a preceding Lecture, that this last is a state of mind, quite distinct from what is called opinion; and also, how important an influence it

would exercise on the belief of mankind, in the case where we suppose a divine revelation, or a miraculous dispensation of any kind, to be the subject of discussion. I would now observe, that although it is upon the strength of the expectation itself, and not upon the strength of the reasons on which it was built, that the effect would depend; yet, supposing those reasons to be solid, we should be able not only to explain the belief of mankind, but to demonstrate, that it was infallibly true.

If we except the evidence of prophecy, real or pretended, I am not able to assign any way in which such an expectation could spring up. It is possible there may be other ways; but the question is not worth examining. We know that the belief of the Gospel, was preceded by a belief in certain prophecies; and it is the origin and authority of those prophecies which I am now especially about to consider. It will, however, be convenient, with a view to the full understanding of the argument, first to fix in our minds some general rules and principles applicable to this particular sort of proof. As it is a kind of evidence, not built upon abstract reasoning, nor upon experience, but upon considerations quite remote from all the ordinary sources of our knowledge, I shall not attempt to divide the subject in a strictly logical way; but be content to offer my thoughts in the best manner I am able, according to the order, in which they happen to present themselves to my mind.

I observed just now, that when men reason about the future, their conjectures seldom extend to the anticipation of contingent events; but only of such, as stand to each other, in some known relation of cause and effect. The reason is, that in the former, there are no rules by which our judgment can be guided. We may indulge our fancy in random guesses; but a man of sound understanding never believes that his fancies will come true. All this is too evident to be discussed. It will at once be admitted, that the future is known only to God. Predictions may come to pass by chance; but if we take a case, from which this possibility is excluded, there is no explanation of prophecy, except that of divine inspiration, which it is possible to propose.

Accordingly, if we turn to the treatise De Naturâ Deorum, in which Cicero discusses the question of a Divine Providence, we find him making the Stoic rest his proof, of the being of a God, and of his government of the world, on the science of divination; as considering that to be a kind of knowledge, which could not exist at all, on a supposition of the world being governed by chance; nor be attained by human wisdom without aid from the divine. He represents the Epicurean, on the other hand, as rejecting, for the opposite reason, the popular belief altogether, because it presupposed the existence of a Supreme Being. It is on the same view of the subject, that Josephus commends the use of the Jewish Scriptures to the Gentiles. "By them," says he, "may be re-

jected the Epicurean doctrine, which would exclude a God from the administration of human affairs; for how," he observes, "is it possible that the event should correspond with the prediction, if things below were directed by chance, and not by a wise prescience?"

The ground of this conclusion does not, I think, require to be explained; but the reasoning from which it is drawn, is well stated by Cudworth in his Intellectual System, in a passage where he is discussing the proof of a Divine Providence. "There is," he says, "a sort of presaging faculty, which may perhaps be supposed to proceed from the natural power of created spirits, whom we may believe to have larger understandings, and a wider comprehension of things, and greater advantages of knowledge, than men possess; but when events, remotely distant in time, and of which there are no immediate causes actually in being; which also depend upon many circumstances, and a long series of things, any one of which being otherwise, would alter the case; as likewise upon much uncertainty of human volitions, which are not always necessarily linked and concatenated with what goes before, but often loose and free; and upon that contingency that arises from the indifferency or equality of eligibility in objects; lastly, upon such things as do not at all depend upon external circumstances, neither are caused by things natural anteceding, but by some supernatural power: I say, when such future events

as these are foretold, and accordingly come to pass, this can be ascribed to no other, but to such a Being as comprehends, sways, and governs all; and is, by a peculiar privilege or prerogative of his own nature, omniscient."

This passage of Cudworth expresses, with much force and distinctness, the postulate upon which the proof of a legitimate prophecy depends. It is not, we see, a mere happy or sagacious conjecture, which entitles the prediction of an event, to be dignified with this name; but a prediction of facts, unconnected with existing causes or passing events; and depending upon contingencies, such as human reason has never pretended to calculate. Whether such prophecies have ever been delivered, or have ever come to pass, is not now the question. But, assuming this to be the hypothesis of the argument; and supposing that we were about to consider, not any stated case, but only what sort of evidence, beyond any which we know, would be most conclusive of a divine revelation; and could be most easily demonstrated; and might be provided, with least interruption to the prescribed course of things; and would be spread with most facility over the widest range both of time and space:—I am prepared to show that there is none, whether natural or preternatural, of which we have any information, that would combine all these objects to the same extent or degree, as this of prophecy:—no miracle, therefore, which, supposing a divine revelation, would be more likely to

have been employed by God; or to the employment of which, there would be so few speculative objections.

In examining the use which is made of the argument from prophecy, by writers upon the Evidences, it is for the most part impossible to discern the exact place which it is made to hold: a remark which will apply as pointedly to Paley as to any one. So far as I have observed, the use of prophecy is commonly regarded, not as an integral part of the Evidences, but as a sort of supplemental proof, which is over and above what the argument really requires. Accordingly, the evidence from miracles is always so stated, as if it were complete in itself, and needed no collateral support. I shall not stop to examine this position. It may or may not be true, in the present state of Christianity; but assuredly it was not true of Christianity, before it was established.

I. In the proof of a miracle, as we have already partly seen, and as I shall hereafter have occasion to show more at large, the point of the argument, where some collateral evidence, over and above a proof of the facts, must be produced, is in the link, which should connect the testimony of the witnesses to what they saw, with the truth of that, which is only their opinion. Did the fact really happen? That may be proved, we will suppose, on their affirmation. But if we go on to ask, How did it happen? By what power or authority?

For what purpose? These are not questions to be determined on the oath of witnesses as to what was their opinion and belief, but on the reasons they may be able to allege. And their reasons must be drawn, not *ex parte rei*, as logicians express it; that is, not from the nature of the facts; but *ex parte externi*, or from what is termed circumstantial evidence.

Now there is little difficulty in stating where this extraneous evidence is to be sought in the case of miracles, which we suppose to have happened five hundred years ago.—For what professed end were they performed? What was the character of the end proposed? Was it accomplished?—The answer to these questions would enable us to determine, whether the miracles were the effect of human agency or not. But in the case where we are examining the meaning and character of facts, happening before our eyes, no appeal of this sort is possible. The testimony of experience is here necessarily wanting; and if we should appeal to reason, all we could do, would be to take up Butler's argument; and show that our explanation of the facts was conformable to what we know of God's natural government of the world.

But if we would see how little use could be made of such a mode of reasoning in the case I am now stating; suppose that the Apostles had been confined to this resource. Is it to be thought that mankind would have believed in the divine authority of the miracles wrought by Christ, from the mere analogy

of his doctrines with certain deep and refined speculations? In the present day, indeed, Butler's argument is triumphant; because it is in answer to those who assert that the doctrines of Christianity are incredible and absurd. This way of thinking can be directly met, only by a metaphysical argument. But in a case where we suppose ourselves to be examining, not into the truth of abstract objections, but into the cause of a stated fact, and the end for which it was designed:—to propose an explanation, the proof of which, is not drawn out of the fact itself, but from theoretical data of any kind whatever, would be worse than useless.

It is here then, at the place where the testimony of witnesses can yield us no assistance, and where reason can offer nothing but conjecture, that the necessity arises for that peculiar help, which prophecy is able to afford.

II. The next remark which I have to propose, is a sort of corollary from the preceding. As the proper use of prophecy is,—not to prove the truth of facts, but only to explain them: it is not necessary, in this view, that the event should be of an extraordinary kind, or one which supposes a deviation from the laws of nature. Be the event what it may, if it can clearly be proved to have been predicted; it becomes on this supposition, at once a miracle. I will illustrate this by an example, which will assist in explaining my meaning better, perhaps, than a general proposition can do.

In a review by Le Clerc, quoted by Jortin from the Bibl. Anc. et Mod., where the former is examining the proofs of a Divine Providence, we are told, "that in the number of providential interpositions, supposing the fact to be true, might be placed what happened on the coasts of Holland and Zealand, the 14th July 1672. The United Provinces having ordered public prayers to God, when they feared that the French and English fleets would make a descent on their coasts, it came to pass that when these fleets waited only for a tide to land from their smaller vessels, it was retarded, contrary to the usual course, for twelve hours, which disappointed the design; so that the enemies were obliged to defer it to another opportunity, which they never found, because of a storm, which arose afterwards and drove them from the coast. A thing of this nature, happening at such a conjuncture to save the country from ruin, was accounted miraculous; and a prediction of it," observes Le Clerc, "would have proved it to be so. However, as nothing falls out without the Divine concurrence, there was great reason to return God thanks for the deliverance. In the history of other nations, events of this kind are recorded, *which, if they had been foretold*, must have been accounted real miracles."

According to this narrative, it is plain, that the safety of Holland was in fact effected by the storm which drove the combined fleets from the coast, much more than by the delay of the tide. This last

would seem, *primâ facie*, to have been only an accidental occurrence. Nevertheless, supposing it to be true, it was an unusual occurrence; and if the dispersion of the combined fleet had been the subject of a prophecy, with the circumstance of this particular fact, of the delay of the tide, *appended*, in order to exclude the supposition of its having come true by chance:—the majority of mankind, in that case, would rightly have considered the predicted tempest, to have been the effect of a miraculous interposition. Much, however, depends upon the truth of the fact about the tide, which Le Clerc evidently does not mean to vouch for. The tempest, by itself, might be ascribed to chance; but if predicted, in concurrence with another independent event, such a supposition becomes excluded; and the miraculousness of the providence, by which Holland was preserved, would not, in such a case, be doubted by mankind.

It is clear from this instance, that the most ordinary event might, in this way, be made to wear a miraculous aspect. It is the tacit supposition of a divine interposition, which constitutes a miracle; and not our ignorance of the causes from which it proceeded. The destruction of Babylon, extraordinary as the circumstances connected with it appear to have been, presents itself to us in the pages of Herodotus, simply as a great historical event; but it wears a very different aspect, as related in the Old Testament. The prophecies which preceded its capture and desolation, (if we believe them to have

been written in the age which they pretend, and to have been correctly interpreted,) by connecting its overthrow with the immediate agency of God, give it a character, which is quite distinct from that which we attribute to the destruction of Carthage, or the capture of Syracuse.

III. Another peculiarity to be noticed in the nature of prophecy,—and by which it is advantageously distinguished from every other kind of miracle—regards the ease by which its pretensions to truth may be determined. If a passage was found in Holingshed's Chronicle, stating that he had seen a prophecy, in which it was foretold, that in the year 1900 the throne of England would be filled by a queen, who would die, in the last day of the year, of a slow consumption: strange as it would be, if the event should happen—yet those living at the time would have no difficulty in ascertaining either the authenticity of the prophecy, or the fact of its fulfilment.

Again, in the case of prophecy—and viewing this evidence in the abstract—the question may easily be cleared of all suspicion of fraud or collusion, or contrivance of any sort. In the instance where the prediction preceded the event, by a long interval of years, such an explanation would be excluded by the very terms of the hypothesis. But even in the case, where the event is to come to pass, within the lifetime of those, to whom the prediction is delivered: if we only suppose the fulfilment of it to depend upon

events, over which human agents can confessedly exercise no control,—all the rest is a matter easy to be determined; depending upon the truth of facts, about which there need be no difference of opinion. Supposing the meaning of the prophecy to be quite clear and unambiguous, and to refer to an event about which, if it happened, there could be no mistake; two points only, and those very easy of proof, would require to be ascertained:—the date of the prediction, and the truth of the event.

But even in the case where the sense of the words, in which the prophecy was expressed, is obscure and doubtful: yet if it was delivered from the first as a prophecy and received by mankind as such; and was *expected* by them to be fulfilled in a particular sense: then that particular sense, is the only point which we have to consider. If the prophecy was fulfilled, agreeably to the sense, which was put upon it by those who were living before the event; and in conformity with the *expectation* excited in their minds; (for this it is upon which, as I before explained, the force of the evidence depends;) then it must pass for a divine testimony. People afterwards may argue upon the words, and shew that they *might* have had another meaning; but if the meaning, put upon them by mankind from the beginning, came to pass: that determines the controversy. It is not the conformity of the event with certain articulate sounds which constitutes the miracle; but its conformity with the

antecedent hopes and opinions, of those who were looking forward to this proof.

This is a remark, which I mention as of great consequence to be borne in mind. It is one, to which I shall have frequent occasion to revert hereafter; and of which a very important use will be made, when I come to examine the principles, on which many of the Jewish prophecies, will require to be interpreted.

IV. A fourth advantage which the evidence of prophecy presents, over every other kind of miracle, is, that it interferes not in any way, either with the liberty of human actions, or any settled law of nature. But more particularly it is in this respect superior:—that the proof of other miracles depends upon the report of witnesses, who were present at the transactions; that is, upon an evidence, not only weak and fallible in many points, but which is restricted to a particular spot, as well as to a single age:—whereas, prophecy is a proof, which is able to stand alone; and without any circumstantial limitations. It relies not upon the judgment, or opinion, or senses of mankind; it is not necessarily confined to the people of one generation; nor does it lose any part of its force, by the lapse of time. Supposing the present dispersion of the Jews, to have been the subject of a distinct prediction, it affords as conclusive a proof of the divine inspiration of the Jewish Scriptures in the present day, as it did a thousand

years ago; and this, through all the nations of the world.

But this evidence is not only complete in itself, without any collateral support—either from general reasoning or from other subsidiary miracles; but moreover, it carries along with it, its own interpretation; that is to say, not only is the impress of divine authority, visibly stamped upon the very hypothesis of this proof; but it may be so contrived, as to explain at the same time, the end and purpose for which it was intended.

For example:—supposing the fact of the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, to have been declared many years beforehand, though not listened to by them or their rulers:—in that case, their subjugation was the effect of a miraculous interposition; that is, it was an especial act of Divine Providence, and must have been so considered by the nation. But the *cause* of it, might nevertheless have been concealed; and if so, it could not have been divined by any help from mere signs and wonders. Supposing however the account which we find in the Old Testament, of this great event, to be true; and that the calamity had really been fore-denounced, as a judgment upon the Jews for their obstinate idolatry; on this supposition, the reason of their punishment must have been as well known to them, as was the hand, by which it was inflicted. And such, judging from the history, appears to have been the fact. For that, which the

remembrance of all God's miracles in Egypt had failed to effect, seems to have been accomplished, by this signal example of the Divine power and displeasure; so much so, that the Jewish people are thenceforth described, as having never again fallen into idolatry.

This is the statement of the fact, as recorded in Scripture. Whether true or false, it is consistent with itself, and with every thing that we know of human nature. There is therefore, I may observe, no ground for the remark insinuated by Bolinbroke and repeated by Gibbon, that the many previous lapses of the nation, implied a disbelief of the wonders wrought by Moses. The fact only shows, how strong is the effect, which a clear case of prophecy is calculated, in certain circumstances, to produce upon the imagination of mankind. Other gods, besides the God of their fathers, could work (so the Jews would appear to have believed) signs and wonders; but their long fore-warned captivity in Babylon, and the subsequent fulfilment of their promised return to their own home and country, afforded a proof so unequivocal, of the over-ruling and omnipotent Power, to which they, as a nation, were subject, as seems to have dispelled thenceforth all idolatrous illusions for ever from their minds. And if what is related in the Bible be true, they reasoned justly; the miracles wrought by Moses, according to the notions of mankind in that age, did not demonstrate that the God

of Israel was the Supreme Ruler of the universe—the captivity and restoration of the nation, under the circumstances stated in the Bible, did.

V. The next characteristic peculiarity of this evidence, showing its superiority over every other form of proof by which a divine testimony can be demonstrated, is this: that while other miracles are, as it were, units, and constitute a proof, the force of which can be increased only by the process of addition:—prophecy, on the other hand, may be combined into a regular scheme; and the force of the evidence, as well as the extent, both of space and time, over which the knowledge of it may be spread, be multiplied and increased *ad infinitum.*

Let us suppose, for example, some great event in history to have been clearly predicted; one which no concerted efforts of mankind could possibly have brought to pass; and the causes of which were so complicated and so remotely connected with each other, in time as well as in place, as to make the supposition of its having been foreseen, by any effort of that presaging wisdom which Cudworth speaks of, quite impossible. The case is readily imagined; for more than half the events we read of, are of this kind. Unless, then, we suppose the previous knowledge of this event, to have been communicated to mankind in some miraculous manner, we must of necessity believe that the prediction was uttered by chance; at least we should be obliged to consider its coming to pass, as having been the result of one of

those extraordinary coincidences, with which one is every now and then surprised.

Put the case, however, that there was a series of prophecies, by different persons and in different ages, all predicting this same event; and each of them adding some limitation, or supplying some particular, which had been till then omitted: suppose, further, that the authors of all these successive prophecies, had professed to speak, not as of themselves, but by the inspiration of God: would any one, under these circumstances, contend, that the coincidence of the event with the previous prediction and belief, was only accidental? I think not; but to prevent doubt, the case may be made still stronger.

I have just now supposed the predictions to be multiplied, but that the subject of them all, was one and the same fact. But let the subject itself be also multiplied. Suppose some one great and leading fact, to have been connected with other facts, happening in different ages and in distant parts of the world; all emanating, as it were, from the same point, and yet directed to one common centre, and so co-operating with each other in one great end, as at length to have united the thoughts and hopes of half mankind in one general expectation:—If one by one, and in due order, every particular event was regularly brought to pass, and the general expectation came to be exactly fulfilled:—would the most sceptical man that ever lived, still continue to believe, that all this was likewise the effect of chance?

It will perhaps be said that the case which I have been putting is purely imaginary; but that is a point for future inquiry. In the mean time, I think it will be readily conceded that, supposing the case not imaginary, it would demonstrate the hypothesis of a divine interposition, by an evidence as irresistible as any that could possibly be proposed. In mere certainty, its proof would equal that of a mathematical theorem.

The greater the number of the events predicted, and the farther they are separated from each other in time and place, the stronger the presumption becomes, on this scheme of proof, that the fulfilment of them was not effected by any human combination. The more miraculous we suppose them to be, and the more contrary to the previous experience of mankind: the less likely it is, that the prediction of them should have come true by chance. The greater the end to be accomplished, the more remote from the conjectures of reason, the more impossible on the principles of human probability and belief: so much the more credible and intelligible that explanation becomes, which ascribes the whole to God.

VI. There remains yet one other point of view, in which this proof from prophecy may be looked at, and advantageously compared with that from any other sort of miracle; which is, that every other sort of miracle is dumb, if I may so express myself; it utters no voice—it gives no answer. Whatever in-

formation it conveys, is extrinsic, and must be deduced by argument and reasoning:—on any supposition it only indicates the intervention of Divine Power. But as to the purpose of such intervention, and the truths or propositions which, on the supposition of a pretended revelation, it was intended that mankind should be brought to believe,—on these points, all other miracles, if we had nothing except the facts to reason from, would leave us in total darkness. Light may be struck out of them, but it must be by means of some application from without.

But prophecy is not only a proof of the Divine interposition; it is, in the case of a revelation, the missive, as we may say, on which the subject-matter of the revelation, may be written. What I mean is, that not only may mankind be prepared beforehand, by means of prophecy, to receive the revelation to be communicated to them; but by the same means, they may be prepared to distinguish, at the proper time, the truths and doctrines which they shall be directed to believe.

No figure can more correctly represent the idea to be conveyed, as there is none more common with the writers, both of the Old and New Testaments, than that which teaches us to consider the Prophets and Apostles, as ambassadors from God to mankind. In the third chapter of Exodus, where God commissions Moses to communicate to Pharaoh, as well as to the children of Israel, his divine will that the latter should depart from Egypt, in order to sacrifice

to him in the wilderness, this character of an ambassador from heaven, is distinctly attributed to Moses. In the case of a revelation, it is a title which represents very accurately, the functions which the first teachers of it have to perform; for they have no judgment or discretion of their own to exercise; their whole authority being derived from the commission under which they act.

Putting out of view for a moment the subject-matter of the commission itself, let us keep our mind, for the present, simply on the idea here presented to us—of an embassy sent by the ruler of some powerful empire to a neighbouring state. And let us suppose the proposals of which he was the bearer, to be of a kind seemingly very improbable in themselves, and rendered more so, from the absence of every external mark of dignity about the person of the ambassador. Under such circumstances, it is evident that the people, among whom he arrived, would require, in the first place, to see his credentials; that is, to have some proof of his pretensions to the character which he assumed. For this purpose, it would not be enough to bring testimonials to the honesty and respectability of his personal character; nor, supposing doubts to have been raised as to his authority, would they be removed, by his offering to shew the reasonableness, and usefulness, and importance of the propositions, which he had to communicate:—he would be required to bring the proof of his commission, under the seal and signature

of his master, before the propositions to be made, would be taken into consideration.

But if, upon listening to the subject of his communication, it should turn out, that instead of the proposals, which it contained, being reasonable and evidently beneficial, just the contrary was the light in which they appeared; and that, in the apprehension of those to whom they were made, they were in the highest degree unpalatable, as tending to subvert all existing interests and relations; and most improbable, judging by experience, to have proceeded from the quarter to which they were ascribed:—it is plain, that on this fresh supposition, new matter for consideration arises; and that the circumstances of the case are at once materially changed for the worse.

In the first place, room would be opened for the suspicion of fraud or deception of some kind; or at least, of some mistake having been committed. The credentials might be supposititious; or have been obtained improperly; or, even if this were deemed unlikely, yet the person by whom they were borne, might possibly have mistaken his instructions; and, in the proposals delivered by him, might have spoken rather according to his own folly, than according to the real sentiments of him, by whom he was sent, or the interests of those, to whom he was accredited. At all events, not even the production of the seal and signature of the master would by itself alone, in the circumstances here stated, be considered as

conclusive testimony, either to the wisdom or justice of the propositions to be debated, or of the authority, on which they were asserted to have been made.

In this situation of the case, let us then make a third supposition. Imagine it to have been known beforehand and expected, that an ambassador of an unusual character was to be sent, bearing a communication which also was to be extraordinary. Or, to frame the case yet more exactly: suppose a sealed document to have preceded his arrival,—about the authority of which no doubt was, or could be entertained—with directions for not opening it until after his presentation. Here would be a test, that would at once determine the true character of the authority which he pretended. If upon opening the document, its contents were found to agree, in all important, and in many merely circumstantial points, with the terms which had been before communicated: the feeling of surprise might still remain; the prudence, the justice, the propriety of the propositions, would be open to examination perhaps; but no question would remain about the authority, on which the propositions were made, nor any doubt, either about the character of the bearer, or the fidelity with which he had fulfilled his instructions.

I think it can hardly be necessary to point out the application. We have only to substitute the words "God," and "Jesus Christ," and "mankind," and the "doctrines of the Gospel," and the "mi-

racles of the New Testament," and the "prophecies of the Old," in the place of the corresponding names of persons and things here supposed—and you will have at once, what I apprehend to be the hypothesis, on which the belief of mankind in the divine authority of the Christian revelation was originally built. If we suppose the sealed document to be the Jewish Scriptures: and the contents of it, to have consisted, not of proposals of state, but of prophecies, such as were just now described, relating to things and truths, thereafter to be communicated and believed:—Then have we the exact case of a revelation: one, from which not only all doubt as to the character of the messenger would have been removed; but in which, the subject-matter also of his communication, would have been stamped with the seal of an authority, from which there was no appeal. The prudence, and justice, and propriety of the propositions would, on this supposition, be infallibly certain: and the only question that could be raised, would regard the authority of the document itself. This was just now assumed; but of course, in the instance of any case, in which a real revelation should be pretended, that point would require to be proved.

LECTURE V.

ON THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

There is no book, whose loss would cause so wide a chasm in our historical knowledge, as the Old Testament. But for it, we should be without the materials for so much as even a tradition, respecting the early ages of the world. Of its value as a literary document, it may be sufficient to observe, that the language in which it is written had ceased to be a spoken language, before any other history now extant was composed; and that the facts which it records are exactly those about which our curiosity would be most alive, supposing we had no information concerning the original ancestors of mankind, beyond what has been preserved in the broken, and, for the most part, fabulous traditions, which we find in the ancient poets.

As there are no contemporary records, it is of course impossible to discuss the authenticity of this

volume, by a comparison with other accounts; it is only from internal marks that any argument can be drawn. *Primâ facie*, no doubt, the extraordinary character of the events, with which the Jewish part of the history is filled, would detract from the general credit of the writers. But putting this objection aside, and speaking only of style and manner, there are no writings of antiquity, not even those of Homer himself, so indelibly stamped with the features of truth.

Literary forgeries belong to a literary age; and not to a state of manners, such as we may suppose to have existed at Babylon or Jerusalem, 600 years before Christ. Omitting this, however, it may be safely said, that if there be a history in the world free from every imputation, or even surmise of forgery or fiction, as arising out of any perceptible design, on the part either of the historian or the nation, it is the Jewish. Abounding as it does, beyond all others, in wonders and apparent improbabilities, and in subjects fitted to feed that spirit of national boasting which seems inherent in human nature, yet when such events are recorded in the Old Testament, it seems to be without any end which we can assign, except the simple purpose, of placing the wickedness of the nation in a more conspicuous light. In the victories of the Jews, no mention is ever made of the prowess of the soldiers, or the skill of the commander; in their defeats, it is never attempted to extenuate the

disgrace. From the beginning to the end of the Bible, I do not recollect one word which can be construed, as the language of national vanity; while there is hardly a page, in which some passage is not to be found, humiliating to this feeling. A more dark and unfavourable portraiture, than that which the Jewish people have preserved of themselves, has never since been drawn of any nation, even by its enemies. And yet, painful and disagreeable as the likeness is, this history has been preserved by them, even to the present time, with an anxiety and solicitude which, without a knowledge of their religious opinions, would not be easily explained, even if we suppose it to be true. But if we suppose it to be untrue, and that the events described in it never really happened, this will only change the difficulty; it will not solve the problem.

Whether the Pentateuch was written by Moses, or by some one living in a more recent age, is a question which, when once raised, cannot, from the nature of things, be determined on the common principles of criticism. But the important question is, were the events, related in the Pentateuch, believed from the beginning by the people, among whom they are described as having happened? If they were not, then how are we to account for their submission to those very burthensome institutions which, if we may trust that book, were founded on a belief of the facts there related, and on that belief alone?

Supposing the truth of these facts, they must necessarily have been witnessed, not by the relater alone, whoever he was, but by the whole multitude of persons who followed Moses into the wilderness. If they were *not* true, it is plain that there is no middle supposition: The whole history, from beginning to end, must have been not only an invention, but an invention many ages posterior to the asserted date of the transactions; because, if they had taken place, the memory of them would not have passed away in one, nor in two, nor in three generations; and the first beginning of their being believed must be referred to some period long posterior. This belief must, however, have had a beginning; and, therefore, the question has been often asked, but never answered by those who reject the book of Exodus—at what time shall we date its origin?

The difficulty here proposed, is also increased by another consideration:—If the facts related in the Pentateuch did not really happen, how are we to account for the origin of the social and religious institutions of the Jews? By what possible means, under any conceivable construction of circumstances, and at any after-period whatever, the whole Jewish people should have been brought to credit so marvellous a narrative, relating to their own immediate nation and country, (supposing it to have been a mere fiction,) is far from easy to imagine: but that they should have been persuaded to change their manners,

and customs, and ways of life, and modes of worship, at any such after-period; and to adopt an entirely new code of laws, with respect to every one of these particulars, in consequence of their sudden belief in facts, then and there for the first time heard of, and which were not pretended to have been wrought among themselves, but among their ancestors many hundred years back: this is utterly incomprehensible. It would be an extraordinary moral phenomenon on any hypothesis; even if the laws they had agreed to, be supposed mild and easy. But on the contrary, these laws are of an opposite character. They are not, like those we are accustomed to read of among other nations, intended merely to regulate, with a view to the general welfare, the conduct of individuals in their intercourse with each other, as members of a body politic. They are not few and simple, shortly learned and easily explained; but, according to the statements of the learned among the Jews, they amount to more than 600 precepts; of which the greater part, do not affect the interests of the community at large, have no relation to mutual rights, but are strictly personal sacrifices; some of them as irksome as if they had been intended to be penal; while a large proportion of the remainder admit of no explanation, on any ground of expediency; and can by no possibility be enjoined as duties, except on the principle, of implicit obedience to the supposed command, of some absolute and irresistible power.

Now if we receive the Jewish Scriptures as an *authentic* document, this particular difficulty is at once removed. If the miracles ascribed to Moses, whether rightly or wrongly, were believed by those who were his contemporaries: however hard it may be to account for such belief or for the facts themselves—it will not be hard to account for the acquiescence of the Jews, of after ages, in the laws which he imposed and which they found established. But if the facts, on the authority of which the laws were submitted to, neither happened nor were believed to have happened, until many generations after: in this case, the conduct of the Jews must have been based upon such unintelligible principles of reasoning, such a total confusion of ideas, as no ingenuity can pretend to unravel.

For let us put the case here supposed, and judge of it by our own experience: and for this purpose, instead of the Jewish, let us substitute the laws of the Christian code. These last, are all of them confessedly agreeable to reason, and to the feelings of the wiser and better part of the world, as being plainly calculated to promote the peace and happiness of mankind; and, therefore, strict as they may be, and in some respects hard to practise, it will nevertheless be admitted, that it would be an easier task to persuade individuals, or a whole nation, to bend their necks to the authority of Christ, than to the severe yoke of the Jewish ritual. But what, let me ask, would be the success of a Christian missionary, preaching among

the New Zealanders, or any barbarous and idolatrous people, if as an argument for submitting to the precepts of the Gospel, he were to tell them, that the miracles recorded of Christ had been worked among themselves in the time of their forefathers; and were even to go so far, as to appeal to their own memories and consciences, for the truth of what he said?

Surely such an appeal would be thought akin to madness. Whatever difficulty there might be, in persuading a people, who had never heard of Christ, to believe in the miracles ascribed to him, it would not be diminished, but very greatly increased, if it was also attempted to make them believe, that they had been wrought in their own country; and moreover that the precepts in question, though never heard of before, were the very laws which their forefathers had handed down to them. Such, however, is precisely the hypothesis which we find in the Old Testament. Whether we take up the historical, or the prophetical, or the devotional parts of the volume—the wonders which God wrought for their fathers in Egypt, is the one topic always urged upon the Jews, as the foundation of their duty to obey the commandments which he then gave them. But if these wonders never happened, and had never before been believed to have happened:—was the nation out of its senses, or were the writers; that the former should have been induced to listen, or the latter have hoped to persuade, by such an argument?

If indeed we were at liberty to believe, not only

that the facts described in the Pentateuch never happened; but that the laws themselves, which we suppose to have rested upon them, were never really received by the Jews—the reasoning would cohere. But the testimony of history is peremptory on this point; or even if it were silent, the present existence of the Jews affords a living proof, not only of the general reality of the history contained in the Old Testament, but of an attachment to the laws and institutions described in it, such as there is no example of, in the history of any other people upon record. "All other nations," says Philo, writing while Jerusalem was yet standing[1], "that have possessed codes of laws, have changed them, at times, in various particulars. Wars, foreign and domestic, and other adverse circumstances, or else luxury and the love of change, or even prosperity itself, have occasioned the institutions of most nations, to vary with the varying condition of the people for whom they were intended. But the Jewish law," says he, "has not been changed so much as in one particular, since the time of its first promulgation. It alone has continued firm and unmoved, as if stamped with the signature of nature herself. And although no other people have endured so many afflictions as the Jewish; nor been exposed, in an equal degree, to every vicissitude of good or bad fortune—yet not one single iota (οὔδεν οὔδε τῶν μικροτέρων), has been cancelled or

[1] De Vitâ Mosis, lib. ii.

annulled. Neither hunger, nor pestilence, nor wars, nor kings, nor tyrants; neither sedition, nor any evil, either of divine or human infliction, have been able to supersede the attachment of the Jewish people to the commandment of their fathers, or to tempt them from the observance of it."

In these remarks, I have confined myself simply to the truth of the great leading facts, related in the book of Exodus. I have not entered upon the question about the authorship of that, or the other books ascribed to Moses. Supposing these books to be true, and to have been written at the time they pretend, no important conclusion would be affected, by the supposition that the writer of them was unknown. That some changes of names and other slight verbal additions may have crept into the text, from marginal notes or the errors of transcribers, is probable; it would be a miracle if they had not; but that the five first books of the Old Testament, be the date of them what it may, or be the author of them who he may, are not forgeries, but genuine compositions—is a matter about which I cannot understand how a doubt should exist, in the mind of any man of ordinary taste and knowledge. As far as language, sentiment, and composition afford the means of judging, they are the very coinage of truth itself. It is the miraculous character of the history, which alone could have suggested a suspicion about its authenticity. But the belief of the Jews themselves in the reality of the events, up to the very

time when they are described as happening, is a fact so mixed up with all their feelings, and opinions, and institutions, that the supposition of the truth of the history, is the only key we have to explain the case: reject this supposition, and questions will arise on every side, which we shall vainly attempt to resolve.

It would be easy to extend these remarks, and by a comparison of the books among each other, in the way which Paley has adopted with so much success, in his Horæ Paulinæ, to prove their authenticity by marks of another kind. But this task has been ably performed by others; and it is besides not necessary to the present argument. As I am now about to enter upon a consideration of the Prophecies of the Old Testament, it seemed necessary to say something of the authenticity of the book in which they are found; and I have done so, in deference to this supposed necessity; but however important it may be, on other accounts, to demonstrate the historical credibility of the Jewish Scriptures, yet the questions at issue belong to other departments of theology; they have no logical connection with the Evidences of the Christian Revelation. The credibility of the historical parts of the Jewish Scriptures is only important to us, inasmuch as from the frequent allusions to them in the New Testament, the authority of the latter may seem to stand pledged for their veracity. But the truth or falsehood of the history of the New Testament itself,

depends upon proofs quite independent of the miracles performed by Moses.

Supposing these last to be true, and the books in which they are recorded, to have been written under the sanction of divine authority, it well becomes Christians to meditate upon this part of the Old Testament, with a view to general edification. But the connection of the Christian with the Jewish covenant must be sought, not in the miracles, nor in the historical parts generally of the ancient Scriptures, but in the types and prophecies which they contain. These have been incorporated with the history of the Jews, partly, perhaps, in order to keep them alive in the memory and belief of mankind; but except for this or some similar reason, it would not affect any part of the argument on which the present belief of Christianity is founded, if the historical books of the Old Testament had not been handed down to us at all.

We may soon satisfy ourselves that this is so, by examining any work upon the Evidences, either by recent writers or by the ancient apologists. In none do we find that any part of the argument is ever drawn from the facts contained in the Jewish Scriptures. Sometimes allusion is made to the New Testament, as confirming the divine authority of the Old; but I am acquainted with no writer, who has adduced the wonders which God wrought by the hand of Moses, in proof of the miracles ascribed to Christ. It is the adversary of Christi-

anity who commonly appeals to the Old Testament; this being the side on which he deems the evidence to be weakest. The effect has often been, to excite alarm in pious minds, without, however, in the least affecting the subject-matter in debate. A moment's consideration must shew us, that the truth of the Mosaic miracles is one question, and that of the Christian, quite another. And as it is not fair on the one side, so neither is it wise on the other, to treat them as if they were indissolubly united; to make the New Testament "answer with its life," as Paley expresses it, "for every fact recorded in the Old."

I do not mean to suggest any doubt about the credibility of the last; but it must necessarily be more easy for us to demonstrate the miracles, upon which the truth of Christianity is built, than those, upon which the Jew supports his faith. And since the former might easily be true, even though we supposed the latter to be without any reasonable proof, they ought upon every principle to be regarded as two separate questions. Our Saviour often alludes to points of Jewish history; but it is only to the "Law and the Prophets" that he refers as "they that testify of him." Accordingly there can be no reason why we should not confine our argument within the same limitation; especially as it will greatly narrow the field of controversy; and connect the proof of Christianity with those parts only of the Old Testament, which are not open to

debate; but which rest upon facts as easy to be ascertained, and as little depending upon mere conjecture, as any point of history that I am acquainted with.

No reader of discernment can open the Old Testament, and not immediately see, that the books composing it, are not by one and the same hand. The original distinctions of style have been a good deal concealed, by the dress under which the language appears in our translation; but even with this disadvantage, every one perceives that the author of Isaiah did not compose the Psalms; nor the writer of the Pentateuch, the books of Kings and Chronicles. But whether those several books were composed a thousand years before Christ, or only six hundred; whether they are the works of those whose names they bear, or of authors altogether unknown, are points of no importance to the question of the divine inspiration, under which the Jews believed them to have been written, so long as, leaving the historical parts, we confine our attention to the prophecies which they contain.

We know that these prophecies, whether real or pretended, are written in a language, which, at the time to which the fulfilment of them refers, had been a dead language more than five hundred years. It is absolutely certain that a translation of them is now extant, which was executed three hundred years before the same period. These are facts not to be disputed. The only questions, then,

respecting them, which concern the truth of Christianity are easily stated, and admit of a simple determination:—Were these prophecies distinctly announced as predictions of future events, at the time when they were delivered? Were they believed to be prophecies, by those among whom they were preserved? Were they understood in any specified sense, general or particular? Were they, in process of time, substantially fulfilled? that is, Did the event or events come to pass, according to the interpretation, which the previous expectation of the Jews, had fixed upon them?

Supposing these questions to be answered in the affirmative, it will readily be seen, that all other questions sink into insignificance.—Who were the authors of the several books, in which these prophecies are written? In what precise year were they uttered? Whether this or that, rather than the sense which actually was put upon them, would have been the more natural construction?—All these become questions simply of critical curiosity. If it can be proved, that they were written many generations before the date of their supposed fulfilment; if they came to pass in the sense which was put upon them, before that period; and if the events predicted were such, as no human knowledge could have foreseen, nor any human art or power have produced:—in this case, these prophecies were written by divine inspiration; and all the events which form the subject-matter of them—and that great

event, more especially, to which they all pointed, and in which they ultimately merged—were brought about by the direct interposition of a Divine Authority.

I have stated the case hypothetically, not as what is true, but as what would be true, and would be so considered, in the circumstances supposed. But whether true or not, if mankind had been persuaded to believe, that the case actually was, as I have here stated; that is to say, if they had admitted the premises here assumed, the conclusion would have been as irresistible, as if it had been deduced from mathematical principles. If any error was committed, we must seek for it in the premises from which they reasoned, and not in the reasoning itself.

Let us then proceed to examine these premises in detail, and see what the evidence was, on which the belief of their truth was founded. The determination of this question involves no opinion about speculative points, but regards only a matter of fact; the proof of which (if there be one) may be as easily stated and explained, as that of any proposition whatever which depends upon historical testimony.

LECTURE VI.

OPINIONS OF THE FATHERS OF THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES.—MEANING OF THE PROPHECIES FIXED BEFORE THE COMING OF CHRIST.

THE object of the preceding remarks was to shew, that if we assume the prophetical parts of the Old Testament to have been written many generations before the date of their supposed fulfilment; and that they came to pass, in the very sense which was put upon them by the Jews themselves, and had been put upon them, long before the appearance of Christianity in the world:—in that case, this religion must have been a revelation from God. After what has been said, I do not think this conclusion will be contested; but whether now contested or not, it is certain, that supposing the premises to have been established, it would not have been contested in

the days of the Apostles. It is, moreover, certain, that it was on the assumption of these premises being true, that the Apostles rested the whole weight of their preaching.

In a former Lecture, I had occasion to refer to a chapter of Paley, in which he shews that neither St. Peter nor St. Stephen in the Acts, nor St. Paul in any of his Epistles, have alluded to miracles as the *ground* of their belief; nor, indeed, except on a very few occasions, have alluded to them at all. The fact is dwelt upon by Paley, at some length; but it is observable, that after discussing the silence of the Apostles on this part of the Evidences, and stating the reasons of it, he does not go on to notice the proofs, on which they actually did place the argument. He tells us that the Apostles took for granted, that the miracles ascribed to Christ were known to all their hearers; but he does not add, that the medium of proof by which they endeavoured to demonstrate, that those miracles had God for their author, was altogether drawn from the prophecies of the Old Testament.

This fact, however, is so plain a feature in the New Testament, that it may seem to be a waste of time to demonstrate it; because no one can doubt it, who is acquainted with the history of the Apostles or their writings. The Apostles do not go about to establish the authenticity of the Jewish Scriptures, nor to shew their prophetical character. These points they take for granted, as matters, which none of

those with whom they had to reason, would for a moment call in question. The invariable purport of all their arguments, the end which they kept before them, in whatever they said or wrote, was to prove, that the subject of all the various prophecies with which those Scriptures were filled, was the Gospel which they preached; and, so far as appears, this only it was which the Jews denied.

How clear the Apostles believed this proof to be, and how superior to every other, is exemplified in the Second Epistle of St. Peter; where, having alluded to the transfiguration of Christ, at which he, and James, and John were present, when there "came a voice," as he says, "from the excellent glory, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased:" he immediately adds, "but we have a more sure word of prophecy." The truth of the transfiguration depended on the testimony only of two or three witnesses; and the voice which they had heard from heaven, might have been an illusion of the senses; but the testimony of prophecy, which he compares to "a light shining in a dark place," (as throwing its beams into futurity, and making clear what must otherwise have remained hidden from human knowledge,) did not, as St. Peter intimates, depend on his veracity, or that of St. John, or St. James; but on a proof, about which there could be no deception; the authority of which was admitted equally on all sides.

I am now merely stating the reasoning of the

Apostles. It would be easy to exemplify what I have said from passages without number; but the matter is too clear to require a detailed illustration. If there are any doubts, the means of settling them are in every one's hands. And could I take for granted, that the writings of those who succeeded the Apostles, were as familiarly known as the Christian Scriptures, it would be unnecessary to dwell any longer on the point. But, if we except professed students of divinity, few persons are probably aware, that the early Fathers do not, any more than the writers of the New Testament, rest their argument upon the miracles of Christ.

The earliest Christian writings, after those contained in the New Testament, are a collection of short pieces, by the cotemporaries, or immediate successors of the Apostles; making together a small volume under the title of the Apostolical Fathers. That these writings, whether authentic or not, are of Apostolic antiquity, is generally admitted. But they are purely hortatory, and do not refer to questions which concern unbelievers; and for this reason they throw but little light upon the evidences. The same is likewise true in a greater or less degree of Irenæus, Cyprian, Epiphanius, and others among the early Fathers. Their writings, having been composed for the exclusive use of Christians, or for the refutation of heresies, give us no knowledge of the arguments employed for the conversion of Jews or Pagans; but only of the

state of the Church, and of the doctrines and discipline maintained by its members. The works of that age which concern the present inquiry, are those which were composed, either in defence of the Gospel, or against heathenism.

Confining ourselves then to such writers of this last class, as were born within the two or three first centuries from the death of Christ, the names which present themselves, are those of Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Lactantius, and Arnobius. Except Origen, all of these appear to have been originally heathens; and the first observation which I have to make is, that while all of them, either expressly or by necessary implication, attribute their own conversion to the study of the Old Testament; not one, if we except Arnobius, appeals to the miracles, as the proof of Christ's divine authority. They mention the miracles among other facts, as substantiating this conclusion; but the conclusion itself, they rest upon the fulfilment of the prophecies, instanced in the progress made by the religion which he introduced. There are other writers of the same age, of whom fragments remain; such as Athenagoras, Tatian, Theophilus, and the author of the Epistle to Diognetus. Their testimony is less decisive, but as far as it goes, it will lengthen the list of witnesses to the fact I am here alleging.

In Justin's first apology, there is a long and elaborate statement, in which he produces, through se-

veral consecutive chapters, the various passages of the Old Testament, in which the person of Christ, and the doctrines which he taught, and the success of his preaching, are foreshewn. And he prefaces the statement in the following words: "Lest any one should object that there is nothing to hinder, but that he who is called Christ among us, should have been only a man, and born of a man; and have worked by magical arts those wonders which we attribute to miraculous powers, (μαγικῇ τέχνῃ ἃς λέγομεν δυνάμεις πεποιηκέναι:) and therefore, consider him to have been the Son of God; we will proceed to shew, that our opinions are not founded on what persons have said, but on the necessity of believing that which was foretold before it came to pass; inasmuch as we have witnessed, and do still witness with our own eyes, the fulfilment of those predictions: which is a demonstration which I think will appear even to you, most true and certain [1]."

I am not aware of any passages in the writings of Tertullian or Origen, directly ascribing the proof of the divine authority of the miracles of Christ, to the prophecies relating to him, as Justin would seem to do in the above extract; but abundance may be adduced, in which the argument rests solely on this single testimony; while I do not remember a case in which it

[1] Apol. I. §. 30.

is made to rest on the former. In more places than one, Origen charges Celsus with unfairness in his objections against the miracles of Christ, because he must have known, says he, that it was not from them, that the Christians drew their proof of his divine authority, but from the prophecies of the Old Testament:—οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπως τὸ μέγιστον περὶ τῆς συστάσεως τοῦ Ἰησοῦ κεῖται, ὡς ὅτι προεφητεύθη ὑπὸ τῶν παρὰ Ἰουδαίοις προφητῶν, παραπέμπει ἑκών.

A still more remarkable passage, however, to the same purpose is to be found in Lactantius, in the fifth Book of his Div. Inst. c. 3. "But Apollonius, it is said, never gave himself out to be a god, on account of the miracles which he wrought: —assuredly not. Nor should we have believed Christ to have been a God, had he merely performed miracles. But learn, that we do not believe him to have been God, solely for this reason; but because we have seen all things fulfilled in him, which the prophets have foretold. He did miracles, it is true; and we should have supposed him to have been a magician (as you now think, and as the Jews formerly thought,) if all the prophets, with one consent, had not predicted that he would do such things."—"*Disce igitur, si quid tibi cordi est, non solum idcirco a nobis Deum creditum Christum, quia mirabilia fecit, sed quia credimus in eo facta esse omnia quæ nobis communicata sunt vaticinia Prophetarum. Fecit mirabilia: magum putas-*

semus, ut et vos nunc putatis et Judæi tunc putaverunt, si non illa ipsa facturum Christum, Prophetæ omnes uno spiritu prædicassent."

St. Augustine and St. Chrysostom lived too late to be brought as witnesses in the question; but their opinion is of weight as a confirmative authority. And as the point I am now illustrating, has no reference to the value of the proof from miracles, compared with that from prophecy, abstractedly considered, but only to the question,—What was the relative place which was assigned to the Old and New Testament, in the view taken of the Evidences, in the early ages of the Church?—there is a passage from Augustine which I gladly extract, if it be only to show that in these remarks upon the reasoning of the early Fathers, I am not stating any thing new or paradoxical. "To say, that the Hebrew prophecies are not fit evidences for bringing the heathen to a belief on Christ, is ridiculous folly," says St. Augustine; "seeing that all the heathen nations have been brought to the belief of Christ by the Hebrew prophecies."—"*Dicere autem, non esse aptam gentibus Hebræam prophetiam ut credant in Christum, cum videat omnes gentes per Hebræam prophetiam credere in Christum, ridicula insania est*[1]."

The authorities above produced, are sufficient to justify the assertion here made by Augustine;

[1] Contra Faust. xiii. c. 2.

it would otherwise be an easy task to enlarge them to almost any extent; not indeed by direct quotations, but by shewing, in every case, what the reasoning was, which they actually employed, whenever the truth of Christianity was the point at issue. They do not slur over the miracles of Christ as if they did not believe them, or supposed that they would be denied—far from it; but assuming the question to be, not the truth of the facts, but the explanation of them—it is to the Old Testament they uniformly appeal, as shewing that nothing had been asserted or was believed of Christ, or had been taught by him, without the warranty of long preceding prophecies. But the question is not, as to the use made by the Fathers, of the Old Testament; but as to the soundness of the premises, from which they reasoned. To this point, then, our attention must now be directed.

The obvious and popular objection to the evidence of prophecy, is the vague and indeterminate language in which, sometimes the subject-matter of the prediction, and sometimes the prediction itself, is couched. In the case of the heathen oracles, their amphibolical obscurity was a matter of proverbial observation: *οἱ χρησμολόγοι οὐ προορίζονται πότε*, was a saying of Aristotle, often quoted. In truth, it is a difficulty not peculiar to false prophecies, but in some degree, inherent in the nature of the evidence.

When the subject of a prophecy is some specific

event, such as was the destruction of Jerusalem, or the time of the sojourning of the people of Israel in Egypt, there is nothing to hinder the language of it from being plain and unambiguous. But unless the intent and meaning of the prediction be a matter of fact, or something equally determinate, a certain degree of verbal obscurity can hardly be avoided. How was the *person* of an individual to be distinguished, so that his character, as a messenger from God, might immediately be known, without the possibility of imposition? And still more, how were *truths* and *propositions* hereafter to be revealed, so to be foretold, as that when revealed, no doubt should exist as to their divine authority?

Accordingly I do not mean to say that the prophecies of the Old Testament, if separately weighed and examined, are all of them so clearly expressed, as not to admit of any diversity of construction. On the contrary, I believe that if the book were placed in the hands of a person for the first time, and his opinion asked as to the purport of all the oracles, real or pretended, with which it abounds, he would be very much at a loss what explanation to give; certainly he would be unable to render an exact and detailed account of their meaning. But this will only render the fact the more remarkable—especially if we consider the subject of those prophecies—if it should appear, that an exact and detailed tradition has existed among the Jews, apparently from time immemorial, both as to the

general signification of their prophetical books, and as to the particular meaning of detached passages; and that point by point, and almost word for word, this traditional interpretation was actually realized.

It is common to hear objections raised against the manner in which passages from the Old Testament have been applied, by the writers of the New. Sometimes their interpretations are said to be forced; sometimes they are accused of having mistaken the sense; and in a great number of instances, of having considered expressions and allusions as prophetic, which are stamped with no such character. Much valuable learning has been shewn in vindicating the Apostles from these charges; but the proper answer is to be found, not in the critical exposition of the passages, but in that which is an historical statement: namely, that, with the exception of certain passages, which I shall hereafter state, and which are all of one particular kind, in no instance that I am aware of, (though I have examined the question with some attention) do the Apostles ever apply any passages from the Old Testament to Jesus Christ, except those which were regarded as prophetical by the Jews of that day, and had been so regarded long before; and which, moreover, had by them been always interpreted of the Messiah. Whatever difference of opinion may now exist on this point, between the Jews and Christians, has arisen since the introduction of Christianity. At the time when it appeared, there

was no controversy as to the meaning of the passages which the Apostles adduced; but only as to the reasons they assigned for applying that meaning to Jesus of Nazareth.

This, I think, is evident, upon the very face of the narrative parts of the New Testament, no less than in almost every one of the Epistles. There is not so much as a hint, in the former, of any contradiction being given, either to our Saviour himself, or afterwards to the Apostles, as misapplying the Scriptures; and with respect to the Epistles, it will be seen, upon examination, that except we suppose an agreement of opinion, up to a certain point, between the writers of them, and the Jews, in respect of the general sense of the quotations alleged by the former, their arguments will often not have common sense. While, on the other hand, the absence of any discussion, in proof of the prophetical character of the passages they allege, and their total silence as to any doubt or contrariety of interpretation, would seem to furnish as strong a proof, as any negative inference can do, that in the premises from which both parties reasoned, no doubt or contrariety of sentiments at that time prevailed.

But we are not left to inference, or to merely negative proofs of this important fact; nor to the evidence of writings which have been composed by Christians. There are Jewish documents remaining, about whose authenticity, no question has ever been

raised on any side, which leave us in no uncertainty as to the belief of the Jews, at the time when Christianity first appeared, on all the points then at issue between them.

The Jewish writers may be divided into two classes:—those who lived before, and those who have lived since, the compilation of the Talmud. The latter, though often valuable, as authorities for explaining the text of the Bible, and the manners and customs to which it refers, do not possess any sort of authority, in the determination of points of controversy relating to the sense of the prophecies. The question is not, what is the interpretation of Maimonides, or Joseph Albo, or Kimchi, or writers of a comparatively recent date, whose opinions have been in a great measure guided by a desire to oppose the Christian interpretation; but what, in each instance, was the interpretation which was affixed by the Jewish Church, in the age of the Apostles. Nothing can be more plainly marked, than the change which has been effected in the opinions of the Jews, by the establishment of the Gospel: so much so, that whenever we find two senses of any passage, one of which is more, and the other less favourable to the Christian scheme, it may be concluded almost with certainty, that the former is the ancient, and the latter, the modern interpretation.

Omitting then all notice of modern authorities, and attending only to the ancient, I think that it

may be laid down, as a proposition to which there are not more than one or two exceptions, (and those exceptions admitting of an explanation which will be found to strengthen the rule,) that the sense which was put upon the several prophecies adduced by the Apostles, as we find them stated in the New Testament, was the same as had been put upon them by the Jewish nation in general, and as was then taught in their synagogues.

Except the Targums, or Chaldee Paraphrases of Onkelos on the Pentateuch, and Jonathan on the Prophets, there are no Jewish writings extant, the composition of which is supposed to have been so early as the Christian epoch. Though the traditions, which have been put together in the Mischna, belong to a much earlier date, yet the book itself was composed in the second century. The commentary on the Mischna, or, as it is called, the Gemara, was compiled considerably later; and the contents of it are of various ages: some before Christ, and some as late as the fifth and sixth centuries.

Next to the Targums, the work most important to our present purpose, is the Sohar of R. Simeon Ben Jochai, who flourished early in the second century. This book is held in the highest veneration by the Jews, and is the foundation of their Cabbala. The subject of it is, the coming of the Messiah, and the things which will happen upon the earth in those days, as deducible from

the prophecies; and so nearly do the deductions approach to the construction, put upon the Old Testament by the writers of the New, that Schoettgenius came to the conclusion, that the author, though a Jew by birth and by profession, must in his secret mind have been a Christian.

In addition to the above-mentioned sources of information, concerning the traditional opinions of the ancient synagogue, are the Rabbinical commentaries on the several books of the Old Testament, called Libri Midraschici. The authors of these books are supposed to have lived, some of them before Christ, and others, successively in the second, and third, and fourth centuries.

Whatever question might be raised, as to the reliance to be placed upon the authority of these several books, on the part of Christians, in instances where it pressed against them; yet the most scrupulous weigher of evidence may dismiss all jealousy and suspicion from his mind, whenever the bearing of it is in their favour. Although the Jews have, in a great many cases, openly thrown aside the testimony of their early teachers; no instance has ever been produced where they have done so, except for the purpose of shutting out the arguments adduced by Christians. To suppose that they would, under any circumstances, depart from tradition in a case where it would open a door to those arguments, is as contrary to probability as any supposition that could be proposed. "Who-

ever," says the author of the Sohar (quoted by Schoettgenius) "shall propose any interpretations of the word, except such as he has heard from the mouth of the Rabbins, him, shall the holy, blessed God punish in the world to come: and when his soul shall seek to enter into its habitation, they shall cause him to be cast forth from among the number of the living."

Certainly in many instances, the spirit of this admonition has been transgressed by the Jews, in silently dropping many doctrines and traditions of their church, which afforded a handle to their adversaries; but I am persuaded we might safely say, that not so much as one opinion, from the days of Christ till the present, has knowingly been engrafted upon their ancient traditions, the tendency of which was to confirm the Christian scheme.

Having offered these few brief remarks in explanation of the testimony by which I mean to shew, that the prophecies of the Old Testament, if fulfilled at all, have been fulfilled,—not in a sense which was discovered after the event, or was received only by the disciples of Jesus Christ, and which was not known before, or, if known, was rejected by their adversaries: but have been fulfilled in a sense, which, whether agreeable to the principles of criticism or not, was agreeable to the meaning and import of the several prophecies, in the opinion of the Jews of that time:—having, I say, given some account of the data upon which I hope

to establish the truth of this proposition, I shall now proceed to the proofs on which it depends.

The authority on which these proofs will rest, are —first, the Targums, or Jewish Paraphrases; and secondly, two books which throw a light, as curious as important, upon the ancient doctrines of the Jewish Church. These books are the Pugio Fidei Adversus Mauros et Judæos, written by a Spanish monk before the invention of printing, of the name of Raymundus Martini, and edited by J. B. Carpzof, with the notes of De Voisin, 1687; and the Horæ Hebraicæ et Talmudicæ of Schoettgenius, printed at Dresden, 1733: a work not sufficiently known, but which never ought to be off the table of the theological student. Every statement made in each of these works, is supported by references, in the words of the several authorities adduced; and I have found very few instances where the quotations do not bear out the conclusions. To the fidelity of the quotations I am unable to speak; though many of them would have tempted me to take that trouble, as being beyond measure surprising from the pen of a Jew; but Augustinus Justinianus, in the preface to his edition of the Victoria contra Judæos, by Porchetus, Paris, 1520, tells us that he has verified every one of the quotations of Raymundus Martini, and can bear a full testimony to their fidelity. He tells us that Martini was a monk of the order to which he himself belonged; and originally, as he believes, a Jew. Indeed no one,

as he says, who was not of their nation, or who had not the assistance of a Rabbin, could have obtained such access to the secret treasures of the Jews, as the Pugio Fidei indicates. He spoke from his own knowledge, having, as he tells us, experienced the difficulty: "*Expertus sum quantis sit opus laboribus, vigiliis, sumptibus, auxiliis denique volentibus, Hebræorum penetrare secreta. His tamen omnibus ipse utcunque instructus, legi in Hebræorum monumentis bonam partem eorum quæ citantur a Raymundo, ut nullus reliquus sit dubitationis locus de allegationum fide; possumus rei hujus locupletissimum apud unumquemque fidem facere: atque testimonio librorum unde desumpta hæc pretiosa supellex; quos fere omnes mihi comparavi: observoque apud me perinde ac regis margaritas ac gemmas.*"

In order to keep the proofs which I shall bring forward, within a reasonable compass, I shall confine them to a fixed part of the Old Testament. By far the largest number of the passages alleged by the writers of the New Testament, are found in two books, viz. Isaiah and the Psalms. Let us then take these and examine, one by one, every passage quoted from them by the Apostles, as applicable to Christ. Next let us turn to the two works just mentioned, to see whether the same passages were referred by the ancient synagogue to the Messiah. Whenever this shall appear to have been the case, it will be evident that the sense put upon them by the Apostles, was not of their own "private interpreta-

tion," but was that which the nation at large had been instructed to receive.

Ps. ii. 1, 2. 6. 8, quoted Acts iv. 25. 28; xiii. 33. Referred to the Messiah in Melchita, fol. 3, 3. Sohar. Gen. Midrash. Tehillim.

Ps. viii. 4. 6, quoted Heb. ii. 6. 9. Referred to the Messiah in Tikkune Sohar. c. 70.

Ps. xvi. 8. 11, quoted Acts ii. 25. 32. Referred to the Messiah in Bereschith rabba, sect. 88.

Ps. xxii. 1. 8. 16. 18, quoted Matthew xxvii. 46. Referred to the Messiah in Midrash. Tehillim. Pesikta Rabbathi in Talkut Simeoni. fol. 56. 4. Sohar. Numer. fol. 100.

Ps. xl. 6. 8, quoted Heb. x. 5. 10. Referred to the Messiah in Midrash. Ruth, fol. 43. 3, 4.

Ps. xlv. 1. 7, quoted Hebrews i. 8, 9. Rom. ix. 5. Referred to the Messiah in Targum. Sohar; and also by the modern Jewish commentators.

Ps. lxviii. 18, 19, quoted Ephes. iv. 8. Referred to the Messiah by R. Obadja Haggaon, cited by Cartwright. Schemoth rabba, sect. 35.

Ps. lxix. 21, quoted Matt. xxvii. 34. 48.—Gall and vinegar given to Christ to drink. I have found no Jewish authority for the application of this particular fact to the Messiah, either in Schoettgenius or the Pugio Fidei; but the Psalm itself is applied to him generally by several writers quoted by Martini.

Ps. cx. 1. 4, quoted Heb. v. 5, 6; vi. 19, 20. Compare Sohar. Gen. fol. 35. Sohar. Num. fol. 99.

Midrash. Tehillim ad loc. Targum. Sohar. chadash, fol 42. Gen. fol. 42. 29.

Ps. cxviii. 22, 23. Compare Sohar. Gen. fol. 118. Idem Numer. fol. 86, *et passim.*

The above are the only psalms to which I can find any plain allusion in the New Testament; and if we may trust to the references given by Schoettgen and Raymundus Martini, they are all of them, either generally or particularly, applied to the times of the Messiah by the old Rabbinical writers. We are not, however, to suppose, that those here quoted, are the only psalms which the ancient Jewish church so explained; on the contrary, many, not adduced in the New Testament, might be added. The principle of interpretation adopted by the Jews would appear to have been very simple :—it was, that, whenever any expressions were found in the prophetical writings, conveying a meaning, too high and comprehensive to admit of an historical application to known persons or events, such expressions should be referred, either to the Messiah himself, or to his promised kingdom. As to double senses of the prophecies, of which Grotius and Warburton talk, and other writers after them, it may be doubted whether such a notion ever entered into the minds of the ancient Jews. Their rule seems to have been founded on the opposite supposition: that no prophecy could have two senses; and, therefore, that when the literal sense of the inspired writer afforded no intelligible meaning,

the words were to be understood prophetically. In fact, if it be once allowed, that a prophecy is capable of more than one true interpretation, where are we to fix the limit? The danger of such a principle needs not to be pointed out; and except it be founded on stronger reasons than are given by Grotius, in his commentary on St. Matt. ch. i. it is as unfounded as it is dangerous.—But to return to our subject.

Of the sixty-six chapters which compose the Book of Isaiah, all, except fifteen, are referred by one Jewish writer or another to the times of the Messiah; but in the New Testament, I think that there are not quotations from more than sixteen or seventeen.

Is. ii. 1. 5. Conversion of the Gentiles. John x. 16. Acts xxviii. 28. These passages are applied to the Messiah in the Targum, and generally by Jewish commentators, both ancient and recent.

Is. vii. 14. The miraculous birth of Christ. "*Hoc caput*," says Schoettgen, "*Judæi antiquiores, ex inscitiâ, juniores vero, ex malitiâ neglexerunt.*" I shall take occasion, in my next Lecture, to offer some remarks upon this important prophecy, which will, I hope, both explain the ignorance of the ancient Jews, and vindicate the present, from the charge here preferred by Schoettgen; but in the mean time, it is sufficient to say, that this prophecy stands out almost singly, as one which the Apostles have applied to Christ on their own authority.

Is. viii. 13, 14. Christ, a stone of stumbling. Rom.

ix. 33. 1 Peter ii. 7, 8. Applied to the Messiah in Sanhedrim, fol. 38. Breschith rabba, sect. 42. fol. 40.

Is. ix. "Unto us a child is born." This very important prophecy is referred to the Messiah in the Targum; and it is generally so understood by Christians. Nevertheless, I cannot satisfy myself that any allusion to it is to be found in the New Testament.

Is. xviii. 16. Christ, the chief corner-stone. 1 Pet. ii. 3. 6. Applied to the Messiah in Sanhedrim, fol. 98. 1. Talkut Simeoni, i. fol. 49. 3. Breschith Kezara citante Raymundo Martini in Pug. Fid. ii. 4. p. 313.

Is. xxx. 3, 4. 15. Miracles of the Gospel and effusion of the Spirit. Acts ii. 4. Rom. xi. 18. Compare Janchuma, fol. 1. 2. Debarim rabba, sect. 6. fol. 258. 2. Sohar, chadash, fol. 89. 3.

Is. xxxi. Times of the Messiah. New Testament *passim.* See Pesikta rabbathi, fol. 29. 3. Tanchuma. Talkut Simeoni, i. fol. 157. 1. Sohar. Exod. fol. 34. col. 134.

Is. xl. John the forerunner of Christ. This chapter is referred to the Messiah by the present Jews, as well as by the ancient. See Kimchi. Aben Esra. Pesikta in Talkut Simeoni, ii. fol. 49. 1. as quoted by Schoettgenius *in loco.*

Is. xlii. 1. 7. 16. New Testament *passim.* Applied to Christ in the Targum, and by all the present Jews.

Is. liii. The whole chapter is referred to the Mes-

siah in the New Testament, as it also is in the Targum; and in the Sohar *passim.*

Is. lv. 1. 5. Christ, the living water. John iv. 10. 14. Schoettgen quotes from Galatinus, Breschith rabba ad Genes. xlix. 14; but the passage is not found, he tells us, in the editions which he has consulted.

Is. lx. Glory of Christ's kingdom. New Testament *passim.* So applied in the Targum, and by the ancient Jewish Church *passim.*

Is. lxi. Christ, anointed by the Spirit. Luke iv. 16. Matthew, iii. 16, 17. This chapter is referred to the Messiah by the modern Jewish commentators, as well as the ancient.

If it would not be tedious, it would be a task of no difficulty, to go through the remaining passages quoted from the Old Testament by the Apostles, in confirmation of Christ's divine commission. They are, I believe, not more than between twenty and thirty; and with the single exception of Job xix. 25, (about which the Jews, both of the present and of former times are silent,) in every instance, the authority of the ancient Synagogue may be produced, in confirmation of the interpretation the Apostles affixed.

With respect to the more important of the prophecies which they allege:—all those, that is to say, which the Jews considered, as the "terms" by which the *person* of the Messiah would be known, and, from which, the *time*, beyond which he was not to be looked for, was to be determined:—we can produce the authority of the Targums in favour of the

Christian interpretation. And in the present question this is the highest of all authorities; because these books were known to the people at large, and in fact were the channels, through which all their knowledge of the original Scriptures was derived. Daniel, in his prophecy of the seventy weeks refers by *name* to the Messiah; and Gen. iii. 15, Numbers xxiv. 17, Haggai ii. v. 7. 9. Mal. iii. 1. Micah v. 2, Zech. ix. 9, are like wise referred to him in the same manner, by all authorities, ancient and modern.

It is not necessary to enter into any controversy in this part of the argument. I am not saying that the ancient Jews were right or wrong, or that the Apostles were right or wrong. I am simply stating a matter of fact:—that whether right or wrong, the construction put upon the prophecies by both parties was the same: the difference between them, not regarding the reality or general meaning of the prophecies, adduced by the latter, but only the proof of their having been fulfilled.

The preceding remarks have been built upon the general rule; but it must not be dissembled that many and important exceptions to it may be produced. The Apostles quote passages from the Old Testament to show,—that Christ was to be born of a virgin; that he was to rise from the dead; that he was to drink gall and vinegar; that his garments were to be parted; that he was to be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver. These and some other facts are adduced by the Apostles, as fulfilments of prophecies; and some of

them, doubtless, are of much importance. But I have been able to find no proof that those passages were referred to the Messiah by the ancient Jewish Church; and yet, if unexplained, they would seem to be sufficient in number, to overturn the general proposition which I have laid down. But exceptions, which are founded upon specific reasons, instead of overturning, will sometimes confirm a rule. We have now to inquire, whether in the instance of the prophecies here adverted to, any such reasons can be shown, for their having been withdrawn from the general rule which I have just now asserted. The consideration of this point will furnish the subject of my next Lecture.

LECTURE VII.

ON PROPHECIES, THE MEANING OF WHICH WAS KEPT BACK UNTIL AFTER THE EVENT.

As every apparent deviation from the course of nature is not necessarily a miracle, so neither is every prediction to be called a prophecy. Many things may seem in our eyes to be deviations from the course of nature, which are nevertheless in strict accordance with its laws. So likewise many things spoken at random may come true by chance; many things may come true, which human foresight was able to divine; and some predictions have a tendency to fulfil themselves. Of such prophecies as these, many, no doubt, in all ages, may have been fulfilled. But there is no instance recorded in profane history, of any prophecy having come to pass, from which all and each of these suppositions can be excluded. History indeed is full of fabulous miracles; but if we except the Old

Testament, there is not any case, either in ancient or modern times, in which the fulfilment of a prophecy has been so much as pretended; meaning by this word, not a mere blind coincidence, but a case in which an event, which no human sagacity could have anticipated, nor any combination of human means have brought to pass, came true in accordance with a previous expectation.

It is the previous expectation which shuts out all dispute, and constitutes what would seem to be the case of a perfect prophecy. But it is plain that this case can only happen, when the subject-matter of the prophecy is a contingent event; by which I mean an event, the causes of which, as was just now said, are placed not only beyond all human calculation, but also beyond all human power and control. For otherwise the previous expectation becomes an occasion of doubt and suspicion, as opening the door to a suggestion of fraud or collusion. There are cases, in which even a mere knowledge of the existence of a prophecy, would be liable to this inconvenience; and when the proof of its fulfilment would be difficult or impossible, except on a supposition that it had previously been either unknown altogether, or misunderstood.

It is plain then, that if we were examining, not an insulated prediction, but a scheme of prophecy, in which, as subordinate to one great and principal event, many others had been predicted, some contingent, and some not so, but depending upon known

causes, the hypothesis would require, that in the *latter* class of events there should have been no preceding expectation. In many cases it would be necessary, that even a knowledge of the prophecy itself should have been kept back. For there is a large class of facts which depend upon the voluntary actions of human agents; and which men may agree together either to bring about or to hinder. There is another class of facts, the truth of which it may be difficult to prove or disprove; and which men, therefore, may simulate, though they did not really happen; or if they did, may deny. In any of these cases, the supposition of a previous expectation, instead of demonstrating a Divine Providence, would cause the proof of it to be uncertain. It would not, therefore, impeach the pretensions of a scheme of prophecy to be considered as of divine authority, that many of the predictions which it contained had not been understood until after the event, provided this had occurred, only in the instance of such events as I have here been speaking of. If in the case of all other events, that is to say, of all events depending solely upon the will and power of God, it should appear that there had been, not only an antecedent knowledge, but, as regards the general subject of the supposed scheme, a full and unequivocal expectation—the absence of such previous knowledge and expectation, if it was confined to events which were not contingent, instead of detracting from the proof of a Divine Providence, would confirm it: by at once excluding the supposition

of chance or blind necessity. It would demonstrate the agency of an intelligent Cause. Such a scheme must have been a concerted scheme, as being planned upon a rule, the observation of which necessarily implied forethought and design.

Bearing these remarks in mind, let us now proceed to examine the prophecies of the Old Testament, under the two heads here laid down, of perfect and imperfect; and observe whether, in adjusting the events foretold, the distinction which I have pointed out between contingent and non-contingent facts, has been respectively preserved. We have seen that the prophecies applied to Christ in the New Testament, are, with certain stated exceptions, the same as had been applied to the promised Messiah, by the Jewish Synagogue; but there are deviations from this rule, some passages being referred to Christ by the Apostles, which had not been so understood before. Distinguishing these last, as cases of imperfect prophecy, the question is, whether their use was accidental only, or whether it was regulated by the nature of the facts, as just now explained. It is on this point that the value of these prophecies, as evidences of revelation, will depend.

Assuming, for the sake of argument, the divine authority of the Gospel, it will not, I think, be doubted, after what has been said in a former Lecture, that an expectation of it, on the part of mankind, before it was revealed, would greatly have facilitated its reception. It was therefore perfectly consistent

with the belief of its having come from God, that prophecies relating to it, should have been designedly spread abroad, and have been generally understood in some sense, not incompatible with its true meaning. This remark will include all predictions relating to the nation of the promised Messenger, to his lineage, his birth-place, the generation of mankind in which he was to appear, and so on. These facts are all of them contingent in their nature; and the general object of such prophecies, would not have been so completely answered, by the knowledge of them having been kept back, as by its having been long before communicated. But if we examine the life of Christ, we shall immediately see, that there is another description of marks and incidents, which if made the subject of prophecy, would be in the opposite case; and in which the Divine purpose, for the reason just now stated, would seem, as plainly, to require obscurity and concealment.

For example: had those prophecies, in which the violent death of the Messiah is foreshewn and the exact time when it was to take place, been understood literally by the Jews, they would not have put Jesus Christ to death, in disproof of his pretensions, and as a means of undeceiving the people. When pressed by Pilate "to let Jesus go!" they "denied the Holy One and the Just," and "desired a murderer to be granted unto them;" "but," adds St. Peter, "I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers."

In like manner, had they known beforehand, that those passages in the Psalms, where it is said "they gave me gall and vinegar to drink," "they pierced my hands and my feet," "they parted my garments among them," were prophecies referring to the manner in which the Messiah would be put to death,—it is clear that they would have been careful not to cause their fulfilment in the person of our Lord, at the very moment when they were punishing him as an impostor.

The same remark will apply to the thirty pieces of silver, which had been given to Judas Iscariot, as the price of his treachery, and with which, when it was returned to the rulers of the people, they bought the potter's field. Had that passage of Zechariah been understood by them, as a prophecy relating to their Messiah, in which he says, "And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prized at by them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord[1]",—it would have been easy for the Jews, humanly speaking, to have defeated its intention. This is not merely a possible supposition. The place of the Messiah's birth was a contingent fact; and St. Matthew tells us, that Herod attempted to defeat the prophecy from which it was known, by putting to death all the children of two years old and under, who had been born in the neighbour-

[1] Ch. xi. 13.

hood of Bethlehem. The above prophecies relate to events of a collateral kind, and not to matters of fundamental proof; but there are others of the very first importance, which come under the same class. The seventh chapter of Isaiah (v. 14), where the miraculous conception of Christ is believed to have been predicted, may be mentioned as an example, in this also, the supposition of a previous expectation, instead of strengthening the evidence of a divine authority, would have vitiated the proof.

There is perhaps no prophecy of the Old Testament, which has attracted so much attention as this, or has been the subject of as much discussion. Almost every writer upon this part of the evidences, from Justin Martyr down to Bishop Chandler, has placed it in the foremost rank. The latter indeed considers the proof of this passage having been a prophecy, and having received its fulfilment in Christ, to be so plain, that he regards the absence of any notice of it in the Jewish writings, as an evidence of the dishonesty of their doctors: "Many things," says the Bishop, "were said in the ancient Targums, that do not appear in the present copies. And the same is true of other Jewish books. These writings were entirely in the Jews' own possession a few centuries ago. And as the Jews became acquainted with the state of their controversy with the Christians, it was a temptation to expunge such glaring

passages, as would give advantage to the Christians and were of no use to themselves, when they were sure not to be found out."

I am not aware of any legitimate reason for believing, that there is the smallest truth in this sweeping charge against the Jewish doctors. But in the present instance, there is positive proof to the contrary; inasmuch as it appears from Justin, that the Jews, in his time, interpreted the passage, as they do now, not of the Messias, but of Hezekiah. It is true, nothing can be more tame or less seemingly probable than this sense. Ahaz, it appears, was desired to ask a sign of God; and upon his refusal to do so, the prophet tells him, that the Lord himself will give him a sign. "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." Now Hezekiah was never called Immanuel. And if the sign to be given to Ahaz, was simply, as the Jews say, that a young woman should bear a son, who was to be distinguished from other men, in no way besides, the passage, as Justin tells Trypho, appears to be devoid of all meaning. It is, however, incontestably certain that no authority can be found, in any Jewish writing, either ancient or modern, for the interpretation put upon this passage by the Apostles. I do not say that there is no authority for asserting the miraculous generation of the promised Messiah; but that there is none, as deducible from this particular passage:—for it is important to

observe that the notion itself, which the prophecy conveyed, was certainly not new to the Jews.

It is plain, as well from their own writings as from the Gospels, that they did not expect the birth of the Messiah to be in the way of ordinary men. "Who shall declare his generation?" said Isaiah; and accordingly we read in St. John vii. "Do the rulers know that this is the very Christ? Howbeit we know this man whence he is, but when Christ cometh no man knoweth whence he is." Thus we are told by Lightfoot, that it is a question often mooted in the Talmud, "whether he was to come from the living or the dead." There seems also to have been a surmise, that the Messiah was to be without a father. *Dixit R. Berachijah quod Deus sanctus, benedictus, dicit Israeli, Vos dixistis coram me, Pupilli facti sumus, sine patre.—Redemptor quoque quem ego stare faciam ex vobis, sine patre erit, sicut dictum est*[1], "*Ecce vir, Germen nomen ejus, et de sub se germinabit;*" *et sic dicit Esaias*[2], "*Et ascendit ut virgultum coram eo.*" *Super eo David quoque dicit*[3], "*Ex matrice auroræ tibi ros juventutis tuæ.*" So far the gloss, says Raymundus Martini: observing that in these words the Jews referred to the manner of Christ's generation.

Now surely, if the Jews speak of the Messiah as one who was to be born "without a father;" and describe his generation under the similitude of a branch, or a root that was to spring up of itself out

[1] Zech. vi. 12. [2] Ch. liii. 3. [3] Ps. cx. 3.

of the ground, which is propagated not by seed, but by a process of its own; in this case, though they may have had no expectation of any such events, as are related in the first chapter of St. Matthew, yet their minds must have been prepared for events of some kind, which were to be out of the ordinary course of nature. And if so, it is plain that when the Apostles applied the passage of Isaiah, now before us, to Jesus Christ, they were not putting any new construction upon the general meaning of the prophecies, but only striking out the sense of a particular passage, the knowledge of which had, till then, been kept back.

But why, it may be asked, should the knowledge of this event have been kept back? So far from being a fact which was dependent upon any human agency or control, it was not only a contingent event, but a miracle. This is true; but it was, as I shall explain, an event which, if it had been preceded by a distinct expectation, never could have been proved. The absence of this, is even a part of the evidence on which it stands.

The truth of the fact, as a moment's consideration must shew, rests, and must rest, on the testimony of the mother of our Lord. The Apostles do not say, (nor if they had, would an adverse party have received their affirmation,) that the knowledge of it had been revealed to them by inspiration; but even if it had been, it would still be certain, that the application of the prophecy to the birth of the

Messiah, was subsequent to our Lord's nativity; and the belief of his miraculous conception anterior to the knowledge of the prophecy. If we read St. Matthew's or St. Luke's account of our Lord's birth, we shall have no difficulty in understanding the origin of this belief. No one who attached credit to the particulars which are there narrated, could be likely to have questioned the application of the prophecy; and no one who did not believe those particulars, could have been called upon to believe the fact, solely on the evidence which the words of Isaiah furnished. The business of prophecy, as has been explained, is not to prove the *truth* of facts, but to explain the *cause*.

In the present case, it cannot be questioned, but that the event was of a kind most difficult to prove, even if true; and almost equally difficult of disproof, if untrue; and, therefore, such, as would not have been entitled to belief, simply on the credit of the Virgin Mary's veracity, unsupported by other evidence. This other evidence consisted of those various miraculous occurrences related by the Evangelists:—the salutation of the angels, the manifestation of a meteoric sign in the heavens; the address of Elizabeth, and all the particulars connected with the birth of John the Baptist. If those transactions were true, they must have been well known to many persons then alive; and if false, the refutation of them was also easy, inasmuch as at the time

of our Saviour's death, the events in question were comparatively recent.

This is the ground on which the credibility of Mary's declaration depends. The use made of Isaiah's testimony by the Evangelists, was to identify the child Jesus, with that child of whom the Scriptures had spoken. And if we suppose the application of the prophecy to the Messiah never to have been thought of before, but to have been first suggested to the Apostles, *after* their knowledge of the extraordinary facts which attended the birth of Christ, its testimony would become most important, as removing from the minds of those who believed those facts to be true, all doubts about the reality of Mary's evidence. The case hardly admitted of any other proof.

It is plain, however, that in the above way of reasoning, every thing depends upon this supposition. If we adopt the hypothesis—which so many writers, in their zeal, endeavour to maintain—that the prophecy of Isaiah was always understood by the Jews in the sense which the Christians have put upon it, and contend that the miraculous conception of the Messiah had, from the beginning, been a part of the popular persuasion, the weight of the argument would seem to be thrown into the opposite scale. Had this been the case, a handle would have been given to those, who rejected the pretensions of Christ, for saying that the invention of the story had been

suggested, by the well-known belief of the vulgar. Under such circumstances, the prophecy would have been a hindrance to the evidence of the fact, and not a confirmation of it. Instead of advancing the divine purpose, it would rather have tended to obstruct it. Following up the reasoning, it is plain that the concealment of its meaning from the Jews, who lived before Christ, furnishes no argument against its authority; but on the contrary, when considered in connexion with the general scheme of prophecy, it becomes a presumptive argument in its favour.

There is another fact in our Saviour's history, of even more importance still, which does not seem to have formed any part of the Jewish expectation concerning the Messiah: and that is, his resurrection from the dead. Although the Jews appear to have been perfectly aware of the predictions relating to the sufferings, which the Messiah was in some mysterious way to undergo, yet the thought of his being destined to suffer death at their hands, never seems to have presented itself to their imagination. Of course, therefore, those prophecies which adverted to the manner of his death, or to any facts which pre-supposed this catastrophe, were not understood beforehand. Allusion has already been made to some of those prophecies; and it now remains to inquire, whether the same considerations, which explain the ignorance in which the Jews were kept, relating to the facts then adverted to, will not also account for the obscurity of those prophe-

cies, in which the resurrection of the Messiah is supposed to have been foreshewn.

After the death of Christ, the passage of Psalm xvi. "Thou shalt not leave my soul in hell, neither shalt thou suffer thy Holy One to see corruption," was applied to this great event. The same application was made of Hosea vi. 2. "After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight." I do not, at present, remember any passage of the New Testament in which these words of Hosea are referred to; but they have been since, applied to the resurrection of Christ. The words of the Psalmist are directly quoted in the Acts, and alluded to in other places. The Targumists, however, clearly understood the passage of Hosea, to refer to our own resurrection from the grave; and I am aware of no passage in the later writings of the Jews, from which it can be inferred, without straining the sense of the words, that they understood either it, or any other place of Scripture, to intimate the resurrection of the Messiah.

Here again, then, it is plain that the belief of Christ's resurrection, whether we suppose it to have been predicted or not, was unconnected with any general expectation of the fact. A rumour had, indeed, transpired:—"The chief priests and pharisees came together to Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command, therefore, that the sepulchre be made sure, until

after the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead." This was the explanation to be guarded against:—the supposition of fraud and collusion. But if so, does it not seem evident, that in the case of a fact open to this interpretation, any antecedent belief would have afforded a *primâ facie* case of suspicion: as furnishing a solution, not only of the motives of those by whom the imposture was perpetrated, but also of its success? It is plain, that the allusions to this event in the Old Testament are both few and slight, as well as dark and ambiguous; so few and slight, as hardly to constitute a prophecy. As it is, however, they are more than the case requires. The proof of this part of our Saviour's history would have been damaged by any clear and distinct prediction; and if the Scriptures of the Old Testament had been altogether silent on the point, no evil consequence would have ensued. The fact, if true, was one which did not stand in need of any extraneous proof. The object of prophecy, as we have seen, is to prove, not the reality of events, but to demonstrate, by means of a miraculous proof, the finger of a Divine Providence. But if we suppose that our Saviour was really put to death by the hand of the public executioner, and that he afterwards rose from the grave, remaining many days upon earth conversing with his former friends and disciples,—it would not seem that any miraculous proof was required, for the purpose of

convincing mankind that a fact like this, could only have been performed by God. "It is some consolation to poor human nature," says the elder Pliny, "that God cannot do all things. He is denied that privilege,—the best he has conferred on men,—of taking refuge in death; he cannot bestow upon mortals the gift of immortality, nor recal the dead to life."—"*Nec Deum quidem omnia posse. Namque nec sibi potest consciscere mortem, quod optimum dedit homini in tantis vitæ pœnis, nec mortales æternitate donare, nec revocare defunctos.*"—*Nat. Hist.* ii. 7. Pliny was a believer in natural magic, and has a chapter upon the science, as he deemed it to be; but it appears, (if we are willing to take his testimony as an exponent of the popular opinion,) that in the estimation of those days, to raise a person from the dead, was a miracle, which even the power of God himself could not accomplish.

The Jewish doctors tell us, "that all the prophets, none excepted, prophesied only of the years of the redemption, and the days of the Messiah." "All from Moses our master," says Maimonides, "to Malachi of blessed memory." "They all," says Abarbanel, "moved by the Holy Ghost, testify and foretel the coming of the Messiah." It is expressly for the purpose of adding to their knowledge of such prophecies, that the more learned of their nation profess to study the Scriptures. Of course, therefore, it would have been no ground of objection to the Apostles, in their own day, nor would

it necessarily be so in ours, if they had sometimes quoted passages from the Old Testament, and applied them to Christ, which had not been so quoted and applied before. Nevertheless, though they might have been justified in such a line of argument, yet it may, I believe, be broadly asserted, that with the single exception of Zechar. ix. 9. there is no such case to be found in the New Testament, unless it be in the class of prophecies which we have been examining; the sense of which could not have been opened, until after the event, without interfering, in the way just now explained, with the proof of their fulfilment. The passage of Zechariah, "Behold, thy king cometh unto thee; he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass," was known to the Jews, and always applied to the Messiah. So far, therefore, it belongs to the class of perfect prophecies. But upon the principles I have been laying down, its evidence would have been of more value, had it been imperfect: that is, not known and understood, until after its fulfilment. It was a mark easy to be assumed; and for that reason, can be adduced only as an evidence to signify the humility of him, who was to be the Messiah. So far its testimony is applicable to Jesus Christ, in a sense which was not apprehended by the Jews; but beyond this, its value as a prophecy has been reduced almost to nothing, by the very circumstance, which would have im-

parted to a fact that was contingent, its chief importance.

The object of the preceding remarks has been, to explain certain theoretical rules, connected with the interpretation of prophecy; and to shew, that the prophecies of the Old Testament have been constructed in strict accordance with those rules:—the next step is to shew their exact accordance with the event. The tests of prophecy, it has been said, are, time and place, and person; nothing being more easy than to construct prophecies, which shall seem to be fulfilled, if no restriction of circumstances is required. —"*Hoc si est in libris, in quem hominem et in quod tempus est? callide enim, qui illa composuit, perfecit, ut quodcunque accidisset, prædictum videretur, hominum et temporum definitione sublatâ. Adhibuit etiam latebram obscuritatis, ut iidem versus alias in aliam rem posse accommodari viderentur.*"—(*De Div.* ii. 54.) Whatever justice there may be in this remark, as referred to the framers of the Sibylline oracles, it cannot, with any fairness, be applied to the authors of the Jewish. Whether their predictions were fulfilled or not, is a question hereafter to be examined; but it will be allowed, that in the Old Testament, mankind were boldly put in possession of the tests, by which the truth or falsehood of its pretensions to divine inspiration might, at the proper season, be determined. No necessary definition, whether of time or place, or person, or things, was

withheld. We find there, no cunning reservations; no dark hiding-places; no artful accommodation of the language to whatever sense might prove convenient. It is not necessary to shew this in detail, by a separate examination of particular prophecies. The proof of the divine inspiration of the Jewish Scriptures, does not rest upon the fulfilment of this or that prediction; but on the accomplishment of the end to which they were all, in their several places and degrees, subordinate; and the final establishment of which, was the object of that vast and long protracted scheme of Providence, whereof the whole of the Old Testament is but one continued record. In this view of the argument, we may pass over all minor points, and taking the interpretation put upon their prophecies by the ancient Jewish church, as the datum of the argument, compare what it was which the Jews expected concerning the Messiah, and the revelation of which he was to be the Messenger, with the facts which are now believed of Jesus Christ, and the Gospel. It is upon the result of this comparison that the question hangs, and not upon insulated facts.

LECTURE VIII.

THE PROPER USE OF PROPHECY IN THE PRESENT DAYS EXAMINED.

I HAVE before had occasion to remark, that at the time when the Apostles lived, nothing, humanly speaking, could be more improbable, than that the event which they proclaimed to be at hand, should have come to pass. The Gospel was then as a mere speck in the horizon. That in the lapse of a single generation, it should have spread itself over the whole firmament, and the name of its Founder have become familiar to every people, and in every language of the known world,—though an historical fact not to be disputed,—presents a problem, which neither the miracles of the New Testament, nor the prophecies recorded in the Old, would be sufficient to explain, without the supposition of God's continued co-operation.

Abstracted from the opinion of a Divine Providence, there was not, when Christianity appeared, a single point on which the hope of its success could have been built. All anticipations from reason and experience, all calculations of policy, were opposed to such an expectation. The passions of mankind, their prejudices, their interests, were all adverse to its reception. Every constituted authority, as well as every conventional influence, whether of power, or learning, or rank, or wealth, were arrayed on the side of its adversaries:—and yet it spread with a rapidity and uninterrupted uniformity of progress, which is not only surprising in our eyes, who look back upon the event, but was the subject of wonder and amazement to those, who were witnesses of the phenomenon. It is adverted to by Justin Martyr, as if he were describing a stream whose course flowed upwards, or a vessel which sailed on the waters, with outspread canvass, against wind and tide, and every countervailing force. Mysterious in itself, a miraculous character was given to it from the declarations of the Old Testament: "*Quidquid agitur*," says Tertullian, speaking of these prophecies to the heathens, and pointing their attention to the signs of their fulfilment, then passing before their eyes, "*quidquid agitur, prænuntiabatur; quidquid videtur, audiebatur: dum patimur leguntur, dum recognoscimus probantur:*" and this, he proceeds to say, is a pledge that all opposition to the Gospel will be in vain: its ultimate triumph is decreed: "*hinc igitur apud nos futurorum quoque tuta*

fides est jam scilicet probatorum; quia cum illis quæ quotidie probantur, prædicebantur. Eædem voces sonant: eædem literæ notant: idem spiritus pulsat."—*Adv. Gent.* c. xx.

Tertullian was writing at the time when mankind were in the transitive state between idolatry and the Gospel; and when the success of this last in the world, was already so assured, as to justify him in adducing its triumphs, as an argument to show that the promises of the Old Testament were actually fulfilling. And he appeals to this argument in preference to every other. Passing over all the proofs, on which we now rest the argument—passing over, moreover, the proofs on which the Apostles rested the argument,—he bids his Gentile countrymen mark the rapidity, with which Christianity was spreading itself on all sides; and then compare that which they themselves witnessed, with what they read in the prophets of the Old Testament, concerning the future triumph of Christ's kingdom. This great fact, which in the days of the Apostles, was a truth which remained for time to prove, had already become a substantive part of the evidences of the Gospel. Tertullian does not argue, as they did, that God was *about* to establish the religion of Christ, because he was the Messiah whom the Prophets had foretold; but he shows that our Saviour was the Messiah, because his religion had *been* established, or, at least, was visibly in the way to be so.

I need hardly observe, that if such a line of argu-

ment was legitimate, at the time when the controversy between Christianity and idolatry was yet pending, and before the success of the former was declared—it should be quite conclusive in the present day, when the controversy is at an end and the victory completed. If the probable triumph of the Gospel in the world, was a sufficient reason for asserting its divine authority, independently of all other proof, except that which was furnished by the Old Testament—this presumption should become a certainty, now that the triumph of the Gospel is no longer a matter of conjecture, but an undisputed fact.

This reasoning may, perhaps, appear to prove too much; but I believe that a fuller consideration of the question will rather confirm than weaken its truth.

I formerly observed, that all writers upon the Evidences, in the present day, treat the subject, as if they considered the proof to be complete from the miracles alone, without the aid of prophecy. I then remarked, that it is on the success of Christianity in the world, that their reasoning ultimately rests, and not, as is commonly believed, on the mere wonderfulness of the facts. Now the same proposition is true, *mutatis mutandis*, of the argument from prophecy. This evidence is also complete in itself, without the aid of miracles. I do not mean that Christianity could have been originally established

by the help of prophecy alone; any more than it could have stood originally, on the strength of miracles alone;—but only that it can now stand singly on either proof. In short, I am prepared to shew, that if Paley and other writers have been able to demonstrate the divine authority of revelation, from the New Testament alone, quite independently of the Old—it is even still more certain, that the same may be demonstrated from the Old Testament alone, independently of the New.

And first, let us examine the question, on general principles of reasoning.

Upon a review of the uncertainty of all human speculations concerning the unseen world, and the manner in which God ought to be worshipped, Socrates, as has been mentioned, was led to conjecture, that a divine revelation would, at some period, be made to mankind. But he did not venture to guess at the truths, which would be made known—nor pretend to foretel the age, in which this disclosure would be made—nor to mention the nation to which it would be communicated—nor to describe the person who would be employed to reveal God's will to mankind. If he had done this, and if all the particulars had come to pass, agreeably to his prediction, such prescience would have been regarded by mankind, as the effect of divine inspiration. But to take another case:

It is well known that neither Mahomet himself

nor his followers have alleged any miraculous proof of his pretended divine mission. If that pretension rests on any argument at all, it is simply on the presumption to be drawn from the success of the Koran. Although this argument, taken by itself, is not entitled to consideration, yet it has been brought forward, as a set-off against the weight attached to the same fact, among the evidences of Christianity. Instead of examining the difference of the two cases, let us assume a perfect similarity. Accordingly we will suppose that there existed among the Arabians a series of documents, of the same character as those, which were in possession of the Jews. Let all the other circumstances be also similar: Let there be the same proofs of an antiquity reaching to an age long anterior to the times of the rise of Mahommedism in the world; and likewise evidence to show, that the belief in their prophetical character, had not been an opinion suggested by after events, but an article of the national creed, as old as the documents themselves. We may further imagine these venerable documents to have been concealed from our knowledge until the present age, and to have been very recently brought to light.

Suppose, now, that on examining this volume we found a distinct prediction of the rise of a new religion in the world, in which all the leading doctrines at present held by the followers of Mahomet were plainly set forth. Moreover, that the coming of a

future messenger was announced, by whom other stated particulars were to be fully revealed; that the exact time of his appearing—the place of his birth—the rise and progress of his religion—the dominion exercised by his successors, and other particulars, were stated, such as no human sagacity could have foretold. If now all this should be undeniably in perfect conformity with the subsequent history of Mahommedism, and agreeable to the present belief of its followers:—would any one in such a case, deny the divine mission of its founder?

It seems to me that, in the case here supposed, the most sceptical reasoner that ever lived would be under a necessity of ascribing the conquests of Moslemism, and the diffusion of its doctrines, to the express interposition of Divine Providence. A pious mind, indeed, may believe all events to happen by the indirect permission of God; but, in this case, the establishment of the Mahommedan religion would be considered, as the very act of God; and no one, if we assume the above premises to be true, and suppose them to be admitted, could come to any other conclusion without denying the existence of a God. And even that alternative, if followed out, would, I think, only add to our perplexity.

Let us then apply this same reasoning to the proof of Christianity, as that proof now stands in the Old Testament. That which has just been stated hypothetically, as what would be true of

the religion of Mahomet under the conditions assigned, will be equally true, under the same supposed conditions, of the religion of Christ.

Without entering into the question whether the facts asserted by our Saviour's followers really happened or not, there can be no doubt as to the belief of mankind, on that point, in the present day. So, likewise, with respect to the articles of the Christian creed:—The original belief of mankind in these articles may be as unreasonable, if any one pleases so to think, as we will assume the facts themselves, on which they are built, to have been improbable. Both these points shall be left out of our consideration. That which I am now concerned to examine, refers to another question: Was the belief of mankind, in the truth of those facts and doctrines, which constitute the substance of the Christian creed, predicted before the time when this religion was established? That those things are *now* believed, no one will doubt. But unless the question which I have just asked, can be answered in the negative, the divine origin of Christianity will be as clear a truth, according to the best judgment I am able to form of the subject, as any moral demonstration can be. I see not any door through which it will be possible to escape from the conclusion.

I am quite aware that this will seem to be a strong declaration, even though it is made hypothetically. But whether it is stronger than the supposition on

which it is made would warrant, if the case were true, is the question which we have to determine; and this we shall better be able to do, when we shall have been put in possession of the facts on which its truth depends.

Let us then imagine the case with which I set out:—that we knew none of the particulars connected with the rise of Christianity in the world—that the writings of the Apostles were lost, as well as the history of their doings—in short, that neither the New Testament, nor any knowledge of the particular which it relates, now existed.

Of course we should be ignorant on this supposition of the sayings of Christ—of the places where his miracles were performed—of the circumstances accompanying them—and of all particular facts connected with his ministry. But we might still know a good deal, in a general way, on these points, from other contemporary sources. Let us, however, suppose that no authentic account of any kind existed, either sacred or profane, of the events out of which Christianity arose; that there was an hiatus in this part of history—a page torn out, rendering the knowledge we possess of the facts we are speaking of, an entire blank.

It is not necessary to say that this, if true, would be a grievous disadvantage to the interests of Christianity. It would set aside all the help men derive from their imaginations, and reduce our faith, to little

more than a dry belief, in a number of general propositions. But it is not to be concluded, that we should therefore be without the means of forming an opinion of its divine authority.

Omitting all question about the historical truth of the facts which are asserted by Christians, there is no doubt that, truly or falsely, they *believe* the Founder of their religion to have been born in Judæa,—at Bethlehem,—of the seed of Abraham and tribe of Judah,—of the lineage of Jesse,—and family of David;—that he was the son of a reputed virgin;—that he was preceded by another prophet, who was his forerunner;—that he lived a life of poverty;—that he worked various miracles;—that he was put to an ignominious death;—that he rose again from the grave, and ascended into heaven;—that his death was a propitiation for the sins of mankind;—that he is now seated at the right hand of God, all power and dominion over his Church being committed to his hands. Moreover, it is the belief of all the Christian world, that these events took place, during the standing of the second Temple, a short time before the final destruction of Jerusalem, and about 500 years from the period of the termination of their captivity in Babylon.—These things may not be true, but the belief of their truth is certain. How did this belief arise, and when?

For an answer to these questions, turn back to history. As we are supposing no documents to exist belonging to the age when the transactions

are believed to have occurred,—let us begin with the writings of Justin Martyr, which were composed probably about fifty years after the taking of Jerusalem. From his testimony we learn, that an immense multitude of persons, in almost every part of the Roman empire, and even beyond its limits, had professed, at the time when he wrote, the identical belief, as to every one of the particulars just now stated, which mankind entertain in the present day.

We go back seventy or eighty years before the time of Justin Martyr; and we observe, that the whole earth was then either Heathen or Jewish: that not so much as the name of a Christian was known. But yet, in the interval between these two periods, we find, on Heathen as well as Christian authority, that the Temple of Jerusalem, and the Jewish ritual worship, have been abolished;—the city itself has been destroyed;—the nation overthrown and dispersed;—and that in the mean while, a religion, asserted by mankind to have had its rise in Judæa, during the intervening period, has risen upon the ruins of the Jewish, and has spread itself among all ranks and classes of men, in every quarter of the world.

It will, I think, be admitted, that this statement of the case, presents an historical phenomenon of no ordinary character, nor of a merely common-place interest. Viewed simply as a political or philosophical question, the curiosity of every thinking man would

be awakened to the desire of learning further particulars about it. What manner of person, it would be asked, was the founder of this supposed revelation understood to have been? What account had he given of it himself, and what had he done, to persuade mankind of its truth?

Taking into our account the extraordinary nature of the case, it certainly would not excite our surprise to be told, as we are by Justin and others, that he was believed by his followers to have been invested with miraculous powers:—even though the reality of such pretensions, in the absence of all other data, might be thought very problematical. But whether true or false, we should be able to say, with confidence, that the same story as that which is now believed, was believed at a period so near to the events, as to render it next to certain, that it must also have been believed by those, who lived at the time, when if true, they must have happened. Nevertheless, it would be impossible, on such information as this, to say that a religion, whose origin was so indistinctly understood, was of divine authority. Extraordinary and utterly inexplicable as its rise and rapid progress might be considered, yet between this admission, and the acknowledgment of its claims to be a revelation from God, would be a wide interval of doubtful speculation.

At this point, then, let us suppose a discovery to be made, for the first time, not of the New, but of the Old Testament. The language in which

the volume is written, would be a guarantee of its antiquity: the hands in whose keeping it had been preserved, would be a warrant for its genuineness; many other things there are about it, which would create a lively interest. But it is in relation to the great problem we have been speaking of, that its importance would be chiefly felt; and felt, I think, not without emotions of wonder and surprise.

Upon examining the volume attentively, we should find, that a large portion of the whole was directly referrible, and the remainder of it, for the most part, indirectly, to a PROMISE, said to have been made by the Supreme Being, to the original parents of the great family of mankind, purporting that certain privileges, forfeited by them, and withdrawn from their children, should be restored in the person of one of their descendants,—who is described as "the seed of the woman." This Promise, thus generally expressed, (as the application of it was also very comprehensive, embracing apparently all the children of Adam,) was in process of time repeatedly renewed; and always with some circumstance appended, clearing up, and, at the same time, defining its meaning; until at length, it becomes plain, that the sense of it must be understood, as indicating the approach of some great and mysterious individual, through whom God proposed entering into a new covenant with mankind.

The names under which this exalted person is described, are commensurate with so high an em-

bassage. "Thy King cometh;" "thy Salvation cometh;" "the Lord cometh;" "the Messenger of the Covenant, he shall come;" "the Desire of all nations shall come." "The Son of God;" "the Son of Man;" "the Holy One;" "the Just One;" "the Lord our Righteousness;"—are also titles attributed to him; but the appropriate name, by which he was more characteristically designated, was the Messiah, that is, the Christ, or the Anointed.

On further examination, we find that the revelation, of which this divine Messenger was to be the bearer, is abundantly clear, as to the general fact, however indefinite as to some of the particular truths, that were to be disclosed. Conformably with the promise made to Adam, it was to be a dispensation, under which an atonement and reconciliation of some sort, was upon repentance, to be effected between man and his offended Maker.

In that day, all the false religions of the world were to disappear; the idols were to be utterly abolished; they were to go into the holes of the rocks and the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord; whose power alone was to be exalted, and the earth to be full of the knowledge of his name, as the waters cover the sea. The kingdoms of the world were to become the kingdoms of the Lord;—a new heaven and a new earth were to be created, in which the righteous only should dwell, by an everlasting covenant, which should never be destroyed, but stand fast for ever.

Sublime as is the language, in which the general import of the Promise is here described, yet the dignity of the Messenger, in whom the fulfilment was to be accomplished, and upon whose shoulders the government of this mysterious kingdom was to be placed, is expressed in terms which are, if possible, still more sublime. His name, we are told, shall be called, "Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."

But though all the nations of the earth were to be blessed in him; though his dominion was to extend from one end of the earth to the other; though kings were to fall down before him, and princes to worship him;—yet was he to have no external marks of greatness or superiority; he was to have no form nor comeliness; and when men saw him, there was to be no beauty that they should desire him. His first appearance was to be without noise or obstruction; he was not to cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets; but was to grow up silently and imperceptibly, like a tender plant, or a root out of a dry ground. Moreover, he, was to be a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; he was to be taken from prison and from judgment, and be brought like a lamb to the slaughter; but it was for our transgressions that the promised Deliverer was to be wounded: he was to be bruised for our iniquities; he was to make intercession for the transgressors, by yielding his soul an offering for sin.

Such, in few words, is the substance of that great Promise, towards which the thoughts and expectations of mankind were directed in the Old Testament. It is obvious to observe, that the subject of it is not limited to time or place, but embraces all ages and nations; the event to which it points is, not the downfall of an old and the rise of a new empire, in the world; but the downfall of an old and the rise of a new religion;—a moral and not a political revolution;—not something which was to happen to mankind, but something which they would, at a certain period, be brought to believe. That this Promise has, so far, been fulfilled, needs not to be stated. We ourselves are the witnesses, or rather, I should say, we are an evidence of the fact.

But combined with the revelation of certain truths, and the annunciation of future mercies and blessings, are a great variety of circumstantial prophecies, having no relation to the Promise itself, but only to the time when the promised Mediator of this new covenant, between God and his creatures, would appear; to the lineage and family from which he was to spring; the place where he was to be born; and other particulars of a similar kind, which were to be the marks, by means of which the fulfilment of the promise was, at the proper season, to be ascertained.

Compare, then, the particulars here stated and described, with the belief which mankind entertain; that is, compare the marks laid down in the Old

Testament, by which the coming of the Messiah was to be determined, with the facts relating to the nation, and family, and birth-place, and life, and death, of Jesus Christ, as asserted by Christians. Look also to the time, within which all these things were to happen, according to the Jewish Scriptures, and after which it is expressly said, that "the vision and the prophecy were to be sealed up;"—and then see whether it agrees or not with the date assigned by history to the rise of Christianity.

This is a task which it requires no learning to accomplish. We are not called upon to inquire, whether the facts asserted of Christianity are true, but only to inquire what are the facts which its followers believe. And with this limitation of the question, it is plain, that so far as concerns the general history and character of Jesus Christ, or the great and leading doctrines which constitute the religion of which he was the Founder, they are points which are laid down by the prophets of the Old Testament, almost as circumstantially as by the historians of the New. Whether the four Gospels had been written or not, would therefore make but little difference in the argument, by which we now connect the truth of Christianity with the evidence of prophecy. We learn from the New Testament the process by which the fulfilment of the prophecies was effected; but their fulfilment is now a matter of fact, and quite independent of our knowledge or ignorance, as to the manner in which it came to

pass. The correspondence between the present belief of mankind and that promised revelation, which is the subject of almost every page, in certain books of the Old Testament, is not a verbal coincidence, but a coincidence of facts: a coincidence between an established belief, about which there can be no doubt, and a previous expectation, not less certain, founded on the faith of prophecy. It matters not to inquire, whether the language of prophecy has been rightly understood or not. I am taking it in the sense, in which it was understood by those, who lived before its supposed fulfilment; in the sense, that is to say, on which the previous expectation was built. If that sense was *wrong*, the conformity of the event with the expectation which preceded it, instead of being explained, becomes only the more miraculous.

If we were examining the case of some single prediction, it would perhaps be an obvious supposition, that its correspondence with the event was merely accidental. But the coincidences in the present case are not of a kind, or if they were, yet they are too numerous, to admit of this supposition. If it be admitted that they have been fulfilled, to say that it was the pure effect of a lucky hit,—a mere extraordinary toss-up in the chapter of accidents, would in fact be no explanation, but only a device to get rid of the question. And yet I am able to see no alternative between standing upon this ground, and admitting the divine origin of the

Gospel. I see no intermediate hypothesis by which we can escape this conclusion: not even if we assume the propositions of which it consists, to be untrue; for this would only take us out of a difficulty, to plunge us into a plain and palpable absurdity.

That a human being, by some effort or process of reasoning with which we are unacquainted, might know beforehand certain facts, which were really to happen; or that he should be able to anticipate certain doctrines, having a foundation in truth, which mankind in the lapse of ages would be brought to entertain, is at least an intelligible supposition. But to suppose that any depth of wisdom, or art, or science, should enable him to calculate by reason, or any accident enable him to guess by chance, that mankind would come, some hundred years after, to believe in a particular fable, in a certain dream, founded neither in reason nor experience, neither in truth nor in fact, is a supposition utterly extravagant and incomprehensible.

But whatever explanation we may embrace, the data on which the proof of the truth of Christianity, from the prophecies of the Old Testament, is founded, as they have been here stated, are facts which a man is not at liberty to call in question. The proof is not one which he can shake off, merely by denying the truth, or asserting the impossibility, of Christianity. The minute and circumstantial conformity of the religion which is now professed, with the revelation which the Jews expected, will not be at all less cer-

tain, even though we should suppose the very existence of such a person as Jesus Christ, to be a mere fiction; and all that is believed concerning him, to be nothing more than imagination. On this supposition, indeed, the actual belief of mankind will require to be accounted for, on some hypothesis, founded on an explanation different from that which we read in the New Testament: but this will be the only difference, so far as the present argument is concerned.

If the facts related by the Apostles really happened, then the fulfilment of the prophecies to which they appeal, and the divine origin of the religion which they preached, may be proved on a testimony which cannot be questioned: namely, the signs and wonders, and innumerable miracles, by which the publication of it to mankind, was accompanied. If we contend that these last did not really happen, and suppose Christianity to be a mere superstition, in this case it will be necessary to explain how it has come to pass, that the present belief of mankind in facts, which never had any existence, and in doctrines that have no foundation in truth, either human or divine, should yet be found minutely delineated and exactly foretold, in books, of which the very latest was written, beyond all possible question, not less than 400 years before this belief was known in the world.

To say that this miraculous knowledge was given to the writers of these books, by divine inspiration, will here be contrary to the hypothesis. As little will

it be asserted, that this knowledge was conveyed to them by reason: for reason never could have anticipated the belief of mankind in propositions above, or contrary to, reason. If there be any third supposition, it is one which I cannot guess, and therefore am not able to investigate.

The object of the preceding remarks has been to shew the proper use to be made of the Old Testament, by us in the present day; and how important a place it occupies in the evidences of Christianity. To omit this testimony altogether, or pass it over lightly, as not essential, is as great and unaccountable a mistake, as has ever been committed in theology. It may be admitted that the proof from the New Testament is complete in itself, since the establishment of Christianity, without any help from the Old; but we have seen, that the proof from this last, is no less complete by itself, since the same event, without the aid of the New. The necessity for this double principle of evidence, was created by the exigences of a new religion. The proof of the prophecies having been fulfilled, would have been difficult in the days of the Apostles, if not impossible, without the argument from miracles; as the divine authority of the miracles, could not have been originally demonstrated, without the testimony of prophecy. At the time when Christianity was first preached, both proofs were combined in the conclusion. It can now stand upon either of them singly; nevertheless we are not to suppose, that one

or the other of these respective proofs may now be laid aside, or has become superfluous. The object which a man of serious mind proposes to himself, in studying the evidences of Christianity, is not to gratify his curiosity respecting the truth of the particular miracles related in the New Testament, or the fulfilment of particular prophecies in the Old; but to come to a right conclusion respecting the authority of the revelation which has been built upon them.

There are difficulties, however, in obtaining the assurance we desire—partly from a consciousness of the fallibility of our own understanding, and, in the case where we reason from the miracles alone, from the fallible nature of the proofs themselves. The authenticity of the books, the competency of the writers as witnesses, or their authority, as judges, are points which we cannot reduce to a mathematical certainty. Then again, the character of the facts adduced is so surprising, that it is not easy to estimate what is the amount of testimony which they require: or supposing them to have happened, the doctrines preached by the Apostles are hardly less remote from our apprehensions, than are the events which they narrate, from our customary experience. Even supposing these last to have happened, where we may therefore still ask, is our security, that the truths they published, are the very truths which the miracles were intended to attest?

These are not fanciful, but very natural feelings, and which it often requires a strong effort of reason

to put down. In a matter of such vital importance as the principles of our religious belief, and where the subject is in many respects so far above our comprehension, we distrust our own understandings; we seek some evidence, by which we may be sure that we have committed no mistake. Even the mathematician subjects his clearest conclusions, to what he calls a proof; well then may we be excused, if we desire to do the same, in our religion.

But what course does the mathematician pursue? When an algebraist or geometrician wishes to test the correctness of his deductions, he does not simply revise his proof, but he subjects it to some other process of demonstration; and if he finds, that two opposite or distinct lines of reasoning lead to one and the same result, he considers that it may be depended upon as certain. Do we then desire to verify the proofs which the New Testament affords, by submitting the argument from miracles to some independent test? The thing is not difficult. We have the Old Testament in our hands. Let us try the divine authority of the Gospel, by the evidence of prophecy. If the conclusion comes out, point by point, the same from the Old Testament, as we had previously arrived at, by reasoning from the New; or *vice versâ*, if the conclusion which we draw from the latter is confirmed by the former, then we shall have obtained the same result, from two processes of reasoning as independent of each other, as any which the strictest demonstration would require.

At the time when the miracles were exhibited,

neither the object for which, nor the authority by which, they were wrought, could have been known without that "more sure word of prophecy," which, as St. Peter says, was "as a light shining in a dark place." But that "dark place," is now no longer dark. Prophecy with us is not to be regarded as a mere ancillary argument. It is now, as we have seen, a substantive and concurrent evidence, complete in itself; resting on its own strength; and requiring no other witness than the proof of its truth, which the actual belief of mankind is sufficient to provide. But it is easy to see, this is not the position which was occupied by the evidence of prophecy in the days of the Apostles. They could not appeal to the actual belief of mankind, at a time when all mankind were either Jews or Pagans. The argument in their hands must have taken quite a different shape. It must have been to facts of another kind, that they addressed themselves, when they adduced the Old Testament in proof of the doctrines which they preached:—proceed we to inquire what those facts were, and what the reasoning which they built upon them.

LECTURE IX.

CONNEXION OF THE DEATH OF CHRIST WITH THE EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

WHATEVER construction we put upon that great Promise, the belief of which exercised so long, and in the end, such a fatal influence upon the destiny of the Jewish people, none can be proposed, which will not involve the supposition of some new era in the history of mankind:—a change of some sort in their condition under God's providence. Whether this Promise was from God, or, if from God, what was the true interpretation of it, is a question which we are not at the present moment called upon to discuss. Keeping our eye upon facts only, it will be equally certain on any view we can take of the subject, that mankind at large have put that construction upon the meaning of the Old Testament, for which the Apostles contended. This will not be the less certain,

if we suppose neither the Jewish nor the Christian explanation to be right. I have never heard of any third interpretation; but if there were many others, it would not affect this part of the question. It is clear, that the covenant, or promise, or good tidings, or whatever it is to be called, which forms the subject of those portions of the Old Testament which are not historical, if it has not been realized in the Gospel, has not been realized at all.

Viewing the question, then, as between the Jews and Apostles, and taking the New Testament as our guide, it would not appear that any difference of opinion existed, at the time when Christianity first appeared, as to the reality of the Promise to which the minds of men were then pointed; but only as to the time and place of its fulfilment;—whether in this or in another life, whether in a literal or in a spiritual sense. It is plain, moreover, that the solution of this doubt could not be obtained beforehand, merely from the words of the Old Testament. It was a question which had been left open, and could be determined only by the event.

But a time was predicted, when this uncertainty was to be removed. God was to send a "Messenger of the covenant," who was to interpret his Promise, and pronounce the conditions, upon which it would be offered to mankind. From his mouth the revelation was to proceed. This, at once, narrowed the controversy, between the nation of the Jews

and the Apostles. Was Jesus of Nazareth, that Messenger? "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" This was the one question on which issue was joined. Was he, or was he not, "that prophet, that should come into the world?"

In the present day, this question, as has been already said, may comparatively speaking, be easily answered. The time when "that prophet" was expected, is now passed. We have lived to witness the fulfilment of the Promise which was made to mankind; and the belief of millions in its truth, has become an initial point, from which all our reasonings may diverge.

But the Apostles, as we have seen, were shut out from all the advantages, which the lapse of time has furnished. They were thrown upon the necessity of adducing a more direct evidence; and one, upon human grounds of reasoning, much more difficult of access. What that evidence was, I shall now proceed to examine. In the discussion of this point, I shall not go out of my way, when it can be avoided, to argue any point of opinion; my business is simply to exhibit a statement of the proofs on which the belief of mankind, as to the fulfilment of the expected Promise, whether right or wrong, was originally founded.

I need hardly observe, that all the knowledge we possess on this head, which is not quite general, has been drawn from the New Testament. There is no other source to which we can apply for authentic

information. On examining this book then, we find that the whole volume, from the beginning to the end, relates to Jesus Christ:—his birth,—his actions,—his sayings,—his deportment and character, are there, in a very lively manner, pourtrayed: and from these, the writers of this book, strenuously and successfully contended, that he was that Divine Messenger so often spoken of in the Old Testament, in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. This is the single point which they endeavoured to prove. It is not that he was *a* prophet, but that he was *the* Prophet. It is not that he delivered *a* message from God, but *that* message, which the whole Jewish people were then and there expecting; and which related not to the promise of *some* revelation, but to the meaning of a revelation long since in their possession; one which had been sealed up, indeed, from their knowledge, but the contents of which was, and had been, for many generations, the object of their earnest and wondering curiosity.

The question then which we have to examine, is this: What were the circumstances, in the life, and actions, and teaching of Christ, by which so high a claim was to be substantiated? Assuming all the facts related in the New Testament really to have happened:—what were the prophecies fulfilled in his person, by which those who were living when he came into the world, could know with certainty that he was that Messiah, whom they had so long desired? What were the truths and doctrines he

taught, which when they came to be revealed, explained the meaning of the "words of this sealed book," to use the expression of Isaiah, which had been so long entrusted to the keeping of one particular people, set apart apparently from the rest of mankind, for that express purpose?

If we call to mind the remarks which were made in a former Lecture, when discussing the general principles upon which the proof of a divine revelation depended, we shall be able to appreciate all the difficulties, with which the task, undertaken and accomplished by the Apostles, was environed. But in addition to those which I then pointed out, as inherent in the thing itself, theoretically considered,—there was, in the case of the Gospel, a difficulty, over and above, arising out of a peculiarity in the leading doctrine of which it consists,—I mean the death of its Founder.

The language both of the Old and New Testaments, clearly indicates that this death was to be caused by violent means: it was to be a sacrifice, a ransom, a propitiation, an atonement. The words of prophecy directly express this in many places. In the New Testament it is always said, that the very purpose of Christ's coming, was to die for the sins of the world. I am not now asserting any theological point, but merely stating what is the language used by the Apostles, as well as by the writers of the Old Testament. Moreover, the whole history, as well as particular passages of the latter,

imply that the instruments of this crime were to be the Jews themselves,—the very people among whom he was to be born, and with whom the prophecies relating to him had been deposited.

But how was this to be effected? The object which these prophecies had in view was, that the Jews should know their Messiah, when the time for his appearance among mankind should arrive. But if, when he came, they were to be the instruments, in the hand of God, of putting him to a shameful death, it was necessary, that the meaning of the prophecies relating to him, should be carefully withheld from their knowledge. For it is hardly to be supposed that they would voluntarily have incurred the guilt of crucifying the Lord's Anointed. The act presupposes, that they were ignorant of his true character. The hypothesis, then, upon which this portion of the prophecies was constructed, would seem to require, that "the marks of the Messiah," as they are termed by the Jews, should be of such a kind, as not to afford the means of recognizing his person, while he was yet on earth.

That this was, in effect, the case, we learn from the New Testament. But the fact is not the less remarkable. In the whole volume of the Old Testament, there is no single prophecy, so expressly referred to the Messiah by their ancient paraphrasts, nor so frequently alluded to, in other ancient writings of the Jewish Church, as the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. There is scarcely a verse, from the beginning

to the end of the Targum of Jonathan, upon this important scripture, in which the Messiah is not directly named, as the subject of the prophecy. In the Pugio Fidei are numerous extracts out of several later Jewish documents, from which it would appear, that their earlier Rabbins had deduced from this same chapter, a knowledge of the mediatorial office of the Redeemer. The Jews of the present day acknowledge the prophecy, in the same sense as their forefathers understood;—but yet it is next to certain, that the death of the Messiah, at the hands of his own, or of any other people, was never apprehended by them, as one of the events by which his advent would be declared. Though this part of his future history is foreshown as clearly as words can express, in the twenty-second Psalm, in the ninth of Daniel, and in the well-known chapter of Isaiah just now alluded to; and though other parts of these same chapters are by the Jews themselves referred to the Messiah (and, indeed, in the case of the two last at least, could not have been otherwise):—yet does this event appear, from the very beginning, to have been entirely concealed from the knowledge of their church.

We are not, at present, called upon to explain the reasons why the Jews, as a nation, rejected Jesus Christ; but only to state the grounds, on which mankind in general consented to receive him as their Saviour. Those who disbelieve in his divine authority will, of course, adduce the conduct of the Jews, as a

presumptive argument against it. But, on the other hand, they by whom his divine authority is believed, will consider the same fact, as an evidence of the contrary conclusion. For we have seen, that except the Jews had been kept in ignorance on this point, that great prophecy, on which the whole scheme of the Gospel rests, could not, humanly speaking, have been fulfilled. And we have also seen, that on their own hypothesis of the meaning of those very portions of the Old Testament, in which this prophecy occurs, their denial of the existence of this particular prediction, whether right or wrong, is equally unaccountable.

Be the force, however, of the objection what it may, it was foreseen and provided against. There are few things more pointedly spoken of in the Old Testament, than the future blindness which would be made to fall upon the Jews. In the very earliest of all the prophecies relating to their nation, when Moses is speaking of the intolerable miseries which they would have to endure in the last days, it is mentioned, among other instances, "that they shall grope at noon-day, as the blind gropeth in darkness[1]." Isaiah, speaking of the same period, tells the Jews "the spirit of deep sleep would then be poured upon their understandings." They were "to have eyes, and see not; ears were they to have, and hear not," —"their heart was to be made fat and their ears heavy, and their eyes to be shut, lest they should

[1] Deut. xxviii. 29.

see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted and healed[1]." It would be easy to accumulate authorities on this head from almost every part of the Old Testament. But they must be in the memory of every one who is conversant with the Scriptures; as must be also, the frequent allusions to them, which are made by our Saviour. The fact is very exactly stated by St. Paul, when he tells the Corinthians, that the minds of the Jews "were blinded; for until this day," (speaking of the veil which Moses put over his face[2],) "remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament. Even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart[3]." If the prophecies may be believed, this effect was the act of God. And if it was the act of God, we have seen the reason why he interposed. The accomplishment of his purpose required that the Messiah, when he came, should be rejected of the Jews; but as the great end in view was to reveal him to mankind at large, how was this last purpose to be obtained, without such evidence as would, at the same time, open the eyes of the former? We know that the difficulty was overcome: let us examine the means which were employed.

With respect to miracles, it was believed by the Jews, that many wonderful signs would be manifested in the days of the Messiah; among others, that the

[1] Ch. vi. 9, 10. [2] Exod. xxxiv. [3] 2 Cor. iii. 14, 15.

blind would receive their sight, and that the lame would walk, and that there would be no more sickness nor death. But, as far as I am able to judge, they considered these as general blessings, belonging to the kingdom which he would establish. I cannot find any authority for supposing, that they were reckoned among the marks, by which he was to be personally known; nor does the language of the Old Testament necessarily lead to such a supposition. The Jews strenuously and unanimously assert, that it does not. But their present way of thinking, except when it confirms the Christian interpretation, is seldom of much importance, and need not, in this case, be regarded. Of the evidence which the miracles of Christ afforded of his divine authority, few will doubt; at least not in the present day. But I am speaking of this evidence, as it appeared at the time when Christ was born; and considering only, whether it was among the foreshown marks of the Messiah. Of this I have found no sufficient proof.

Putting aside, then, the miracles ascribed to Christ, and the uncommonness of the character which he displayed, and looking only to the outward circumstances of his appearance,—few things strike the mind more forcibly, when reading his history, than the total absence of every thing, by which his person could be distinguished, from the general mass of human beings.

The great majority of mankind belong to the labouring part of the community; and in that

class was the Saviour born. In that class was he also educated, and passed all the years, both of his youth and manhood; nor does he seem, even during the period of his ministerial duties, ever to have stepped beyond it. Of his habits or actions as an individual, we know absolutely nothing; no private incident or anecdote of his life has been preserved, even in tradition. Nevertheless, if we compare his history, brief as it is, with those parts of the prophecies which relate to the future Messiah, we shall see that there is no note or stipulation, in any part of them, which was not fulfilled in his life, as it has been related in the New Testament; nor any circumstance to be pointed out in any part of his life, which was adverse to his pretensions, as ascertained from the Old. And yet, so strictly *exclusive* were all the marks on which the proof was made to depend, that upon looking into the life of Christ as it has been preserved by the evangelists, and comparing it with the prophecies; or examining the prophecies, and comparing them with his life,—it will be difficult to point out any passage of either, by which the identity of Jesus with the future Messiah, could have been conclusively asserted.

Besides the miracles which he performed, there were abundant materials to be found in what he said and did, to cause admiration,—to create surmise,—to perplex the judgment of mankind; but upon the face of the narrative, there is no fact by which he could have been recognized as the Messiah. Not any inci-

dent is mentioned, which could properly have been made the subject of a prophecy. But if there had been, care was taken that no marks of that kind should be foretold. Precautions had been provided, to defend mankind from the danger of believing in false Christs; but all means were withheld, by which the Jews might know, how to discern the true one.

No one, not of the seed of Abraham, could be the Messiah; no one, not of the tribe of Judah; no one, not of the lineage of David; no one, not born at Bethlehem; no one, not coming into the world before a certain epoch; no one coming into it, after. Moreover, the particular event was clearly foreshown, after which all hope of his coming would be, for ever, at an end. But in the age when Jerusalem was destroyed, though the number of persons could not be large, yet there might be many more individuals than one, whom these limitations of time, and place, and lineage, would not have excluded. Every one of these marks was negative; not one of them was such as could only apply to a single individual. Effectual preservatives they might be, under Divine Providence, against the possibility of imposition; but, taken by themselves, they were nothing more.

Thus far, then, the blindness of the Jews is not so surprising, as it might at first sight have appeared. During the period of Christ's ministry upon earth, there was not one definite mark by which he could be infallibly recognized. Viewing the Scriptures in the light, in which the Jews then and since have re-

garded them, and fixing our eye upon those particular predictions, by which all their thoughts and expectations were absorbed,—it may be said of Christ, that his appearance, as well as his pretensions, instead of fulfilling, not only seemed, but did actually contradict, every one of the affirmative prophecies, upon which the popular belief was built.

If we examine closely the narrative of the Evangelists, we shall perceive that the faith, even of the Apostles themselves, at this period, amounted to nothing more than a lively opinion; an eager hope, in which their understanding had less share than their heart and imagination. While their Divine Master was alive, they "had trusted that it had been he, which should have redeemed Israel;" but the persuasion of this truth was not proof, in their minds, against the fact of his crucifixion. It would be little better than a waste of time to produce proofs of this; because no one who has read the Gospels with attention, can have overlooked the many passages from which it may be shown. Relying upon that evidence, as well as upon the circumstances of the case, I think it may be asserted, without exaggeration, that at the moment when "Jesus bowed his head and gave up the ghost," there was not a human being upon earth who knew, with full assurance, whose spirit it was, which had taken its departure. I will add, that if the story had closed there and then, there would not be, at this present time, a Christian in the world. All trace of an event, at which we are told by those who

witnessed the scene, that "the earth did quake," and "the sun was darkened," would have perished, even from the memory of mankind.

This event, however, was supposed at the time, by those who compassed it, to have supplied a test which was considered by all, as conclusive of the controversy, so far as regarded the opinion, that he was or could be the Messiah. "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross;"—"If he be the King of Israel, let him come down from the cross, and we will believe him;"—"Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself;" —"He trusted in God, let him deliver him now, if he will have him, for he said I am the Son of God:" —are noticed by the Evangelists among the taunts, to which the Redeemer was exposed; expressions which I quote, because they are significant of the reasoning, that was in the minds of the spectators.

But we read that God's ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts. A more striking illustration of this certain truth need not be adduced, than the case before us will afford. That which, in the eyes of the Jews, and indeed of all human wisdom and conjecture, seemed to disprove the pretensions of Jesus to be the Christ, by an evidence palpable to the senses of mankind,—was an argument by which his title was, and may always be, demonstrated.

I am not now speaking of the fact, merely as it was the fulfilment of a prophecy. Doubtless, in this

point of view, it furnishes a remarkable testimony to the divine authority of Christianity. That a religion, the profession of which is co-extensive with human civilization,—which the rich as well as the poor, the learned as well as the ignorant, believe to have had its origin with God,—should, nevertheless, have been ostensibly founded by one, who was put to death by public authority, between two thieves, as a convicted blasphemer,—would reasonably excite our wonder and surprise, on any supposition that we can frame. But that the fact should have been unambiguously foretold, many generations before it came to pass; and have been laid down, as the great and leading doctrine, on which this religion was to be founded, is something more than extraordinary—it is itself as clear a miracle as the imagination can well conceive. No wonder, if the suspicion of such a truth as this was hidden from the Jews.

But in saying that the death of Christ supplied an argument by which his divine authority might be demonstrated, we should greatly undervalue its importance, if we were simply to speak of it in a general way, as the fulfilment of a great and amazing prophecy; it possesses, if possible, a still higher and more important claim to our attention, as demonstrating, by infallible evidence,—by an evidence, independent of any opinion we may entertain as to the truth, either of the prophecies of the Old Testament, or the miracles of the New,—that the parti-

cular proposition which the Jews hoped to establish, when they put him to death, was not and *could* not be true.

It is evident from the narrative of the Evangelists, that when the Jews dragged Jesus before the tribunal of Pilate, the impression upon their minds was, that he was an impostor. It does not appear, that they denied or disbelieved the facts related in the New Testament; but whether true or not, they thought that, by means of them, he was attempting to deceive the people into a false opinion of his real character. It is also plain from the narrative, that he had worked, or pretended to have worked, miracles; and, moreover, that the interpretation which he had put upon the prophecies, in those places where the death and sufferings of the future Messiah are spoken of, was the same as that, which the Apostles afterwards, and all Christians have since maintained.

These facts being premised, it will be easy to show that they are absolutely irreconcileable with the charge which was preferred by the Jews. The position which I hope to establish is, that assuming the truth of the history, in that part which relates to the death of Christ, the supposition of his having practised any deception upon mankind, had been so provided against, in the Old Testament, as to make the truth of the charge, on account of which he suffered, quite impossible.

I need not say how important a point will be gained, if we can establish this proposition on any

infallible proof. Viewing the question as it relates to ourselves, it would seem to embrace the whole argument. If we could be certain, that the Founder of our religion neither deceived himself, nor was endeavouring to deceive others—that he was neither an impostor, nor a madman, nor an enthusiast—it would follow, by a necessary consequence, that we who believe in his pretensions, cannot have been deceived. Accordingly, if we examine any work upon the Evidences, we may observe that this is the point at which the discussion always ends. After the argument to prove the authenticity of the books of the New Testament has been gone through, the remainder of the reasoning is uniformly consumed in proving, that the Founder of the Gospel could not have intended to deceive.

This is the true meaning of all the disquisitions which we read concerning the sublime morality which Christ taught; the reasonableness of his doctrine, the wisdom of his sayings; the spotless purity of his life; the consistency and perfection of his character:—all these arguments reach only to this conclusion. No one would contend that Christ was the Son of God, because he was meek and patient, and wise, and free from every taint of sin. The argument is, that no man who was all this, would have said that he was the Son of God, when he was not; nor have pretended to miraculous powers, if he had not really possessed them.

And here it may be asked, is not this legitimate

reasoning? Do not the qualities displayed in the character of Christ, as exhibited in the delineation which the Evangelists have left us of his portraiture, really refute the accusation of the Jews? We answer, that in any ordinary case, they would, beyond doubt, have done so. And they would do so in his case, if it could be demonstrated by any direct and infallible argument, that they were real, and not assumed. But we must bear in mind, that the case of our Saviour was no common case, and cannot be tried by any common rules. Many other pretensions were asserted by him, besides that of working miracles. He pretended to a power on earth to forgive sins; he pretended to have been always in the world before Abraham was born; that those who believed in him should never die, but have eternal life; that all power, both in heaven and earth, was committed to him; "making himself," in short, according to an expression of the Jews, "equal with God."

Now, be the apparent sincerity and virtue of any human being what they may, if the question be brought to this issue, that we must either conclude them to be assumed, or believe in his title to such high pretensions as these assertions imply,—however difficult the alternative might seem to our judgment, yet would the latter supposition appear to be so beyond measure improbable, that there would hardly be room for any liberty of choice. Putting the case thus nakedly and in the abstract,—if the same circum-

stances were to be acted over again in the world, mankind upon this statement would believe, that either there was fraud in the case, or fanaticism; nothing could overcome such a suspicion, except it had been first shewn, that all solutions of this kind were *impossible.*

Bearing then in our minds these general remarks, let us now come to the case which the Gospel presents, as the facts are described in the New Testament.

I will not here enter upon the often debated questions, whether the truth of a doctrine may be proved by miracles, or the truth of miracles by the doctrine. The Jews had repudiated the doctrine of Christ; they had slighted the miracles which he performed; they had dragged him before the supreme magistrate, as a cheat and a deceiver of the people. Another fact is, that at this time there was an unfulfilled prophecy among the Jews, not known to the nation at large, or not understood, which stated that the future Messiah was to suffer death by violence, and by a judicial sentence: he was to "be taken from prison and from judgment, and to be cut off from the land of the living."

The above are not points of opinion, but matters of fact. Assuming then the premises, I propose to show, that the sentence executed upon Jesus, was, under these circumstances, the means by which the charge made against him was demonstratively refuted. I am tempted to add, that in his particular case, there

existed no other means, by which it *could* have been certainly disproved. The proof here alleged, was not a direct proof that Jesus was the Messiah; it was not a direct proof that he had really performed the miracles which he asserted; but I mean to show, that it was a direct and absolute demonstration of what comes to the same thing,—namely, that when he put forth these pretensions, he was neither acting under a delusion himself, nor endeavouring to practise any upon others; but that he believed what he asserted, and could not be mistaken in his belief.

If our Saviour had intended to deceive the Jews into an opinion, that he was that long-promised Messiah, for whose coming they were waiting with so much anxiety, it is quite certain, that he would have conformed the proof of his pretensions, to the expectation and belief of the persons, upon whom the fraud was to be attempted. Or if he had ventured upon a new interpretation of the prophecies on which the expectation of the Jews, respecting the Messiah, was founded, it would have been contrived with the view of flattering, and not of shocking, their prejudices; of conciliating still further their support, and not of needlessly exciting opposition.

For example:—knowing that the Jews expected their Messiah to be one of their own nation, no impostor would have gone out of his way, to assume the character of a Greek or a Roman. Knowing that they expected him to be born at Bethlehem, he

would not falsely have pretended to be a native of Samaria. Knowing that they expected him to be of the lineage of David, he would not have given himself out, as one of the posterity of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, "who made Israel to sin." By parity of reasoning, knowing that the Jews expected their future king to come surrounded with regal state and to assume the throne of Israel, it is still more certain, that no impostor would have rejected such an interpretation of their ancient oracles,—one offering so many temptations to an ambitious or designing man,—for the mere vanity of being the author of a new interpretation, which should import that the future Messiah, instead of being a mighty potentate, was to present himself in a character, which was nearer akin to that of an outcast and a beggar, than of a king or conqueror.

However, as there is no reasoning upon any certain data, when the actions and motives of human beings are the subject in discussion—let us suppose this possible. Very incredible it certainly is; but we may not perhaps say that the supposition is impossible,—that it would involve a contradiction. But in the case where we are speaking of a presumed *imposture*, it plainly would be a contradiction of the hypothesis, to suppose that any one, whose object was to persuade mankind to receive him in a particular character, would *knowingly* take up, and not only take up, but absolutely persist, at every sacrifice, in a line of conduct which must self-evidently

defeat the very end which he was fraudulently aiming to attain.

I have here put the case as strongly as the argument requires; but not so strongly as the fact. In the instance of Jesus Christ, if we assume the opinion of the Jews to have been true, not only are we to suppose, that he was fixing upon the prophecies relating to the Messiah, a sense of his own, in opposition to the universal persuasion of those, whom he meant to deceive; a sense which involved the renunciation of every object, which can be conceived to stimulate the ambition of a supposed impostor; a sense, moreover, which directly and palpably thwarted his professed design:—but a sense which entailed the supposition of his being put to a painful and ignominious death; and this not as a possible consequence, but as the very postulate on which the success of his fraud depended. Do the annals of mankind supply, or has any one met, in his own experience, with the case of such an attempt to deceive mankind as this, having been ever practised? Certainly, no miracle could be more contrary to the course of nature, than such a supposition as has here been made would be, to the first principles of the human mind.

I have been reasoning on the impossibility of explaining the conduct of Jesus Christ, by supposing that he intended to deceive others. But perhaps it will be said, that he may have been deceived himself; in other words, he may have

been an enthusiast, a fanatic, or perhaps a madman. As no difficulty is so great as the belief that he really was, what he pretended to be; if this can be disproved, it may not seem to matter, by what principle we account for his motives.

Now I cannot but think, that in refutation of this hypothesis, we may, on the strictest rules of reasoning, appeal to the history of Jesus Christ. Though the wisdom of his instructions, the purity of his life, the calmness and majestic simplicity of his deportment, in every circumstance, however trying and affecting, may not warrant us in affirming that he was 'more than a God,' according to the expression of a celebrated French writer; yet are they, at least, sufficient to show, that he was not 'less than a man.' In fact, the religion of which he was the unquestionable Founder, furnishes a sufficient answer to such a conjecture, if we could suppose it to be gravely put forth. But there is a circumstance, belonging to the death of Jesus Christ, which at once removes his case out of the reach of every sort of suspicion; a circumstance which makes every supposition, of fraud, or delusion, or madness, or enthusiasm, all equally impossible.

The death of Jesus Christ was not the effect of suicide, like that of Peregrinus, the crack-brained philosopher, of whose self-martyrdom at the Olympic games, in emulation of our Saviour, Lucian has written an account. Christ did not raise a funeral pile with his own hands, and invite all the people of

Judea to witness, in his person, the fulfilment of the prophecies. His death was in pursuance of a judicial sentence, inflicted not by his own hands, but by the hand of the public executioner, and at the instigation of his bitter enemies. In no other way could the prophecy have been fulfilled; for the Messiah was not to die a natural death, nor by his own act; though innocent, (for it was carefully stipulated that "he was to commit no violence, neither was deceit to be in his mouth,") yet was he to be "numbered among the transgressors;" he was to be "taken from prison and from judgment," and "led like a sheep to the slaughter."

Put the case then as we please: suppose Christ to have been both an impostor, and a madman, and an enthusiast, all in one; yet how was he to accomplish his purpose? In what way was he to bring about the completion of the prophecy, on which he grounded his pretensions? The design, it may be admitted, might have entered into the head of a madman, though of a madman only. But it would require more ingenuity than the wisest man might possess, to have carried it into execution. For by what artifice, or under what conceivable pretence was he, without committing any offence, such as would confute his claims, to engage his enemies, the Jewish rulers, and not only them, but the Roman governor and the whole body of the people, to conspire with him in so insane a conspiracy?

The absurdity here stated will be equally apparent,

whether we suppose Christ to have been endeavouring to deceive others, or to have been himself deceived. But on this last supposition, another difficulty presents itself—in the miracles which he worked, or pretended to have worked. These might be either true or false; but whether they were the one or the other, was a question respecting which, his own judgment could not have been deceived. Enthusiasm might mislead a man to believe, that he was a prophet; that he was favoured with divine revelations; and under the effect of partial insanity, it is impossible to say, what a man might not believe in this way. No explanation however of that sort is applicable to the miracles, which Christ pretended to have wrought. If they were fictitious, the charge of enthusiasm or insanity, may be fixed on those who were so credulous as to believe them; but as against the agent, the charge must be that of fraud.

We have before seen that this charge may be refuted, from the nature of things. Combining the history of Christ's death, as related by the Evangelists, with the predictions of the Old Testament, it is a fact which makes the accusation of imposture impossible. It would be difficult to mention any conclusion, (the denial of which does not involve a mathematical absurdity,) which I should deem more certain. The prediction of Isaiah may, or may not, have been a divine prediction; it may, or may not, have signified the death and passion of the Messiah; but if such an interpretation was put upon it by

Christ, in opposition to the whole body of his countrymen, be he what he might, he was no impostor. It would less shock our reason and common sense to believe, that the history of his death, as we read it in the New Testament, was only a fable, invented purposely by his disciples, in order to make that opinion impossible.

To refute such an hypothesis as this would seem like trifling; nevertheless it is the only one, as far as I can see, to which an adverse party can resort. We know, however, that the death of Christ was a real transaction. It was a public act, and has been recorded by Tacitus, among the events which happened under the reign of the Emperor Tiberius.

When we read this part of our Saviour's history, as it is told in the New Testament,—so natural is the sequence of events,—so artless is the narrative,—the incidents are so simple and so probable,—that the true character of this marvellous transaction is often not duly felt and understood. Occupied with our own painful feelings, and with amazement at the deep iniquity of the human heart, the mind is made to lose sight of the event itself. We see nothing strange or wonderful in it, nothing passing belief or requiring explanation. But take away the narrative of the Apostles; say nothing about, how the event came to pass; leave to the imagination only the dry fact which Tacitus mentions,—that the "author of the Christian name was one Christ, who had been punished with death in Judea, under the procuratorship of

Pontius Pilate;"—and I doubt whether so extraordinary a fact would have been credited on his bare authority. Many persons would have been tempted to class it among the many vulgar errors, with which history abounds. That such a religion as that of the Gospel,—so pure, so elevated, so free from every baser mixture of human weakness or passion, should have had its rise in such a beginning, so opprobrious in itself, and so little ominous of its rapid and permanent success,—would be deemed a legend and not a history.

And indeed, even with the narrative of the New Testament before us, if the curtain had dropped at the closing scene of our Saviour's life on earth, the after-establishment of Christianity would have seemed an event surrounded with mystery and apparent contradiction. For it would have been asked—Why, after his own nation had put him to death, as a deceiver of the people, should the rest of mankind have taken up his cause, and have agreed to pay him divine honours?

Admitting the truth of all that is related of Christ; acknowledging the wisdom of all that he said, and the reality of all the actions ascribed to him; accepting his character, as it has been described to us by his immediate followers; believing his death upon the cross to be a sufficient testimony in proof of his just title to be that "prophet who should come into the world:"—yet these facts only prove the divine commission of Christ; they afford a general founda-

tion of belief; but, taken by themselves, they demonstrate no particular truth, no specific doctrine.

The death of our Saviour on the cross, for example, does not necessarily lead to a belief in the doctrine of his atonement; and the interval between any fact related of him by the Evangelists, and the belief in his divinity, is wider still. That both these truths, as well as others which are now received by all the Christian world, were asserted by the Apostles, is a matter too plain to stand in need of discussion. But it may be said, that these are not common truths; that they are doctrines which require other confirmation besides the memory or the opinion of the Apostles. Difficult as it may seem, to imagine them in error, they *may* have been mistaken. Whether *we*, in the present day, are at liberty to suppose this, is I think, a question; but certainly mankind were authorized to propose this doubt to the Apostles themselves; and, as we may see in their writings, did propose it.

When the Apostles, then, affirmed these doctrines, on what ground did their assurance rest? The narrative plainly shews that it was on some evidence which was brought to their knowledge, subsequently to the death of Christ. The allusions of Christ to his real character, to the sufferings which awaited him, and to the spiritual nature of his future kingdom, were certainly not comprehended by his disciples at the time when they were made. It was afterwards that their minds were opened to the true

understanding of the Scriptures, in relation to these as well as other points. But how, it is natural to inquire, could they be infallibly certain that they had not mistaken the true meaning of our Lord's instructions to them? or, supposing no room to exist in their own minds, for any doubts of this kind, yet by what evidence could they remove such doubts from the minds of others? Such doubts might be unreasonable; but whether reasonable or not, beyond all question they would be felt and proposed; for there is abundant evidence to shew, that they are not always unfelt, even in the present day. It was important, then, that the Apostles should have been provided with the means of answering all such doubts, whether in their own minds, or in the minds of others.

If we carefully examine the Scriptures, we shall see, that even on the occasion of revelations far less material, God did not use to leave himself "without a witness." When Peter was commanded in a trance, three times repeated, no longer to confine his preaching to the Jews, a revelation was made at the same time to Cornelius, under circumstances which could leave no doubt in the minds of either, as to the reality of the Divine communication. Here, then, the belief of Peter was not founded on the fallible evidence of his own individual conviction; but on a testimony, which demonstrated the miraculousness of the communication. So likewise, in the conversion of St. Paul; the certainty of the Apostle in the

reality of the call which he had received, was not permitted to rest, only on the evidence of his own senses, or on that of those who accompanied him,—even though he was struck blind, by the effect of the light which shined round about him. The minute directions which he received, after they had been confirmed by the corresponding vision of Ananias, could not be mistaken, and must necessarily have removed every doubt from his own mind. If others had disbelieved his story, it must have been because they doubted his veracity, and not because they thought he was himself deceived. Assuming that what he said was true, his having been called by divine revelation to be an Apostle, was not to be questioned. There might be, on the part of others, a suspicion of collusion; but there could be no mistake of any sort in his own mind.

Just so it was, as I shall now proceed to explain, in the great doctrine of Christ's divinity. The truth of this important article of faith, in the minds of the first disciples, did not rest, for its proof, upon this or that text of Scripture; not upon the meaning of words, but, as we shall see, upon the direct witness of God; expressed in acts of divine power, such as left room for no debate about the reasoning or the judgment of the Apostles.

LECTURE X.

ON THE PROOF OF CHRIST'S AUTHORITY AS HEAD OVER HIS CHURCH.

We have seen that all those predictions of the Old Testament, considered by the Jews as the marks or notes of the Messiah, which related to the nation, and tribe, and family, from which he was to spring, the place of his birth, and time of his appearing, were negative—invented, to prevent any deception or mistake, rather than to lead the minds of the Jews to any positive knowledge. I have not mentioned the crucifixion among those marks, because it was not reckoned among them by the Jews who lived before Christ; although it was foreshewn, in terms beyond all comparison more clear and unambiguous than the others, and was, in its own nature, infinitely the most important of any.

But this last mark also was negative, and not

affirmative. Except in the circumstantial particulars, there was nothing in the fact itself, by which it would have been distinguished from the death of Socrates, or of many other wise and good men, who have fallen victims to the prejudices and passions of a misguided multitude. Nothing of a miraculous kind had been predicted of it. Nor does it appear, from the narrative, that it happened contrary, in any respect, to the usual course of nature. What invested the death of our Saviour with its peculiar character, was his almost immediate reappearance upon earth, in the self-same body, as to all outward and visible form, as had been deposited in the grave. It was this last, which stamped the whole event with the evidence of a Divine interposition, and connected it with the scheme of the Jewish prophecies. This it was, which furnished a key to those parts of them, in which the sufferings of the Messiah were foretold.

From this epoch, the same remark must be applied to many other incidents which are related by the Apostles. The manner of his death, by piercing his hands and feet; the gall and vinegar which were given him to drink; the division of his garments; the purchase of the potter's field with the price of his blood;—though all of them, within the ordinary course of nature,—from the moment that they were believed to have been foretold, became likewise miraculous in the apprehension of mankind.

The great and leading subject of the prophecies

of the Old Testament, is not, however, the person of the Messiah, nor his divine character; but the blessings of that future kingdom, which he was to come into the world to establish. Now the truth of a prophecy admits only of one proof, which is, its fulfilment. Before a prophecy has been fulfilled, we may believe that it was delivered by Divine inspiration, from the previous fulfilment of other prophecies, proceeding from the same quarter, (and this was the ground on which the Jewish expectation of a Messiah was built); nevertheless, we cannot, before the event, know as a fact, that it was inspired.

Accordingly, had our Saviour, when he re-appeared upon earth after his resurrection, come surrounded with all the pomp of earthly power and dominion; had he, that is to say, literally ascended the throne of his father David, and reduced all the neighbouring nations to subjection:—in this case, no one, and least of all (notwithstanding the part they had recently taken), would the Jews, have called in question the identity of his person and kingdom, with the person and kingdom of that mysterious individual, whose advent they had so long expected. We see, then, at once the point on which the controversy between them and the Apostles turned.

At first sight, the ground upon which the latter stood, would seem very difficult of defence. The Apostles spoke of a spiritual kingdom; of an unsubstantial throne erected in the heavens; of a

power and dominion, whose insignia were invisible. But how, the Jews might ask, was the reality of all this to be demonstrated? By what tests, could the fulfilment of such a prophecy as this be ascertained? Admitting that all authority in heaven and earth, *had* been committed to Christ, as Head of the Church,—yet how could the Apostles know it to be true? In Limborch's account of his controversy with Orobio, the Jew urges this very point:—" *Cum cœlestia sensibilia non sunt, non aliunde suam certitudinem probare poterant quam ex promissorum clara et aperta adimpletione: quæ cum non fuerit, cætera quæ referuntur suspecta fuerunt.*"—Scrip. Tert. p. 147.

The difficulty is not to be dissembled. Supposing the sense put upon this part of the prophecies by the first Christians, and not that put upon it by the Jews, to have been the true sense; or supposing the prophecies themselves to have been as clear and as free from obscurity, as any proposition can be, which is expressed in words: yet in what possible way, could mankind obtain any direct knowledge of the fact? How could they be made cognizant, while in this world, of the actual truth of that part of the Old Testament, in which the future revelation of Christ's spiritual authority was foreshewn? Even now, when so many nations of the earth are called by his name, these questions may be proposed; but in the days of the Apostles, they evidently constituted the very substance of the argument.

To a pious mind, the difficulty here stated is perhaps of no serious moment. It is readily admitted, that there must be many facts relating to the unseen world, and to other states of existence, which, with our present faculties, we are unable to comprehend or conceive; and many, which even if they could be made intelligible, we can yet never know to be true, from the impossibility of obtaining the sort of data, from which all human knowledge must be drawn. Such propositions, however, may be the objects of divine faith; and this, of which I am now speaking, has usually been numbered in that class.

Nothing can be farther from my thoughts than to call in question this principle of belief, which is one on which we are daily obliged to act. But in the case before us, it is a way of thinking, which belongs to persons born and bred in the doctrines of the Gospel. If we put ourselves in the position of those to whom the Apostles addressed themselves, it will be apparent, that a belief in Christ's divinity could hardly have been established, in the first instance, on this principle. Pure and spotless as is the portraiture of Jesus Christ, as delineated in the New Testament; and wonderful as are the actions which are there ascribed to him; yet there is nothing in his life, or in the manner of his death, which by themselves, would have warranted such a conclusion. So long as the question related only to the credibility of his testimony, respecting the commands

or the promises of God, ample foundation was laid for the faith of his followers. And so they appear to have judged. But when he changed the ground, and hinted at the great truth of his divinity, that was deemed a hard saying; and accordingly the Evangelists tell us, that many of them thenceforth turned aside from following him.

I am not now discussing whether they were right or wrong, but am examining a matter of fact. We know that within a very short period from this time, the belief of his followers was, on this point, entirely changed. From whence did this proceed? What was the evidence, on which this rapid change of opinion was founded? We have seen that during the lifetime of Christ, the minds of his followers were not enlightened as to his true character. And during the few days which intervened between his death and resurrection, even the qualified opinion which they had formed, of his being their future king, would seem to have vanished from their thoughts. It is not less certain, that no knowledge of the real truth had penetrated their minds, during the interval between his resurrection and final disappearance from among mankind. Even when he had explained to the disciples at Emmaus, and afterwards to others of them, "all things which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms concerning him," still their imaginations were unable to grasp so extraor-

dinary a fact; their understandings still remained covered with a veil. For the last words which they addressed to Christ, as St. Luke tells us, the very instant before his ascension, shewed that their minds were yet in darkness. "Lord," said they, "wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Implying, that, even then, they looked upon our Saviour as one, who was to be an earthly prince and ruler.

If we reflect for a moment, we shall see that all this was in strict accordance with every opinion we can form of the human mind. So long as Jesus Christ continued to mix with his disciples in a human form, no impression upon their understanding was, or could have been, of power to countervail the evidence of their senses. I am persuaded that, under such circumstances, a supposition of the divinity of Christ was beyond the compass of human belief:—it was, I would almost say, an impossible conception. The ascension of our Lord into heaven, and his being received out of the sight of his disciples, almost while the words I just now adverted to, were yet on their lips, may be thought to have put a final stop to all hopes of a temporal kind. But between the renouncing such expectations, and the belief of his being seated at the right hand of God:—who "hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth,

and things under the earth[1]:"—the distance is not to be measured.

The conclusion from all this needs hardly to be pointed out. Since the belief of the Apostles, and of the other disciples of our Lord, in the doctrine of his divinity, had no existence in their minds, until after all direct intercourse between them and Christ, was to every outward appearance entirely cut off,—it would appear to follow, that the reasoning on which it was grounded, be it what it might, must necessarily have been drawn from some proof, which was independent of their previous opinions; and which must have come to their knowledge, at a subsequent stage of the evidence.

A truth is only then said to be demonstrated, when such a proof has been adduced, as will compel the person denying it, to affirm an absurdity. In this sense it may seem, that to speak of demonstrating the divinity of Christ, would be contrary to common sense. I shall not, therefore, use such an expression. Nevertheless I think it may be shown, that a person who admits the facts related in the New Testament, (putting upon the words any construction he pleases, which is not confessedly impossible,) and yet affirms the mere humanity of Christ—or supposes that when he left this world, he took upon him only the nature of angels,—will be compelled to embrace a supposition, approaching as nearly to an absurdity, as

[1] Philip. ii. 9, 10.

any practical proposition in divinity well can do. I have limited my remark in this way, not because the facts I am about to state, do not imply any thing more than the non-humanity of Christ; but because, this being granted, the Apostles demonstrated his proper *divinity* on other, and, as they considered it, more direct testimony.

It might be difficult to show, one by one, of every particular miracle ascribed to Christ, that each of them was separately believed, by all Christians, from the beginning. But a belief of his resurrection, of his ascension, of the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, and of the miraculous powers of the Apostles and others generally among the early Christians, was certainly universal. This is an historical truth which no one, except through ignorance, is likely to call in question. Assuming then a belief in these facts, on the part of the Apostles and their contemporaries,—what I now propose is, to point out the connection between it and the belief in the reality of that regal power and authority, which, from the days of the Apostles to the present time, Christ has always been supposed to exercise over the affairs of his visible church; and the actual assumption of which, has ever since been considered, as the fulfilment of that long train of prophecies, in which the future kingdom of the Messiah was foreshown.

It is plain, both from the Acts and Epistles, that not only the Apostles themselves, but likewise many of the disciples, were endued, or (which is the same

thing in the present argument) believed themselves to be endued, and were believed to be so by others, with various miraculous gifts. These gifts, moreover, are never spoken of, as the result of any virtue or authority inherent in themselves, but are uniformly attributed to the power of Jesus Christ.

Thus, when St. Peter cures the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, he says, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk[1]." And afterwards, when the fame of the miracle had attracted the attention of the chief priests and rulers, he addressed them, saying, " Ye rulers of the people and elders of Israel, be it known unto you all and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole." In another place the same declaration is made, but in terms still more distinct. For when the same Apostle cures Æneas of the palsy, we are told that Peter said unto him: " Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and take up thy bed." And he arose immediately.

It would be easy to accumulate instances in which similar powers are exercised by the Apostles, and referred by them to the same cause: namely, to gifts imparted to them they knew not how, and by a hand which they could neither feel nor see, but which

[1] Acts iii. 6.

they considered to be Christ's. Admitting then the miracles described in the Acts, to have been really wrought; and supposing the Apostles to have had solid reasons for saying, that the power of working them proceeded directly from his invisible agency,—it will not, I think, be denied that in this case, a sufficient ground would be laid for the interpretation which was put by them on this part of the prophecies.

What the nature of the authority delegated to Jesus Christ in heaven might be, or how far it extended, it might not be easy to determine; but that he was still alive,—that he was invested with divine powers, of some sort,—that his spiritual authority over his followers had not been withdrawn,—must have seemed to be a fact, the belief of which was not to be resisted. If, after he had ceased to be numbered among the inhabitants of this world, a spiritual intercourse between him and those who believed in his name, continued to be kept up; if the same power to suspend the laws of nature, which he had exercised upon earth, still remained with him, and was still made manifest, in the gifts communicated by him to those, who were left in charge, with the duty of spreading abroad the knowledge of his religion;—such a supposition abundantly accounts for the belief of the Apostles, respecting the reality and nature of Christ's continued presence and authority in his Church.

For it should be observed, that it was not a simple case of spiritual agency. We may suppose the faculties of superior spirits to be as boundless

as we please. If once the hypothesis be admitted, that they are permitted to interfere with the laws of God's material world, it may be difficult to say that any particular miracle is beyond the compass of their power to bring about. Nevertheless, we may confidently assert, that the present case exceeds any hypothesis which can be legitimately proposed. Whatever powers, or whatever faculties, created spirits may be deemed to possess, yet it is from God that they have received them: they are the gifts of Him who made them, and not the effect of their own skill and knowledge, any more than the instincts of the meanest insect, are the result of its own handywork. Allowing therefore the natural powers of other orders of beings to be ever so different from ours, or ever so superior, yet no one, I think, will suppose that they are able to impart them to other finite beings like themselves: this would indeed be to usurp the prerogative of God—the act not of a merely spiritual, but of a creative being.

If then the miraculous gifts exercised by the Apostles, were communicated to them by Christ,—he must have existed, when he left this world, not in his human nature, not in the nature of an angel or spirit; but in a nature which, if not divine, we are unable to define in any other terms.

But whence did the Apostles and first teachers of Christianity draw their proofs for saying, that the author of the miraculous gifts, exhibited by themselves and others, was Jesus Christ? Or, supposing

them to possess such evidence as satisfied their own minds as to the cause, yet how were they to satisfy the minds, as it would seem they did, not only of the standers by, but of mankind in general? It might have been the knowledge of secret arts; it might have been fraud and collusion; it might have been the operation of some unknown cause or causes; or even the immediate act of God himself. In the face of so many possible surmises, whence was the evidence obtained, by which the miracles in question, and all those gifts of the Spirit, of which we read so much, both in the Acts and Epistles, were shewn to have had Jesus Christ for their author?

Why, so many of the very same persons, who had refused to believe in Jesus Christ while he was alive, and working miracles in his own person, should have been made to acknowledge his authority after his death, will perhaps be explained, if we may suppose that other proof was afforded, on which to ground this conclusion, besides the belief and affirmation of his disciples: but where is this other proof to be found?

Now, if we are willing to takethe narrative which we find in the New Testament as our guide, this evidence may be readily produced. Admitting the data which that narrative presents,—the belief that God had given Christ "to be head of all things in his church," was founded upon reasons, fully commensurate both with the strength and universality of the

belief itself, and with the importance of the conclusions, which were built upon it;—and, I would add, upon reasons which involved no question of opinion, but a matter of fact, the truth or falsehood of which was in that age easy to be determined, and which certainly, was not likely to have been admitted merely on hearsay.

The fact to which I am now alluding is, that great miracle of miracles, the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost. The account of it is given at length in the second chapter of the Acts. We are told that, "When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind; and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire; and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed, and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, and Pontus, and Asia,

Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking, said, These men are full of new wine."

Let me here observe that, always excepting the extraordinary and almost incredible character of the fact itself, which the above passage describes, there is no one note of truth which can be required in a narrative of facts, that is not to be found in the history of this event.

It is recorded in a writing, respecting the authenticity of which, it is not possible that any doubt should exist, in the mind of a competent judge. Over and above every external mark which can attach to a document of antiquity, and the entire absence of any counter-evidence: the numerous undesigned coincidences which Paley has pointed out between it and the Epistles of St. Paul, are such as, without any exaggeration, may literally be said to demonstrate, that it is not only a real, but also a contemporary history.

Again, the fact itself was eminently public. It was transacted in the open day, before numerous witnesses; drew the attention of the multitude, at a time when Jerusalem was filled with thousands and ten thousands of strangers, collected from every part of the world; and, as we find a few verses

further on, was the first cause of the belief in Christianity spreading beyond the circle of Jesus Christ's immediate friends and followers.

Moreover, if the event really happened, (which in some shape or other, seems to be almost demonstrable,) it would appear, from the very nature of the fact, to have been very strictly what the Jews termed "a sign from heaven;" that is, a testimony free from all possible suspicion of fraud, or of forbidden arts of every kind, and such as nothing but Divine Power could have exhibited. "The multitude, when they came together," could not have been deceived as to the fact, when "every man heard them speak in his own language." No believer in the secrets of natural magic, was ever so extravagant, as to ascribe to the possessor of them an authority over the laws of mind, as well as of matter. And with respect to those, on the other hand, who were the subjects of the miracle—we may observe, that it addressed itself, not to their senses only, but to their personal consciousness. It left no room for demur or discussion; it was at once visible in its attendant circumstances, and the proof of it was independent of external testimony. "Are not all these men which speak Galilæans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" Not the language of this nation or that, but, as the story goes on to say, Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in every nation under heaven.

St. Luke proceeds to describe the amazement, which seized upon the minds of the multitude, who assembled on this extraordinary occurrence; subjoining a circumstance, which, in the case of events claiming to be miraculous is of great importance to the evidence: viz. the accompaniment of such an effect, as might have been expected to follow, supposing the whole to have been a real history, and to have been generally believed. After St. Peter had addressed the crowd, which had assembled, as soon as what had happened became noised abroad, "then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common. And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart: praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved."

I have given the above passage at full length, to shew how emphatical a stress was laid upon this particular miracle, by the Apostles and early con-

verts; and how important a place it occupies, in the history of their subsequent belief. Reasoning on what was their persuasion, assuredly a miracle more unambiguous in its nature, or more incontrovertibly stamped with the finger of Divine Power, could not have been exhibited before the eyes and understandings of mankind. And, therefore, when the historian tells us, that "from that day many signs and wonders were done by the apostles;" and when we find St. Peter addressing the assembled multitude and saying:—"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses; therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear:"—we can no longer be at a loss to understand the immediate ground upon which, both the Apostles themselves and those who entertained their opinion, regarded him, by whose unseen agency so extraordinary a miracle had been wrought, as an object of worship and adoration. That which we have now to explain is, not this conclusion itself, but the medium of proof, by which the Apostles were emboldened to connect, so unhesitatingly, the wonderful event, which had just been transacted in the face of a promiscuous multitude of witnesses, with the person and invisible operation of Jesus Christ; instead of ascribing it, in general, as might, at first sight, have seemed more natural, to the interposition of that Almighty power, to which St. Peter himself,

in the twenty-second verse, attributes "the wonders, and miracles, and signs," which were wrought by our Saviour while on earth, and before God had "highly exalted him."

Now, there is no passage of the Old Testament, in which the miracle of the descent of the Holy Ghost, on the day of Pentecost, is predicted; but only a general promise of the effusion of the Spirit, from which no specific knowledge was to be obtained; least of all such a knowledge, as the present case supposes. Neither, if we examine the miracle itself, can we point out any particular mark, from which the especial agency of Christ could have been certainly predicated. Joining all the circumstances together, there were, doubtless, general presumptions of the fact; but they were not such proofs as the magnitude of the case required; not such even as the Apostles would have had reason to desire, and as the analogy of God's dealings on less important occasions, would justify us in expecting. Certainly they were not of a kind to silence the objections, which other and adverse parties would have been able to urge.

But the Apostles were not left in a difficulty that was unprovided for, or unforeseen. Our Lord had told his disciples before his ascension, that "all power was committed to him in heaven and on earth." Before his death, he had consoled them, under the apprehension of his departure, by promising that he would send to them, in his stead, "an-

other Comforter, even the Spirit of Truth himself; who should teach them all things, and bring all things to remembrance, whatsoever he had said unto them." And in order that they might afterwards be in no doubt, as to the author of the gifts that should be imparted to them, he distinctly declared, that in this, the necessity of his departure was partly founded; inasmuch as "if he went not away, the Comforter, whom he would send unto them from the Father, would not come unto them; but if he departed, he would send him unto them;" assuring them at the same time, that he would not leave them without help, but "that he would be with them alway, to the end of the world."

The proof of these promises was not to be doubtful; but both the truth and the meaning of them would be understood at the proper season. "When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me." "When he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he shall guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself—he shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you." "All things that the Father hath are mine; therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shew it unto you."

This is not the topic of one or two discourses of our Lord with his disciples, but was, in one form or another, the prevailing subject of almost all his closing communications. "A little while and the

world seeth me no more; but ye shall see me." "A little while and ye shall see me, and again a little while, and ye shall not see me, because I go unto my Father." These things said he often to his disciples, repeatedly adding, that the reason of his impressing them upon their minds was, that when the things which he was speaking of, should come to pass, they might then recall his words to mind. "And now I have told you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass, ye might believe." "But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them." "These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended." "It is not for you to know the times, or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight."

Such were the last words which our Saviour uttered upon earth; and when we connect them with all that had preceded and all that followed, it seems to me, that we can be at no loss to understand the ground on which the belief of the Apostles was built, when they bade the house of Israel assuredly know that "God hath made that same Jesus whom

ye have crucified both Lord and Christ," "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come."

Our Saviour had bidden his disciples to remember, when the things of which he had spoken to them should come to pass, that he had told them before, in order that when they did come to pass, they might know that it was He. When therefore the time was come, and all things had come to pass, as their Divine Master foretold,—combining the fulfilment of his promises to them, with the recent facts of his resurrection from the grave, and subsequent ascension into heaven, in the open day, and before the eyes, not of the Apostles only, but of many witnesses,—I cannot but think that the first Christians were in possession of a sufficient foundation of fact, for asserting the fulfilment of the prophecies which related to the kingdom of the future Messiah; and interpreting them, not according to that literal sense, which the previous expectation of the Apostles themselves, up to the very last moment, had led them to entertain; but according to that spiritual and higher meaning which the establishment of Christianity in the world has now demonstrated to be the true one; and the proofs and certain signs of which, were exhibited in the miraculous gifts and powers which Christ, in accordance with his promise, imparted, in various measures, to the Apostles and to the Church in general.

We see then the evidence, on which the knowledge of Christ's spiritual authority over his Church was originally founded. No better proof of the fact need be required, than that which the miraculous descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost supplied, supposing that amazing event to have been the work of Christ; and it is difficult to understand what more convincing proof of this last could possibly have been afforded, than the promises which he left with his disciples, before as well as after his resurrection. No proclamation of an earthly king's accession to his throne, could be more significant of the event, than was this first exercise of divine power on the part of Christ. Combined with his resurrection and ascension; and with that long chain of prophecy, by which the coming of his future kingdom was foretold, in language so far above the known realities of every earthly throne,—it affords as ample and strong a foundation of belief in the doctrine of Christ's spiritual authority over his Church, as the reason of man has a right, or, perhaps I should say, is able to demand. Supposing the doctrine to be true, our faculties remaining what they are, no higher or better evidence can be suggested;—if we consider the nature of the proposition, it may be doubted whether, in the eye of natural reason, the proof of it would not antecedently have been deemed impossible.

People, it is true, will be found, who may deny that the facts, on which the proof depends, really

happened; who may disbelieve, that any promise of a Comforter was made by Christ to his disciples, before he left the world; and may charge them with imposture, in pretending that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit continued to be possessed by the Church, for several years. Such pretences, it may be said, are impossible and absurd; that is to say, the truth of them would be contrary to our experience. Certainly no such miraculous gifts are now possessed by the Church; nor is there any reason why they should be. And if we take our experience for a standard, not only of what is probable or improbable, but of what is true or false, the facts we have been dwelling upon, may be rejected, no doubt, as impossible and absurd. It was precisely upon this ground, that the College of Cardinals at Rome, imprisoned Galileo for teaching, and made him, on his knees, "abjure, curse, and detest," as impossible and absurd, contrary to common sense and Scripture, the doctrine of the earth's diurnal motion. They were speaking not from their knowledge of God's works, but from their ignorance. As little is it from their knowledge of God's will that men speak, when they deny the facts related in the New Testament. But be the subject what it may, men are not at liberty to reject specific evidence, in dependence upon any sweeping maxims; least of all in the case of facts; for facts can no more be disproved than they can be proved, by general reasoning.

Those who, without attempting to refute the evi-

dence, deny the miracles of the New Testament as *abstractedly* incredible, seem often to forget that people had common sense and understanding in the days when the Apostles preached; and, in truth, were no more likely to have believed in Christ's resurrection and ascension, in the gift of tongues, or most of the other miracles described in the Gospels, if they had not really happened, than in the present day. At least, such belief would have ended with those upon whom the imposition had been practised; it would not have been transmitted to their children, and handed down in perpetuity to the times we live in. *Opinionum commenta delet dies, naturæ judicia confirmat*, is a maxim of experience, which, if applied to Christianity, will make it very difficult to believe, that it had no higher origin than that of ignorance and fraud.

But all merely general assumptions, would at once have been met in the age when the Apostles lived. Those with whom they reasoned were not at liberty to talk of the miracles, as incredible and absurd. The belief of God's intention to make a revelation to mankind was a ground, upon which all parties were then agreed; and this belief plainly involved a supposition of miraculous evidence. Moreover, the present existence of Christianity in the world is a proof, that there were probable grounds for that belief; and if so, neither have we, in the present day, a right to talk of the Christian miracles as incredible and absurd. Such an assumption, upon

every rule of reason, is most unwarrantable. It is quite plain, however, that if we suppose them to be true, and that we were reasoning with persons who so believed, in that case the particular conclusion drawn by the Apostles was altogether demonstrable. The argument cannot be stated more clearly than it is in St. Mark: "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe: in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. So then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen."

Such are the concluding words of St. Mark's Gospel. If the facts which he here states really happened, we need seek no further evidence to prove that the Promise delivered to mankind in the beginning, of a future king and deliverer, has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

LECTURE XI.

ON THE EVIDENCE OF PROPHECY, AS APPLIED TO THE PROOF OF DOCTRINES.

By revelation must be understood, the disclosure of certain truths and propositions, and not a mere exhibition of facts. Accordingly, we have seen, that the subject of the great original Promise which was made to mankind of a future Messiah, did not regard his person, nor the place of his birth, nor the family from which he was to spring, nor the actions which he was to perform;—these were merely the circumstantial signs of its fulfilment;—that which it regarded was, the doctrines which mankind would thenceforth be instructed to believe, respecting the change of relation, in which the future generations of mankind would stand to God.

I now propose to assume as a fact, that the revelation which God had promised in the Old Testament,

was delivered to mankind in the person of Jesus Christ; which revelation was completed, when "he was received up into heaven," and seated "at the right hand of God." But what was the final cause, the purpose of this extraordinary dispensation? In other words, what was the communication made to mankind through Christ?

We all know that the subject of this communication consisted of propositions very difficult to believe. When talked about by Christ, although his meaning was shrouded in words most cautiously chosen, the by-standers took up stones to stone him. In other places, he speaks of them, among his disciples, as things which would be too hard for them to bear; nor was it until after his death, that the true import of the sayings, which he had stored up in their memories, was revealed to their understandings.—What we want, therefore, to explain is, how it happened that the same propositions which, during the lifetime of Christ, were too hard for the belief of his Apostles, became after his death so plain, as to be believed by the commonest of their followers.

Except in the case of demonstrative reasoning, we must look, not only to the amount of direct proof; that is, not only to the arguments for, but also to the arguments against. A fact, which is conformable to our customary experience, will be believed, on evidence which would be rejected, if brought to attest one, to which all experience is opposed. So it is also in matters of opinion. The same authority, which

would obtain belief for truths which are agreeable to our notions of things, will be disregarded, when alleged in support of propositions which we deem improbable. And applying this remark to the case of Christianity—it does not follow, that because in a given case, the evidence of our Saviour's miracles alone, might have been sufficient authority, for proving that God had made a revelation to mankind; therefore the same evidence would suffice, whatever we might suppose to be the doctrines of which it was said to consist. We have only to put a case, in which the doctrines were demonstrably immoral and hurtful to mankind, and no evidence, be it supposed ever so plain and conclusive, would avail to prove that they were from God.

But if we were reasoning with persons, whose minds were possessed by prejudices and preconceptions, it would needs happen, that many things must seem, according to their notions, improbable or incredible, which would appear quite otherwise to men of wider thoughts, of more unbiassed judgments, and greater knowledge of the true principles of reason. This is an observation which we often have occasion to make when listening to objections against the doctrines of Christianity. They are mis-stated on one side, and misunderstood on the other, and propositions are described as contrary to reason, respecting which reason is perfectly silent. But whatever the doctrines of the Gospel might have seemed in the abstract, yet, if we assume the truth of the

facts on which they rest, all *à-priori* reasoning is at an end. It is no longer an abstract case that we have to consider. If those facts really happened, which are described by the writers of the New Testament; if it be true that Christ, after his death, rose from the grave and ascended into heaven, and was the author of those miraculous gifts of which we read; and that all this was the completion of a series of prophecies communicated to mankind many generations before;—we are compelled to suppose that these things happened by design. There must have been some motive in the mind of God, some great object to accomplish, as regards the happiness of mankind, sufficient to explain so extraordinary a deviation from the course of things, and proportionate to the vastness of the means employed for its attainment.

It is plain, that the revelation of some high and mysterious truth, is involved in the hypothesis of such evidence. Why was the Gospel preceded by a previous dispensation and by a long chain of prophecy? Why was the Messiah to suffer death upon the cross? Why was he to be taken up into heaven? Why, after his disappearance from the sight of men, was he to be invested with divine power? And if so, for what end was a knowledge of the authority with which he was invested, miraculously communicated to mankind?—Other similar questions may be proposed, the answer to which will be found extremely difficult, on a supposition that Christ was only a prophet and teacher, sent to enforce our

obedience to the principles of morality, and to confirm our belief of a future state, and of the other great truths of natural religion; but by no means equally difficult, if we suppose that the doctrines to be revealed, consisted of such truths as Christians have always believed; and which, except on some such foundation as that just now described, could never have been established. In this view the doctrines of the Gospel cease to be abstractedly improbable. The evidence on which they were built may be deemed so; but assuming that evidence, the probability of their divine authority would not be strengthened, but quite the contrary, if they had consisted only of propositions conformable to our antecedent opinions. In common language, this is often all that is meant by reason. But by this term, when properly defined, we mean to indicate the abstract relations of things; —which, for any thing that we know, may be infinite in number—and not merely such truths, as fall within the supposed natural limits of human knowledge.

We are now speaking, not about the proof of the divine origin of revelation, but about the proof of its doctrines—looking at the question, as we may suppose it to have stood in the days of the Apostles, and while the opinions of mankind, as to the subject-matter of their preaching, were divided. And here it may be important to observe, that abstract objections to the truth of n old-established religion, pretending to divine revelation, can be urged only by

those who reject its authority. Those who believe it to have come from God, may inquire what the doctrines are of which it consists; but they are not at liberty to examine whether the doctrines are true, by any standard of what we deem probability. What St. Peter says of prophecy, applies still more forcibly to revelation in general. Admitting it to be divine, it is not "of private interpretation;" seeing "it came not by the will of men," but was delivered by "holy men of old," who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost:" and their meaning is to be judged of, not by this or that man's opinion, but by the common sense and understanding of mankind in general. I am here speaking, of course, only of fundamental doctrines, and not of points which have evidently been left open, and the determination of which is not necessary.

As the right understanding of this point is of much consequence, in the argument on which we are now entering:—before we proceed to examine the grounds on which the great truths of the Gospel were originally received by mankind, it will be well to stop and consider previously what the changes are, which have been introduced into this, as into every other part of the question, by the lapse of time. We have seen the manner in which it affects our reasoning in the case of the prophecies, and likewise in that of the miracles:—I shall now show, how largely it enters into the

evidence, on which our belief of the doctrines is founded.

We read in Isaiah, "As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be, which goeth out of my mouth. It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." The truth which is here enounced, contains as plain a maxim of reason, as is to be found in theology: viz. that God does nothing in vain,—that his purposes are yea and amen—that no design of his can be supposed to have miscarried—that every thing which is from him, is as it was intended by him to be. I presume this to be a proposition which need not be formally proved.

Now, if the belief of the Jews in the divine inspiration of their Scriptures and in the prophetical scheme, which they supposed them to contain, was founded in mistake; and if all the actions ascribed to Christ in the New Testament, were either fabricated or had no connection with any religious object, there is an end of the question. There is no doubt, that the present belief of mankind in Christianity, took its rise in the credit attached to the prophecies, and to the history of Christ; but if neither

the one nor the other had any thing to do with a divine revelation, it would be absurd to consider the belief of mankind as true, merely on account of its antiquity and wide diffusion.

But take the contrary supposition. Assume the Jewish Scriptures to have been written under divine inspiration, for the express purpose of preparing mankind to receive a promised revelation; and assume the miracles to have been really worked by God, in testimony of that purpose having been fulfilled—in that case, it follows that if we would know what that revelation was, we have only to ascertain what was, in the beginning, and has since continued to be, the belief of mankind. We are sure, that if it was God's word, "it did not return unto him void; but that it accomplished that which he pleased, and prospered in the thing whereto he sent it." It is quite certain, that the religion now established in the world, had Jesus Christ for its Founder. If, then, he was a Messenger divinely commissioned, it is not to be supposed, that the designs of the Almighty miscarried in his hands; that God's purposes were defeated; that the means which he provided for carrying his long-promised design into execution, were improper, or insufficient, and not suited to the end.

So improbable, in my apprehension, would such a supposition be, that if it could be shown to me, that the present belief of mankind, as regards the

great and fundamental truths of Christianity, was irreconcilable with the real meaning of the writers of the New Testament;—it would at once be decisive against the authority of the books. Whether they were written by those whose names they bear or not, if they did not contain the doctrine of our Lord's divinity, of his atonement, of his intercession, and other fundamental points which have always constituted the substance of what Christians believed, they would be of no authority in settling points of faith. Any hypothesis, which is not impossible, would be more probable than that God should have designed to make a revelation to the world—that he should have contrived a vast apparatus of types and prophecies, extending through many hundred years, for the purpose of awakening the expectation of mankind—that he should have sent the promised Messenger at the indicated time, and have invested him with miraculous powers of every kind, in attestation of his authority:—and yet, in the event, besides having failed in bringing mankind to a belief in the truths, which he did reveal, should have brought them to a belief in truths, which were not only different from those which his Messenger was sent to communicate, but absolutely subversive of them. It matters not how we might attempt to account for such a supposed result:—the hypothesis involves a contradiction in terms. We may understand the reasoning, right or wrong, by

which a person is led to reject Christianity altogether; but this kind of compromise between reason and revelation, is altogether inadmissible.

The ground on which such a way of reasoning is defended, in this country at least, is a supposed misinterpretation of the true meaning of the Scriptures. But, as was just now observed, if they do not contain the doctrines, which the infinite majority of believing Christians, every where and in every age, have asserted,—this would merely lay a ground for impeaching their authority. We know, however, that the infinite majority of Christians not only consent in believing the same great truths, but also in believing that they are to be found written in the volume of inspiration. Here, then, the argument from prescription is of double force; because, in a question which regards the meaning of language, be the subject-matter what it may, whether reason or religion,—custom, as every schoolboy knows from his Horace, is an arbiter from whose decision there lies no appeal.

Barrow quotes as a remark of Aristotle, that "what seems true to some men is somewhat probable; what seems so to the most, or to all wise men, is very probable; what most men, both wise and unwise, assent to, doth still more resemble truth; but what men generally consent in, hath the highest probability, and approaches near to demonstrable truth; so near, that it may pass for ridiculous arrogance and self-conceitedness, or for intolerable obsti-

nacy and perverseness, to deny it[1]." This mode of calculating moral probabilities, may perhaps be thought to require some qualification, when applied to abstract truths; and perhaps, in other cases also, it may admit of exceptions; but in the case, where the point in debate relates to the meaning of a writer's language, the rule is absolute. To contend, that the writers of the New Testament intended to convey any meaning except "that generally received," is a proposition which, on any other subject than religion, reasonable people would not be found to argue. It is a position from which an adversary can never be driven, whether he is right or wrong; and therefore is, in fact, a surrender of the question.

To return then to the argument: I had occasion to remark, in a preceding Lecture, that the great doctrines of the Gospel were not left to rest upon texts of Scripture, or the meaning of words, but upon the direct witness of God. In using these last words, I had in my mind, the resurrection of Christ, and his ascension into heaven,—taken in connection with the fulfilment of our Saviour's promise to his disciples, of the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, and the miraculous gifts, which continued with the Church for several succeeding years. These events I classed together as constituting one great fact, which supplied the key, by means of which the true meaning of the Old Testament was

[1] Serm. VIII. vol. ii.

revealed. From this period, and not before, the sense of those parts of the prophecies which related to the divine nature of Christ,—the purpose of his death,—the offices which he continues to fill in relation to mankind,—was really understood by the disciples. It was then clear, that the words of inspiration were to be interpreted in a spiritual manner; that when the Scriptures speak of the kingdom of the Messiah, of his supreme authority over all nations and people, of the blessings which his people would enjoy, of the punishment which would fall upon his adversaries,—these expressions were to be referred, not to a visible dispensation of things, but to an invisible; that is, to a future world, and not to this present life.

If any person should speak of these propositions as absurd or impossible, he would display an evident ignorance of the proper meaning of the words. But certainly they are propositions not only very difficult to conceive, but which even would seem at first sight to have been placed altogether beyond the reach of proof. The ascension of Christ, as we have said, and his subsequent unseen presence among his disciples, manifested as it was in so many visible effects, first opened their understandings to the principle, on which the Scriptures of the Old Testament were to be interpreted; but the truth of these facts did not involve a belief in all the other articles of the Christian creed. They rendered the supposition of them possible; they en-

titled the Apostles of Christ to a hearing from the Jews; and called upon the last to weigh carefully the arguments; but if, after all, the Apostles had been able to adduce no other evidence in confirmation of the doctrines which they preached, except their own honest and sincere conviction, that such was the true explanation of the facts—it is easy to see, from the very history itself, that their reasoning would not have succeeded.

To our minds these doctrines are simply wonderful, or improbable—or, if we please, incredible. But to the minds of the Jews they were moreover unpalatable in the highest degree, as directly contradicting all their dreams of national glory and superiority; and placing their chosen race, on the same level, in the eye of God, as the surrounding nations of the Gentiles. It may be difficult to state with exactness, what was the true weight of the evidence which the miracles afforded, in proof of such an unwelcome interpretation of the Promise made to their fathers; but whatever the weight of it ought to have been, its actual effect was plainly not such as would have been produced by it, in the present age. It is, however, needless to examine this point. We are inquiring into the facts of the case; and in this view the history of our Saviour's preaching, as well as that of the Apostles, is before us. From that we know, that he did not ask even the Apostles to believe in him, on the single authority of the miracles which he had wrought, or on his own assevera-

tion; nor did they afterwards rest their preaching on the single proof, which their testimony supplied, to the things which he had said and done.

"If I bear witness of myself," says Christ, "my witness is not true." "Search the Scriptures," says he, a little after, "for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me." "O fools," said he to his disciples at Emmaus, "and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself."

If we turn to the preaching of the Apostles, the ground on which they placed the argument cannot for a moment be mistaken. They speak of the miracles which they performed, simply as proofs of Christ's presence among them. But when they reason concerning his offices and attributes, they do not appeal either to them, or to any supposed authority, which the possession of miraculous gifts might be thought to confer. St. Paul does not speak in the language of Isaiah; he does not begin his epistles with "the word of the Lord came unto me, saying;" or, "thus saith the Lord God of Hosts, the God of Israel;" but he addresses both himself and his hearers to the testimony of "the law and the prophets." Even when he is reasoning with the members of the Christian church, who were of course

ready to acknowledge his apostolical commission, he speaks to them, as to persons who had been Jews like himself; showing from the Old Testament, that the only explanation of the wonderful events which they had witnessed and believed, was to be found in the truths which had been there foreshown, either in direct prophecies, or else under types and shadows, the true meaning of which, had till then been kept back.

Whether this proof was legitimate or not, at least it was employed successfully. But I hope to show that it was not only legitimate,—that is to say, not only such evidence as, combined with the facts which they asserted, was sufficient to justify the conclusions which they drew,—but that it was the only kind of evidence, by which such propositions as the Apostles asserted were capable of proof. The possession of it affords the only explanation that can be given, of the success with which their commission was executed. Marvellous as this success was, yet we have only to assume the truth of the hypothesis on which they reasoned, and it will be fully and entirely explained.

It may be convenient to call to mind, in this place, what was said in a former Lecture, where I illustrated the nature of the proof from prophecy, by supposing the case of an ambassador, deputed by one state to communicate to another, certain propositions quite out of the ordinary and probable course of public affairs; and that, in con-

templation of the doubts which might, in consequence, be raised about the genuineness or true meaning of the instructions which he was to bear, a sealed document had been sent, preceding his arrival, the contents of which were not to be opened, until after his credentials had been delivered. I need not here repeat the passage at length, but shall satisfy myself with recalling it to recollection.

In the hypothesis then on which the Apostles had to reason with the Jews, it will readily appear, that the Old Testament held exactly the same place in their argument, as a sealed document would do, in such a case as I have supposed. It is certain, that at the time when Christ was born, the Jews were expecting an embassage from God. It is also certain that the Old Testament, in the same exact form as at present, had been a very long time in their hands; and was regarded by their whole nation, as having been written under divine inspiration. Moreover, an universal opinion prevailed among them that, directly or indirectly, the contents of it referred almost exclusively to the times and things, which should come to pass in the last days; when there would appear among them the Messenger of this great Promise made unto their fathers, to which, as St. Paul told Agrippa, their twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, had for many ages hoped to come.

Suppose then the truth of the facts which the Apostles, as well as many others, had witnessed:—That after his death, Christ had really risen from the

grave, and ascended into heaven, and had continued to exhibit proofs of a divine power, when his presence was no longer apparent to the senses of his disciples: —Here, I think, we have proofs enough, time and circumstances agreeing, that he was that prophet who should come into the world. More clear credentials of a divine commission, need not, and could not easily be asked. But the message which he communicated was unpalatable—highly improbable—surpassing all previous expectation or belief. Under these circumstances, the Jews refused to receive Christ, as the promised Messenger; repudiating not only the propositions of which he was the bearer, but his person; treating both the one and the other, with hatred and contempt.

In this position of things, the Apostles appealed to the Old Testament:—to the sealed document. They compared the several marks of the promised Messiah with the life and history of Christ: his nation—the place of his birth—the tribe and family from which he was to come—the time of his appearing—the treatment he experienced—all these they find agreeing. The authority with which the Messiah was to be invested, coincides with the very powers exercised by Christ. And looking farther, they see that, sealed up under types and figurative prophecies, the very propositions which Christ had communicated, may plainly be deciphered. There, the reason of the unexampled sufferings to which he had submitted, was explained; the meaning of numberless allusions, which they

understood not at the time, but then called to their recollection, was, in like manner, cleared up; and the true nature of his relation, both to God and to mankind, was elucidated. Right or wrong, this was the hypothesis on which the Apostles placed the argument. Assuming that hypothesis to be true, (which their adversaries did not deny,) the question between them and the Jews, was not whether the doctrines preached, were abstractedly probable or improbable; but whether they were or were not, the doctrines which God intended to reveal, and which mankind were expected to believe.

Time, the only infallible interpreter of prophecy, has now decided this question. There were many reasons in the days of the Apostles, many more than probable arguments, for believing that the prophecies were to be interpreted in a spiritual sense; but before that sense had been received and *established*, it could not be infallibly demonstrated. It could not be infallibly determined by the words of Scripture, nor from any principles of general reasoning. The fact of Christ having made a propitiation for the sins of mankind, could not be proved by arguments drawn from the nature of God's moral attributes; neither could it be shewn from natural theology, that the promised Saviour must needs be divine. Such reasoning demands caution in the present day; but those with whom the Apostles argued, would have treated this proof as absurd. The meaning of the Old Testament, or rather the intention of its supposed author,

was a question which time would ultimately determine; but if we go back in imagination, and place ourselves in the position of those, who had nothing except the miracles of Christ to reason from, we shall easily see, that in the meanwhile, it was necessarily a matter of opinion and debate.

On examining the history of the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles of St. Paul, there is no difficulty in finding what the form was, which the debate had then assumed. If the Apostles were right, the obligation of the Mosaic covenant had ceased. It had been superseded by a new and more spiritual covenant. This it was, which the Apostles endeavoured to prove, and which the Jews denied. At the time when St. Paul was writing, we may plainly see, that the affirmation or denial of this, was almost the single question into which all minor controversies had been resolved.

In opposition to the facts, which the former alleged in confirmation of their assertion, the latter appealed also to facts. "You adduce the miracles of Christ," said they to the Apostles: "we adduce the miracles of Moses. Where is the proof that the object of the former, even admitting them to have happened, was to release our nation from the future observance of the ceremonial law? It was imposed upon our fathers, on the evidence of signs and wonders, greater and more numerous than those which you adduce: —By what mark then, are we to know that the signs you speak of, were designed by God for the

purpose of signifying that we, their children, are released from the covenant, by which they were so straitly bound? You refer us to the Old Testament: but then you apply to it a principle of interpretation which we do not recognize, and which, from the nature of things, you cannot demonstrate. We read of a king who should ascend the throne of David—of a dominion which is to extend from one end of the earth to the other; and you say that all this is to be understood not in the gross literal sense, but in a spiritual way. Such is your persuasion and belief; but by what test do you propose to shew that you are right? The question, whether your view of God's meaning, or our view, be the true one, is not a question of reason, but one, which it is for events to determine:—if you appeal to this evidence, where does it meet our eyes?"

Now if we turn to the position of the Apostles, at the time to which the history of the New Testament extends, I am unable to see in what way these objections were to be overcome, on the evidence which was then in their hands. If we set aside the facts, on which the proof of Christ's miraculous presence among his disciples was founded, it was obviously not in their power to demonstrate their point. Even assuming the truth of what they related, except we suppose both parties to have believed implicitly in the authority of the prophecies, it would have been impossible. But admitting both these suppositions, they only proved that Christ had been, and con-

tinued to be, invested with divine power and authority. Neither taken singly nor conjointly did they necessarily shew, that the law delivered by Moses at Mount Sinai was abolished; that the Jews were no longer God's peculiar people; that the partition-wall between them and the Gentiles had been removed; that the future kingdom which the prophets had described in such gorgeous colours, was the Christian Church;—an assembly, as then seemed, of a few private individuals, of no importance, either from their station, or rank, or influence. The wonder is, how any persons, who had been bred and born Jews, should have been persuaded to embrace these propositions,—all of which evidently followed from the reasoning of the Apostles, but not at all from any visible manifestation of things.

The Jewish nation, or at least the surviving remnant of them, deny that proofs to this effect have been produced; and persist, accordingly, in still maintaining the obligation of their ancient law. But a large proportion of them were persuaded to embrace an opposite conclusion; at all events, we know that a large proportion of mankind in general have done so. And whatever difference of opinion may have existed, at the time when Christianity was yet in its infancy, as to what was the true import of the Promise made to mankind in the Old Testament, no such question, among those who acknowledge its divine inspiration, can exist in the present day. As I before observed, this is a controversy to which time

would seem to have put an end:—but it still remains for us to explain what the proofs were, what the further facts, heretofore not noticed, to which we owe the advantage of being able to stand on this convincing argument? The answer to this important question will form the subject of the argument on which we are now about to enter.

The knowledge of this part of the Evidences does not respect the foundation of our faith, but only the causes, by which the success of the Gospel is to be accounted for and explained. For this reason, it has not attracted the attention of writers upon the Evidences. But even the most pious Christian is sometimes assailed by difficulties, which, although they do not overcome his faith, are often sufficient to affect his comfort. "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief,"—is a prayer, which others, beside the father of the dumb child mentioned in St. Mark, have been made to utter. For this reason, whatever enlarges and enlightens our knowledge of God's dealings with mankind, can never be considered as unimportant in the view of faith. The existence of a great First Cause may be demonstrated from the conformation of a flower or of an insect, as clearly as from the motions of the heavenly bodies. Our certainty of this great truth is not increased by merely repeating the process of demonstration; but the liveliness of the feeling, with which the mind embraces it, is greatly enhanced by such a process.

Before I enter upon an examination of the proofs

by which the Apostles were able to demonstrate, that the sense put by them upon the Promise contained in the Old Testament was the true sense; and to persuade so many thousands of mankind to embrace their interpretation, at a time when its truth was not, as in the present day, a stated fact, but a matter of expectation only:—it will be convenient first to discuss some general points, partly in elucidation of the principle on which the argument from prophecy depends, as applied to the demonstration of doctrines,—with a view more especially to some objections which it may seem open to; but chiefly for the purpose of explaining certain Jewish modes of thinking and reasoning, the knowledge of which will give us some insight into the true nature of the causes, to which Christianity owed its immediate success, upon any large scale, either among the Jews or beyond the boundaries of Judea.

LECTURE XII.

ON THE EVIDENCE OF PROPHECY, AS APPLIED TO THE PROOF OF DOCTRINES:—*(continued).*

I HAVE had occasion more than once to remark, that however extraordinary we suppose an event to be, or however contrary to the usual course of nature,—mankind, nevertheless, would have no difficulty, in believing it to have happened, on proper testimony, if previous to its coming to pass an expectation of its doing so had generally prevailed. There may be some events, which it would be impossible to make mankind expect; but none, which, having been before expected, would be deemed too incredible to be believed. A person who should expect an event before it happened, and refuse to believe it afterwards, on the ground that it was incredible, would surely convict himself of the plainest inconsistency.

But, unless I deceive myself, a little reflection will show, that this remark is quite as true, *mutatis mutandis*, when applied to the belief of mankind in matters of *opinion*, as in matters of *fact*. Be a doctrine proposed, never so unlikely or never so remote from the conjectures of abstract reason,—yet we have only to borrow the same hypothesis, and suppose a miraculous declaration of it to have been more or less anticipated, in the prevailing opinion of a large portion of mankind, and the anticipation of the doctrine to be received, will occupy exactly the same place in the proof of its divine authority, as the previous expectation, in the case of any miraculous event. Certain foreshown marks must be pre-supposed, by which it could be identified; but these being assumed, the effect would be the same. Call them prejudices, call them popular delusions, if you please; but when a doctrine came to be revealed, with the expected marks upon it, and falling in exactly with established habits of thinking among those to whom it was proposed;—in this case men would not argue about its fitness or its probability, but only whether it was, or was not, the very proposition which they had looked forward to receive.

Here the previous belief would stand in the place of all other arguments. And in the case where we suppose a revelation to have been actually made, and the question to be only as to its contents, such a previous belief would universally be considered, and practically

would really be, an *à-priori* evidence of the truth of the doctrine; a proof of its antecedent credibility, more demonstrative in the opinion of mankind at large, than all the abstract reasonings in the world.

So true does this seem to me, that after the best consideration I am able to give the subject, the bias of my mind is to believe, that the remarks which I formerly made about the conditions, on which the evidence of miracles depends, are still more true, in the case of doctrines pretending to inspiration. These last, stand in the same relation to our reason, as the former, to our experience; and if mankind never could have been brought to believe in the divine authority of the facts related in the Gospels, without the previous expectation of a revelation from God, created by the prophecies of the Old Testament;—it is even still more probable that without a similar preparation, in respect of the subject-matter of that revelation, they would never have been brought to believe in its doctrines. The more remote we suppose the doctrines to be, from the conclusions which it is within the compass of human reason to deduce, the greater, no doubt, would be the necessity for such a preparatory dispensation. But the hypothesis of a preparatory dispensation of some sort, enters into the very theory of a doctrinal revelation; *without* it, I am quite at a loss to see on what kind of evidence, the divine authority of such a revelation could be legitimately demonstrated. Admitting for the sake of argument, that the nature

of the truths to be revealed ought to be taken into the account, before any sweeping assertion be hazarded; still, as regards the Gospel, I think that we should not risk much in affirming, that without some antecedent communication of the divine will, its establishment, humanly speaking, would have been, in the strictest sense of the words, an absolute impossibility.

At all events, the general proposition which I am here supporting, and which is all that my argument requires, will hardly be disputed;—that if the doctrines which the Apostles preached, fell in with the popular persuasion among the Jews, and afforded a not inconsistent explanation of the promises, on which their expectations had been so long and so anxiously suspended, this circumstance must have greatly facilitated the reception of Christianity. "The law," says St. Paul, "was our schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ." These words afford an exact commentary upon the above general remark. They are the simple statement of a fact, which might be illustrated from almost every page of the New Testament. If any doubt it, he has only to reverse the hypothesis, and the truth of them will be immediately apparent.

Suppose that Jesus Christ, instead of appearing among the people of Judea, had suddenly opened his commission at Rome, or among a people, who were strangers to the Promises of God; to whom the name of a Messiah was unknown; who had never

heard such words as Atonement, Salvation, Kingdom of Heaven, Resurrection, Faith, Sin, Repentance, and other phrases, the exact meaning of which was quite peculiar to the Jews, and under which those specific ideas were signified, without which the truths of the Gospel could hardly have been made even intelligible:—in this case, I need not say how many impediments the Apostles would, at every step, have been obliged to contend with. But if from words we come to things; and suppose that when they propounded the high and difficult doctrines it was their business to communicate—the Divine Nature of Christ, his Vicarious Sufferings, his Intercession at the right hand of God, of Salvation through faith in his name — they had been left unprovided with any proofs except the miraculous facts which they had witnessed, and their own confident belief, as to the particular truths which those facts were designed to attest,—here the difficulty is still more apparent. It would seem idle to inquire how they could have obtained credit, in such a case; for one does not see how it would have been possible that they should have been understood. Some preparation of belief, on the part of mankind, was necessary: a preceding opinion or expectation of some kind was required; nor can it be doubted that the Old Testament, in the case of Christianity, supplied this desideratum. It was an evidence whose authority was admitted by those to whom the reve-

lation was made, and the meaning of which alone, constituted the subject-matter of debate.

But here, some objections present themselves, which before proceeding further, must be considered and explained.

The first, is founded upon a remark which immediately suggests itself when considering the proper nature of prophecy; which is, that the subject of it must be some matter of fact; something which is to come to pass in time and place. But how are general propositions, how are truths and doctrines, to be prophesied? "*Quî potest provideri,*" says Cicero, "*quidquam futurum esse, quod neque causam habet ullam, neque notam, cum futurum sit?*" Historical events may be predicted, and the truth of the prediction may be brought to a test. The destruction of Babylon, the division of the empire of Alexander among his chief captains, might be prophesied;—the facts would happen, or they would not. But the truth of a theorem, of one of Euclid's propositions, for example, could not be prophesied: this is a matter to be demonstrated,—no other test of its truth can be applied.

The distinction is very obvious, and is, no doubt, of importance. In explanation, however, of the difficulty which it seems to present, I would observe, that although truths cannot be predicted, yet there are nevertheless two ways in which they may become the subject of a prophetical scheme.

I. They may be directly foreshewn; that is, they may be represented to the understanding, under the form of types and symbolical actions; with an intimation, that the true signification of them shall hereafter, at some assigned period and under certain predicted circumstances, be clearly revealed. For example, when Christ delivered the parable of the Sower to his disciples, they did not at first comprehend its meaning; but the moment the key was put into their hands, by our Lord's explanation, the import of the figure, under which the true sense of the parable was concealed, immediately became as plain as if it had been couched in common language. Now this explanation was given by our Saviour in time and place. It was an action of his life, which we might conceive to have been foretold. I will take another illustration, which will make this still clearer.

Our Saviour told his disciples, that "the kingdom of heaven was like unto a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind; which when it was full they drew to the shore, and sat down and gathered the good into vessels, and cast the bad away." Now supposing, that with a view to represent the mixture of good and bad men, which would belong to God's future Church under the Gospel dispensation, the high priest had been directed every year, to cast a net into the sea of Galilee, as here described,—this would have been a type, the meaning of which, it would have been impossible to interpret, had not our Saviour's words furnished us with a

key, viz., the Kingdom of Heaven; and the future *communication* of this key was a point of fact, which might have been made the subject of a distinct prediction.

Whenever the Roman consul appeared in any assembly of the people, he bowed the fasces: "*vocato ad concilium populo, summissis fascibus in concionem ascendit,*" says Livy. This was strictly a type, signifying what it might have been made to *foreshew*, supposing the case of a revelation: viz. that the supreme authority of the state was vested in the people.

In this way, then, it is plain that matters of doctrine may be directly inserted into a prophetical scheme; they may be foreshewn in parabolical allusions and representative rites, or other actions.

II. Matters of doctrine may be made the subject of prophecy in an indirect manner. I mean to say, that although the *truth* of a doctrine cannot be predicted, yet the *belief* of mankind in its truth may be foretold. This is a matter of fact, which may come to pass in time and place, just as any other historical fact. Let us put the case:—Suppose a revelation to have been promised many years before it was disclosed, the doctrines of which had been veiled under types and shadows, and scenical allusions, and the true interpretation professedly kept back until a fixed period, when certain other stated things should happen:—then, if at the appointed time those things did happen; if that revelation was

made; if all mankind changed the religious opinions in which they had been born and bred, for certain new opinions, exactly in accordance with those types and shadows and allusions,—the interpretation of which, when put into their hands, had rendered the sense of their secret meaning as clear and perspicuous as before it had been dark and difficult:—here it would seem that we have a case in which, evidently, doctrines may become the subject of prophecy, not indeed considered as truths, but simply as propositions that would come to be believed. In this way, the divine authority on which a doctrine had been received, might be as certainly known as the divine inspiration, by which we were sure that the belief of it had been predicted. I shall produce some examples from the Old Testament, which, will perhaps make my meaning, in this part, more clear, and at the same time throw light upon the general argument.

The divine nature of Christ, in relation to our knowledge, is not a fact, but a proposition; and, as such, its truth could not be made the subject of a direct prediction. But it is a fact, and not a proposition, that divine worship is now paid to him, and has been from the beginning;—it may be contrary to reason to speak of Christ as if he was a divine being, but it is a fact that he is so spoken of; that he is and has been *called* God.

Let us turn now to the Scriptures. We find in

Isaiah[1] these words: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.—For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it, with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever."

Take another passage, from Jeremiah[2]: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS."

In the last of these passages, the words in Hebrew are, "Jehovah our Righteousness;" and both this passage and that from Isaiah, are distinctly referred to Christ in the Targum of Jonathan: there is no question, therefore, about the sense in which they were understood by the ancient Jewish Church. It is no less certainly a fact, that from the days of the

[1] Ch. ix. 2. 6, 7. [2] Ch. xxiii. 5, 6.

Apostles to the present, our Saviour has been "called" the Mighty God; that "the name whereby he has been called" has been The Lord our Righteousness. Here, then, is a case in which a proposition may stand upon the evidence of prophecy, and in which it actually does so stand. Right or wrong, the *belief* of our Lord's divinity formed part of that revelation which was to be communicated.

Again, let us open at that passage of Isaiah (ch. liii.) in which the death and propitiation of the Messiah are so openly signified. I have before observed that the whole of this prophecy is, with one voice, referred to the Messiah by the ancient Jewish writers, both before and after Christ. So stringent is the passage itself, and likewise the tradition of their Church, as to its proper interpretation, that their later teachers have been constrained to invent the doctrine of two Messiahs; of whom one was to appear in a state of poverty and humiliation, riding upon an ass, and the other in the clouds of heaven, as a king and conqueror. We have considered, in a former Lecture, that part of the prophecy which relates to the death of the future Messiah. But, connected with the prediction of this event, we have a revelation of the *reason* why he was to suffer; and the matter of fact is so bound up with this latter revelation, as to make it impossible that any person should believe the former to have been fulfilled in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and put

any other explanation upon his death, except the doctrine which the Church has always entertained.

The Messiah was to be cut off from the land of the living; he was to be taken from prison and from judgment; he was to be led like a lamb to the slaughter. And the cause of this was, the transgressions of his people; for their iniquities he was to be bruised; the chastisement of their peace was to be upon him, and with his stripes they were to be healed. Moreover, he was to bear the sins of many, and to make intercession for the transgressors. None of these propositions could have been made the subject of direct prophecy, except in the shape of types,—such as the scape-goat, the sacrifice of Isaac, the sprinkling the blood of the sacrifices, or other similar parabolical actions and allusions. But in this passage of Isaiah, the great doctrine of our Lord's *propitiation* is so identified with the prediction of his *death*, as to be indirectly prophesied with as clear an evidence, as if the subject of it had been a matter of fact.

We, who see the doctrine of a propitiation for the sins of mankind, established as the belief of the whole Christian church, may be satisfied, and justly so, with the word of Christ and of his Apostles for its truth. For the most part, Christians, in the present day, seek no better proof. But in the days of the Apostles, the value of their testimony was the very point in debate. Those who did not question

their sincerity, would yet have questioned their reasoning power, if they had affirmed such a doctrine simply on the authority of their opinion. But with this passage of Isaiah in their hands, the death of Christ furnished them with a key, by means of which the whole mystery of their Law, and of the truths which, veiled under the shape of types, occupied so large a place in it. The suddenness of the light which broke in upon the understandings of his followers, and its effect upon their feelings, when our Saviour, after his resurrection, opened their eyes to this part of Scripture, is affectingly described in St. Luke.

"And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures? And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon. And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread. And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they

had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honey-comb? And he took it, and did eat before them. And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. And he led them out as far as to Bethany: and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and re-

turned to Jerusalem with great joy; and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen."

Having made these remarks upon the use of prophecy, as an evideuce of revealed truths, and upon the place which the doctrines of the Gospel hold in the scheme of the Old Testament, I shall now proceed to examine a practical objection to this evidence, in relation to matters of faith, which is too important to be passed over without notice. It is one which, though it might not shake the soundness of the reasoning, by which I have shewn the use and importance of prophecy, considered as a preparation for the belief of any particular doctrine or doctrines, may yet be thought to throw some doubt upon the safety of employing it, as an engine for demonstrating their truth.

The objection, as applied to Christianity, is this: that in thus accounting for the ready reception of its doctrines, we introduce an hypothesis which casts a suspicion upon their divine authority.

For thus it may be argued. If the original belief of mankind was not founded immediately upon the supposed divine inspiration of the Apostles, as attested by the miracles which they wrought, but upon certain preconceived notions, prevailing at the time, as well in their own minds, as in the minds of those among whom they preached:—by what rule can we be sure, that the doctrines of the Gospel are any thing more than human opinions,

founded merely on popular prejudice. This is precisely the view which has been put forward by the more learned of those who, admitting the divine mission of Christ, reject many of the doctrines which we find laid down in the Epistles of St. Paul, and in other parts of the New Testament. These doctrines, say they, formed a part of the popular persuasion of the Jews, *before* the evidence on which they are said to depend, was exhibited. The foundation of them, therefore, they contend, rested originally, not upon divine, but on human authority; or at least upon such a mixture of both, as to render it impossible to distinguish between the two.

This objection is fairly drawn from the preceding reasoning, except that it proceeds upon a supposition, that the evidence on which the truths of the Gospel rest, is to be sought in the facts related in the New Testament, and in them alone. Assuming this, the difficulty is obvious. We have said that the truths of the Gospel, as generally believed, would not have met with the favourable hearing which they obtained, except they had fallen in with certain popular opinions. They may, therefore, so far be said to have been founded upon those popular opinions; inasmuch as that if they had been presented to a people who had never heard before of a propitiatory sacrifice,—of the remission of sin,—of salvation,—of a kingdom of heaven,—of a resurrection from the dead,—it is probable that no process of reasoning could have enabled the Apostles to explain to their hearers the

meaning of the doctrines which they preached. If these antecedent notions had been built merely upon popular error and superstition, (and there is no medium between this supposition and a divine revelation,) it is plain that the whole diathesis of the argument would have been vitiated. No after-evidence could have given authority to conclusions drawn from such premises; like Nebuchadnezzar's image, whose "feet were part of iron and part of clay," it would have fallen to pieces from the mere want of cohesion in its parts.

Let us put a case. There is a treatise of Bacon's, *De Sapientiâ Veterum*, in which he endeavours to point out the various truths, which were concealed under the mythology of the ancients. "Who," says he, "that is told, how Fame was the posthumous sister of the giants, does not immediately see that by this is signified, the rumours and seditions which continue to infest the body politic after the cessation of rebellions? Or, when he reads of the army of the giants having been routed by the braying of Silenus' ass, does not at once apprehend this as intimating how often rebellions are dissipated by the mere empty terror of panic fears and reports? *Quis tam durus est*," he says, "*et ad aperta cæcutiens*, as not to see these and such like truths under the various fables of Greece and Rome?"

Suppose then that these or similar truths (the revelation of which, as some have thought, was the object of the Eleusinian mysteries) had been preached

by some ancient sect of philosophers, as from God. If the same interpretation which they announced had always been believed by many thousands, before their time, simply on the authority of common belief: —In this case, it is plain that no after-evidence, no miracles, no conceivable reasoning, could have constituted them a revelation, or have imparted to them a divine authority. If the fables themselves had been originally of human invention, no subsequent process could have invested them, in the opinion of mankind, with the character of inspired truths.

But this is plainly not the hypothesis on which the truths of the Gospel stand. The types and shadows, and symbolical rites and ceremonies of the Jewish law, are assumed, as not being human inventions, but divine. The popular notions and belief which arose out of those institutions, we have supposed to have been the preconcerted effect of a divine dispensation. Whether the fact were so or not, is a very proper question to discuss; but quite a different one from the objection which we are now considering. If the notions and ways of thinking prevailing among the Jews, was the consequence of a miraculous Providence—in that case, instead of being reasons for distrusting the truth of the doctrines of the Gospel, they are a part of the evidences on which these last repose. Moreover, it is an evidence which no skill or cunning on the part of human agents could have contrived. A person who did not believe the facts related by the Apostles, might

accuse them of having availed themselves of the state of public opinion among the Jews, to promote their ends; this may be conceived; but certainly none but God only, could have *prepared* this particular state of mind many generations before. Here the hypothesis of Christianity, if true at all, is essentially and demonstrably divine.

This objection, however, that the doctrines preached by the Apostles were engrafted on a preceding belief, is not one which could have been urged at the time; because it formed the premises of their argument. That the foundation of this belief had been laid by God, and was not of human authority, is the single point on which they and their adversaries were agreed.

Before we dismiss the subject, it may be desirable to say a few words, respecting the use, which may be made of the objections I have been just now considering, as affording a probable explanation of the reasons for the obscurity of many of the prophetical parts of the Old Testament. Viewing the Jewish dispensation as a preparatory scheme, it is plain that the difficulty was to adjust its parts in such a way, as to illumine the minds of the Jews, with only a partial knowledge of the revelation to be communicated. The question was, how little light would suffice for the purpose of enabling them to recognize the truth, when the time should arrive for revealing it more fully, and not how much God was able to communicate.

If the minds of men were to be prepared for a reception of the doctrines of Christianity, it is evident that some approximation to the actual truth was necessary. There would otherwise have been no preparation at all. The mere expectation of a revelation of some kind, was not enough in the case of doctrines so difficult of apprehension, as those which we find in the Gospel. Habits of thinking, and trains of ideas were to be created, without which, as we have seen, the propositions it contained would not even have been understood.

On the other hand, it was also necessary that all knowledge of the actual truth should be withheld. If the Jews had known this before Christ, the Gospel would have been no revelation. The advent of Christ, and the miracles which he performed, instead of being part of its evidence, would themselves have required to be accounted for and explained; would have embarrassed, rather than have assisted the faith of mankind. I had occasion to shew, in a preceding Lecture, that except the knowledge of certain prophecies had been withheld, until after their fulfilment, the proof of their divine inspiration would have been impossible. If we apply the reasoning by which this was evinced, to those parts of the Old Testament which relate to the *truths* that were to be revealed, we shall observe, that there the rule will hold universally. No truth which had been known and believed beforehand, could have been made to stand on the evidence of fulfilled prophecy.

The principle will apply, as we saw, to a large class of facts; but, applied to truths, here it is absolute and universal.

When people, therefore, complain of the obscurity of the prophetical parts of the Old Testament—of the vagueness of this passage, and the darkness of that, and the figurative ambiguity of another—it may be suspected that they have not always sufficiently considered the nature of the case. Taking prophecy as a scheme, there are parts of it which must unavoidably be wholly or in part obscure. It is a condition necessarily attaching to this particular evidence: a point assumed, and without which, the proof of its authority would be impracticable.

It has been said, speaking of certain rules of rhetoric, that there are some, which people in general could not have discovered by themselves, which yet any man of understanding may comprehend, when pointed out to him: "*Nam neque tam est acris acies in naturis hominum et ingeniis, ut res tantas quisquam, nisi monstratas, possit videre: neque tanta tamen in rebus obscuritas, ut eas non penitus acri vir ingenio cernat si modo adspexerat.*" This exactly defines the true perfection of a typical prophecy, the object of which is some proposition, hereafter to be believed. Under whatever form the proposition may be foreshown,—whether of some symbolical action, or of a parable, or of figurative representation of any kind —it should be such as no man could have divined beforehand, but which he immediately apprehends,

as soon as its real meaning is suggested to his mind. This end is only to be obtained by the aid of types of some sort, and in some shape or other; and this is the use to which they are always appropriated in the Old Testament. One and the self-same key was to open the meaning, not of one prophecy, but of many; not of one doctrine, nor one passage of God's dealings with mankind, but of many doctrines and many passages; and the wonder, as it seems to me, is not, that there should be so much obscurity in the Old Testament, but that, under such circumstances, there should not be found still more.

If we consider how multiplied are the disputes, which have been raised about the true contents of revelation, even as explained to us in the New Testament—we shall easily see, how unreasonable it must be to complain, that the prophecies of the Old Testament, and especially the part of them now under our eye, are not free from obscurity; or that the true sense and intention of the author is not to be obtained, from a mere grammatical examination of the language. This rule is utterly worthless in the interpretation of most of the prophecies. The true and perfect test, as I before explained, of the divine inspiration, is the sense affixed before the time of its fulfilment. If a prophecy relates to a matter of fact, the previous expectation determines its meaning. If the event corresponded in time and place with the previous expectation, here we have a rule of interpretation which admits of no mistake. But this rule, as

we have seen, cannot be applied to the revelation of truths and doctrines. They do not come to pass, as facts do;—and as to a previous knowledge of the propositions to be communicated, that would hinder, if not altogether defeat, the ends of prophecy. The nearest approach then which we can make to any determinate rule of interpretation, in application to that part of the Old Testament, which relates to the subject-matter of the Promise, and not to the evidence of its fulfilment, is this:—did the Jews know beforehand, that under the institutions of the Law, and in the Psalms, and in many leading events of their history, certain truths, afterwards to be revealed, were concealed?

If this can be shewn to have been the case; and if it shall appear that those very truths which had beforehand been darkly guessed and faintly apprehended in a low and earthly sense, became the very doctrines which, in a high and spiritual sense, were afterwards embraced by all mankind,—it seems to me, that the divine authority of those doctrines will rest upon an evidence as solid, as the reason of the most jealous inquirer, or even the most sceptical ingenuity, can require.

How far the doctrines of the Gospel are able to claim an evidence such as this, will be the next subject for us to consider.

LECTURE XIII.

JEWISH OPINIONS RESPECTING THE FUTURE CHRIST.

At the end of Joh. Buxtorf's Synagoga Judaica, is a chapter entitled "*De Venturo Judæorum Messiâ*," in which he gives a detailed account of the expected blessings which the Jews look forward to enjoy, when their promised Messiah shall appear. The dissertation is full of curious matter, containing chapter and verse for every statement, and well worth the trouble of reading. As it is of moderate length, I shall not content myself with merely referring to it, but endeavour to compress its contents into an abridged form; with a view to some short remarks in illustration of the reasoning embodied in my last three or four Lectures, upon the belief of the Jewish Church, and upon the state of the argument for the truth of Christianity, at the moment when it was

first planted in the world;—before it had begun to make a noticeable appearance in the eyes of men,—while the belief in it was only a seed just beginning to spring up—and when its origin, its character, its future destiny, and every point connected with it, must have been a matter of speculation even in the minds of the Apostles themselves.

Although the authorities produced by Buxtorf are taken from the Talmud, the compilation of which was posterior to the time of Christ, yet there is not the least reason for supposing, that any material change has taken place in the theological belief of the Jews, since that period. The success of Christianity, and the evident clearness with which it may be shewn, that all the terms fixed in Scripture, for limiting the time of the Messiah's coming, are now passed by, has forced their learned men upon the necessity of adopting one or two opinions, probably unknown to their ancient church;—as it has compelled them to change their interpretations of some passages of Scripture, which before the time of Christ were understood in the sense which was put upon them by the Apostles;—but these innovations are easily distinguished, and do not in the least affect the substance of their doctrine.

Among them may be mentioned an assertion to which I have before adverted, that there were to be two Messiahs;—one whom they call the son of Joseph, who was to be a suffering Messiah, and who, they say, has appeared; and another, the Son of David,

whose coming is the great object of their faith, and under whom all the glorious promises, which the Scriptures make to their nation, are to receive their accomplishment. Now the present hopes of the Jews, in regard to this, their triumphant Messiah, are beyond any doubt substantially the same, in most points, as have been entertained by them, from a period certainly anterior to Christianity. His coming, say they, has been delayed on account of their impenitence; but it has been delayed only; the promise still remains uncancelled; and among the petitions which are put up daily by them in their synagogues, one always is, that it may be shortly, and in their days, fulfilled.

Before describing the several particulars in which the happiness of the Jews, under the kingdom of their Messiah, is to consist; it may be proper to notice the portents which are to precede, and to be the signs of its approach.

The first is, that there is to be no school of the Rabbins, no chief of the Synagogue,—no faithful teachers of the word,—no good or holy men; the heavens are to be shut up, and there is to be no food for man or beast. This they deduce from Hosea[1], where it is said, "For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim."

[1] Ch. iii. 4.

The second sign is, that the sun is no longer to give its heat; and that all kinds of pestilential diseases are to arise, and thin the nations of the world. This is inferred from Malachi[1]: "For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven," &c.

The third sign will consist of various prodigies in heaven and earth, according to Joel[2]: "And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke." The other signs are of the same kind, and all severally deduced from express passages of Scripture; as, that the sun is not to give light for thirty days,—that a conqueror is to arise, who, for nine months, shall oppress all the nations of the earth with his tyranny and exactions,—that there shall be at Rome a marble statue, representing a beautiful virgin, before which the wicked from all quarters shall fall down and be seized with the most violent love,—that this statue will be the mother of an infant to be called Armillus, who shall pretend to be the Messiah; and under whom, the Jewish nation are to be driven from their own land, and to be loaded with every sort of misery and oppression. That after this the Archangel Michael is to come with a great trumpet, according to Zechariah[3], and, blowing to the four winds, the true Messiah and the prophet Elias will appear, and manifest themselves to certain pious Jews, living in the wilderness of Judea:—that

[1] Ch. iv. 1. [2] Ch. ii. 30. [3] Ch. ix. 14.

then the trumpet will sound a second time, and immediately all the graves that are in Jerusalem will be opened, and the dead will rise; and all the Jews dispersed throughout the world, be brought in chariots and on the shoulders of the nations, to Judea. As the tenth and last sign, the trumpet is to sound a third time, as a signal to all the Jews, who shall be living upon the banks of the rivers Gosan, Lachor, and Chabor.

I have greatly abridged this part of Buxtorf's dissertation; and perhaps it might have been passed over without notice, because it is evident that the greater part of these signs are the inventions of an age, posterior to that of Christ. There are traces in the New Testament of an expectation on the part of the Jews, of signs of some sort to be exhibited to mankind, by which the Messiah's approach would be made known; but the kind to which they were looking forward, were probably merely prodigies; not such portentous dispensations as the Talmudists, reasoning partly from the triumph of the Gospel in the world, and partly from the condition to which their nation has been reduced, have since been led to enumerate.

With respect, however, to the several Blessings which we find mentioned in the Talmud, as composing the future condition of the Jews, under their promised king,—there is proof, that they were substantially the same before the coming of Christ, as at the present time. It is chiefly in that part of

their belief, which refers to the vengeance which God will take upon the enemies of his people, that the Talmudical doctors have introduced inventions of their own, and given the rein to their imaginations.

First, they are persuaded that the Messiah, when he comes, will gather together from every quarter of the heavens, all the dispersed of their nation in every quarter of the world, as it is written in Jeremiah [1]: "Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither.' From these words they infer, if any, while alive, were deaf, or lame, or blind, that when the Messiah shall restore them to life, (as he will do all the children of Abraham, throughout the world, and conduct them to their own land,) all their infirmities will be healed ; for then, as Isaiah writes [2], "the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing." The general doctrine of a resurrection to life they build upon Daniel [3]: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake."

In that day, likewise, there shall be none sick, but God will remove all plagues and all diseases from

[1] Ch. xxxi. 8. [2] Ch. xxxv. 5, 6. [3] Ch. xii. 2.

among his people. Moreover their days will be prolonged to the age of those who lived before the flood. "For as the days of a tree are the days of my people[1]." God will also not only remove all diseases, but all evil concupiscence and inclinations to evil. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh[2]." But lastly, and above all, God in that day will so reveal himself to the children of his chosen race, as that they shall see him face to face. "And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together[3]."

I omit the long account given by Buxtorf of the feast, which the Messiah is to give to all the assembled Jews. It has probably a foundation in some ancient tradition, connected with the texts of Scripture which he quotes, as the authority they produce; but it is so absurd, both in itself and in its details, and is so plainly marked with the extravagant imagination, which disfigures the more recent inventions of the Jewish Synagogue, that I shall pass it over as irrelevant to the present argument,—which is only concerned with the opinion of their Church, at the period when the writings of the New Testament were composed. Of the antiquity of all the other particulars embodied in the expectation of the Jews, proof may be produced from other sources besides

[1] Isaiah lxv. 22. [2] Ezek. xxxvi. 26. [3] Isaiah xl. 5.

those which Buxtorf adduces. But indeed no better evidence is required than the texts of Scripture, on which each several promise is alleged. These, we may have observed, are the self-same texts, as are commonly produced by the Apostles, in reference to their interpretation of God's promises:—a coincidence which is easily explained, by supposing that the reasoning of both was built, as beyond any doubt it was, upon one and the same foundation.

That many, perhaps the majority of the religious portion of the Jewish nation, expected the above promises to be fulfilled in a literal sense, need not be doubted. Nevertheless it is not conceivable, but that there must have been very numerous exceptions. Indeed we know this to have been the case, upon the authority of the Evangelists. They tell us of a whole class of Jews, who expressly denied that there would be any resurrection of the dead when the Messiah came. Many, we must suppose, would reject other parts of the popular belief; and some would regard the whole, as containing only a figurative description of that "world to come," that αἰῶν μέλλων, which was then, as it has ever been among the Jews, the great subject of religious faith; indeed the only article of *faith*, properly so called, which their creed contains.

Be this, however, as it may—whatever was the state of the public mind in Judea, at the time when Christ appeared—yet as preached among a people accustomed to believe, or to listen to others who believed,

in the future revelation of such a state of things, as has been just now described, surely the interpretation of God's promises, which was proposed by the Apostles, was any thing but incredible. If it seemed startling, it must have been so, only from its novelty; from its sobriety rather than its extravagance. Putting aside altogether the proofs adduced of the truth of this interpretation, as arising out of the great and wonderful events, of which so many had been witnesses; and leaving the question to be determined only by reason and probability,—the Christian doctrine, as to the true nature of the Messiah's kingdom, was plainly the less unlikely of the two; less directly subversive of all that we should deduce by experience, or conjecture from reason, of the thoughts and ways of God. Disappointing, in the highest degree, the doctrine preached by the Apostles must have been, to a people whose minds had been filled with the imaginations of the Rabbins; but not exceeding belief, merely on account of its opposition to their natural apprehensions.

Neither were those among whom the Gospel was first preached, at liberty to reject its doctrine, as being founded upon a new and unauthorized principle of interpretation. For the principle on which it proceeded was one, which is now, and always has been recognized among the Jews. It would be easy to show this, by citing instances where their writers explain the meaning of the several parts

of their Law, as typifying particular truths; and examples in abundance are produced by Schoettgen in his dissertation *De Hierosolyma Cœlesti*[1].

The source from which this part of Jewish theology took its rise, is in the Old Testament. When Moses was taken up into the Mount[2], the Jews believe that God then showed him[3] the "patterns" from which the form of the ark, and all the various things with which it was to be furnished, were to be severally copied. This is alluded to in the Epistle to the Hebrews[4], where St. Paul speaks of the law, as having only " the shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things." It was a well known tradition of the Jews, and the Apostle plainly assumes it, as a thing admitted and understood. The same allusion occurs in other places, where the writers of the New Testament speak of the " Jerusalem which is above;" the " heavenly Jerusalem;"—the " Jerusalem which is the mother of us all;" the "Jerusalem which now is," the " New Jerusalem;"—showing, by the way in which they use the words, that they were not proposing any new doctrine, but speaking of one which was familiarly known.

What I have just said will not only prove that the Jews, at the time when Christ came, were accustomed to the principle of interpretation asserted

[1] Vol. i. p. 1205. [2] Exod. xxiv. [3] Exod. xxvi. 30.
[4] Ch. ix. 23; x. 1.

by the Apostles, but will also explain what it was, which they understood by it. We are not, however, to suppose, that this principle was received only by individuals, or confined to the things, which related to the Temple. It was sanctioned by the whole body of their learned men, and adopted by them as the foundation of an entire system. Whether it should be called a theological or philosophical system, it may be difficult to say. Such as it is, however, it is not without merit as an ingenious hypothesis, though known by a name which has become a proverb of reproach among all other philosophers and theologians. The science I am speaking of, is the famous Cabbala of the Jews. I am not concerned with the conclusions of this science, about which I know little or nothing, but only with the principle, on which the science, whether wise or foolish, is built.

"When God created this lower world," says R. Simeon Ben Jochai (quoted by Schoettgen from the Zohar Exod. fol. 88. col. 360) "he created it according to the pattern of the world above, in order that this world might be the image of the world above; and his reason for so doing was, that the one world might be connected with the other." Assuming this as a fact, the more learned of the Jews have divided all human knowledge into two principal parts; of which the one is embodied in their Talmud, where men may learn the practical parts of divine truth; but for the truth itself, they must consult their

cabbalistical writers, by whom the original principles of all things are explained.

As I am now upon a subject in which it is easy to proceed beyond one's depth, I shall avail myself of the account given us by Reuchlin, of this part of the Jewish theology, in his treatise *De Arte Cabbalisticâ*, published by Galatinus, at the end of his work *De Arcanis*, printed 1561. We may find the same account in other writers who have treated of the subject; but Reuchlin drew his knowledge from the fountain-head, which few, except himself, would seem to have thought necessary. "*Quidquid*," he says, "*de Sacrâ Scripturâ homines optimarum artium amatores, scientiâ naturali addiscunt, auro bono par est et appellatur* OPUS DE BRESITH. *Quod vero scientiâ spirituali recipimus,* OPUS DE MERCHAVA *dicitur, et auro æquatur optimo et purissimo. Scribunt enim Cabbalistæ, quod* OPUS DE BRESITH *est sapientia naturæ;* OPUS DE MERCHAVA *est sapientia divinitatis. Et quoniam utraque scientia utcunque circa mundum et ea quæ consistunt in mundo, versatur; estque Talmudistarum et Cabbalistarum, ea in re, unanimis arbitratus, quod duo sunt mundi: primus, intellectualis, qui vocatur* עולם הבא, *id est, mundus ille futurus quoad nos; et secundus, sensibilis, qui dicitur* עולם הזה, *id est, mundus iste præsens, ut ex verbis sapientum nostrorum recepimus . . . Idcirco dividuntur Talmudici et Cabbalistæ, secedentes in duas facultates, tametsi ex creditis receptionibus ambæ similiter oriantur et emanent. Nam utrique majorum suorum traditionibus*

fidem habent, nulla ratione redditâ. Sed hac distinguuntur disputationis ordinatione, quod omne studium, omnem operam universamque mentis suæ intentionem, Cabbalista a mundo sensibili, finaliter ad mundum intellectualem, transfert et traducit. Talmudista, autem, in mundo sensibili permanet, ac animum universi hujus mundi non transcendit; quod si quando licenter ad Deum et beatos spiritus pergat, non tamen Deum ipsum ut immanentem et absolutum accedit, sed ut opificem causamque rerum et circa sua creata occupatum . . . . . Igitur altiore loco et digniore gradu habendi sunt Cabbalistæ. . . . ."

The above passages are put by Reuchlin into the mouth of R. Simeon, the disciple of R. Akibah, who lived in the beginning of the second century. The immediate disciples of the former are supposed to have compiled the Zohar, before quoted, about the year 170. It is to this book, that we owe much of the knowledge which we possess, concerning the opinions of the ancient Jewish Church, on a variety of interesting points. But with respect to the particular point, which it is my present object to prove, we have an older and still more unquestionably authentic authority, in the testimony of Philo, who was the contemporary of the Apostles. A large portion of his voluminous writings is entirely devoted to an exposition of the principle, just now stated; namely, that all the things, and even persons and facts, which are described in the Old Testament, are merely σύμβολα τῶν νοητῶν, as he expresses it;

the shadow of "the things unseen," representing, to our senses, truths that really exist only in the understanding.

It would be an endless task to shew this by an accumulation of passages from his writings; but I am tempted to produce one extract, as proving that the supposition of a spiritual meaning being couched under the literal sense of Scripture, was a received notion among the Jews: one so common as to have been abused in the hands of the vulgar, and on that account, calling down the censure of the wiser sort among them.

It seems that the practice of spiritualizing the Scriptures, had extended itself so far in his age, as to have led many to disregard the literal meaning altogether, and to neglect in consequence the practice of the law. This scandal Philo sharply censures; and his reproof is characteristic enough of the little reverence, which Philo himself entertained for the precepts themselves, the outward observance of which, he so strongly recommends. "Although," says he, "all mankind were to agree to call a sick man whole, or a whole man sick, their opinion would not alter the real state of the man. Yet people are not on that account to despise the good opinion of mankind, which deserves regard, as a thing very useful in this life; and which good opinion always attends those who, contented with things as they are, follow the customs and institutions of their fathers. There are some, who, believing that the

written law contains only figures of intelligible truths, study these last very carefully, but altogether neglect the written laws themselves. Now this," he argues, "might be very well, if men were intended to live in solitude; if they were not members of society; very well for men who were ignorant of houses and lands and the other conveniences of life, to follow truth, naked as she is in herself; but we must not forget, that the sacred Scriptures teach us, not to neglect the opinion of the world, and not to violate laws, which divine men, and better than we, have sanctioned." He then goes on to instance particulars. "The Sabbath," says he, "the feasts of the nation, the ceremonies of the holy temple, all these things will be neglected, if we attend only to the things signified by such ceremonies, and not to the things themselves. On the contrary, our duty is to regard the written law as the body; the other, that is, τὰ δι' ὑπονοιῶν δηλούμενα, as the soul; and to value the former accordingly, as being the house in which the latter resides. In this way," he tells us, "we shall more clearly understand the symbolical meaning, and at the same time escape much blame and ill-will." I have given only the substance of the passage, for the sake of brevity; but it may be found in the Treatise περὶ Ἀποικίας, at p. 450, Vol. II. Ed. Mangey.

Though Philo was a Jew by nation, yet his writings savour very strongly of the Academy, and very slightly of the Synagogue. His own belief, evidently

is altogether that of a professed philosopher; and there is good reason to doubt whether he considered Moses himself, as being much more. I do not remember that an allusion to the promise of a Messiah is to be found in any of his writings. He is called by Clemens of Alexandria, Philo the Pythagoræan; but what the object of his writings was,—whether to philosophize Judaism, or to judaize philosophy,—it may be difficult to determine. He seldom refers to the prophecies, and when he does, he speaks of the writers, not in the language one might expect from a Jew,—as of men inspired with a knowledge of events to come,—but as τὶς τῶν ἑταίρων Μωυσέως, or τὶς τοῦ προφητικοῦ θιασώτης χοροῦ. So also when he attempts to illustrate the meaning of Moses, by explaining the hidden signification of the outward rites and institutions of the Law,—it is to moral and philosophical truths, that he refers; and not to such truths as Reuchlin speaks of, as forming the subject of the Cabbala.

But we find no traces of Philo's opinions, or of that class of persons, to whom he refers in the extract just quoted, (so far at least as my own knowledge extends,) in any part of the ancient theology of the Jews. The modern school of Jewish theology has Maimonides for its author, who lived in the twelfth century. He has attempted to explain the more obscure parts of Scripture, by supposing such reasons as he could find for the different institutions of the Law; and his authority has been

quoted with more respect than it really deserves. As an exposition of Jewish theology, properly so called, it is worse than useless, as being founded upon principles, not drawn from any sources of tradition, but from Aristotle, or other authorities whom Hillel or Gamaliel, or the compilers of the Zohar or Mischna, would have repudiated with scorn. But there are no traces of any such philosophical spirit, in the writings which have come down to us from the ancient Jewish Church. The truths to which our attention is directed in the Zohar, and which are assumed to be concealed under the representation of visible actions, and sensible images, refer entirely to the revelations, which it was supposed would be openly made, in the times of the Messiah.

When the Talmudists spoke of the "heavenly Jerusalem," or of the "kingdom of heaven," or of "the world to come,"—they signified a state of things to be established on *earth:* they understood these words to express a *temporal* state. When the same words occur in the writings of St. Paul, or the Apostles, we are to understand by them a state of things, which has already commenced under Christ's Church; but the consummation of which, will be hereafter, at his second coming to judge the world. As the elucidation of this point is not important to the argument, it may be sufficient to refer the proof to Schoettgen, vol. 1. Dissert. v. De Hierosolyma Cœlesti, c. vi. and Witsius. Exercit. v. De Monte

Agar, §. 17, 18. and Exercit. v. Historia Hierosolymæ, §. 29. All that I am at present concerned to shew is, that in putting a spiritual sense upon the prophecies, the Apostles were not introducing any new maxims of interpretation; but were proceeding upon a principle, known familiarly to all the Jews; one fully recognized by the learned,—even by those among them who, like Philo, seem to have considered their Scriptures, not in the light of prophecies concerning things to come, but simply as monuments of a wisdom almost more than human; and under which certain divine truths were couched, not apparent to the apprehension of the vulgar. I am not examining, whether in adopting such a method of arriving at the true meaning of Scripture, the Apostles were right or wrong. I am only adverting to a fact, and saying that, whether reasonable or not, the principle itself was a recognized principle, to which individuals might not assent, but to which the Jews, as a body, were not at liberty to object.

It may seem strange, at first sight, that a mode of reasoning apparently so uncertain, on any supposition, and so totally inadmissible under ordinary circumstances, should yet, in the case of the Old Testament, have obtained, as we have seen, an almost unanimous consent. But we are not to judge the Old Testament, on the principles of philosophical criticism, as we should a work by Plato, or Cicero. It does not profess to be a treatise upon religion or

morality, but to be the depository of a communication from God to man; the means by which, in the process of ages, mankind were to be brought to the knowledge and belief of things, deeply concerning their happiness, and such as they could never learn except by revelation. This is not the sort of end which is proposed in other books; and, therefore, this book is not to be subjected to the same rules of comparison.

The end for which the Old Testament was written, made it necessary, not only that its true meaning should be concealed, but that the Jews should know it to be so; and be accustomed to regard their Scriptures not as men regard other books, but as a sort of mine, in which their learned men were to dig, night and day, for the treasures of hidden wisdom which they contained. It is easy to see how comparatively useless the Old Testament would have been to the Apostles, when reasoning with the Jews, concerning the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom, if the latter had never before heard of any except the strict literal interpretation. St. Paul's arguments, in such a case, would not have obtained a moment's attention, even from the lowest of the people. On the other hand, the many advantages which were derived from the prevalent habits of thinking among the Jews, as just now explained, and from the belief that all the parts of their temple service, and much of their history, and large portions of the writings of the prophets, were, as Philo expresses it, the mere

σύμβολα τῶν νοητων, and not the very things themselves, which were in the word of God,—narrowed the controversies between the Apostles and their adversaries, and brought it at once to an intelligible issue. The supposition of a hidden meaning being once admitted, the question, whether the truths preached by the former, were the very truths which God, according to the Jewish notion, had shown to Moses on the mount, was evidently one which only God could decide. It was not a matter of opinion, but turned upon the determination of a fact, the proof of which rested with the Apostles. They were not to allege God's decision, in a general way, but to demonstrate it, by some overt act of the divine interposition.

All this presupposed certain antecedent conclusions; and among the rest it presupposed an acknowledgment by the Jews, that their Scriptures were not to be interpreted, like any other book, and that the true sense of them, was a secret sense. We have seen, in the preceding Lecture, how important it was, that their knowledge of this fact should at the same time be carefully limited; so that the full meaning of their law might be kept back from their minds, until the time had arrived, when the great events on which the evidence of its revelation would depend, should be brought to pass. But how were these dissimilar and jarring ends to be obtained? We see what it was which the case required. It was some contrivance, by

which the true sense of the prophecies, (that "sealed document," to which I have more than once compared them,) was to be veiled from the sight of the Jews; but which, at the same time, involved another process, by means of which its general import, and various circumstantial particulars relating to it, should be disclosed.

We have before examined the first of these processes, when explaining the reasons on which the use of types was founded. And if we desire to understand the process by which a knowledge of the typical character of the Old Testament was made so evident to the Jews; and the causes of their implicit belief in the reality of the truths which it concealed, —we have only to remember the estimation in which the Jews held their Scripture, and reflect for a moment upon its contents. A moment's thought will show, that the doctrine of a concealed sense, was a necessary conclusion in their minds; it was scarcely possible for them to have regarded it as the inspired word of God, without, at the same time, attributing to it a meaning, beyond what was conveyed by the literal interpretation.

It is said in Ezekiel, that God had given the Jews "statutes which were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live;" that is,—as the Jews define the words "statutes" and "judgments," —had given them precepts, for some of which no reason whatever was assigned, and others, of which the reasons were given, but which possess no moral

excellence. It has been said, that the number of such precepts, which are found in the Old Testament, having been the cause of many Jews, in the twelfth century, falling away, some to Christianity, and others to Mahommedism, occasioned Maimonides to write his *More Nevochim;* in which he endeavours to find the reasons, on which every precept of the Law was severally grounded. But if I am not mistaken, we may find a much more satisfactory solution of those precepts than any which he produces, in the very absence of those reasons which Maimonides endeavours to find; for the impossibility of explaining many parts of the Old Testament, was the very means, by which the knowledge and belief of its typical character was obtained, and by which it has always been kept alive in the minds of his countrymen.

Human compositions may be without any meaning, as human actions or human laws may be without reason, or, at least, any adequate reason. But such a way of judging is not allowable in a case where we suppose a divine author. Whatever act or sentiment we attribute to God, must be supposed to have had, not only some reason, but some sufficient reason. And this every one does suppose when he is considering the works of God's visible creation. We cannot see the use of poisonous reptiles, of earthquakes, of so much sin and misery as fills the world; nevertheless we believe that a sufficient reason exists for all these things, though it

be concealed from our understanding. Just so it was that the Jews reasoned.

To whatever part of the Old Testament we turn our attention, we are continually met by passages, in which we are compelled to suppose a meaning beyond what the text, when literally explained, will supply. In the historical parts, for example, how many transactions are there, such as the Sacrifice of Isaac, the Confusion of tongues, the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil, which it is equally difficult to believe, or to refer to God's commands, without assuming reasons of some sort, whereof no hint is given to us in the Old Testament itself. If we turn to the Levitical law, the same conclusion is still more strongly forced upon our minds; and even in the prophecies, we at once perceive, that the world in which we live remaining what it is, the literal fulfilment of those passages which refer to the Messiah's kingdom would be impossible. Under these circumstances, the doctrine of types, that is, of a spiritual or symbolical interpretation, necessarily became, and always has continued, a part of the Jewish theology; and it arose out of the peculiar kind of difficulties with which their Scriptures abound.

I trust that the importance of the subjects discussed in the present and preceding Lectures will be considered as a sufficient excuse for the interruption which they have caused to the general argument. This we shall now resume. The point at which we

stopped was,—the antecedent proofs by which the belief of the leading doctrines of the Gospel were originally supported. I observed that these proofs did not necessarily appear to involve the abolition of the Mosaic Law; nor afford any direct evidence to show, that the future kingdom which the prophets had described in such sublime language, was the Christian Church;—a society, which, instead of exhibiting any outward and visible signs of that spiritual power and dominion which it soon afterwards obtained, was, in the time of the Apostles, maintaining a painful struggle for existence. It remains to consider the evidence by which the unequal struggle was sustained, and finally conducted to a successful issue, in the triumphant establishment of the authority of Christ over the minds and consciences of mankind.

LECTURE XIV.

THE PROOF BY WHICH THE ABROGATION OF THE MOSAIC COVENANT WAS DEMONSTRATED.

In the preceding remarks, I have had in view to explain the state of the question as between the Apostles and the Jews, at the period when the preaching of the Gospel was confined to Jerusalem and Judea. Our attention has been directed, not only to the proofs with which the Gospel was at that time provided, but also to the position in which the Apostles stood, in reference to the peculiar opinions and habits of thinking, in which both they and the people among whom they preached, had been educated.

But, to recur to a remark which I have more than once had occasion to make, a very slight inspection of the Old Testament will show, that the great and leading subject of the prophecies, was not the person

of the Messiah,—was not his sufferings or actions on earth, but the Kingdom which he was to establish. This was the burthen, in one shape or another, of almost all the predictions relating to that New Covenant of which Christ was to be the messenger; and may be said to constitute the Promise, on which the hopes of the Jewish people had so long been fixed.

Beyond all doubt, such was the view which the Jews had been accustomed to take of the question. When their minds adverted to the fulfilment of the Scriptures, it was on the fancied glories and felicities of that more than golden age, that their thoughts were wont to fix. We have seen in the preceding Lecture the particular blessings which they had been looking forward to, under that "new heaven and new earth" that was to be revealed. And it must be allowed, that it would not be enough to say of the event, that it has not fulfilled their expectations;—it has contradicted them in a manner the most pointed, and, in some respects, even the most humiliating. Notwithstanding, therefore, the extraordinary character of the great facts, on which the Apostles rested their proof of Jesus being the predicted Messiah, yet I do not think that a knowledge of human nature will warrant us in feeling much surprise, at his pretensions having been rejected by a majority of the nation. In comparison with the notions which the Jews had formed of the

meaning of the Promise made to mankind, the Christian interpretation—high and mysterious as the doctrines involved in it may be—would seem, as has been observed, to be infinitely sober and probable. But such was not, and was not likely to be, the opinion of the Jews; nor indeed, if we attend closely to the terms of the question, am I prepared to say that the evidence was such, at this stage of the proof, as necessarily to compel the full assent of the understanding. There was left a wide ground for doubt and conjecture, and wonder, even in the view of many, who may be supposed to have embraced the Gospel.

If the principle of interpretation, by which the Apostles explained the meaning of the prophecies, was admitted, one thing was clear; namely, that the Promise made to mankind had not been fulfilled, and would not be fulfilled, according to the sense, on which the Jews had built their expectations. But neither had it been fulfilled at that time, according to the sense which the Christians contended for. The nations of the earth still walked in the valley of the shadow of death; their idols of silver and gold were still seen on the hills, and in every high place. Kings and princes had not become the nursing fathers of Christ's Church, neither had the nations flowed into it. The knowledge of the Lord, instead of covering the earth as the waters cover the sea, was still confined to his chosen people—upon them

only had the light shined:—If then the "times" of the Messiah had come, where were the signs of his appearing?

If it was true that Jesus had risen from the dead, and that many wonderful works had shewn themselves forth in his name; and if it was the design of God to exalt this name above every name, and to make it one, at which every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth,—this would, perhaps, afford an interpretation of the prophecies consistent with what God had really promised, though not with the construction put upon them by the Jews. When such a design should have been visibly accomplished, then it would be plain that the latter had mistaken the mind of God. But the question was one of fact, relating to the meaning of prophecy, and which could be determined only by the event.

In the meanwhile, abundant room was afforded for conjecture and opinion. For so long as the Jewish dispensation was standing, and heathenism continued to be the predominant religion of the world, and all things else the same, to outward appearance, as before the preaching of the Gospel, the question, Who Jesus was, and what the end of his coming? would seem, in any view of it, to have remained open. However strong the reasons may have been, for the belief which the Apostles and their immediate followers entertained, yet, at least, the door was not shut upon the contrary belief. Jesus Christ might be the true

Messiah; but it was not his coming into the world which was sufficient to fulfil the prophecies, either in the Jewish sense or in any other. This was an indispensable condition of that fulfilment, and an essential part of the scheme, which it was his object to complete; nevertheless, until Christianity was established, or at least, until its future triumph had become a probable event in the eyes of mankind, the proof of its divine authority could not be *demonstrated:* speaking as a Jew, whether Jesus of Nazareth were that prophet who was to come, or whether mankind were to seek another, was a point which still remained to be conclusively determined.

But according to this way of reasoning, it will perhaps be thought, that the demonstration of the truth of revelation would not have been possible. If the establishment of Christianity presupposed the antecedent fulfilment of certain stated prophecies; and the fulfilment of those prophecies, on the other hand, presupposed the antecedent establishment of Christianity—the case was brought to a stand-still. It was reduced to a dilemma, from which there was no way of escape, except on the illogical, or worse than illogical hypothesis, of the establishment of Christianity in the world having preceded the evidence, on which its proof depended.

No doubt, if the divine authority of Christianity had been a metaphysical truth, the difficulty as here stated, would have been insuperable. But I need hardly say that such is not the case. In the affairs

of life, mankind constantly believe, from probable evidence only, that particular events will come to pass, and act on the confidence of their doing so. It is the same even in science. Philosophers sometimes believe things to be true, before they know them to be facts. If we take the law of gravitation for granted, and apply it to the condition of our planet in the solar system, it would appear from mathematical reasoning, that the earth, instead of being an exact sphere, must be flattened towards the poles; and that its polar diameter ought to be shorter than the other by about thirty miles. It is now ascertained that the fact corresponds with this conclusion; but the latter was believed by philosophers, before its truth had been verified by actual observation.

At the period of which I am now speaking, it was just the same in the case of Christianity. A large number of persons, both in Judea and elsewhere, by comparing the events related in the New Testament with a variety of prophecies contained in the Old, had come to the conclusion, that the long-expected time had arrived, when the Jewish covenant was to be done away, and a new and more perfect covenant to be substituted, agreeably to God's promise, in its place. This was a matter of doubt, and conjecture, and controversy, if we please; and as such, it would be believed by some and rejected by others; and the partisans of either belief would hold their respective opinions, some with more and some with

less confidence. But it is evident that, so long as the Jewish polity and institutions continued to subsist, the question was necessarily surrounded with much difficulty. Assuming the divine authority of the Gospel, its establishment among mankind, jointly with the establishment of the Jewish law, must have seemed to involve a contradiction. On such a supposition, it must have been clear that the divine obligation of the latter was at an end. But by what demonstrative argument was it possible to show this, so long as the Temple of Jerusalem was standing, and could number among its worshippers, not only a majority of the inhabitants of Judea, but thousands and hundreds of thousands, "out of every nation under heaven?"

If we examine the Epistles of St. Paul, or even the Acts of the Apostles, it will at once appear how important a place this controversy occupied, in the estimation of all parties, at the time to which I am now referring. The obligation of the Jewish law was the question debated in the first council that was held in the Church. That and the calling of the Gentiles (which in fact are one and the same question) constitute the entire subject of the three most elaborate Epistles of St. Paul, and are emphatically alluded to in most of the others. It was a subject of debate, and even of angry discussion, not only among the brethren in general, but for a time even among the Apostles themselves. Some appear to have supposed that the Jewish law was still binding

upon the consciences of those who had received circumcision; others, that it was only expedient; others, that it was indifferent. But St. Paul maintained, and at length united the suffrages of all the Apostles in his opinion, that it was absolutely unlawful. It was keeping up that partition-wall, which it was the very object of the Gospel to break down; and threw a doubt upon the revelation of that great mystery, which had been hidden, as St. Paul says of the calling of the Gentiles, from the foundation of the world. Practically, it was a denial of the fulfilment in Jesus Christ, of the Promise made to mankind from the beginning,—an evident countenancing of the Jews, in their rejection of him as the Saviour.

These, however, and similar arguments, were reasons, but not proofs; at least, not demonstrative proofs. They did not carry conviction even to the minds of many who professed to be converts to the Gospel. Of course they would not silence the objections of opponents; and on any supposition, the burthen of proof rested clearly with the former. If, as they asserted, the Jewish law was done away, it was a fact of which there was no visible sign; and one, which it was almost impossible to determine, on speculative grounds of reasoning.

But the period was approaching, when such arguments would no longer be required. A proof of a totally different kind was then in preparation; by which the cessation of the Mosaic dispensation, supposing the institution of it to have been from

God, would seem to have been as clearly pronounced as if it had been abrogated in words. The proof to which I am now alluding was the destruction of Jerusalem.

In order to understand the important bearing of this event upon the point before us, it will be necessary to remember, that the Temple of Jerusalem among the Jews, was not like the temple of Apollo at Delos, or of Diana at Ephesus, among the heathens :—merely one of many celebrated temples, in which worshippers assembled ;—but it was the only temple belonging to the nation. Though the Jews, at that time, were dispersed in vast numbers throughout the world, and had synagogues, where they met together for the purpose of religious instruction, in almost every city,—yet they were not permitted to perform any of the rites of public worship; that is, they were not allowed to offer up any sacrifices nor to build any altar, except at Jerusalem. There alone the priests could officiate, or the Levites perform the duties of their daily ministration. There it was that the three great Feasts, of the Passover, and of the Pentecost, and of the Tabernacles, were to be solemnized; and every male was commanded to attend annually at each of these solemnities, however distant his abode might be, or whatever the difficulties of the journey.

It plainly appears, therefore, that after the destruction of the city and temple by Titus, the observance of all that part of the law, which re-

garded the national worship, became, and has ever since continued to be, impossible. By forbidding any oblation or any offering for sin to be made except in the place where the ark of the covenant was deposited, the religion of the Jews was, as it were, nailed down to one spot; and its temporary character also, considering what the history of the world has been, had been no less distinctly signified. Supposing a declaration to this effect to have been intended by God, his meaning could hardly have been more clearly pronounced.

Taking then the terms of the Jewish Law into the account; and considering, at the same time, the extraordinary character of the events, out of which the question about its further obligation had arisen—it would seem, that the naked fact of the destruction of the city and temple of the Jews, and the total desolation of their nation, happening at such a juncture,—must have been more than a mere presumptive proof of its having been put an end to by divine authority, in the minds of persons who, as in the case before us, had before agreed in ascribing its origin to God. If, however, we suppose them to have believed, that the dissolution of the Jewish polity was a providential event,—the effect of a decree, which had gone forth at the very time when this polity was established,—the conclusion would be demonstrative. People might have shut their eyes to the evidence on which such a supposition was based, but, if they

believed the premises, to deny the inference was impossible.

So far then as concerns that part of the question, which related simply to the continued obligation to observe the Jewish Law, nothing can be more plain, than that the position of the argument became entirely changed, after the overthrow of the nation. The case of Christianity was not merely improved, but it stood upon different ground. Even if there was nothing more to be said, except the fact, that the rise of the Christian religion in the world was coincident, both in time and place, with the fall of the Jewish,—yet would this alone, in the minds of persons believing that the things related by the Apostles had really happened, have been regarded as a divine testimony, in favour of the doctrines which they taught.

But however confident their belief might have been under such circumstances, yet would it be immeasurably strengthened, if we suppose the events in question, not only to have been joined together in the course of God's Providence, but to have been connected with each other in the same general scheme of prophecy:—to have been spoken of, as one and the same event, in particular predictions; and to have been so apprehended, in the distinct expectation of thousands and tens of thousands, at a time when the religion of the Jews was yet in all its splendour, and before the name of Christianity was known.

The proof of this proposition is the point which we have now to examine. I am to shew, not that the rise of the Christian, and the fall of the Jewish religion, were merely contemporaneous events; not, that the one event merely presupposed the other, or might be inferred from a comparison of the dispensations with each other; but that they were expressly joined together in the scheme of prophecy; that the connection between them was the subject of positive revelation,—the proof of which, after the destruction of Jerusalem, was a matter of fact, superseding all merely general grounds of reasoning, and absorbing for ever all minor questions and circumstantial disputes.

I am not able to point out any passage of the New Testament, from which it can be shewn, that this event, at the time when it happened, was expected either by Jews or Christians. But since it came to pass, its miraculous character has never been called in question by either party. Both Jews and Christians have ever considered it as the fulfilment of prophecies, which were well known to both. The only difference of opinion has been, as to the meaning and design of God. That it was his immediate act, has never, I believe, from the time when it happened to the present, been made a question by any believer in the Old Testament.

There are many passages in the sacred writings, in which allusion is made to the days when God would make a revelation to mankind, of a better and more

spiritual law, than that which he gave the Jews at Mount Sinai. And the terms in which the promise is expressed, convey most clearly a supposition of the future abrogation of that covenant. It answered the purposes of Maimonides to call this last opinion into question; but I believe he was the first Jew who did so; and his reasoning has been strongly condemned by some of his own nation, as contrary both to Scripture and tradition. That it is contrary to the former, may easily be demonstrated by any one, who will take the trouble to examine the several places in the Old Testament, in which the future revelation is described. And that it is contrary to the latter, is a point of fact, admitting of easy proof, by any one who will take the trouble to consult the earlier writings of the Jews.

But the case requires no testimony from tradition. The temporary character of the Jewish Law, as I before observed, is a part of the hypothesis on which it was framed. It could not have been intended by God to answer any thing more than some intermediate purpose. The total silence which it maintains as to doctrine; (for the unity of God, if made known by revelation, was not first communicated to the Jews by Moses;) its incompleteness, as a code of morals; the exclusion from its communion, of all nations except the descendants of Abraham, sufficiently indicate so much. But putting aside all considerations of this kind,—the circumstance before adverted to, that the continuance of the Jewish Law

was made impossible, except on a supposition of the continuance of the Jewish nation in Judea, and of the maintenance of the Temple at Jerusalem, is plainly inconsistent with a belief in its intended perpetual obligation. For such an opinion must presuppose that the city and temple of the Jews, instead of being destined to destruction, were to be miraculously preserved.

But it is not necessary to shew the temporary character of the Mosaic dispensation, either by internal or external proofs. It was so declared from the beginning, on an authority which those, who were the subjects of that dispensation, could not doubt. For the very person to whom the declaration of the Law was committed, announced at the same time, that it would come to an end. Viewed simply as a prophecy, there is perhaps not one in the whole volume of the Old Testament, so remarkable in itself, and in the exactness with which it has been fulfilled, as the prediction by Moses, of the final destruction of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jews, contained in the twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy. As the line of our present argument does not require me to demonstrate the truth of the prophecies, but only to shew the place which this evidence held in the minds of men, at the time when Christianity was first preached, I shall not dwell upon the particular contents of this remarkable passage of Scripture; but only observe generally, that in every way, it is worthy of attention. Its

pathos and sublimity place it in a high rank, when viewed simply as a composition; and if considered as a prophecy, its claim to our attention is of a far higher kind. We are, however, now considering, not the divine inspiration of this important prophecy, but the place at which it enters into the Evidences of Christianity, with a view to understand the relative position of the argument before and after the destruction of Jerusalem.

In the stage of it at which we are now arrived, the proof depended upon the evidence to shew, that the obligation to observe the Mosaic Law had ceased. No Jew who admitted so much, would hesitate to accept the interpretation put upon the Old Testament by the Apostles. I shall not stop to shew this by quotations from the Epistles; every one who is familiar with those of St. Paul, must be aware that the renunciation of all righteousness by the Law, is the leading doctrine of them all.

Now, by what evidence was he able to demonstrate this? It was not a proposition of which a Jew would be convinced by any general reasoning; and the utmost which could be effected from a consideration of the types and prophecies, was to shew, that the Law would thereafter cease. But the Apostles affirmed, that sacrifices under the Law actually were abolished: that mankind were freed, both from them and from all the other ordinances of Moses. This was a necessary consequence of the doctrines which they preached. But admitting it to be true, by what evi-

dence could it be proved? It might be a probable opinion; and as such, it was embraced by the majority of the disciples. But it was not embraced even by the whole of them; and, after all, it was only an opinion; it did not, like the doctrine of Christ's divinity, or atonement, rest at this period upon any evidence of facts. Even if the Apostles were right, yet as things then were, the actual knowledge of its truth was confined to God. So long as Jerusalem was standing, and the people allowed to dwell in their own land; so long as their temple was upheld in all its magnificence, and sacrifices daily offered upon its altars; and all things, to use the words of the Jews, as quoted by St. Peter, in reference to this very argument, "continued the same as they were from the beginning of the creation,"—the doctrine preached by the Apostles on this point, not only must have seemed to be, but really was, a bold deduction from the premises, even assuming those premises to be true. The data were not demonstrative. The efficacy of the law of works might have ceased; but so long as worship was paid to God at Jerusalem, and all the ceremonial rites enjoined by Moses, punctually performed, the fact was incapable of proof. It was among the secret things which could be known only to God. Nor unless it pleased him to determine the question, by some miraculous intimation of his will, is it easy to see in what way the controversy was ever to have been decided. For there was no human authority by

which it could be determined; nor any testimony, except God's, from which there would be no appeal.

Under these circumstances, and in the very height of the argument—at a time when we may suppose men's minds to have been distracted by contending opinions, and when doubts and difficulties must have perplexed the understanding even of the wisest—such, was the moment fixed upon by God for ending the controversy. And how was this testimony pronounced? It was in a way not to be mistaken. Suddenly Jerusalem was encompassed with armies—siege was laid to the city,—the temple was destroyed—and the whole nation was scattered as with a whirlwind, through every region of the earth. If all parties, on both sides of the question, had agreed to refer the controversy to the divine arbitrement, and had consulted together, as to what proof they would mutually abide by—it may justly be doubted, whether they could have fixed upon a testimony so unambiguous in itself, or so exactly applicable to the particular point, which was to be determined.

I shall not stop to weigh the force of this testimony. We know that the Jews in general did not receive it. They renounced not one jot of their hopes; they abated none of their pretensions. They continued to assert the obligation of the Law of Moses; and rejected more strenuously than ever the divine authority of the Gospel. We are not called upon to account for their conduct at this particular juncture. It may have been the natural result of

those habits of thinking which had been so deeply rooted in their minds, respecting the future exaltation of their own nation;—or it may have been, as the language of prophecy will fully warrant us in believing, the effect of a judicial blindness. It is enough, that we have only to read Josephus, in order to be abundantly satisfied that sense, and reason, and deliberation, had no share in any of their actions at this period.

Be this, however, as it may; our business is only with facts, and with the reasoning immediately built upon them.

Admitting, then, that the destruction of Jerusalem afforded evidence to prove the abolition of the Mosaic covenant,—yet it may be said, that this fact alone did not necessarily demonstrate the divine authority of the Christian—To us, in the present day, it should certainly seem that this acknowledgment would have followed as a necessary consequence. Nevertheless, as, in the absence of all other evidence, it was not a strict logical inference, except in the minds of those who had witnessed, or otherwise knew and believed, the miracles of Christ, and the various events connected with his life and ministry on earth;—I shall now proceed to show, from the other circumstances of the case, that this same event afforded, not only a demonstration of the Jewish covenant having been abolished, but was so plain a testimony to the truth of Christ's pretensions, as no argument from reason could have supplied.

LECTURE XV.

THE PROOF BY WHICH THE INSTITUTION OF THE GOSPEL COVENANT WAS DEMONSTRATED.—(CONCLUSION.)

We have seen, that the Jewish Law, of necessity, ceased with the city and polity of the Jews. This last expired, not by slow declension, but came to a violent termination. Even had the destruction of Jerusalem been a casual event, unconnected with any assigned and foreknown intention of God, it would still have put a period to the Mosaic covenant; for thenceforth its observance became impossible. But as the sudden overthrow of the Jewish state was foretold by its Founder, at the very time when the covenant was proclaimed, we are obliged to consider the abolition of the Law, which was a necessary consequence, as having been from the first included in the same divine scheme; and cannot look upon one as being the act of God, without regarding

the other as being his act likewise. But did this supposition necessarily involve an acknowledgment of the divine authority of the Christian covenant? The two things are easily separated in idea; if there was any indissoluble connection between them in God's dispensations, it must be demonstrated, not by reasoning, but by the words of revelation.

This point we shall now proceed to examine; and I shall endeavour to shew, from the prophecies, that the same miraculous event, by which the termination of the Mosaic dispensation was to be made known to mankind, was also the stated signal, by which the commencement of the Christian was to be proclaimed.

The Jews tell us that after the fall of the city, R. Jose exclaimed, "Alas! the times of the Messiah are past!" By the "times of the Messiah" was understood the calculated period, after which all hope of his coming, according to the Promise, would be at an end. And so clearly is this period, by the confession of the Jews themselves, now passed by, that an anathema is pronounced in the Talmud upon any one, by whom, for the future, the times shall be computed. Indeed, some of their Rabbins affirm that the Messiah is come, but has not been revealed to the Jews, in consequence of the impenitence of the people.

On examining this computation, the passages of Scripture, from which the Jews deduced their calculations, appear to have been not more than four, viz.

Genesis xlix. 10; Haggai ii. 7, 8, 9; Malachi iii. 1; and Daniel ix. 24, 25, 26, 27. I shall reserve the prophecy of Daniel for a more detailed examination; but with respect to the others, every one of which is distinctly referred to the time of the Messiah's advent by the Targums, we may observe that they intimate no fixed positive date, but only define the period beyond which he was not to be expected. "He was to come suddenly to his temple;" and in consequence of his personal presence, the "glory" of this "latter house" was to be greater than the "glory of the former," and the time of his coming was to be while the city and state of the Jews were subsisting.

These marks, it may be remarked, are negative and not affirmative; they do not fix upon the time when the "Desire of all nations" was to appear; but only limit the epoch, beyond which, this hope was not to extend. Whenever the second temple should cease to exist; or whenever "the sceptre should depart from Judah," and "the lawgiver from between his feet,"—that is, when the Jews should cease to exist as the subjects of a separate state, living under their own laws and institutions, the "times" of the Messiah's coming, as limited by these prophecies, would be at an end. One point, however, is very distinctly and affirmatively foreshewn: which is, the dependence of this event upon the existence of the state, and city, and temple of the Jews. In each of the above predictions, the calculation is pinned upon one or

other of these; and when they had come to an end, all future hope of the Messiah's advent was demonstrably excluded.

It is plain, however, that at the time when the New Testament was written, no argument could be based upon any of the above passages. The second temple lasted about five hundred years; but, for any thing which could have been proved from them, it might have lasted a thousand years longer. Nevertheless, it is clearly intimated in various places of the New Testament, that the Jews, at that time, believed the period to have arrived, or to be nearly approaching, when the Messiah would appear. False Christs had already arisen; and from this date, as we learn in Josephus, the public mind was kept in a state of perpetual disquiet, owing to daily rumours, and successive attempts at imposition. I shall, in another place, have occasion to show that the popular excitement was not confined to Judea, or to the Jews; but at present our business is with them.

The question is, from what passage of Scripture was this belief and eager expectation derived? Now, the answer to this question is not difficult; for there is only one passage in the whole volume of the Old Testament, from which any conjecture as to the actual period when the Messiah was to come, could possibly have been formed. In that passage, the coming of the Messiah, and the destruction of Jerusalem, are spoken of as if they were parts of one and the same

event; and the generation of mankind, in which they would come to pass, is as clearly defined, as if the prophet had been speaking of a past occurrence, instead of one which belonged to posterity.

The prophecy to which I am now alluding, is to be found in the ninth chapter of Daniel, and is well known as the vision "of the seventy weeks." The prediction which it contains is so remarkable in itself; it bears so immediately upon the point I am now more particularly adverting to; and affords so clear a testimony to the inspiration of the Old Testament, as well as to the divine authority of the New, that I shall make no apology for dwelling upon it, at greater length than I have deemed necessary, in the case of the other prophecies, which have fallen under our consideration.

I need hardly say, that no doubt exists, as to the authenticity of the book of Daniel, or as to the age in which he lived. There is demonstrable evidence to prove, that it was composed many ages before Christ was born; and that it was inserted in the canon by the Jews, who lived immediately after the captivity. Josephus observes, that Daniel was to be considered as among the greatest of all the prophets, inasmuch as not only did he foretell things to come, as other prophets also had done, but also the exact time of their happening. When Limborch, in his *Amica Collatio*, asks Orobio to state his reason for believing in the divine authority of Moses, at the same time that he rejects the authority of Christ: the answer

is, that Daniel, who was beyond all doubt and contestation divinely inspired, has given his testimony to Moses. I quote this, to shew the sort of exclusive esteem in which this prophet continues to be held among the Jews; the ground of which, however, it will be difficult to explain, except we suppose it to be the opinion entertained by them of the particular prophecy now before us.

It is plain that the part of it, to which Josephus is immediately adverting, must be that, where Daniel foretels the period when the "people of the Prince that was to come, would destroy the city and the sanctuary." For although there are some other very remarkable predictions in this book (to one of which Josephus refers) yet this is the only one in which the *time* is specified. I am not aware of any probable objections or difficulties, as connected with this celebrated prophecy. The only reason for questioning its prophetical character, is that which Cicero alleges, in refutation of some Sibylline oracles—that the writer, when he delivered it, was in perfect possession of his mind: "*hoc scriptoris est, non furentis; adhibentis diligentiam, non insani.*" This objection, as we read in St. Jerome, was dwelt upon by Porphyry; but it may be summarily dismissed by observing, that be the writer who he may, or what he may, he lived some hundred years before the events which he predicted, came to pass. The destruction of Jerusalem (to refer to some former remarks) was not a prediction, which needed to be expressed darkly or under

figurative allusions, lest men should combine to defeat or to bring about its fulfilment. It belonged to a class of events, which it was far beyond the power of individuals, either to cause or prevent.

Omitting, then, all merely critical questions, and confining our remark to the contents of Daniel's prophecy, it may be proper to premise that the word "week," which so often occurs in it, is not limited in Scripture language to the numeration of days, but is frequently employed in the Old Testament as a reckoning of years. Thus in Leviticus[1], speaking of the Jubilee, Moses says, "And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years." —And again, in Numbers[2], "After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities." The same way of speaking is used by Ezekiel[3]: "And thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year." This form of expression does not appear to have been confined to the Jews. Varro tells us (quoted by Aulus Gellius, III. c. 10.), that at the time when he was then writing, he had "entered the twelfth week of his life:" "*se jam duodecim annorum hebdomadam ingressum esse.*" Another passage to the same effect, which has been quoted by commentators, is found in Macrobius,—"*Sed a sexta usque ad septimam septimanam, fit quidem diminutio, sed occulta:*

[1] Ch. xxv. 8. [2] Ch. xiv. 34. [3] Ch. iv. 6.

—*ideo nonnullarum republicarum hic mos est, ut post sextam, ad militiam nemo rogatur.*"

Come we now to the passage from Daniel[1]: "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy. Know, therefore, and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem, unto the Messiah the Prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate."

Now I shall not stop to inquire whether the writings of Daniel ought to be ranked among the prophecies of the Old Testament, or only among

[1] Ch. ix. 24—27.

the Hagiographa. It is certain, that the above words were written many years before Christ came into the world; and that they were considered by the Jews of that age (as is evident from Josephus, and indeed from the narrative of the events themselves, which caused the rebellion of the nation), to contain a prediction of the period, at which their Messiah ought to be expected.

Another point not less indisputable is, that this prophecy does not, like those before adverted to, merely limit this expectation; it distinctly intimates the exact age in which it was to receive its fulfilment. It moreover marks the age in which the promised Messiah was to appear, not only by numbering the intervening years, but by the stipulation of an accessary event, which no human wisdom could have foreseen; and both these things it does, in language so clear and unambiguous, as to prevent the possibility of a dispute, as to the meaning of the prophecy.

A stated historical fact is specified; four hundred and ninety years after it, the Messiah was to appear; and at this time the oblation and the sacrifice were to cease, by the destruction of the city and the sanctuary; and this was to happen by war. Moreover, another fact is stated, about the meaning of which there could be no dispute; and this was, that the Messiah was to suffer death. Neither respecting this point, nor the name of the city and temple, of which these things were predicted, could there have been, at the time when Jerusalem was de-

stroyed, any possible controversy, either among Jews or Christians; nor (supposing them to have had this prophecy in their hands) even among heathens. It was a plain legible record, and clear of any obscurity as to its construction. The debateable part of the document relates to the name and identity of the person, whom the author of it intended to signify, under the title of "Messiah the Prince." Admitting the truth of all that the Apostles had related of Jesus Christ, and even supposing the facts themselves to have been generally believed, yet it was still open to discuss—who Jesus Christ was, and whether he was "that prophet that should come into the world?" The miracles attributed to Christ will explain the reason of this question having been raised among the Jews and eagerly debated; but the determination of it, depended upon the proofs adduced to show, that not only this, but all the other various marks which had been mentioned, and by which the Messiah, when he came, was more especially to be known, had likewise been fulfilled.

With respect to these marks, this prophecy of Daniel would seem to be the least ambiguous of any in the Old Testament; yet none has given rise to a greater variety of opinions. The cause of this has evidently been an endeavour, on the part of commentators, to assign a more punctual and curious fulfilment to the prophecy, than we can reasonably suppose to have been in the contemplation of God.

Assuming the prophecies of the Old Testament to

have been written under the divine inspiration, it is not to be thought, that the object of them was merely to demonstrate to mankind, God's knowledge of future events. Some other and higher end than this must be presumed, if we suppose him to be their author. We know that the general design of God's disclosures to the Jews, looked to a more specific revelation of himself than this; and we may be equally sure, that in predicting any particular event connected with his Promise, the end immediately in view must have been some purpose, which made it necessary for mankind to be informed of the generation in which it was to happen; and not merely to excite wonder, by an exact and curious coincidence, between the words of prophecy and any nice chronological accuracy of calculation.

Had the Jews known beforehand the very month or year in which the Messiah was to be "cut off," nothing short of an almost miraculous interposition of Providence could have constrained them, as was before observed, to be themselves the instruments of bringing that event to pass. Such a knowledge on their part would plainly have been rather a hindrance to the design of God, than a help to its fulfilment. The end for which the prophecy was intended required only two things:—1st, that the coming of the Messiah should be preceded by a knowledge of his near approach, antecedently to his actual appearance; and 2ndly, that after receiving its fulfilment, the fact should be capable of proof. In the present

instance, we know from history, that the first of these objects was certainly obtained. The Messiah was confessedly expected, at the time when Jesus Christ appeared. And with respect to the second, we shall see that this was abundantly provided for. In truth, if we carry along with us, when examining this prophecy, a recollection of what was just now said about the end, which it is to be presumed was in the view of God, when this remarkable vision was communicated to Daniel—we can hardly fail to be struck with the more than wisdom,—I had almost called it the ingenuity,—by which the means for effecting that precise end were preconcerted.

Before the prophecy had received its fulfilment, it was impossible for those whom it concerned, to pitch upon any definite point of time, on which to fix their expectation. For although the number of weeks was definite, yet the period from which they were to be calculated was not definite. Four decrees are named in Scripture, as having gone out for the restoration of the Temple. The interval between the first and the last of these is upwards of eighty years. But it was not until after the death of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem, that the epoch contemplated in the prophecy could be ascertained. From the moment, however, the city was destroyed, all doubts were at an end. By counting backward, the period from which the weeks were to be computed was made known, and the truth of the prophecy was placed beyond dispute. Anterior to this,

nothing more was revealed, except the near approach of the Messiah.

There is also another circumstance important to remark,—which is, the notation of time here adopted. A common form of computation in Scripture is by generations. "In the fourth generation," says God to Abraham, "thy children shall come hither again[1];" and in addressing the Jews, whether by way of threats or promises, it is often under the appellation, of a stubborn and rebellious, or of a pure and upright generation, that they are described. By this term were designated all who were living in the world at any fixed period; and the words of the Psalmist would give us to understand that the space of time implied was "threescore years and ten, or fourscore years," which he tells us were the allotted years of man upon earth.

Now though the form of expression is changed, yet the same measure of time is adopted in the prophecy before us. "Seventy weeks of years," says Daniel, "are determined upon thy people, and upon thy holy city;" that is, seven times seventy years, or seven generations. Moreover, the period of these generations is not divided into astronomical portions of time, but is computed by hebdomads, or "weeks." In calculating the several events foretold, it is therefore not the "year" which we are to look to, but the hebdomad. When it is said that such a fact happened in a certain year, we do not

[1] Gen. xv. 16.

mean that it occurred in the last month of that year, but in any. So also in the interpretation of this prophecy of Daniel,—the point to ascertain is, simply in what week of the assigned generation, the several particulars which he enumerates occurred, and not in what year of that week, whether it be in the first, or second, or third. It will be important, on many accounts, to remember this remark, when examining the passage before us; but especially because there is some uncertainty in the chronology of the events referred to. I do not mean that we are in danger of committing any wide error, in fixing the year in which Cyrus became master of Babylon, or in determining the name of the year before Christ, which answers to the 7th or the 20th of the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus; but we do not find that learned men are exactly agreed in their calculations. Another source of inexactitude is, that the length of the Chaldean year does not precisely agree with that of the Julian; sixty-nine years of the latter being equal to seventy of the former: a difference which, if not rectified from time to time, in ten generations would have amounted to as many years.

These variations would be important in settling a point in chronology; but they are quite immaterial in the case before us. It was as impossible for Daniel to know, without the help of divine inspiration, that God would destroy Jerusalem in the last seven years of the eighth generation from the time in which he lived, as to know the day, or month, or

hour, of that event. And if in consequence of his prediction, those who lived in that generation were in expectation of the events coming to pass, which did come to pass—there could have been no room, in such a case, for any reasonable doubt, either as to the miraculous character of those events, or the divine inspiration by which they had been foretold.

Bearing these things in mind, let us then take the prophecy in our hands, and see what it contains. And first, for the period or periods from which the several computations are to be made: The words are, "from the going forth of the commandment to restore Jerusalem." Now there were four decrees to this effect, of which three are mentioned by Ezra, and the last by Nehemiah. The first was by Cyrus, about the year 536 before Christ. The second by Darius Hystaspes, about the year 519 B. C. The third, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes Longimanus, 457 B. C. The fourth, thirteen years later, in the twentieth of Artaxerxes, 444 B. C. If we turn to Daniel, we shall also see that the several periods to be counted, are seventy weeks; sixty-nine weeks; sixty-two weeks; seven weeks; one week; and a half week. The number of years which these several periods contain, is easily reckoned; but I purposely omit any such computation, because the subject of the prophecy, as I have observed, is the number of weeks that would make up the intervening generations, and not the number of years.

Taking the chronology of our Bibles, (and that of any other system will equally answer the purpose,

according to the latitude of calculation, which the prophecy, as just now explained, admits of,) and comparing these dates with the several events—1. of the birth of Christ;—2. the first preaching of the Gospel, under John the Baptist;—3. the death of Christ;—4. the destruction of Jerusalem;—5. the duration of the siege;—6. the length of Christ's ministry from his baptism to his death—we shall find the results to be quite incapable of any explanation, except on the hypothesis of a divine inspiration. From the seventh of Artaxerxes to the death of Christ, are exactly seventy hebdomads complete. From the same epoch to the commencement of John's ministry, are exactly sixty-nine hebdomads. Counting from the end of the hebdomad in which the twentieth of Artaxerxes is fixed by our chronology, to the middle of the hebdomad in which Christ was born, is exactly sixty-two weeks. From the first preaching of the Gospel by St. John, ("the law and the prophets were till John, but now the kingdom of God is preached,") until the end of Christ's ministry, was one hebdomad. From the coming of Christ, that is, from the first preaching of the Gospel, to the destruction of Jerusalem, are seven hebdomads; and this event happened exactly at the end of the first half of the seventh hebdomad, when "the sacrifice and oblation" *visibly* ceased. Or if we interpret these words as referring to the death of Christ, when they *really* ceased, then they were fulfilled in the last half of the first of the seven hebdomads, when the three years and a half of Christ's ministry was concluded. Our

translation says, in "the *midst* of the week,"—but the Hebrew word וחצי *vachatsi*, means not the "middle," but the "half,"—*dimidium hebdomadæ* is the translation in Houbigant's edition of the Hebrew Bible[1].

Now if a person should say, that the coincidences here pointed out happened only by chance, it would, I think, be a sufficient reply, that it is not in the power of any arithmetical notation, to express in numbers, the amount of the improbability represented by the agreement of so many events; against every one of which, the odds were, what may be called infinite. But when we bear in mind that one of these events, was the total destruction of one of the greatest cities of antiquity; and the other no less than the advent of an individual, whose coming into the world, be he who he may, has exercised a more important influence over the condition of mankind in general, than any other historical event which is upon record,—it is evident that a solution of this kind is in reality no solution. Porphyry maintained that the book of Daniel must have been written after the events, because in his opinion, it was *impossible* that it should have been written before. Assuming the supposition of a divine inspiration to be impossible, he took up the only

[1] I have limited my remarks to coincidences between the prophecy and the history of the Gospel; but if the "troublous times" when the "walls" were to be "built again," may be referred to the rebuilding of the Temple by Herod, 17 B.C., the date of this, counting from the 7th of Artaxerxes, (from the 20th, brings us to the birth of Christ,) falls within the 69 hebdomads, specified in the 25th verse.

position that would seem to be open. But the early date is quite demonstrable, as I have said, even in the present day; in the days of the Apostles, it must have been not only demonstrable, but notorious.

Before bringing these remarks to a close, we may mention that the agreement of this well-known prophecy with the truths of the Gospel, is not less exact than with the matters of fact connected with the history of its Founder. Those truths, as they have been received by mankind, are as clearly enounced by Daniel, as they were by the Apostles themselves. "Seventy weeks," says he, "are determined upon thy people, and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy."—The Messiah, moreover, was also to "be cut off, but not for himself." It is not necessary to offer any comment upon this part of the prophecy: the conformity of it with the faith established in the world by Jesus Christ, is a matter of which we are witnesses.

I have now said enough to demonstrate that in the scheme of prophecy, the rise of the Gospel, and the downfal of the Jewish dispensation, were indissolubly united. No one who believed in the cessation of the latter, as declared in the sudden desolation of the Jewish state and nation, could see the evident connection of the same event with the coming of the Messiah, and doubt the divine authority of Christ. A person might deny both

propositions, (as the Jews persisted in doing,) but he could not admit the one, without, at the same time, acceding to the other.

Accordingly, from this period, we hear nothing more of judaizing Christians; no farther allusion is made, in any Christian writings now in our possession, to the duty of renouncing the law of Moses; there was no longer any dispute about circumcision, or about the righteousness that was by the works of the law:—such controversies were settled for ever. From this period "the vision and the prophecy were sealed up," and each party made its election of one side or the other. There was thenceforth no intermediate class, whether calling themselves Jews or Christians; or at least, none of sufficient importance to deserve attention.

At this point, the scheme of evidence, on which Christianity was originally established, came to a close. The question of its divine or human authority must stand or fall, on the facts which had at this period been exhibited. No proof, having the character of a divine testimony, was afterwards vouchsafed; no further miraculous attestation was afforded; nor need the Christian be concerned, by any difficulties or objections, deduced from the occurrences of a later period. If the facts related by the Evangelists, did not really happen; or if the prophecies of the Old Testament relating to the Messiah, had not been fulfilled in Christ, at the period when Jerusalem ceased to be numbered among the cities of the earth, —the argument is at an end: nothing that has oc-

curred since can make that now to be true, which was then untrue. But the converse of this proposition is, at least, as plain. If the divine authority of Christianity had, at that period, been demonstrated, then—explain, as we please, its after success, whether by secondary causes, or divine; think, as we may, of its doctrines, as ever so contrary to our notions of probability,—except they can be shewn to be absurd, or impossible, or subversive of the happiness of mankind, they must be received as true. I do not mean merely to say, that they must be considered as possible, or credible, or highly probable:—but that we must regard them as truths which cannot be called in question, without directly impugning the veracity of God.

There is here no intermediate ground; no room for what is called opinion. The contrary way of speaking is, indeed, customary. It is common to hear the evidences described as resting upon cumulative and probable, not upon demonstrative proofs. The distinction to be drawn lies in the word—rest. Christianity is supported by many probable arguments, but it does not *rest* upon them. There are many facts in natural philosophy, drawn from the flux or reflux of the sea, the alternations of winter and summer, of light and darkness, as well as many direct astronomical observations, all confirming our belief in the Principia of Newton. But the truth of Newton's Principia, nevertheless, does not rest upon the evidence of such facts and observations, but

on one great and simple truth. So also in Christianity, there are many converging arguments, from different quarters, some external and some internal, all uniting in the testimony which they bear to the divine origin of the Gospel:—nevertheless it is not upon them that its authority rests, but upon the revelations made to mankind in the Old Testament.

This truth has been lost sight of among Christians, because all writers upon the Evidences have latterly confined their attention to the probable proofs. First and chief among these, no doubt, are the miracles related in the New Testament. And had they been the foundation on which the revelation of the Gospel was raised, and not the main abutment merely, by which it was supported, the proof of its truth would unquestionably have been only probable. But we have seen that it was upon another foundation—on the evidence of a preconcerted dispensation, which had been many ages in preparation, that the evidence of Christianity was laid. Now, this was no probable principle of belief, but one which, if it can be proved, involves all the certainty of a mathematical demonstration. Assuming the proof, it would be as improper to speak of the Gospel, as a probably divine revelation, as to speak of the equality of the three angles of a triangle to two right angles, as a probably true relation.

Had Christianity rested only on the evidence of the Old Testament, it would have been demonstrably certain, or it would have been nothing. As it is,

even if this evidence be removed, our belief may fall back upon the miracles, and the proof will still be probable. But if we look to the New Testament itself, and examine the contents of the revelation there disclosed, it will immediately be apparent, that the supposition of a merely probable authority, can never have been in the mind of its author.

If the religion of Christ, like that of Moses, had looked only to the obedience of mankind; that is, had it only enjoined certain things to be done, and others to be left undone,—it would have sufficed to rest its authority on probable arguments only; because in matters of conduct, it is our duty to be guided by that light which is the clearest. A man who should follow, with his eyes open, a path which he believed would probably lead to his ruin, when another more safe was open to him, would sin as plainly against the rules of reason, as if the consequences had been certain. In such cases, we have no right to insist upon demonstrative evidence, but must be satisfied with probability.

But the case is different in matters of belief. If a religion is proposed to mankind, in which the condition of God's favour is made to depend, not on any outward act, but on a deep and unshaken faith in the promises of God,—it would seem that the proofs of the reality of those promises ought not to be merely probable. To require a person to consider a fact as certainly true, when he knows that it may possibly be untrue; to bid him be demonstratively sure,

without reasons which are demonstrative,—would be a commandment quite inconsistent with our notions of God's justice; and one which would really place faith and reason in opposition to each other.

The faith which is spoken of in the Bible, is not a mere lively belief in the evidences of the Gospel, but a firm reliance upon the hopes which it reveals; a pious and undoubting assurance of God's infinite goodness and veracity. But then, this firm and unqualified conviction supposes us to be sure, that the promises made to us through Christ, rest upon divine authority. That point being demonstrated, it is easy to understand wherein the sinfulness of unbelief consists; for it supposes a doubt of God's truth, a distrust of his sincerity, a suspicion that he will not really perform that which he has declared.

Few persons have the courage to put the proposition to their minds in this form; the common case of unbelief, is that of persons who disbelieve in the doctrine of salvation, as it has been interpreted by the Church, not because they are dissatisfied with the *proof* of the promise having been made by God, but because they consider the propositions which it contains to be impossible and absurd. This they boldly assume:—how wisely, is a question which ought to be first considered; bearing in mind that if they err, it is not with the good and virtuous among mankind, nor yet with the truly wise and learned:—not with the Bacons, and Lockes, and Newtons; but with writers who—to say nothing of graver accusations—

are more quoted for the brilliancy of their wit, or the powers of their imagination, than for any extraordinary gifts of the understanding.

At the time when Christianity first appeared, wit and satire were weapons which, though not legitimate, might yet be used without indecency. The employment of them, if not excusable, was natural; because there is really so much folly and knavery in the world, that sensible men are unwilling to lend an ear to miraculous stories and pretended revelations, be the testimony, alleged in support of their truth, what it may. But the state of things is now altered. Christianity is no longer an obscure sect, but may almost be considered as the established religion of mankind. It numbers rich and poor, learned and ignorant, the wise as well as the unwise, among its disciples. This, indeed, does not prove that it is true; but it proves all that its friends need require; which is, that its claims should be discussed with candour and openness of mind, as involving considerations which, on any supposition that we can frame, are of deep and serious interest. This would be true, even if it could be shown that Christianity was a mere legend.

For let us suppose that it was not true; that its pretensions to be a divine revelation had been refuted; and that this was as clear as any proposition in Euclid. It will still be certain, that this religion exists; and that its rise and propagation and present establishment in the world is the most extra-

ordinary event, and the most deserving the attention of an historian, viewed simply as a philosophical phenomenon, of any recorded in the annals of mankind.

If we examine the contents of this pretended revelation (for so let it be considered), we find nothing there to explain its success. It would be difficult to frame any propositions, less calculated to have met acceptance on any speculative grounds of argument, or less subservient to the passions or vicious inclinations of mankind. With respect to its history, the origin of it is known; it is not lost in the darkness of remote ages, like the fables of the Hindoo religion in modern times, or of the pagan mythology of antiquity. We know when this religion first appeared; we can trace its progress in each succeeding century, almost as certainly, as we can trace its influence on the manners and institutions of the generation of mankind, to which we ourselves belong; and we know that this influence is, beyond all comparison, the most important element in the estimate of the causes, by which the state of society, as it at present exists in Europe, is distinguished.

That mankind believe this religion to be of divine authority, and have always so believed, is a matter not to be disputed. Christianity may not be true, but it is certainly true, that mankind believe in Christianity. Whence then did this belief arise? It arose from causes of some sort; it was built upon reasons, good or bad; upon evidence, true or false.

All then that we ask, or have any right to ask, of

an unbeliever is, that he will sit down to the examination of these causes, with the same freedom from prejudice and passion, with which he would sit down to examine the history of Mahommedism, in the sixth and seventh centuries. Let the ground taken up be purely historical; let the facts be stated nakedly, and without comment either favourable or adverse, to any ulterior conclusion;—and we should risk little in saying, that the results will come out precisely the same, whether in the hands of the believer or unbeliever; and, moreover, that those results will be, to demonstrate that no explanation of the success of Christianity in the world can be proposed, except that which has been received.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not a philosophical thesis, but pretends to be a revelation from God; and if it be not this, it is nothing. Whatever then may have been the evidences on which it was built, if they were from Him, we may lay it down as an axiom to be assumed, that they were framed, not with a view to affect the reason and imagination of wits and men of the world, or of professed philosophers and free-thinkers, but the reason and imagination of mankind at large. That they were such evidences, that is to say, as will appear to have been founded upon the common principles of human nature, and not selected with a view to meet mere metaphysical refinements. How would the facts, on which the belief of mankind shall appear to have been built, have acted upon the understanding of

the general mass of the people in the world, at the time when they were first presented? This must surely be considered, as the proper test of divine authority, in a revelation intended for all mankind.

If then, upon a mere historical inquiry into the actual facts, on the belief of which the Gospel was certainly built, it should turn out that they were in their own nature such, as that if they were again offered to mankind in the present or in any other age, the same result would and must necessarily follow,—that would be evidence for affirming that the author of it was God. Whether this would entitle the evidence to be called demonstrative, in philosophical language, it is not necessary to examine. The origin of Christianity is not a question of abstract truth, but of fact; namely, whether certain doctrines, be they in themselves probable or improbable, were or were not promulged to mankind under divine authority. What we want, therefore, is not a metaphysical, but a practical definition, which the test just now proposed would furnish.

On this test I have steadily endeavoured to keep my eye in the preceding Lectures:—in no instance, am I conscious of having ever drawn or attempted to draw any conclusion, except from facts which are historically certain; and which would not be less certain, even though a second revelation from heaven should declare the Gospel itself to be a fable.

DISSERTATION I.

ON THE CAUSES OF THE PROPAGATION OF CHRISTIANITY AMONG THE HEATHEN.

DISSERTATION I.

CHAPTER I.

The object of the preceding Lectures was to examine generally the true use and design of the Old Testament. But there are some prophecies which I passed over without notice, as not having any direct or necessary connection with the evidences of Christianity. The predictions to which I am alluding, relate to the fortunes and vicissitudes of the Jewish and other surrounding nations. The greater number of these received their completion before the birth of Christ. One, the most remarkable of any, which related to the dispersion of the Jews, is still fulfilling under our eyes. But none of them have entered into any part of the reasoning, on which we have placed the proof of Christianity. It

is then a natural question to ask: What was the use and intention of these numerous prophecies? The answer to this inquiry will lead to one or two points deserving of examination, as connected with the history of the propagation of Christianity. And as this subject is, in itself, one of deep interest, not to the theologian merely, but also to the philosopher and the historian, I propose throwing together some remarks, suggested to my mind by the above question, hoping to incite others, who have more leisure and learning, to undertake a task of which I can only indicate some principal bearings.

It is clear, from the New Testament, that the belief of Christianity, after the death of its Founder and first preachers, must have spread with an augmented, and not a diminished rate of increase. Now this supposition, explain it as we will, seems to be altogether inconsistent with the hypothesis of no other causes, besides the miracles of Christ, having co-operated in its success. Had these constituted the single proof of his divine mission, it would have followed, that the effect must have been most apparent, nearest the spot where they were worked and the time when they happened; and would have grown gradually weaker and slower, as the circle within which the report of them was spread, became wider and wider.

Of the innumerable thousands who, we have reason to believe, had embraced Christianity before the expiration of the first century, how few can be sup-

posed to have been eye-witnesses of the miracles of its Founder! But it may be collected from the Acts, that even of these, the larger number lived neither at Jerusalem nor in Judea. A Christian Church had been formed at Rome some years before any of the Apostles had been there; the same in other places; and the narrative would lead us to believe, that the persons by whom the Gospel was most eagerly received, were thus circumstanced.

In the view of reason, perhaps, the evidence for the truth of a miracle may be as certain to those, who lived a hundred years after the event, as to those who were present when it was performed. Supposing we possessed some infallible document to demonstrate, that it was believed by those who were upon the spot; and such as to satisfy us, that if we had been present, our belief would have been the same as theirs,—our absence may alter the effect of the evidence upon our minds, but does not in the least affect the proof. But great is the influence, we may almost call it the tyranny, exercised over the understanding by the senses and imagination. Speaking of mankind in the mass, we may safely assert, that the effect of any event, of a kind to excite wonder and astonishment, must always be more marked upon the minds of those who witnessed it, than of those whose knowledge has been obtained only at second-hand, and after a long interval of time. If the reverse of this should appear, in any instance, to be the case, it would afford a strong presumption, that the evidence

of other circumstances, besides that of the facts themselves, must have been taken into the account; that some light, real or supposed, must have broken in upon the minds of men; some motives and reasons, such as were not accessible at first, or not clearly understood, over and above those, which appear on the face of things.

Now there is no indication, in the history of Christianity, of any specific natural causes having intervened; nor, after the destruction of Jerusalem, do we know of any that were miraculous, to explain this phenomenon, in the case before us. So far as human wisdom indeed, or human power, and learning, and authority, are concerned, the absence of all these causes of success is commonly stated among the proofs of its divine original. Upon a first view this is something more than a mere difficulty; it seems to be a paradox. For, see how the case stands.

The evidence on which Christianity depends, was prepared and calculated solely for the Jews. It was communicated only to them; by no other people was it, in the first instance, at all understood.—But on looking into history, contrary to all seeming probability of human nature, contrary to the very premises of the evidence itself, we find that the Jews, for whom it was intended, and to whom alone it had been made known,—did not receive it; while the nations to whom it had not been communicated—were rapidly converted. Within the lapse of two or three generations, polytheism, in all its ancient

forms, was silently, and without violence, exterminated in Europe, and in the countries adjacent to the Roman empire; while Judaism, which seemed to be torn up by the very roots, and scattered to the winds, by a catastrophe more overwhelming than ever before or since fell upon any nation, from the beginning of the world, not only survived in that age, but has continued to survive, amidst every variety of oppression and persecution, to the times we live in.

We may not perhaps be allowed to adduce this extraordinary fact, as a proof of the divine origin of Christianity; but at all events, and beyond all question, it affords no presumption to the contrary. On the former supposition, it would admit of explanation; but it admits of none, on the principles of human experience. Adopt, therefore, any view of the case we choose,—however paradoxical the fact may be, it is clearly a difficulty, not belonging to the evidence, but only to the history of Christianity. Even if it were possible to raise an adverse argument upon such ground, the force of it would be obviated, in the present case, by our finding that this very fact of the rejection of the Gospel by the Jews, and their subsequent "removal into all the kingdoms of the earth," and their continued preservation, as a monument of the divine displeasure,—formed a part of that very revelation, of which they were themselves the depositories.

But give the case up to the unbeliever upon any

terms he pleases, it can never be made to assist his side of the argument. If he adduces the incredulity of the Jews, as a proof that the facts related in the Gospel did not really happen, or were not believed, —then, the sudden conversion of the heathen nations of the world becomes doubly perplexing. There will be no clue to the difficulty, in this case, except that of Bayle in his article "Abdera," in which he leads his readers to infer that all mankind, in the first century, were mad. This was falling, I think, from Scylla into Charybdis; but it is the only alternative. I am persuaded that in the age when Christianity first appeared, it must have presented itself to many, as the most intelligible solution.

It will hardly be expected that we should seriously refute such an hypothesis; but if it were necessary to do so, the only course to follow, would be to examine the history of this period. The documents for this purpose, which we have in our possession, being, with the exception of the Acts of the Apostles, not historical but controversial, contain none but very general facts; nevertheless, they will be found to afford sufficient light, to enable us to form some corresponding notion of the causes to which Christianity owed the rapidity of its success. Enough at least to refute, not only the hypothesis of Bayle, but every explanation that can be offered, if based upon the ordinary principles of human belief.

Every one is aware, that it was the progress of Christianity, which rooted out heathenism from the

ancient world. And it would also seem to be commonly supposed, that the effect was slowly produced, by the same sort of gradual process, with which erroneous opinions in legislation or philosophy are banished from the minds of men. Now although it is true, that the religion of the heathen nations of antiquity was not overthrown, in the same way as the Jewish law and worship, by a sudden political convulsion; yet the rise of the Christian religion in the world, was an event almost as distinctly marked, as the downfal of the latter. For the first few years, indeed, its growth was slow, like "that of a tender plant in a dry ground," to use the expressive words of the prophet. But as soon as it had fixed its roots in the soil, it began to spread out its branches with a vigour and rapidity, which it is difficult fully to explain, on any supposition we can frame;—even assuming the truth of the facts, out of the belief of which it arose.

Although there is abundant evidence in the New Testament, to shew, that there were many heathens among the earliest converts, yet it is plain that a large majority of the first disciples, in the days of the Apostles, must have been from the Jews; or else from that numerous class, spoken of in the Acts, as Gentiles, but who had so far embraced Judaism, as to have joined with the Jews, not only in renouncing idolatry, but in worshipping the same God with themselves. If we look to the thirteenth chapter of the Acts, we shall see that the Gentiles are

there mentioned as being assembled in the same synagogue with the Jews at Antioch, in a way which marks it to have been a familiar occurrence. Cornelius belonged to this class, as well as Timothy and Titus; also the eunuch mentioned in the eighth of the Acts; to whom may be added the centurion spoken of by St. Luke, as loving the Jewish nation, and having built them a synagogue.

But it is not necessary to dwell upon the proof of this. Any one who takes the trouble of examining the New Testament, and especially the historical parts of it, with a careful eye, will readily see, that under the various names of Worshippers or Devout Persons, or Greeks, or Strangers, or Gentiles, this class of persons,—by whatever denomination they ought to be distinguished, whether as proselytes of the gate, or by any other title,—must have been very numerous even in Jerusalem and Judea; and in other parts of the world, there is reason to believe that they formed a still larger multitude. Not being circumcised, nor under an engagement to observe any part of the ceremonial law, it is probable that they were not looked upon as Jews, either by the heathens or by themselves. What proportion the number of such converts may have borne to the rest of the disciples, is not a matter of any importance. That the number was large, is plainly indicated in the Acts and Epistles.

For all the purposes of our present inquiry, these persons, it is plain, may be numbered as Jews; be-

cause they were able to understand and to appreciate all the evidence, afforded by the prophecies in favour of Christianity, as well as if they had been of the stock of Abraham. So far as they may be supposed to have been exempt from many prejudices and unfounded pretensions, inherent in those who were of the circumcision, it is not to be doubted, but that their minds must have been much more open to receive the truths of the Gospel, than if they had been Jews by the privilege of their birth. The breaking down of the partition-wall between these last and themselves, which was the great offence of the Gospel in the eyes of the Jewish nation, must have been no offence, but just the reverse, in their eyes. It was an interpretation of prophecy, much more likely to obtain their favourable regard, than the arrogant as well as improbable belief, which the Jews clung to, with such blind affection.

Be the weight of these remarks, however, what it may, it is quite clear from the New Testament, that it was within the circle, formed by these two classes of persons,—namely, of Jews properly so called, and of the Gentile worshippers, as here described,—that the great body of the early converts was almost exclusively found; and that this continued to be the case, up to the period to which the narrative of events in the New Testament extends. A very slight consideration of the arguments put forward by St. Paul in his Epistles will shew, that he was uniformly writing to persons, who not only believed, but un-

derstood the Jewish Scriptures. The period I am now speaking of, reaches to the year 65, or perhaps a little later; but it ended before the destruction of Jerusalem.

From this time, for a space of about thirty-five or forty years, we hear no more of Christianity, or of the Christians, from any contemporary authority. It is evident, from Tacitus and Suetonius, that their opinions had widely spread, and had attracted the notice and excited the fears of the government; but, except the persecutions in the reigns of Claudius and Nero, we learn no specific fact. About the year 106 or 107, comes the letter from Pliny the younger to Trajan. At the time when this was written, it would seem to be plain, that the Christians must hav ebecome a large and increasing multitude of persons. And as there is no reason whatever for supposing that they had spread more numerously in Bithynia than elsewhere, we may safely infer from this document, that their doctrines had now reached the remotest parts of the Roman empire. Pliny informs the emperor, that the sect, in that province, included persons of all ages and conditions:—that the contagion had seized not only the cities, but the villages and open country; adding, that there had been, for a long time, an intermission of all the heathen solemnities; and that the sacrifices to the gods had almost ceased. "*Multi enim omnis ætatis, utriusque sexus etiam, vocantur in periculum et vocabuntur. Neque enim civitatis tantum, sed vicos etiam*

et agros superstitionis istius contagio pervagata est. Quæ videtur sisti et corrigi posse. Certe satis constat, prope etiam desolata templa cœpisse celebrari, et sacra solemnia, diu intermissa repeti; passimque venire victimas, quarum adhuc rarissimus emptor inveniebatur." In consequence of the strong measures adopted by him, a better state of things was beginning, he says, to arise; but one, still surrounded with so many difficulties, that he writes to the emperor for advice.

From the last-mentioned particulars, it is plain that the majority of the converts, here described, must have been heathen. In the absence of all counter testimony, we are entitled to take Pliny's account of the deserted condition, to which the religion of the state had been brought in Bithynia, as a measure of the success, which had attended Christianity, in the other provinces of the empire, at this early date. In this view, the rapidity of its progress, as above described, however we may attempt to explain the case, is truly astonishing; but, taken in connection with those parts of the prophecies, in which the very state of things which Pliny relates, would seem to have been predicted, the fact, to those who were informed of those prophecies, may well have seemed miraculous.

That this opinion had thus early begun to pervade the public mind, may, I think, be safely inferred from a reference to the writings of the Fathers. They do not argue and discuss whether the prophecies had been fulfilled or not; but they assume the point. It

matters not which of them we take up,—we shall find, from Justin downwards, that the rapid success of Christianity in the world, is the crowning proof of its divine origin, in the view taken of the evidences, by every one of them.

I have before had occasion to mention, generally, that it was the Old Testament upon which they rested their cause. But if we take up Justin, or Origen, or Tertullian, we shall not be long in observing, that among the prophecies, those to which these early writers chiefly appeal, are the prophecies of Isaiah, in which he speaks of the impending discomfiture of idolatry in the world, and the approach of a kingdom, under which all mankind would be brought to a knowledge of the one supreme God. The manner in which they dwelt upon this argument, shews that in their opinion this part of the prophecies had been incontrovertibly fulfilled. The fact itself, I just now observed, they appeal to, as being notorious; and urge it as a conclusive proof, that the evidence, from which the belief in Christ's divine authority had arisen, must have been true.

Whether the early Fathers reasoned rightly or not, is not the question. I am here merely stating what their reasoning was, and on what data it was built. There may be a difference of opinion about the former; but there is no room for disputing the assertion, that even so early as the reign of Trajan, Christianity was in effect established. I do not mean that it was established by law, or recognized

by the state; but it had taken its place in the world; the ensigns of its coming greatness were fairly upraised in the sight of mankind. Already it had become a visible society, not confined to one spot, or city, or country, or language; but diffused, in a greater or less proportion, through almost every nation upon earth.

Accordingly, if we turn to the writings of Justin, who wrote about thirty years after the date of Pliny's letter, and lived in the generation which immediately succeeded that of the Apostles, we shall find that the conclusions I have drawn from this last document, as to the rapid diffusion of Christianity, are fully borne out by his testimony. "There is no race of mankind," says he to Trypho the Jew[1], "whether of Greeks or Barbarians, or of any other appellation, whether of those who wander in tribes, without fixed habitation, or tend their flocks in tents, (ἢ ἁμαξοβίων, ἢ ἀοίκων καλουμένων, ἢ ἐν σκηναῖς κτηνοτρόφων οἰκούντων,) among whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered up to the Creator of the universe, in the name of the crucified Jesus;"—a statement which he prefaces with an assertion, that at the time when he was writing, the Gospel was spread over a wider space than even the religion of the Jews.

The next Christian writer of whom we have any considerable remains, is Irenæus. He was settled in

[1] Sect. 117.

Gaul, and wrote some twenty or thirty years later. Speaking of the unity of the Catholic faith, which "the Church," he says, "though disseminated throughout the world, diligently preserves;" he goes on to remark, that "although there are in the world various languages, yet the authority of tradition is one and the same everywhere. And neither do the Churches, which are founded in Germany, believe differently or teach differently; nor those which are in Spain, or in Gaul, or in the East, or in Egypt, or in Africa, nor those which are in the more inland parts of the world[1]."

Contemporary with Irenæus, and writing very few years later, is Tertullian. In his book against the Jews, reminding them of the various prophecies of the Old Testament relating to the conversion of the Gentiles:—"This prediction," says he[2], "you now see fulfilled in the successful preaching of the Gospel: '*its sound has gone out into all lands, and its voice unto the ends of the world:*' for in whom else have all the nations believed, except in Christ, who has now come? In him have the Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Rome, and Jews of Jerusalem, been brought to believe; in him, the barbarous tribes of Africa, and the dispersed clans of Spain, and Gaul, and Britain;—places inaccessible to the Romans, among the Sarmatians, and Dacians, and Germans,

[1] Lib. i. c. 10. [2] Adv. Jud. c. 7.

and Scythians, provinces and islands of which we know not the names, and which we are unable to enumerate,—have been subdued by Christ."

This and similar passages do not occur in a writing intended for Christians;—who, perhaps would not be likely to question a statement which was favourable to their cause;—but to Jews, upon whom mere declamation of this kind, if not founded in facts that were notorious, would be worse than thrown away. "All other kingdoms," he goes on to say, "as of Pharaoh, of Alexander, of the Assyrians, even the empire of the Romans, is limited and defined; but the kingdom of Christ, and his name, reaches everywhere; is believed everywhere; reigns everywhere; and is adored everywhere. He is King, and Judge, and God, and Lord, to all.—*Christi regnum et nomen ubique porrigitur; ubique creditur; ubique regnat; ubique adoratur;—omnibus Rex, omnibus Judex, omnibus Deus et Dominus est.*" "We are only of yesterday," he writes in another place[1], "and already," he tells the Heathens, to whom his Apology is addressed, "we have filled every place which belongs to you; your cities, your islands, your fortresses, your municipal places of assembly, even your camps and palaces, your senate and forum;—the temples of your gods alone are left to you. It is your own accusation," he tells them,—"*obsessam vociferantur civitatem, in agris, in castellis, in insulis Christianos.* All sexes,

[1] Apol. c. 37.

and ages, and conditions, even among the highest ranks, as they themselves," he writes, "are heard to complain, have enrolled themselves under this name: *omnem sexum, ætatem, conditionem, etiam dignitatem transgredi ad hoc nomen, mœrent.*"

Exactly to the same effect is the language of Origen, who, writing a few years later than Tertullian, asserts that the Gospel had, in his day, subdued the whole of Greece, and the greater part of the rest of the world, πάσης μὲν Ἑλλάδος, ἐπὶ πλεῖον δὲ βαρβάρου ἐκράτησε. There are two other very strong and pointed passages from the same writer, quoted by Paley in his chapter on the Propagation of the Gospel, to which I would refer the reader, as also a passage from Clemens Alexandrinus, who was the contemporary of Tertullian, in which he says, that "the philosophers were only found in Greece, but the doctrine of Christ is spread throughout the world, in every nation, and village, and city, both of Greeks and Barbarians[1]." It is needless to adduce the testimony of later writers; but it may be worth remarking, that, in the book *De Morte Persecutorum*, commonly attributed to Lactantius, and which is in the list of his works, it is stated, that so early as the time of Nero, the Gospel had spread to the remotest corners of the earth: "*ut jam nullus esset terrarum angulus tam remotus, quo non religio Dei penetrasset.*"

It appears then, from these extracts, that before

[1] Strom. vi.

the generation, in which Christ was born, had passed away, his religion had taken root, and was firmly established throughout the world. In the next generation, neither the number of Christians, nor the extent to which their religion was diffused, could any longer be estimated;—and the prophecies of the Old Testament may be thenceforth considered, for all the purposes of argument, as having been completed.

What then were the causes of this rapid and extraordinary success? Were they human or divine, natural or providential, primary or secondary?—This is the question which I shall now proceed to examine.

CHAPTER II.

The determination of the question, proposed at the end of the preceding chapter, is a point in which the Christian, as such, has no distinct concern. Whether Christianity be true or untrue, the causes of its rapid propagation in the world are deserving of inquiry. But a person who believes his Bible may, if he pleases, decline to interest himself about the means employed by God, for spreading it in the world, provided he can be sure, or believes himself to be sure, that it was planted by His hand. If it could be shewn,

that God employed none but natural means for diffusing the knowledge of it among mankind, there would be no reason why the Christian should not acquiesce in such an explanation. Christianity pretends to a miraculous *origin*, but to nothing more. Its rapid rise and present position in the world are conformable with such pretensions. If no adequate causes can be assigned for its progress, during the first and second centuries, without supposing the continued manifestation of a divine interposition,—that will create a difficulty, over and above the proofs to be found in the Bible, which a person who affirms its origin to have been human, will have to overcome. But his overcoming this difficulty or not overcoming it, will not in the least affect the evidence on which the belief of the Christian is built. To him, it is simply an historical inquiry; a matter of mere learned curiosity. If the theological question be got rid of, the philosophical one will indeed remain; but this last, does not touch the foundations, on which the proof of Christianity rests. As the subject, however, is of grave importance in this last point of view only; and as it materially affects the adverse side of the argument, on theological grounds, it is well deserving of consideration.

The question, I would observe, is not as to the co-operation of secondary causes, but only as to their sufficiency. Whatever opinion we may entertain, as to the causes of the sudden diffusion of Christianity through the world, after the destruction of Jerusa-

lem, it would be absurd to deny the intervention of natural means: on the contrary, the co-operation of such must be assumed. To reject this supposition, would weaken rather than confirm the proof of its divine origin; inasmuch, as their *joint* operation would imply, that the Author of the Christian revelation was, at the same time, the Supreme Governor of the world. If this religion was from God, it must have been certain from the beginning, that it would be communicated to mankind, at a time when circumstances would be favourable to its reception. Origen goes still further, and says, that a favourable state of things had been purposely prepared beforehand, by the Divine Providence. To this cause he ascribes the profound peace in which the world was found, at the time when Christ appeared, and the subjection of so many nations under one empire. Had mankind at that time been placed under the government of many and hostile rulers, it would have been difficult, says he, for the Apostles to have executed the command which bade them to "go and teach all nations." He afterwards proceeds to show this, by exemplifying the impediments they would have met with, had they been compelled to preach during the triumvirate, or at almost any period of the world before that, in which they received their commission.

On a similar principle of reasoning, Clemens of Alexandria ascribes the Grecian philosophy to God. "In the same manner," says he, "as the Old Testa-

ment was a preparation, or προπαιδεία, for the Jews; so also were the writings of Socrates and Plato, and their followers, for the Gentiles." I shall not stop to discuss this opinion of his, which would require many qualifications before it could be safely received. My rason for adverting to it is merely to show, that the early Christians, who certainly did not ascribe the *origin* of the Gospel to secondary causes, thought that the supposition of their co-operation in its after success, was quite consistent with a belief in its divine authority. The question, therefore, is not whether secondary causes should be excluded from our hypothesis, when endeavouring to account for the rapid propagation of Christianity in the world; but whether its success can be accounted for, on the supposition of secondary causes alone?

As the existence of Christianity in the world is a matter of fact not to be gainsaid, I take for granted, as a thing of course, that those who assert its human origin, must suppose that none but human means had any part, direct or indirect, in its propagation;—or if causes, over which human agents can exercise no control, contributed to its success, that this effect was purely accidental. We must assume these causes not to have been foreseen, or divinely prepared beforehand; for if they were, in that case, although the effect itself may have followed in the natural sequence of events, yet would it be nevertheless miraculous, for all the purposes of the present inquiry. It is this last which I consider as the true way of explain-

ing the fact. But, before adducing my reasons for so thinking, it will be proper to inquire first, whether any hypothesis to account for it, simply and exclusively by means of natural causes, has ever been proposed; and if so, what those causes are stated to have been.

It would perhaps be going too far to say in unqualified terms, that no one is at liberty to doubt the divine origin of Christianity, except he is prepared to explain, on other principles, the causes of its success. Nevertheless, it is certainly a presumptive argument in favour of its divine origin, that no other specific explanation has ever been produced. I have made this assertion broadly, but I think not too broadly; because, although the causes which Gibbon has assigned[1], to account for the rapid propagation of the Gospel in the second and third centuries, may seem to afford an exception to my remark, yet they are not so really; inasmuch as if we overlook the spirit in which his statements are made, there is not in any one of them a single fact, not even a single conjecture, at which the most devout believer need take alarm.

The causes, indeed, which Gibbon suggests, are all of them, as stated by him, secondary causes. But then, it is to be observed, he does not attempt to explain the first *rise* of Christianity in the world, but only to account for its after progress. And so far are the causes which he assigns, from excluding the sup-

[1] Ch. xv.

position of its miraculous *origin*, that a general belief of this truth, on the part of mankind, is evidently a constituent part of his hypothesis; and, in fact, must be assumed, in order to explain his explanation. In short, the causes which he states, instead of accounting for the rise of this belief, are among the effects which had flowed from it.

This will, I think, be evident at a glance. They are, 1st, The zeal of the early Christians; 2nd, The doctrine of the immortality of the soul; together with their belief in the millennium and a future judgment; 3rd, The pretension to miraculous gifts; 4th, The pure morals of the first Christians; 5th, Their Church discipline.

Now, the readers of Gibbon may agree with him in thinking, that all these were causes of the success of Christianity; and it is probable, that others of a similar kind might easily be named, which conspired, in various degrees, to recommend the religion of Christ, to the favourable reception of mankind. If the early Christians had been without zeal; if the doctrines which they preached had been subversive of morality; if their lives had been impure; if they had been under no rules of government; if they had disclaimed any belief in miracles:—the success of Christianity in the world, upon this supposition, would have been something indeed astonishing! But surely, no one was ever so wild as to think, that because in the case of the Gospel, the contrary of this, in every instance was the fact, it was therefore not from God.

As a general argument, such an opinion would be too absurd to deserve a serious refutation. And if we examine severally the particular propositions, on which Gibbon based his disbelief of the divine authority of revelation, (for such it is to be presumed was his meaning in the celebrated chapter to which I am now referring,) they will not be found much more worthy of attention.

And first, for the inflexible and intolerant zeal of the Christians, and the advantage which they derived, from the mild and tolerant genius of Polytheism. When Gibbon penned this sentence, he must surely have forgotten the persecutions of Claudius and Nero, and Diocletian; as also the letter from Pliny, which was alluded to in the last chapter, and for which he elsewhere endeavours to apologize. But admitting his statement to be correct;—to say that the reason of the success of the first disciples, was their having been allowed to preach their doctrines, —though the fact had been ever so true,—would afford no argument to show, that the doctrines which they taught were not the word of God. As to the inflexible and intolerant zeal which he ascribes to them, this was the natural consequence of their belief in the divine authority of their faith; and if it operated favourably upon the opinions of mankind, it can only have been, because it was regarded as a clear proof of sincerity, on the part of the early Christians.

The next cause is the doctrine of the immortality

of the soul, and of a future state of rewards and punishments; "improved," as he says it was, "by every additional circumstance which could give weight and efficacy to that important truth." Now this truth, no doubt, is part and parcel of the Gospel; but it was also part and parcel of the doctrine of Socrates and Plato. The question therefore is, how did it happen, that a truth which all the wisdom of Socrates, and all the eloquence of Plato, had failed to demonstrate to the satisfaction of mankind, was received by them so much more favourably, on the simple authority of a few poor fishermen and mechanics? This was the point of Gibbon's argument; but it is passed over by him in silence.

The third cause is, the pretension of the first Christians to miraculous gifts. But supposing the miracles ascribed to Christ to have been really wrought, and that the power of working them was extended to the Apostles,—surely it need not make much impression upon the mind of any man, who knows what human nature is, to be told that miracle-mongers continued to infest the Church, long after all miraculous gifts had really been withdrawn. Such an effect was the natural consequence of a belief in the miracles related of Christ and his Apostles. All it proves is, that the minds of men were excited; and as has happened in other cases, that designing men took advantage of the fact: "*Prodigia eo anno multa nunciata sunt*," says Livy, speaking of the second Punic war, "*quæ quo magis credebant simplices ac religiosi*

homines, eo etiam plura nuntiabantur." I can only say, as for myself, that I do not believe in the continuance of miraculous powers in the Church, from the period when Jerusalem was destroyed. General assertions there are, in allegation of miraculous gifts, more than enough; but it is observable, that none of the Fathers speak of such gifts, as possessed by themselves,—however credulous they may seem in the instance of others. It might be questioned, whether there is any specific miracle upon record, from the time when Jerusalem was destroyed to the present, for which such evidence could be produced as would satisfy a court of justice, even in the proof of any ordinary fact. The belief in lying wonders, though naturally and reasonably to be accounted for, was the opprobrium of the early Church; but instead of reckoning this belief, as Gibbon does, among the causes of the success of Christianity, my persuasion is, that on the contrary it was among the impediments which it had to overcome: just as in the present day, the similar pretensions of the Church of Rome, are the causes of much of the infidelity which is now in the world.

In the earlier ages of the Church, such miracles as we read of, in ecclesiastical writers, even if they had been true, would not have advanced the cause of Christianity; for there were none, either in or out of the Church, who reasoned upon this evidence, as we do. Even the vulgar in those days, looked upon them simply as the effects of magical arts, or other-

wise of spiritual agency, good or bad; and we cannot doubt, that wise and learned men, instead of being attracted by such arguments, must have been often kept away.

The fourth and fifth causes assigned by Gibbon, are "the pure and austere morals of the early Christians," and "the union which prevailed among them; together with the discipline established in their churches." These may be reckoned among the causes of the success of Christianity, no doubt; but it is only in the same sense, in which the character of Christ might be so reckoned, or the wisdom which he displayed, or the pure morality which he enjoined; and in this view, the very truth itself of the Gospel may also be so considered. But then comes the difficulty:—If zeal in the cause of Christ, if virtue and pure morality among his followers, and other qualifications of that kind, be sufficient to account for the rapid progress made by his religion, at the time when it was first preached —why, when these same qualities are exhibited among the heathen, do not the same effects follow, in the present day? I need not say that we find no answer to this question in the pages of Gibbon. And yet this is the point upon which the whole inquiry turns; it exactly enunciates the problem which Gibbon passes over, but which, if the subject was to be inquired into, he was required to solve.

The difficulties, which all recent missionaries have

encountered, in prosecuting their evangelical labours among the more barbarous nations of the world, are well known; and their want of success, has often been the subject of surprise as well as of regret. The doctrines which they preach are the same as in the time of Justin or Tertullian: there are the same promises, the same threatenings, the same precepts, the same rites, the same church discipline. And if the *pretence* to miracles be sufficient, even this has not been wanting,—on the part, at least, of one large class of modern missionaries. On the other hand, if credulity, and superstition, and ignorance, facilitated the success of the Gospel, at its first appearance,—these are permanent causes; and where they exist, would, in given circumstances, shew forth the same effects at all times. In all the points, therefore, where a difference is to be traced, it would seem to be in favour of the present age of the world. The authority of power, and of learning, and of wealth, and of all extraneous influences, including an experience of the beneficial tendency of Christianity;—all these elements of success have now changed sides, and are ranged in support of those doctrines to which they were originally opposed.

Looking then to the comparative results, it is plain, upon the very face of the case, that some cause or causes must have been at work, during the period to which the remarks of Gibbon refer, which are not in operation now; nor ever have been, so far as we can judge, except at that particular epoch when

the Gospel was first preached. The question is not, whether those causes were miraculous or not miraculous; nor whether mankind were induced to embrace Christianity upon good or bad reasons: but simply, what the causes or reasons were, by which an effect so surprising in itself, and so important in its consequences, was in so short a space of time, accomplished.

Now if we are willing to abide by the testimony of those who were witnesses of the effect, the answer is ready at hand. The authors of the New Testament rest their proofs, as was before shewn, almost exclusively, upon the evidence of certain supposed prophecies. The early Fathers of the Church, with one voice, ascribe their own conversion to this same argument. Whether they are relating the grounds of their own belief, or pressing their opinions upon the minds of others, the testimony to which they appeal, in proof of the divine authority of what they teach, is always the Old Testament. I have before had occasion to remark what I am here stating, and I must refer to the quotations which I then produced. I am not now saying whether the Fathers reasoned rightly or not; but am merely asserting an historical fact, which is noticed by Gibbon himself, and which no one who is conversant with the writings in question, will be likely to dispute.

But supposing we assume this fact, as one which has before been proved: yet it does not follow by necessary consequence that it will explain the phe-

nomena. If we suppose the Old Testament to have been written under divine inspiration, or—which, for all the purposes of the present argument, will come to the same thing,—that such an opinion was commonly entertained, at the time when Christianity was first established in the world:—this would be sufficient, it may perhaps be thought, to account for the conversion of individuals. It would explain why Justin became a Christian, or why the inhabitants of some particular city or country, to whom the knowledge of the Old Testament had been communicated, should have embraced the Gospel. But it would seem quite inadequate to account for its early and simultaneous propagation, among so many nations, to whom the name of a promised Messiah was unknown. Those parts of the world, it may be said, stood in the same relation to the Apostles, and first teachers of Christianity, as the people of India and China stand in, at this time, to those who now attempt their conversion:—why then is it, that the self-same prophecies, which were so powerful among the heathen, in the first and second centuries, produce comparatively no result worth mentioning, in the present day?

The answer to this question, is not to be obtained from history; because we have few documents for our guidance, belonging to this period; and those which we possess, touch but slightly upon the facts of the case. But if we keep our eye only upon the speculative difficulty, which the question involves,

the difference in the results here pointed out, will easily be explained, by the change which time has made in the circumstances of the case.

The objection, now under consideration, relates only to the heathen nations of the world, whom we suppose to have been ignorant of the Old Testament. Had the revelation of Christianity been confined to the people of Jerusalem or Judea, the objection assumes that their conversion would have come within the asserted explanation. These last knew beforehand the existence of the several prophecies. They were looking forward to the fulfilment of them; and at the time when Christ appeared, were actually expecting the arrival of a divine messenger. The other nations of the world, are assumed to have been unprepared for any such event. But if they also had known of these prophecies, and had been in a state of similar suspense, the same explanation would apply equally to both. It is then upon the supposed antecedent expectation in the one case, and the supposed antecedent ignorance in the other, that the difference between the two, in relation to the present question, plainly turns; and not upon any points of circumstantial belief.

If, then, for the sake of argument, we assume the existence of this antecedent knowledge on the part of the Gentile nations, at and before the time of Christ's appearing,—and we shall be in possession of an hypothesis which, if true, would account for the ready reception which Christianity met with, in

the ancient heathen world. And as it is quite certain that the heathen world, in the present day, is without this preparation, the obstacles which the Gospel now encounters in the hands of modern missionaries, need cause no difficulty. But this will be better seen by the help of an example.

To take then the case just now adverted to, of China and Hindostan; or of any other countries, the inhabitants of which, like the heathen of old, are a refined and civilized people, on points not relating to religion. It is, I think, quite plain, that upon their minds the argument from prophecy, as it now stands, must be for every practical purpose, altogether without effect. The premises on which the reasoning depends, are not facts falling under the notice of mankind, but matters of historical proof. Who was Moses, and Isaiah, and Daniel? When did they write? What is the evidence for the authenticity of the books in which their predictions are recorded? and in what way can it be demonstrated that those predictions came to pass?—These and many like points are all presupposed in the proof of the argument from prophecy. Without this knowledge, it possesses no kind of force whatever; but even with it, we can only explain the conclusion to the understanding, often without awakening any real and active belief. It is easy to demonstrate the proofs of the Deluge, as an historical truth, but very difficult to represent to our own minds, or convey to the minds of others, an impres-

sion of what those who witnessed it, experienced. Just so it is in the argument from prophecy: the effect produced by it upon the minds of those for whose use it was primarily intended, cannot be measured by the mere logical weight of the evidence, as apprehended by persons living in the present day. It is the preceding expectation, which gives this evidence its peculiar character. But on a supposition, that the data are to be learnedly explained and demonstrated, the argument becomes a mere dry theorem, of little or no value in a matter of practical belief, when the imagination of mankind must be appealed to, as well as their understanding. Or if any considerable result is to be obtained by this means, it can only be in individual instances. No collective impression can be produced in this way upon the opinions of any large masses of mankind.

It may safely be asserted, even of the wisest, that speculative truths do not much influence the conduct; for it is not upon them, that men build their hopes and fears, or regulate their feelings. In all that concerns the active belief of mankind, at least as much depends upon the circumstances, under which the truth is presented to their imagination and feelings, as upon the abstract weight of the proofs adduced in its support. This is true as a general remark; but I think it especially so, in the particular case immediately under our present consideration. And to be convinced of this, we have only to take the same instance as before, and view the

case of the Chinese or Hindoos, under the different suppositions of their actual circumstances and that of an antecedent preparation.

Suppose, then, that in the Vedas and other sacred writings of the Brahmins and Buddhists, which are spread all over the East, and about the antiquity of which, there can be no more doubt than about that of the Jewish Scriptures,—there were found a number of distinct and clearly understood predictions, in which the rise of the British dominion of India had been plainly foretold. Suppose further, that in the same books, in which this prediction was contained, others also were to be found, intimating, that after a given epoch—the exact period of which was precisely defined—the present idolatrous worship, now prevailing in those parts of the world, would be brought to an end; and its votaries be led, of their own free choice, to embrace the religion of their conquerors. As the signal of this great revolution, imagine it to have been predicted that the temple of Juggernaut should suddenly, and in some miraculous manner, be overturned and utterly destroyed, and the whole race of Brahmins be violently driven from their country, and dispersed among the surrounding nations. To these, let other circumstances be added, if necessary, so as to remove all ambiguity as to the sense of the prophecies, before they were fulfilled, and all doubt, as to their divine authority, afterwards. We have only to suppose

further, that the knowledge of the predictions was spread throughout all the surrounding countries;—that there was hardly a city of any note, in which they were not talked of and discussed by individuals, and more or less believed;—and we shall have a case nearly parallel to what would have been the position of the heathen nations of antiquity, if they had been informed of the prophecies contained in the Old Testament.

Suppose now the "times" to have been calculated by all the more learned of the Hindoos; and the present to be the generation in which both they and the people of the East were looking for their fulfilment. If then, at the moment when they were reasoning, and disputing, and wondering about the event;—the foreshewn signal should be given, and the doubts of some, and the expectation of others, and the hopes or fears of all, be suddenly realized;—the question is, how would this hypothesis affect the argument, as between the worshippers of Christ and those of Vishnu? Would our subjects in the East still turn a deaf ear to their conquerors, when we spoke to them of the religion of the Gospel? or would the other nations of the earth, who symbolized with them in the essentials of their various superstitions, continue to be as inaccessible to all argument and persuasion, as they have hitherto been found? Every one must judge the question for himself; but to my mind it does not seem to admit of controversy.

A man may say indeed, that he would not believe the Gospel even if presented, under such circumstances, to his acceptance. No doubt many so thought at the time when it was first preached. But that is not the point in question. We are not now considering in what way a particular individual might reason; nor even what would be the true conclusion;—but only what would be the way, upon the common principles of human nature, in which the world in general would reason, under the circumstances here supposed? If we confine the question to what would be the probable effect upon the propagation of Christianity, the answer cannot be doubted.

In the statement of the case here proposed, it will be seen that the hypothesis has not been overcharged. The circumstances under which Christ appeared, were very similar to those which I have supposed; and the miraculousness of the signs, by which the overthrow of the Jewish ritual, as well as that of the heathen nations, was announced, even more extraordinary. For the temple of Jerusalem was a far more conspicuous object, in the eyes of mankind, than is the temple of Juggernaut in the eyes of the Eastern nations. The overthrow of the Jewish state, and the total dispersion of nearly all the inhabitants of Judea, was in every respect a far more remarkable fact, than the banishment of the Brahmins would be;—as the death, and resurrection, and ascension of Christ, must have made a much deeper

impression upon men's minds, when there were thousands of persons alive, whose fathers had witnessed these events, than they can now be supposed to make, when simply asserted as historical truths.

It is further evident that in the case which I have here been supposing, the effect, whatever it was, would not be slow and gradual, but rapid, and sudden, and simultaneous; this is part of the hypothesis. A belief, derived from the fulfilment of prophecy, would propagate itself in a very different manner, from one deduced by reasoning. It would not spread from individual to individual, one by one, but would rise up at once, in every place to which a knowledge of the prophecy had extended. Now, the sudden and unexplained appearance of Christianity at one and the same time, in places the most distant to each other, both within and without the limits of the Roman empire, is the particular point which every writer, who has alluded to the fact at all, especially dwells upon. Justin, and Irenæus, and Tertullian, and Clemens, and Origen, all concur in this observation. They do not describe the multitude of the Christians:—that which appears chiefly to have affected their imagination, was their wonderful diffusion through so many countries; and that, not only in the principal cities, but, as they all affirm, even in the fields and villages. "There is no race of mankind, whether wandering in tribes or feeding their

flocks in tents," says Justin, "among whom prayers and thanskgiving are not offered to the Creator of the world, in the name of the crucified Jesus." "*In agris, in castellis, in insulis Christianos; ubique porrigitur, ubique creditur, ubique regnat,*" says Tertullian. "The doctrine of Christ," says Clemens, "is spread throughout the world, in every nation, village, and city, both of Greeks and Barbarians."

Now, if we were at liberty to assume the fact, that a knowledge of the Jewish prophecies was spread abroad, among all the heathen nations of the world, at the time when Christ was born, in the same manner as was just now supposed, in the case above imagined, the phenomenon here spoken of would be explained. Proceed we then to examine whether there is any authority in history for believing such a supposition to be true. Some cause or causes, appealing not to the understanding of mankind, but strongly affecting their imagination, must necessarily have been in operation:—the question is, was it the supposed fulfilment of foreknown prophecies?

CHAPTER III.

At the beginning of Bishop Chandler's "Defence of Christianity, from the prophecies of the Old Testament," is a dissertation on the expectation generally

prevailing, in the age when Jesus Christ appeared, of some great change in human affairs, or of some extraordinary person then about to be produced, to whom the future dominion of the world would be committed. I know not that any thing need be added, nor that any thing material can be added, to the proofs which the Bishop has brought together in confirmation of this proposition. Nevertheless, having already had occasion more than once to allude to the fact itself, I shall now produce some of the authorities by which the statement may be directly defended. Though they are strong, yet the indirect argument, to be drawn from the history of the Jewish nation, at this period, as will afterwards be shewn, is still stronger.

The earliest allusion which we find to the fact here supposed, is in Cicero[1]; who relates, that, on occasion of the Parthian war, a motion had been made in the Senate, to confer the title of king upon Cæsar, in deference to a prophecy which was produced, (and which is mentioned also by Suetonius[2],) that the Parthians could be overcome only by a king; and that the safety of Rome must be sought under that form of government. This prophecy must have attracted considerable attention at the time; for the belief in it is said by Sallust to have been among the motives of Lentulus for lending himself to Catiline's conspiracy. So firmly indeed was this persua-

[1] De Div. ii. c. 54. [2] In Julio, c. 79.

sion rooted in the minds of men, that Suetonius[1] states, on the authority of an early historian, whose name he gives, that the Senate about this time had resolved, that every child born in a stated year, (the same as that in which Augustus was born,) should be put to death; the assigned cause being an ancient prophecy, "that nature was then in labour to bring forth a king, who should reign over the Roman people;" and the reason is given by the historian, why this decree did not pass into a law. Whether such a decree was ever really projected or not, is a point of no importance. The historian whose words Suetonius quotes, and the credit given to the fact itself by the latter, must be received as a sufficient proof, that an expectation prevailed among the people of Rome, of the appearance of some miraculous person, who was not to come into the world as other men, nor to be a mere ordinary ruler.

This last conclusion is implied in the words by which Suetonius describes his generation. But the best commentary upon them will be found, in a passage of the sixth book of Virgil, in which he applies the prophecy to Augustus, and speaks of it as well known—

> "Hic vir, hic est, tibi quem promitti *sæpius audis,*
> Augustus Cæsar, *Divi genus:* aurea condet
> *Sæcula* qui rursus Latio, regnata per arva
> Saturno quondam; super et Garamantas et Indos

[1] In Oct. c. 95.

Proferet imperium : jacet extra sidera tellus,
Extra anni solisque vias, ubi cœlifer Atlas
Axem humero torquet stellis ardentibus aptum.
Hujus in adventum jam nunc et Caspia regna
Responsis horrent divûm, et Mæotia tellus,
Et septemgemini turbant trepida ostia Nili."—v. 791.

In his fourth Eclogue, Virgil reverts to the subject, in words which are, I believe, admitted on all sides to have been borrowed from Isaiah; but which, at all events, distinctly prove what I am now endeavouring to shew;—That at the time when he wrote, an opinion prevailed, and was known to his readers, that some new era was about to arise, in which all wars would cease throughout the world, and all nations be at peace—in which the lion would no longer vex the folds; when the serpent would be slain, and no poisonous herbs spring forth:—all which blessings he promises on the faith of well-known prophecies. Prophecies of a similar import are stated by Suetonius and Tacitus, to have prevailed all over the East, at the time preceding the Jewish war; and are distinctly asserted both by them and Josephus, to have been the exciting cause of the fatal rebellion, which ended in the destruction of the nation.

But there is evidence which would lead us to believe, that the popular excitement which ended so fatally for the Jews, had been of long standing in the world, and was not confined to Judea. Suetonius tells us that one of the first acts of

Augustus, upon assuming supreme authority in the empire, (and when, of course, he must have been anxious to calm the angry passions which had been so greatly excited,) was to collect together, from every quarter, the various prophecies by which the minds of the people were agitated. Of these, he publicly committed two thousand volumes to the flames; reserving only a selection from some, which bore the name of the Sibyls; and which last, he ordered to be preserved with care, in a temple built by him in his own palace, for that express purpose. In accordance with this account of Suetonius, we learn from Tacitus, that by a decree of Augustus, no private persons were allowed to have any such collection of prophecies in their possession: a law which continued in force under the reign of Tiberius.

In all questions where great and important interests are concerned, the mind is naturally and properly jealous of admitting premises, which are not demonstrably certain; and this is especially the case in a matter, where the conclusions which we may draw, affect the foundations of our belief or disbelief of revelation. But for this, I do not think that a doubt would be entertained, as to the true origin of the popular persuasion above adverted to:—of the fact of its existence, there cannot be a doubt. "It was an ancient and constant opinion," says Suetonius, "and founded upon a knowledge of some divine decree, that a person or persons would appear in Judea, who should obtain the government of the

world[1]." "It was the persuasion of most persons," says Tacitus[2], "that the ancient books of the priests contained passages, which implied that the East would become powerful, and that those would arise in Judea, who should obtain the empire of the world." Here we see, that the expectation to which Josephus refers[3], and to which he ascribes the rebellion of the Jews,—of some person arising among them who would govern the world, ἀπὸ τῆς χώρας τὶς αὐτῶν ἄρξει τῆς οἰκουμένης: is plainly one and the same with that expectation, which Suetonius says had long prevailed all over the East, and Tacitus speaks of, as an opinion commonly entertained. Now, as there can be no doubt, as to the source from whence the Jewish belief arose, it does not seem to me that there is room for a second opinion, as to the true origin of the heathen.

It is true, that Virgil does not refer to the Jewish Scriptures, nor to the ancient books of the priests, as his authority for predicting that new and golden age, which he describes as being about to arise; but to the Cumæan Sibyl. And, therefore, it may be asked, by what right do we assume that he borrowed from Isaiah, seeing that Isaiah himself may have drawn from the same source. The answer is, that we have the writings of Isaiah in our hands, and are able to judge of their contents. Moreover, we are sure that they were composed many hundred years

[1] Vespas. c. iv. [2] Hist. v. 13. [3] De Bello, vi. 5.

before the time when Virgil lived. But we know nothing of the books of the Cumæan Sibyl, except what we learn from the passages he has quoted; from which passage it is almost a matter of demonstration, that either the Cumæan Sibyl borrowed from Isaiah and the other Jewish Scriptures, or that these last were borrowed from the Cumæan or other Sibylline oracles. In which last case the objection will amount only to this; that the prophecies on which the expectations, both of the Jews and heathens, at the time of Christ's coming, were built, had been delivered to mankind, in an age anterior to that which is now supposed. This supposition will not render the fact itself less certain, that the belief in Christianity was built upon an antecedent expectation. Nor will it affect the reasons for thinking, that the prophecies on which that expectation was founded, must have been made known to mankind in some manner, which we cannot explain by any causes, which our experience of the powers of human reason can suggest. Such an opinion, if true, would darken our knowledge of the exact premises, from which the reasoning of mankind had been drawn; but it would not alter the principle on which their reasoning must have been built, nor introduce any change in the conclusion.

I shall not prosecute this part of the argument, because I do not apprehend, that the question which has been supposed, is likely to be raised; or, at least, after what has been said, to be persisted in. But as

our belief in historical facts, especially if there be anything in them which is extraordinary and out of the common way, is always more lively and complete, when we are able to explain the process by which they came to pass and say how they happened,—it will be worth while to examine a question, (very nearly connected with the history of Christianity, though touching but slightly on the evidence for its truth,) which can hardly fail to occur to our minds, when inquiring into the knowledge possessed by the heathens of the Jewish prophecies; and that is,—How are we to account for this knowledge on their part?

If we examine the prophetical parts of the Old Testament, we shall observe that by far the largest portion is taken up with matter, which relates solely to Judea. But the books of Isaiah and Daniel offer an exception to this remark. Only a small proportion of the contents of these, is occupied with the Jews or their affairs. The leading subject is the calling of the Gentiles and the future triumphs of the Church; or else, the particular judgments of God, against the several nations, of whom the Gentile world was composed. It is the destruction of Tyre and Babylon,—the desolation of Moab, and Edom, and Ammon,—the degradation of Egypt,—the rise of the several empires of the world and their respective terminations, which fill all those parts of the prophecies of Isaiah and Daniel, that do not relate to the Gospel; which last, we may remark, was a subject,

not concerning any one people in particular, but expressly referring to all nations of mankind. These last prophecies were delivered to the world, it is true, by the mouth of persons who were Jews; yet, as it was the heathen nations, as the event has shown, who were the real objects of the divine communication, rather than their own countrymen, it is to the former that we must consider these prophecies as having been properly addressed.

With respect to the events themselves, which form the subject of the greater part of the writings of these two prophets,—most of them, it will be observed, (with the exception of some few particular predictions, the fulfilment of which has been gradual and is still going on,) received their completion before the coming of Christ. Apparently, therefore, they have nothing to do with the proof of Christianity; or at least only by some distant and circuitous process of reasoning. The evidence by which we show that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, is quite unconnected with the destruction of Babylon, or the wars of Alexander, and the subsequent division of his conquests among his chief captains. Under these circumstances, it is a natural question to ask: —What end did these particular prophecies serve? It is difficult to believe that they were from God, and not suppose that they must have had an adequate object of some kind. This must be presumed, even if the purpose of them should remain hidden from our understanding. But certainly a satisfactory

answer to the question I have asked, will remove a difficulty which presses with some weight upon the mind, while examining this part of the Old Testament.

Now whatever the end of these predictions was, it must be referred to some purpose which concerned, not the direct, but the preparatory evidences of Christianity; seeing that otherwise, they would not have related to events, which happened many years before Christ came into the world, but to persons or things, belonging to the age, in or about which he appeared. But if the antecedent expectation of a Messiah among the heathen nations of the world, was as important to the reception of Christianity, as the remarks contained in the last chapter would seem to indicate, a reason will at once suggest itself to our minds, why these prophecies should have been inserted in the Old Testament. Assuming that they were written at the time asserted by the Jews, (and which, except for their miraculous pretensions, no one would ever have called in question,) it is easy to see, how largely a knowledge of them would have conduced to that widely-spread and inveterate opinion, which every historian of the events relating to this period has spoken of, in terms either more or less direct; and without the supposition of which, the success of Christianity, (unless we ascribe it to the effect of an immediate miracle upon the understandings of mankind in that age,) is capable of no explanation, which we are able to assign.

But with the testimony of history for our support, these prophecies guide our conjectures to an easy solution of the case. "Here," might the Jews say to the Gentiles with whom they conversed, "here is a book, whose antiquity you acknowledge, or may readily ascertain. In it we find a declaration, that he, of whom all the prophets of our nation have for ages spoken, is, in the fulness of God's appointed time, to make his appearance in the world. And the generation is now approaching, or is actually alive, in which this prophecy is to be fulfilled. Do you accuse us of enthusiasm or superstition, or smile at the earnest and full reliance of faith, with which our nation is now looking forward to the completion of this prediction? Take the book into your hand; it contains other predictions besides those which relate to 'the consolation of Israel:'—predictions which relate to you, and such as yourselves may judge of. See how accurately all that has been spoken of yourselves has been fulfilled; how wonderfully every thing has actually come to pass, among the kingdoms and princes of the earth, exactly in the order there foretold:—and then answer, whether you have not sufficient reason to expect with us, that this unaccomplished Promise, of a new kingdom which is to arise, and which is to bring with it a new age into the world, will also in like manner, and in the predicted time, no less certainly be fulfilled?"

Such is the language in which a Jew might have addressed a Gentile. It is plain that the reasoning

involved no controversial topic, but related simply to a question of fact, which those who lived before Christ could judge, with fuller means of knowledge than we possess. If the books appealed to, were really as ancient as the Jews pretended and believed; and if they contained the prediction of events, relating to many nations of the world, besides their own, which had notoriously and confessedly been fulfilled;—in this case, the conclusion did not depend upon any matter of opinion, but would equally have its effect upon the imagination of mankind, whether Jew or Gentile. Putting aside the truth of the prophecies in question,—if a large number of persons in every country and city, believed them to be true, it will be enough to account for the fact related by Tacitus and Suetonius. And on the other hand, the importance of such a belief, to the success of the Gospel, if we suppose it to have had God for its author, will sufficiently explain the reason, why the prophecies before us had been delivered.

But admitting all this; assuming that a knowledge of these prophecies, so far as it extended, would account for the existence of an opinion in the minds of many, of the approach of some undefined change in the face of human affairs,—yet how came this persuasion to be so widely spread? This appears evidently to have been the case, from the testimony of the writers, whose words we have quoted. But if we suppose the fact to have had any thing to do with the early history of Christianity, the *universality* of

the opinion in question, seems to be a part of the hypothesis; for after the destruction of Jerusalem, the propagation of Christianity was not slow or gradual; was not step by step; was not confined to any particular region or language; but, if we may place any reliance upon the testimonies in our possession, was, as we have seen, suddenly diffused throughout the world. On this point there can be no dispute. The earliest document we have, is a heathen document; and it informs us, that within little more than thirty years from the time when the Jewish form of worship was ostensibly abolished, a new religion had sprung out of its ashes; and that before the generation in which its Founder lived, had passed away, this religion was become the established faith of all ranks and ages, and conditions of men, in one of the remotest provinces of the Roman empire!

The difficulty here, is in explaining the wide diffusion of the belief, which we suppose to have caused this change, and the simultaneousness of the effect. If we were to confine ourselves to the case of any particular city or district, it is plain that we should only have to assume a knowledge of the Jewish prophecies, on the part of the inhabitants; and explain their possession of it, by supposing that a large number of Jews resided among them,—and we should at once have, if not a true, yet at least an adequate solution. In truth, the mere knowledge of the previous existence of a prophecy, such as

that of the seventy weeks, would be enough, without any antecedent belief in its truth. For the destruction of Jerusalem was a fact not to be mistaken, when it happened, though it might not be credited before; and many who were incredulous while it was standing, would change their opinion when it fell.

Let us, then, for the sake of argument, extend the hypothesis; and suppose that there was a community of Jews, living in every city of the Roman empire. In this case it would be as easy to understand the sudden and simultaneous rise of Christianity throughout a hundred cities and nations, as in one. In fact, we have before seen, that in such a case, it would be sudden and simultaneous, or not at all. If the prophecies had been known beforehand, and understood; that is, had been talked of and discussed, and debated, in Rome and Alexandria, and Antioch, and in every considerable city of the ancient world, before the coming of Christ,—whether we suppose them to have been generally believed or disbelieved, will be a matter of little importance. If they were fulfilled; if that which men had derided beforehand, and supposed to be only the dream of folly or enthusiasm, actually came to pass, under circumstances which left no doubt of a miraculous providence,—the effect, on this hypothesis, as when light is put to a combustible train, must have been visible and instantaneous; not at this place or city only, or in that particular country; but in many places, and

cities, and countries, at what may be said to be, one and the same time.

"As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall the coming of the Son of man be," were the words of Christ. No prediction was ever uttered which corresponded more truly with the event. Nor is there any common fact in history of which we could give a more satisfactory explanation, on acknowledged principles of reasoning, than the sudden rise of Christianity in the world, provided we may assume that a knowledge of the great and leading prophecies of the Old Testament, was generally diffused among mankind at the time immediately preceding the period of their final completion. That is to say, in other words, provided it could be shewn, that at the time of this great event, there was in every considerable city of the known world, not one or two individuals, but a large body of individuals, with these prophecies in their hands, and implicitly believing that the time of their fulfilment was then at hand.

CHAPTER IV.

In proof of the fact, hypothetically assumed at the end of the last chapter, it will not be necessary to

resort to any conjectural reasoning. It is well known, in a general way, that before the coming of Christ, as in the present day, the Jewish nation was not confined to any one particular country. But the extent of their dispersion through all parts of the world, and the importance which they derived from their numbers, in all the chief cities, both of the East and elsewhere, at the time I am now speaking of, can only be imperfectly understood by the mere classical reader. The fact itself indeed may be partly inferred, not only from the Roman historians, but from Cicero and Juvenal. It is, however, not necessary to avail ourselves of their, or of any indirect, testimony; because, among the writings of Philo, there are two books, one entitled, ΕΙΣ ΦΛΑΚΚΟΝ, and the other ΠΕΡΙ 'ΑΡΕΤΩΝ, in the course of which, while discoursing of other matters, he speaks of his nation, in terms which place the subject which we are now considering in a very strong point of view. In order to understand the passage which I am about to quote, it will be convenient to say a few words respecting the occasion of it.

Among other extravagant acts of Caligula, one was a command to the Jews, that his statue should be placed in the Temple of Jerusalem; and the resistance to this order is stated by Tacitus, as having given rise to the war, which ended in their destruction. On this point, Tacitus differs from Josephus, who gives another account of the origin of the war; and an examination of dates will immediately show

that the latter was right, and not the Roman historian. In point of fact, the statue never was put up in the temple, nor was the outrage ever actually attempted. But so great was the consternation, which the bare contemplation of such an act of daring impiety created in the breasts of the nation, not in Judea only, but in other places,—that the Jews of Alexandria sent an embassy to Caligula, consisting of Philo and two others, hoping to make such a representation of the consequences, as would prevail upon him to change his resolution. The two writings of Philo above-mentioned contain a full and particular relation of the whole of the events connected with the transaction: the first, being an account of the causes, which led to the embassy which he had filled; and the second, containing a history of the embassy itself. The whole forms a very curious narrative, extremely well written, and throws much light upon the condition of the provinces, under the government of the Romans. But our present concern is with the statements which we find in it, illustrative of the numbers and importance of the Jews at that period. As it is an account of things then familiarly known, and not of events long since past; and as the truth or falsehood of Philo's statements must have been open to every reader, there can be no reason for suspecting him of any intentional exaggeration.

He tells us that Alexandria was inhabited by two races of people (and the rest of Egypt the same), viz. by Egyptians and Jews; and that not less than

one million of the latter lived in Alexandria and in that part of the country, which extended from the plains of Libya (καταβαθμὸς Λιβύας) to the boundaries of Ethiopia. He then goes on to detail the populousness of his nation, as spread through the world[1]; observing that on account of their multitudes, no single region was capable of containing them. Of the five divisions, into which Alexandria was divided, distinguished by the five first letters of the alphabet, they occupied two. At Rome, the whole of that part of the city which was on the other side of the Tiber, was also inhabited by his countrymen, of the race called Libertini; the descendants of those, who had been made captives in war and had obtained their manumission. In another part, speaking of the alarm which was created throughout the East, when the orders of Caligula were first received, "Petronius, the pro-consul," says Philo[2], "reflected in his mind upon the endless multitude of this people, which is not contained like other nations within any fixed limits, but is spread throughout the whole habitable globe. 'For it is dispersed,' said he to those about him, 'through all the provinces, both of the continent and the islands, so as almost to equal the indigenous inhabitants (ὡς τῶν αὐθιγενῶν, μὴ πολλῷ τινι δοκεῖν ἐλαττοῦσθαι).'"

But besides the alarm which Philo tells us, Petronius expressed, at the recollection of the number of

[1] Vol. II. p. 523—525, ed. Mangey. [2] Vol. II. p. 577.

the Jews, in the countries immediately adjacent to Palestine, he was especially moved, when he also reflected on the swarms, who dwelt beyond the Euphrates; "for he knew that Babylon, and many other of the satrapies, were almost possessed by this nation." A few pages further on, we have the letter of Agrippa to Caligula, in which he is writing officially, as a public officer, to the head of the government; and this has even stronger expressions. "Jerusalem," he says, "is indeed my country, but it is the metropolis not of one region, but of many: of Egypt, Phœnicia, Syria, Pamphylia, Cilicia, and the chief parts of Asia, as far as Bithynia, and the most remote shores of the Euxine." He reminds Caligula that the Jewish nation are equally numerous in Europe; "Thessaly, Bœotia, Corinth, Peloponnesus, the whole of Greece, the continent, as well as the islands of Eubœa, Cyprus, Crete, being full of Jewish colonists. I say nothing," he adds, "of the Trans-Euphratensian provinces, all of which, except a small part, are inhabited by the same nation. So that in showing favour to the Jews of Jerusalem, in the affair of the statue, he would be able to obtain the gratitude, not of one state or city, but of many states and many cities, scattered far and wide through Europe, Asia, and Africa,—the inhabitants of islands and continents both inland and maritime."

Now, unless these writings of Philo are forgeries, (a supposition which it cannot be necessary to refute,) no further evidence need be adduced, in

proof of the fact, on which this part of our reasoning is built. If the ready assent to Christianity, on the part of the heathen nations of antiquity, as compared with its reception among the heathen nations now in the world, may be accounted for, by assuming a knowledge of the Jewish prophecies, on the part of the former, which the latter are without:—then, I think, we may at once stand upon our conclusion. It is certain, from the direct evidence of history, that the Gentile part of the world were informed of the existence of these writings; and if there were no historical proof of the fact, the contrary supposition, with these passages of Philo before us, would be incredible.

It may, perhaps, seem that this account of the motives by which I am supposing the belief of mankind in Christianity to have been originally determined, (or perhaps, as I should rather say, by which their attention to the proofs which were provided of Christ's divine mission, was originally excited,) differs in circumstantials only, from the account offered by Gibbon; and that, so far as a supposition of secondary causes is concerned, the explanations are substantially the same. Admitting, for the sake of argument, that, at the time when Christ appeared, mankind were in expectation of his coming; and that this expectation had its origin in the same source, as the expectation of the Jews; yet this statement, it may be said, implies no miraculous effect. It only shows, that there were pre-disposing

causes, in the accidental state of men's minds, at that particular juncture, which never occurred before or since; but from which, should they recur, the same effects (other circumstances being the same) would again follow. There is no reason, it may be argued, why a person, who entirely disbelieved in the divine character of Christ and his religion, should not agree to all that has here been said, as readily as if he believed in both. The explanation reaches only to a matter of fact; the conclusion from which will be the same, whether we believe or disbelieve the truth of Christianity; whether we suppose the prophecies, by which the antecedent expectation of mankind was created, to have been mere dreams with no better foundation than popular rumour and credulity, or to have been divine revelations.

It is just so: the success of Christianity in the world, and its rapid propagation, are historical facts not to be disputed; as are also, I believe, the facts by which I have endeavoured to explain them. And the explanation just given is quite compatible with a disbelief in the divine authority of its Founder; —this is admitted. But if it be asserted that the Jewish prophecies, out of which the success of Christianity grew, were not the mere dreams of enthusiasm, but the oracles of God himself;—that the particular disposition of events, by means of which, the knowledge of these prophecies had been spread abroad in the world, was not an accidental effect, but had been concerted many ages before by God,

and miraculously brought about by the direct interposition of his Providence:—here an entirely new question presents itself to the mind. The point which we have to determine, is not what the causes were; but assuming them, what the nature of those causes was,—whether natural or divine?

There was nothing miraculous in the belief of mankind,—that nature, at the time when Christ appeared, was "in labour," (to use the expression of Suetonius,) and that she was about to bring forth a king, whose empire would extend over all the known world. Neither was there any thing miraculous, in the fact of Jews being found at Rome, and Antioch, and in all the principal cities of the world. But if it should appear, that this belief of mankind, and this dispersion of a particular nation through all the other nations, were the secondary and instrumental causes of the establishment of a religion in the world, which, from that time to the present, has been believed to be divine, it then becomes a matter of deep interest to inquire, whether those facts were the result of chance, or were part of a wide and providential scheme?

It is evident that a thousand things may happen in the world, which have been prepared long before by God, with a view to designs which are to be accomplished in ages yet to come; and it is consistent with the soundest principles of reason to believe, that no event can happen, which is not, in an enlarged sense of the word, part of some divine

plan. But when we descend from this general proposition to particular facts, we have then no certain compass to go by; none, at least, which we can demonstrate to be certain, and to which we can compel the assent of other minds. In the works of the visible creation, there are positive data, from which we may often infer the meaning and intention of the great Architect, by infallible marks; but in the operations of God's moral government, we can only guess at the final causes of things; our firmest convictions must, after all, be based upon opinion and belief. As I have before had occasion to remark, the past intentions and future designs of God can never be demonstrated, by mere reasoning upon events. Be they of what nature they may, our knowledge is confined to what we experience. We may know the immediate cause of the rebellion of the Jews against the Romans; and we are sure, that the consequence of that rebellion was the destruction of their city; but there is no human source of knowledge, from which we could pretend to say, what was God's reason for bringing this event to pass:—*that* could never have been known except by revelation. Assume, however, that this event had been the subject of a prophecy, delivered to mankind fifteen hundred years before it was fulfilled,—and then the question will wear an entirely new aspect. On this supposition, not only the event itself will become a miracle, but every consequence, directly and necessarily arising out of it, will also be invested with a

miraculous character. Now I am prepared to say, that this supposition gives a true and exact statement of the case of Christianity, as it actually stood in the age of which we are now speaking.

We do not, indeed, find in history any formal account of the causes of its success, at its first preaching; but we know that there was a prevailing expectation, in many parts of the world at that particular period, of some approaching event, which nearly concerned the future condition of mankind; and that this state of feeling had its origin in the prophecies of the Old Testament. With this *datum* in our hands, we are able to explain the fact,—that the preaching of the Gospel found a readier reception among the heathen nations of antiquity, than our own experience of its effects in the present day, would have enabled us to anticipate. It is likewise nearly certain that this effect was caused, by the minute dispersion of the Jews, at that particular period, through almost every city and kingdom in the then known world. All this we learn from history; but we learn nothing more.

On turning to the Old Testament, however, (the very instrument by means of which, the minds of mankind had been prepared to embrace the doctrines, which have since formed the religious belief of nearly half the world,) we find that this dispersion of the Jewish people is the subject of the earliest, as well as of the longest and clearest prophecy, which the volume contains. In determining whether

the rise of Christianity in the world was the effect of natural and secondary causes, or the result of events purposely contrived by God, we are, therefore, not called upon to enter into any learned argument, but simply to examine a few passages in this book, and form our opinion upon a point easy to be judged. There is no room for discussion, as to the meaning of the prophecy; still less, if possible, as to its punctual fulfilment;—the only debateable question is, whether it be possible to suppose that it came true by chance?

Before this question is determined in the affirmative, there are two points which, I hope, will previously be observed and pondered: the first relates to the subject-matter of the prediction. Any person who reads the narrative, which Josephus has left us, of the events which marked the siege of Jerusalem, (which is one most material feature of the prophecy relating to the dispersion of the Jews, and part of the event which it is speaking of;) and weighs the unspeakable greatness of the catastrophe, in comparison with any similar event recorded in history,—will see that it stands alone in the annals of mankind, neither like nor second to any calamity, which, either before or since, ever fell upon the people of any nation. When Tacitus comes to that part of his history, in which he has to relate this event, the expression which he uses, marks how deep an impression it had made upon his imagination. "*Sed quia famosæ urbis supremum diem tradituri sumus, congruens videtur,*

primordia ejus aperire."—*Supremum diem!* There was no metaphor in this phrase, the words were literally true. It was "the last day" of one of the greatest and most renowned cities in the world, which Tacitus was about to record; and there is perhaps no parallel event in history, to which the same expression could, with so little exaggeration, have been applied. It is almost unnecessary for me to remark, that a similar observation may be made even more pointedly still, upon the state of dispersion among other nations, in which the Jews have always lived. Putting aside the persecutions they have endured, the persevering obloquy and injustice of which they have been for so many ages, the unresisting victims (and which no historian can describe in words more exact than those of inspiration);—yet the existence itself of the nation among us, even to the present day, preserving as they do, all their customs and peculiarities, and mixing, as in the beginning, only with each other,—is an event which we may not call miraculous, perhaps, but which is certainly unparalleled. Now that two such events should be foretold in one and the same prophecy, and both of them come literally to pass—and this, by chance,—is a proposition, infinitely more improbable, than would be the truth of the Christian revelation, even if we were able to give no account whatever of its origin.

The other point to which I alluded, as one which ought not to be left out of the argument, by those who may endeavour to explain the fulfilment of this

prophecy on the supposition of chance, is this :—that the same prediction, in different words, and with the addition of new circumstances, is found in the writings of other prophets besides Moses: as in Isaiah vi. 10; Jeremiah ix. 15, xv. 4, xvi. 13, xxiv. 9, xxix. 18, xlvi. 27; Ezekiel v. 10, xii. 15; Amos ix. 4. This would seem to multiply, *ad infinitum*, the amount of improbability, attaching to any solution of the case on the principles we have here been considering. That five different persons, living in different ages, should have predicted one and the same event, would be remarkable; but that the prediction should come true, would, on a supposition of chance, be astonishing indeed. It may be said, however, that these were not independent predictions, but merely copied and repeated. Except we believe in the divine inspiration of the Old Testament, this hypothesis will be absolutely necessary. But, if so, these separate prophecies, whether independent of each other or not, will show, at least, that the prophecy in Deuteronomy was understood many hundred years before its fulfilment, exactly in the same sense, as has always been put upon it since.

I know not that any thing more need be said on this topic. It is plain that the evidence on which our belief in Christianity is now built, rests on proofs which, as I had occasion to observe at the commencement of this Dissertation, are altogether distinct from any explanation which may be proposed or rejected, respecting the causes of its rapid propa-

gation in the world. It would not affect the foundations of our belief, one jot or one tittle, if this particular prophecy, relating to the dispersion of the Jews, were effaced from the sacred volume. But so long as it remains there, and is taken in conjunction with that other great event to which we have been referring, and with which it was connected, in the order of the divine councils:—the Christian has a field of argument, an entrenched position, within which, secure from harm himself, he may at all times, and certain of the advantage, give encounter to his adversary.

DISSERTATION II.

ON THE CREDIBILITY OF THE FACTS RELATED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

DISSERTATION II.

CHAPTER I.

There is no composition of Hume's, which is less impressed with the stamp of his acute and really superior understanding, than his Essay upon Miracles; and yet there is none, which has attracted equal attention. The proposition which he maintains is very imperfectly stated by him; and the reasoning by which it is supported, far from skilful. If nothing more was needed, for the purpose of refuting his general position, than to show the inconsistency of the different parts of his argument, sometimes with his premises, sometimes with his conclusions, and sometimes with each other, the task would require more time than labour. Nevertheless, the proposition itself, which he endeavours to establish, but most certainly does not, is, I imagine, an indubitable truth.

Assuredly the credibility of a miracle cannot be established on human testimony. Not however for the reasons assigned by Hume, because human testimony is fallible,—but because human testimony is not the proper proof. This will be immediately apparent, if we consider for a moment what is the precise signification of the word miracle.

If we look to his reasoning, it is evident that he considered any fact, which happened contrary to our experience of the course of nature, to be miraculous. A moment's reflection will show us, that it is not this which constitutes the miraculousness of any supposed event, but the supposition of its having been the effect of an immediate divine interposition;—its happening contrary to our experience of the course of nature, would only constitute it a prodigy. If a stone, upon being thrown from the hand, were to ascend into the clouds,—this would be a prodigy, but it would be no miracle, according to the sense put upon the word, in the Bible. On the other hand, the most ordinary event may be rendered miraculous, by the supposition of a providential cause.

For example: the plague of locusts in Egypt, as described in the tenth chapter of Exodus, was a miracle, no doubt. But why? Not because it was contrary to our experience of the course of nature; for the fact was not so. They were brought by the east wind, which blew for twenty-four hours; and on the rising of a contrary wind, they were dispersed. The miracle, therefore, did not consist in the *effect*,

but in the alleged *cause:* namely, in the supposition of the fact having been occasioned by a special interposition of God, for the purpose of punishing the obstinacy of Pharaoh. In this way the sickness of Hezekiah was miraculous; the death of David's child by the wife of Uriah, was miraculous; but surely not because the events were contrary to our experience of the course of nature.

It appears then that in the proof of a miracle, two things are required. 1. The effect, whatever it may be, must be shown to have happened. 2. We have to demonstrate, either by induction or by direct evidence, that the cause of the effect was the divine interference.—Two propositions more entirely distinct from each other, in point of principle, cannot be stated: the first being evidently a question of fact; the second, a question of opinion.

Now the mistake which Hume commits, from the beginning to the end of his Essay, would appear to be this: he predicates of the first, what is true only of the second. Assume any fact we please, if we assert the cause of it to have been divine, we cannot demonstrate this, by calling witnesses to the proof of our assertion. The reason is, not because human testimony is fallible or infallible, but because, in a matter of opinion, human testimony is not the proper evidence. Admitting the fact to have happened, we might as well attempt to prove a proposition in Euclid, by calling witnesses to its truth, as hope to prove by such means, the truth of a miracle.

So long as we confine ourselves to the matter of fact, there is no possible event, be it supposed ever so wonderful, which may not be made credible, on the testimony of witnesses. But when the inquiry turns, not upon what it was which the witnesses saw, but *how* the fact happened, and *wherefore*,—we enter upon a province of argument, where the points at issue, are matters of opinion; and must be determined, not on the oath or affirmation of the witnesses, but on the reasons they are able to produce in support of their belief.

It is surprising to observe the incoherent conclusions into which Hume is led, from overlooking the very simple distinction here pointed out. He says that "no testimony for any kind of miracle has ever amounted to a probability, much less to a proof." In the very same page, however, he limits this unqualified assertion, by observing that "there may indeed be miracles, or violations of the usual course of nature," and that he would believe them to have happened, on such testimony as he proceeds to describe; but then, says he, they must not be "the foundation of a system of religion." That is, as he distinctly explains himself, if the opinion of the witnesses as to the *cause* of the fact, be agreeable to his own notions of probability, in that case, their testimony stands good; and he believes the facts to have happened. But should they "be ascribed to any new system of religion, this very circumstance would be a full proof of a cheat, and sufficient with all men of sense, not only

to make them reject the fact," (even though previous to this mistake on their part, he had admitted that their testimony was to be believed,) "but even reject it without farther examination." He does not say that in such a case he would consider the witnesses as mistaken in their *opinion;* that is, as imposed upon by their imagination, or as misled by credulity or superstition; and that he would, therefore, be disposed to exercise increased caution, before he received their testimony to the facts which they related,—but that he would at once set them down as cheats and liars!

In reply to this statement of Hume's, it is common for writers on the side of Christianity to run into the opposite error; and because, under certain supposed circumstances, it would be impossible to question the probity of the witnesses, they seem to reason, as if they thought that their *explanations* of things would also claim to be implicitly received.

For example, after combating the truth of Hume's reasoning on certain abstract grounds of argument, Paley concludes his reply to it as follows: "But the short consideration which, independently of every other, convinces me, that there is no solid foundation in Mr. Hume's conclusion, is the following. When a theorem is proposed to a mathematician, the first thing he does with it, is to try it upon a simple case; and if it produce a false result, he is sure that there must be some mistake in the demonstration. Now to proceed in this way, with what may be

called Mr. Hume's 'theorem.' If twelve men, whose probity and good sense I had long known, should seriously and circumstantially relate to me an account of a miracle wrought before their eyes, and in which it was impossible that they should have been deceived: if the governor of the country, hearing a rumour of the account, should call these men into his presence, and offer them a short proposal, either to confess the imposture, or submit to be tied to a gibbet; if they should refuse with one voice to acknowledge that there existed any falsehood or imposture in the case; if this threat were communicated to them separately, yet with no different effect; if it was at last executed; if I myself saw them, one after another, consenting to be racked, burnt, or strangled, rather than give up the truth of their account:—still, if Mr. Hume's rule be my guide, I am not to believe them. Now I undertake to say, that there exists not a sceptic in the world, who would not believe them, or who would defend such incredulity."

If in this passage, Paley had limited his proposition to a proof of the honesty and sincerity of the witnesses in the case here supposed, and which, of course, is meant as a parallel instance with that of the Apostles, every one will, I think go along with him in his conclusion. But if we are to understand that the character of the witnesses, as here tested, would be a warrant, not only for the truth of the facts which they asserted, but of the opinions, like-

wise, for the sake of which we are left to infer that they exposed themselves to so many sufferings,—the premises, as stated above, will be found insufficient for his argument. Endurance of persecution, on the part of witnesses, affords no test of their judgment; though assuredly no reasonable person would doubt their veracity, in the face of such irrefragable proofs of disinterestedness and sincerity, as here described.

But Paley does not seem to have recollected, while proposing the above case, that it is the cause to which we refer an effect, which constitutes its miraculousness; and that this is not a matter falling under the senses of mankind. If we suppose, therefore, these same witnesses to have affirmed, not merely that the facts which they testified had happened in their presence, but, moreover, that they were not the effect of secret arts of any kind, nor of collusion, nor of spiritual agency, but of God's immediate interposition:—these evidently, whether they were right or wrong, are not statements of fact, but of opinion, to be explained by reason and argument. In default of these, it would be in vain for the witnesses, however large the number, to appeal to the sufferings they had endured. This argument would demonstrate the honesty of their testimony, but not the truth of their conclusions; nor would any inflictions, though endured ever so patiently and unflinchingly, persuade mankind to embrace these last, unless corroborated by arguments totally inde-

pendent of the proofs to show the credibility of the facts.

Substitute, then, in the case which Paley has described, that which is the hypothesis of the Christian revelation, namely, that the witnesses had not contented themselves with recording their opinion as to the cause of the effects which they had seen, but had further declared, that the end for which God had manifested his power, was to persuade mankind to change their mode of life, to renounce the errors of their belief, and to embrace a system of faith, founded altogether upon new views, both of this world and of the next:—and I feel inclined almost to reverse the conclusion of Paley; and instead of saying that there is not a sceptic in the world, who would not believe his twelve witnesses, to say, that there is not a sober-minded man in the world, who would act upon such evidence, except their testimony was explained by collateral proofs of some kind, over and above the arguments, contained in the preceding extract.

In the case of the miracles related in the New Testament, we have seen, in a former part of this volume, what was the collateral proof on which the belief of their divine authority was originally founded, as also the proof on which it stands with us. In the days of the Apostles, this part of the proof was drawn from the prophecies of the Old Testament. In the present day it is supplied, not only by this, but also by the establishment in the world, of that

system of belief, which the miracles were adduced to attest. But if we take the question of miracles, in the abstract, as argued by Hume and Paley, and define the word according to the meaning, in which it is always used by the writers of the Old and New Testaments, I am inclined to agree with the former, rather than with the latter; and to say that the truth of a miracle is not susceptible of demonstration by human testimony alone. But if Hume intended to say, (and it is very difficult to be sure of his exact meaning, on this point,) that no testimony can establish the credibility of a fact, which implies a deviation (so far as we can judge) from the usual course of nature,—nothing can be more easy of refutation than such a proposition.

CHAPTER II.

I OBSERVED just now, that in the proof of a miracle, two things are required. First: The effect, whatever it may be, must be shown to have happened. Secondly: We have to demonstrate, either by induction or by direct evidence, that the cause of the effect was the divine interference. The latter of these points was examined by me, when considering the use and design of the Old Testament: in the present Dis-

sertation, I must be understood as confining my remarks exclusively to the former of the above-mentioned points; and if, in compliance with a customary form of speech, I should be found using the word miracle, when speaking of facts, I desire it to be carefully remembered, that I leave entirely out of consideration all opinion as to the cause; and speak of the effects as miraculous, only because they are supposed to be deviations from the regular course of nature, or, as I should more properly say, of our experience.

The question, then, which I am about to discuss, may be stated in very few words.—Did the events related in the New Testament really happen?—The question is not, *how* they happened, or for *what end*, or by what immediate *agency;* it is not, whether the conclusions which were drawn from them by mankind, were *true* or *untrue;* but whether the facts on which those conclusions, right or wrong, have been built, were real transactions?

Now before we come to the evidence on which the determination of this question will depend, the first thing which we have to do, is to agree about terms; or rather about the subject-matter of inquiry. What do we mean, when we say that an event really happened? Until we know what it is, which constitutes, in general, the reality of a fact, or the truth of an historical transaction, we cannot define the evidence, which the proof of the miracles, recorded in the New Testament, requires; nor apply

a proper test for measuring the degree of credibility they may possess.

Truth and falsehood, in strict propriety of language, cannot be predicated of facts, but only of the historian, or of the witness on whose testimony they are received. Facts are real or unreal, not true or false. These last words have always a reference to some proposition or opinion in the mind of the speaker. But if we were examining a diamond or other precious stone, we should not say it was true or untrue, but real or unreal. It is the same of any sound, or smell, or impression upon the senses:—the question is not whether what we saw or felt, or heard was true; (that relates to another inquiry;) but whether it was real, or only fancied.

Accordingly, when we inquire whether or not any fact recorded in history really happened, the question is, whether the event was seen, or heard, or felt by those who were present, or existed only in the imagination of the historian? If we are speaking of a fact which took place in our own presence, that which is said by us to have happened, is what fell under the observation of our senses. We cannot, however, have this evidence in the case of what others experienced; and therefore, supposing the event to have happened in a remote country, or in a distant age, all that we mean to say, when we assert its reality, is not how it happened, or why it happened, but only that those who were present when it took place, and who must have seen it, if it

did happen, and have known, if it did not, asserted and believed it to have been a fact.

This is plainly not a metaphysical definition, which will apply to all cases of supposed facts; because events may happen in the moon, where perhaps there are no inhabitants, or in places where no witnesses were present, as must be the case every day in the instance of many natural phenomena. But in the instance of historical events, that is, of events of which the actions of mankind are the subject, it is, I conceive strictly correct. It is not merely a definition of the proper proof, but it is a definition of the thing itself. When the matter in debate is, what was felt or seen, or heard? the *belief* of those who were present constitutes the fact which we are seeking to ascertain.

It is true that when people speak of what they saw, especially in the case where the subject of their testimony is any thing that had strongly affected their imagination, they often mix up with their relation much which is only matter of opinion. That is to say, in telling you what they witnessed, they tell you at the same time what they thought and imagined. But it is easy in such cases to discriminate between the testimony of the witnesses and their opinions; and to believe the one, without attaching any importance to the other, or no more importance than the value of their judgment may deserve.

For example, in "a memorable story," as Hume calls it, related by Cardinal de Retz in his Memoirs,

the latter tells us, that passing through Saragossa, the capital of Arragon, he was shown in the cathedral a man who had served for seven years in the capacity of a door-keeper, and who had been seen for a long time, by all the people of the city, wanting a leg. He had recovered that limb, it was said, by the rubbing of holy oil upon the stump; and the Cardinal testifies to having seen him walking upon two legs. Now there can be no doubt in this case, but that what the people of Saragossa, and the Cardinal de Retz, actually *saw*, must have been true. But it is evident, that the marvellous part of this story depends upon the question, whether the second leg of the door-keeper was really a leg of flesh and blood, or only seemed to be such: and this point the narrative does not enable us to determine, farther than that, in the opinion of the people of Saragossa, it was a real leg, and produced by the rubbing of holy oil.

But to take another example, from a somewhat similar case related in the New Testament. When the people of Jerusalem saw the cripple, who was laid at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, get up and walk, at the bidding of Peter, they could not be deceived in this, if it was a real transaction. Supposing all those who were present to have believed that the man got up and walked, it must have been a fact. They may have been mistaken in the judgment they formed; but no deception could have been practised upon their senses. Limiting the

remark to this testimony, what they saw "really happened."

In this case, though we admit the fact to have been a real transaction, yet it is easy to imagine the possibility of a fraud. It was perhaps in the power of those who lived at the time, to satisfy themselves upon this point, but it is not in our power to institute the inquiry. There are cases, however, of another kind, and in which the supposition of a mistake, on the part of those who were present, would seem to be altogether inadmissible; in which, therefore, a person who is incredulous, has no choice, except to disbelieve the truth of the transaction from beginning to end, denying the authenticity of the document in which the account of it is contained.

In this way, for example, a person may very conceivably deny the truth of the facts related in the book of Exodus. But it is the only way in which he can do so. For if it could be demonstrated beyond contradiction, by a document whose authority was not to be impeached, and the evidence of which was confirmed by other historical proofs, drawn from entirely independent sources, that the events related by Moses, were unanimously believed by those who are described as having been present;—in that case, the supposition of their not having really happened, appears to me, quite impossible. If the thousands of Jews, who travelled with Moses in the wilderness, all believed that their shoes never wore out, that their garments never waxed old for forty years, that

their feet never swelled in all that time, and that they were fed daily with manna, which was provided for them by an unseen hand; I say, if it could be *demonstrated*, that all this was believed by those by whom it is said to have been experienced,—it must have been a fact; wonderful and impossible as the story may be thought, nothing would be so wonderful and impossible, as that it should not really have happened. Whether it was the God of their fathers, or some god of the nations, who was the author of these wonders; and on the former supposition, whether the design of them was to sanction the authority of the laws delivered by Moses, or whether we resort to any other explanation, will not matter;—all these are questions of opinion, and might have been debated;—but if the history be authentic, it is impossible to suppose that there could have been, at the time, any doubt about the facts.

In like manner let us take the case of the Egyptians, as related in the same books. If they believed in the occurrence of all the evils, which are described as having fallen upon them; the plague of flies, and locusts, and hail, the murrain of beasts, the death of their first-born;—these facts were not of a kind to allow the supposition of a mistake. Either they really happened, or the history, in which they are related, is not an authentic history, but must have been the invention of a later age. We may not assent to the pretensions of Moses to a

divine authority, and may account for the facts as we please; but if they were believed by the Egyptians to whom they happened, and by the Jews before whom they happened; that is to say, by those who were eye-witnesses of the events, and could not have believed them, if they were only the inventions of an after age:—in that case, be the author of the book of Exodus who he may, the history which he has left us, must be true.

It will easily be seen that these remarks are founded upon principles of general reasoning, and will apply as properly, *mutatis mutandis*, to the histories of Greece and Rome, and to historical facts of every kind, as to the histories contained in the Old and New Testaments. When it is said that a history is authentic, we do not merely mean that it is genuine; that is to say, written by the author whose name it bears; but we mean that it contains a contemporary account of facts; such an account, that is, as was believed by those who lived at the time, when they are supposed to have happened. And it is this assumption of the mind, which lies at the bottom of the credit given to the historian, and not simply an implicit belief in his veracity. No one calls in doubt the veracity and integrity of Lord Clarendon, as a narrator of facts. But if it could be shown that the things which he has related, though believed by himself, had never been heard of, or were not believed by any of his contemporaries,—it would be a vain

attempt, to try to persuade mankind that the transactions detailed by him had really happened, merely on the credit due to the weight of his character.

This it is, then, which constitutes the peculiar value of a written and published contemporary document. We appeal to it, not as a testimony of what the writer believed (for he would be but a single witness), but as a testimony of what is supposed to have been believed by all mankind, at the time in which he wrote. And that which I am now contending for is, that if the subject of their belief, was something falling under the senses of a large number of individuals, —it was an evidence, by which we cannot be deceived.—What was seen and witnessed by many, or even by a single individual, be it supposed ever so extraordinary, "really happened." The true nature and proper explanation of the facts, is a different inquiry, and one which, in any particular instance, may open a wide door to speculation. But I am adverting to the witness of men's eyes and ears, and not of their judgment. This last is fallible enough; but whether it was so or not, in a given case, is a question of opinion, and depends upon quite other evidence, from that which the senses of mankind afford.

The bearing of these remarks upon the books of the New Testament, would not need to be pointed out, except from a common opinion, that the authority of them depends upon their being the productions of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and other disci-

ples of Jesus Christ. Certainly they derive, in many most important respects, a great additional value from this supposed circumstance; nevertheless, so far as regards the credibility of the facts related in the New Testament, that depends upon the proof of those books having been published, at the time when the subject was fresh in the memory of men then alive; and not at all upon the relationship in which the writers may have stood to Christ.

If any thing, this would rather detract from the weight of their testimony than add to it; for while it shows that they were competent witnesses, it also places us under the nec ssity of proving that they were honest and impartial ones. The only important questions that we have to consider are:—1st, Did the writers of the books, be they who they may, live at the time when the events are stated to have happened? and, 2d, Was their statement the same, as was believed by those who lived on the spot, and at the time when they took place? These are the points on which the proof of the authority of the books really depends; other questions are important, only as they are subordinate to these. The names of the writers, or their station, or their character, weigh next to nothing in this part of the evidence. Be their testimony shewn to have been ever so disinterested and sincere, yet if it were consistent with such an opinion to suppose, that the facts which they have related, might have been believed originally only by themselves and by some ten or twelve intimate companions

of Christ, but disbelieved, or never heard of, by any others who were living at the time, in Jerusalem or elsewhere;—we may confidently say that, whether Christianity be true or not, it would never, in such a case, have become the established religion of mankind.—And conversely, on a supposition that the books now in our possession were written at the time when the events are stated to have taken place, or, while thousands must have been alive, by whom, if they really happened, they must have been witnessed: then,—as the establishment of Christianity affords a proof, almost demonstrative, that the facts related by the Evangelists must have been believed by mankind in general at the time to which the narrative relates,—we are warranted in saying, that the history in our possession is a genuine and authentic history, and may be relied upon, as not merely credible, but true.

It is not here meant to assert that the writers cannot have been mistaken, in the construction put by them upon the facts which they have related; but only that, if what they have recorded was the belief of all, who were present at the transactions which they have described,—in that case the events related in the New Testament must really have happened. It has all the evidence which any history does possess, or can even be conceived to possess; for, be a fact what it may, an historian can only relate, what those who were present believed.

It is observed by Hume, that "there is no neces-

sary connexion between the reality of facts and the report of witnesses." Certainly there is not; but there is something very like a necessary connexion, between the reality of facts and the *belief* of witnesses. Now the question which we are discussing is, not what was the report of any set of individuals, but what was the belief of those who were living at the time and on the spot. Had their report contradicted that of the Apostles, it is quite certain that it would not have obtained belief among mankind at large.

This, let me observe, is simply an historical inquiry. We know that the actions ascribed to Christ were variously explained, both at Jerusalem and elsewhere; but there is no evidence to show that they were disbelieved by any persons. What evidence we possess leads to the opposite conclusion. This point we shall come to presently. In the meantime, let me remark that the fact now under consideration may certainly, and even on Hume's own principle, be proved on human testimony. Whatever we may think of the miracles themselves, as recorded in the New Testament, there is nothing miraculous in their having been believed. As mankind, in the present day, believe them to have been true, it is not a thing incredible, that they should have likewise so believed, in the days of the Apostles. Even if this belief were founded on the knavery and credulity of mankind, it nevertheless is not itself a miracle. The most ardent disciple of Hume, there-

fore, will not pretend to say, that this is a fact not susceptible of proof: a proposition which no amount of documentary evidence can authenticate. But if he will grant us this conclusion, that is, admit that the miracles of Christ must have been believed by his contemporaries, as they have ever since continued to be believed by the larger part of mankind, we may freely engage to make him a present of all Hume's finely-drawn reasoning to prove, that they *cannot* be made credible, from the nature of things. Hume's meaning probably was, that, from the nature of things, the supposition of a divine interposition cannot be made credible on human testimony. But it is sufficient to reply, that, in the Gospel, the proof of a divine interposition does not rest upon human testimony, nor upon documentary evidence of any kind; but upon proof distinct from both, and which relates to an entirely different argument. To say of any fact, which confessedly might happen, if God pleased, that, even if it did happen, no amount of human testimony would be sufficient to make it credible, is a mere gratuitous opinion, founded neither on reason nor experience. It is the presumed cause which cannot be proved on the testimony of witnesses, not the fact itself.

CHAPTER III.

In answer then to the question,—Did the facts related in the New Testament really happen?—two propositions must be proved; viz. That the writers of the books lived in the age to which the history refers; and secondly, That the statement which they have left, was the same as was generally believed at the time, both in Jerusalem and elsewhere. How the facts are to be explained; whether the actions attributed to Christ were the effect of fraud and collusion, whether of natural or preternatural causes? —forms no part of the inquiry.

And, first, let us examine the evidence for saying, that the writers of the books lived in the age to which the history refers.

For the full and direct proof of this proposition, we may refer to almost any popular work upon the Evidences. It is hardly possible to add any thing material to the arguments which Lardner and others have adduced, to show the genuineness of the books of the New Testament. Something may, perhaps, be said in further confirmation of the authenticity of the history itself, but nothing can or need be added to prove, that the authors of it were those, to whom it has always been ascribed. Whatever doubts there may be on this point, must be traced to the contents of the volume, and not to any deficiency in the ex-

ternal evidence of its having been written by Matthew, and Mark, and Luke, and John. If the contents of the New Testament had related simply to the history of some remarkable war, or any other ordinary event, in the annals of mankind, no question would ever have been raised on this head; for it would not be outstripping truth to say, that all the writings of antiquity put together do not possess so many, or rather, do not possess a hundredth part of the *external* proofs of genuineness, which this single volume can exhibit.

To say nothing of some hundred MSS. (many of them claiming a far higher antiquity than any other similar documents now extant,) and of distinct versions into all the principal languages of antiquity, made in the age immediately succeeding that of the Apostles:—There are quotations from these books to be found in the early fathers, and in ecclesiastical writers, some reaching to the very generation in which the books profess to have been composed; and so numerous in the next and every succeeding generation, as to imply that they were then almost as familiarly known and referred to, as in the present day. It is not necessary to show this, because, though many persons may be ignorant of the fact, yet no one who has taken the pains to examine the subject will feel any doubt upon the point.

Contrast now this evidence, with the proofs which we possess, of the authenticity of any other of the writings of the same age. Upon what evidence is it

that we believe the Commentaries of Cæsar to have been written by him? Simply that we know, from the letters of Cicero, that he wrote such a work; and that the same was extant in the days of Quintilian and Plutarch. But if it be further asked, how do we know, that the work in our possession is the same as that which they had read, and which Cicero speaks of with such commendation, for the purity of its style and other merits? We have no positive proofs of this, except that the style of the work in our hands answers to this character.

Again, suppose we were to ask on what evidence we ground our belief, that the history of the Peloponnesian war by Thucydides, is an authentic history? Abstracted from the internal marks of genuineness to be found in the work, the only direct *external* proof that I know of is,—that from what is said by Cicero and Quintilian of the style of Thucydides, and of the obscurity of many parts of his writings, and from the remarks of Dionysius of Halicarnassus upon the contents of it, it is natural to believe that they were speaking of the work now in our possession. And though there are no MSS. of an ancient date, no versions of this history into the languages of the time, nor any quotations from the work in early authors; and though the writers above named lived not less than four hundred years after the age of Thucydides; yet we suppose it probable that in their age, testimony could have been produced, from writings that are now lost, similar in kind to

what we adduce, in evidence of the authenticity of the history left us by the Evangelists. Nevertheless, were any one, in the face of this bare assumption, unsupported as it is by any facts, to declare that he believed the writings in question, or those of Cæsar, and Virgil, and others, to have been the forgeries of a later age, merely because such a supposition is hypothetically possible, it is likely that he would be set down as a person of unsound mind.

Even this ground, however, cannot be taken in the case of the writings of the New Testament. The opinion that they were the forgeries of a later age is *not* hypothetically possible, unless we suppose it possible that all the writings of all the fathers, and of all the early ecclesiastical historians, have been also forged; as well as all the versions into the Syriac, the Coptic, the Armenian, and other languages, some of which have for many ages ceased even to be spoken.

Let us now leave the proofs that may be produced, to show that the writings which comprise the New Testament were written in the *age* which they pretend, and turn to the proof of their having been likewise written by the *persons* to whom they are ascribed; or, at all events, by persons who were not only present on the spot, where the scene of the history is laid, but were also ear and eye witnesses of what they have related.

We cannot take up any work on the subject of the Evidences, without observing the sifting criticism

to which the writings of the New Testament have been on all sides subjected. How laboriously is every date, every custom, every historical allusion, even every proper name, explained and discussed! How closely is every objection, however slight, surveyed and pondered! How scrupulously is every suspicion, even the merest surmise, propounded as a matter of formal inquiry and research! Now, as the writers profess, for the most part, only to relate what they had seen themselves, or heard from others who had, it is not at all surprising to find, that they have triumphantly passed through this ordeal, severe as it has been. It only implies that they have said nothing except what they knew to be true. But when we consider that the scene of this history embraces many nations, speaking different languages, with different customs, and laws, and institutions; and add to this, that the writers of it were evidently not men of learning and various knowledge:—the fact admits of no other explanation. That not one single point has ever been fixed upon, in any part of the volume, at variance with the history of the time, or with the manners and customs of the different nations to whom they directly and indirectly refer, is a circumstance which, on a supposition of the books being forgeries, and of the writers not speaking of their personal knowledge, but only from hearsay or imagination, would be a literary phenomenon, contrary to all that experience would lead us to suppose possible.

I think, then, it may be assumed, that as far as external proofs of any kind can be required, (and on any principle of *literary* criticism, the same may be said of internal proofs,) the marks of genuineness which the New Testament can produce, are quite complete. There is no stamp of genuineness which an ancient writing *can* exhibit, which we do not find in this volume; nor has a single indication of spuriousness ever been pointed out. And yet while all other ancient historians are allowed to pass, almost without examination, the writers of the New Testament have not simply been put upon their trial, without any specific charge; but, moreover, after every accusation has been disproved, and every testimony of character, which the ingenuity even of an adversary can require, been produced, still an acquittal is not pronounced. It would seem to be a question that is never to be settled. That which is regarded as proof in other cases, is not received as such in theirs; whatever is possible, must be rebutted as if it had been probable; while nothing is admitted in their favour, except it can be *demonstrated* to be true.

The case has been well stated by an eloquent living writer, who has strongly animadverted upon the unfairness of such a way of reasoning. "It is striking to observe," he says, "the perfect confidence with which an infidel will quote a passage from an ancient historian. He, perhaps, does not over-rate the credit due to him. But present him with a

tabellated and comparative view of all the evidences which can be adduced for the Gospel of St. Matthew, and any profane historian whom he chooses to fix upon, and let each distinct evidence be discussed upon no other principle than the ordinary and approved principles of criticism, we assure him, that the sacred history would far outweigh the profane in the number and value of its testimonies. In illustration of the above remarks, we can refer to the experience of those who have attended to this examination. We ask them to recollect the satisfaction which they have felt, when they came to those parts of the examination, where the argument assumes a secular complexion. Let us take the testimony of Tacitus for an example. He asserts the execution of our Saviour in the reign of Tiberius, and under the procuratorship of Pilate; the temporary check which this gave to his religion; its revival, and the progress it had made, not only over Judea, but to the city of Rome. Now, all this is attested in the annals of Tacitus. But it is also attested in a far more direct and circumstantial manner, in the annals of another author, entitled the *History of the Acts of the Apostles, by the Evangelist Luke.* Both of these performances carry on the very face of them, the appearance of unsuspicious and well-authenticated documents. But there are several circumstances in which the testimony of Luke possesses a decided advantage over the testimony of Tacitus. He was the companion of these

very Apostles. He was an eye-witness to many of the events recorded by him. He had the advantage over the Roman historian in time and place, and in personal knowledge of many of the circumstances in his history. The genuineness of his publication too, and the time of its appearance, are far better established, and by precisely that kind of argument, which is held decisive in every other question of erudition. Besides all this, we have the testimony of at least five of the Christian Fathers, all of whom had the same or a greater advantage, in point of time, than Tacitus, and who had a much readier and nearer access to original sources of information. Now how comes it, that the testimony of Tacitus, a distant and later historian, should yield such delight and satisfaction to the inquirer, while all the antecedent testimony, (which by every principle of approved criticism, is much stronger than the other) should produce an impression that is comparatively languid and ineffectual ?"

I have quoted this passage at length, because it states in lively language a fact which requires to be explained. There is, I think, no doubt that, more or less, this way of reasoning infects the minds both of believers and unbelievers. That it is not a proper way of reasoning, I shall presently endeavour to show; but that it is a natural way, is sufficiently apparent from its universality. For an explanation of the fact, we are referred by Dr. Chalmers, rather to the perverseness of the human heart than to the

weakness of the human understanding. "It is owing," says he, "in a great measure, to the principle to which we have already alluded. There is a sacredness annexed to the subject, so long as it is under the pen of Fathers and Evangelists; and this very sacredness takes away from the freedom and confidence of the argument. The moment that it is taken up by a profane author, the spell which held the understanding, in some degree of restraint, is dissipated. We now tread on the more familiar ground of ordinary history; and the evidence for the truth of the Gospel, appears more assimilated to that evidence, which brings home to our conviction the particulars of the Greek and Roman story[1]."

This is surely going a long way about, to arrive at the solution of a case, which evidently may be otherwise explained, and by a shorter and easier method. The indisposition of men's hearts to the reception of divine truth may perhaps bias the understanding, but it does not disable it altogether. In the instance before us, there is a real difficulty, however much it may be magnified. An inherent fallibility attaches to all documentary evidence, opening the door to a thousand possibilities of deception or mistake, any one of which, it is felt, would, abstractedly considered, be more probable, than that facts so very uncommon as those which the Evangelists have related, should have really happened. But it is the

[1] Evidences of Christianity, p. 21.

uncommonness of the facts, and not their sacredness, which causes our belief to falter. Were the same kind of facts related in the Annals of Tacitus which we find in the New Testament, it is not likely that mankind would reason differently in the two cases, merely because Tacitus was a profane historian, or because the miracles related by him were heathen and not Christian.

In ordinary cases it is beyond any doubt, that the testimony of men who were present at the transacting of events, is to be preferred before the testimony of those who lived afterwards, and at a distance from the place where they happened. But then it must be remembered, in reference to the instance just now adverted to, that when Tacitus and Suetonius speak of Christ, and of the prevalence of his religion at the time when they wrote, they speak only of such facts as are conformable to our experience; not such as have never been heard of, in any other authentic history.

The difference of the two cases will be best explained by examples. Once more then, let us take the history which Thucydides has left us of the Peloponnesian war. On what reasoning do we conclude that the events which are there so fully related, really happened? The answer is plain; that the account which we possess of the transactions, which it describes, was written by an eye-witness of many of them, and a contemporary of them all. Writing, as he did, at the very time, it is absurd to suppose, that

he would have given a detailed narrative of victories and sieges, and various public events of the same kind, if such events had never taken place; and still more absurd to suppose, that if he had, the history would have been believed by his contemporaries.

But then, on what evidence is it that we affirm this history to have been written by a person living at the time: by that Thucydides, in short, the son of Olorus, whose name is mentioned in the third book? The answer is, Why do you doubt it? State the reasons of your question, and we shall then, perhaps, be able to find the exact reply. In the mean time, it is a sufficient answer, that the history itself has all the marks, which we should expect to find in the writings of one, who was personally acquainted with the times which he describes. It contains nothing whatever, which is inconsistent with the supposition of its being a contemporary and veracious account; nor is there any hint in ancient writers, of doubts having existed as to its genuineness.

A disputant, it is true, may still reply, that there is only documentary evidence for all this; that this is a fallible proof; that none but probable arguments have been adduced; that there is no contradiction in supposing the books to have been composed after the events, by a writer assuming the character of an eye-witness, and borrowing, for that purpose, the name of a person mentioned in the course of the history, with the design of giving a colouring to his fraud. All this doubtless might be urged, and is

supposable. But we see, at once, the absurd conclusions, to which such scrupulousness of belief would lead; and I think that we should be justified in leaving the argument, as having been raised by one who was speaking as a sophist, and not as a grave inquirer after truth.

But the case will be materially altered if we change the circumstances, and suppose that instead of narrating a series of military and political transactions, such as are agreeable to our experience of what commonly takes place among rival states, or of such mutations and revolutions, as all human affairs are liable to, the history had been filled with a detail of wonders, and miracles, and prodigies of every kind. In ordinary cases, indeed, this would only affect the credit of the history, and not the evidence of its authorship. No one disputes the genuineness of Plutarch's Lives, though he appears to have believed in many improbable stories; nor regards the history of Livy, as spurious, though it contains many incredible things. It is easy to distinguish between the historian, and the facts which he relates; and to esteem the former at his true value, while we throw aside the latter, as mere examples of popular credulity.

But this distinction cannot be made where events of a preternatural kind, form the groundwork of the narrative. If an account of the civil war, after the death of Julius Cæsar, had come down to us, in which the successes and reverses of the different parties had

been commonly made to turn upon miraculous interpositions, instead of victories and defeats, either in council or in the field,—we should vainly produce proof of its genuineness. It would not be believed, even if it was ascribed to Cato of Utica. People would question the truth of this last assertion, and doubt its having been written by a contemporary; or, if that were rendered certain, they would not, therefore, credit the history itself, nor suppose that the defeat of Brutus and his party had been really occasioned by the visible manifestation of any diabolical agency. Whatever might be the authority or character of the historian, on whose testimony a supposition so improbable was to be supported, we should not trouble ourselves about the facts of the case, knowing that almost any explanation would be more probable than that they should have actually happened.

But suppose it could be demonstrated, beyond all possible doubt or controversy, that the success of Augustus arose out of the *belief* of mankind, in the facts which we have been here assuming; that this was capable of direct proof from the historians on all sides; that it was alluded to in the letters of Cicero; adverted to by Livy; mentioned in Horace; and in the next generation spoken of by Tacitus, and Suetonius, and Plutarch, as the foundation upon which the submission of the Roman people was originally yielded to Augustus, and was afterwards continued to his successors. On this supposition, the whole aspect of the argument is once more changed.

We may now think as we please about the facts, but the veracity of the historian, by whom they were related, is freed from every suspicion. It is clear, that he has only recorded what he believed in common with all mankind. We may doubt his judgment and suspect their credulity; but we are no longer at liberty, on such ground, to question either the genuineness or the authenticity of the history; neither to deny its having been written by the author to whom it has been ascribed, nor to disbelieve that he was a contemporary with the facts which he has related, and was speaking of them from his own knowledge.

A question may still remain as to the reality of the facts believed; that will depend upon the nature of them. If they were such as might have been taken from hearsay; or if only two or three witnesses were cognizant of them; or if they were not believed till many years after,—the solution would be easy enough. But if the contrary of all this was the case; if they were transacted before many witnesses, and under circumstances which would make it impossible for mankind to have been deceived in the matter of fact: then the events must really have happened. I do not say that they must have happened in the way mankind may have supposed. We are not talking about the cause or true explanation of them, but only about what was witnessed by those who were present. What was seen by them, must really have happened, however weak or superstitious we suppose the conclusion which was deduced.

Let us now apply this reasoning to the books composing the New Testament. I will omit all supposition of divine inspiration, and regard them simply as the testimony of four writers, pretending to speak from their own knowledge, of the events which they relate. In like manner, we may put aside all inquiry as to the character of the writers. The question is not whether they were honest and sincere men;—they might have been that, and yet as credulous as any of the multitude;—but simply whether the documents in our possession were penned by them; and, if so, whether they contain the same account of the life and actions of Christ, as was generally believed at the time, when we suppose them to have been recorded. If this question be answered in the affirmative, then whether the actions of Christ were the effect of human contrivance or not, it will be certain that they were performed. If the miracles ascribed to him were believed at Jerusalem, and continued to be believed, on the testimony of those who witnessed them, by thousands and tens of thousands of mankind, living in the age when they were wrought; if the Christian religion arose out of that belief, and has ever since been established upon it:—to call the credit of the historical books of the New Testament in question, (though we know the facts related in them to have been generally believed in the age when they are said to have happened,) because they have asserted things which were believed to have been miraculous,—would indicate a

confusion in our ideas as to the question properly in debate.

No doubt, if Thucydides had filled his history with such details as we meet with in the New Testament, we should at once have rejected his writings as spurious. His work professes to give an account of a war, which was carried on for nearly thirty years, between the rival states of Greece. A common occurrence this, in which, therefore, we might reasonably be surprised, if, instead of accounts of military achievements, the events described by him had related to nothing but prodigies and miracles. But that which we expect to find on opening the New Testament is not the rise of a new empire in the world, but the rise of a new religion; and one which mankind believe, and always have believed, to be a divine revelation. Now it is plain, that in this case, the belief of a miraculous narrative, true or false, constitutes the hypothesis of the argument. Supposing we had nothing in view, except to satisfy our curiosity, the very object of reading this history would be to know, what were the miracles on which the belief of Christ's divine authority was founded. If, on opening the volume for the first time, we were to find that the contents of it consisted of nothing but ordinary details, such as may be seen in every common biography; and that instead of any pretended proofs of a divine authority, we found no evidence of this, but only wise and sublime precepts, the same as we learn in the writings of Socrates or

Plato,—the reader would be, I think, not a little surprised and confounded.

The establishment of Christianity in the world is beyond any comparison the most important event recorded in the annals of mankind. And whether we regard its sudden appearance, or rapid propagation, or the incalculable influence which it has exercised,—its existence in the world cannot be explained without, at least, supposing the *opinion* of a miraculous origin. If no traces of such an opinion, nor of any facts regarded as miraculous, had been recorded by the evangelists, such a circumstance, as it seems to me, would not have rendered their history more probable, but quite the reverse. We may illustrate this by an example.

The surface of the globe which we now inhabit, is covered, as every one is aware, with traces of the action of water. Marine productions are found upon the tops of mountains; and remains of animals, such as are no longer to be met with, but which, when alive, must have dwelt in woods and forests, are found buried in rocks, at the depth of many feet below the surface of the earth. Even forests themselves are discovered in like circumstances. Suppose now that we were speaking of the causes of this great phenomenon. Upon the principle of those who deny the authenticity of the books of the New Testament, because it contains an account of facts, such as we have never experienced, I should be obliged to explain these effects of a divine power, on a supposition

that no causes had been in operation, except such as we are accustomed to witness. Were I to say that I considered the effects which we see, as indicating the occurrence, many ages since, of some great convulsion of nature; some natural commotion within the bowels of the earth, which had subverted the whole frame of our material world:—On the principle we are now speaking of, I should be stopped with the remark, that my supposition was contrary to experience; that the laws of nature were uniform; that history had recorded no authentic instance of any such fact as I was supposing; and that I must explain the phenomenon of the deluge on the customary relations of cause and effect; for that any other explanation would be subversive of all that we know of natural philosophy.

Every one must see how absurd such reasoning as this would be. Nevertheless, I am quite unable to perceive the difference between it, and that which would compel us to doubt the authenticity of the New Testament, or to disbelieve the facts which it contains, simply because they are contrary to our common experience. The deluge itself has not left more visible traces behind it, than has the preaching of Christ. And it would be as impossible to explain the present or past belief of mankind, in the divine authority which he claimed, without a supposition of miraculous evidence, real or pretended,—as to explain the former event, without resorting to some supposition, which must involve the probability of a

deviation, from what our experience tells us of the course of nature. Take from the New Testament every miraculous incident; reduce it to a mere account of our Saviour's sayings; insert nothing but what might have been believed of any ordinary man;—and it will then become improbable from the absence of those very particulars, the detail of which is the only reason why any persons have ever been found to question its authenticity:—just as a theory to explain the deluge would be improbable, which should propose to account for the phenomenon, by the overflowing of rivers or a series of wet seasons, or by any cause or causes within the compass of our experience to demonstrate.

CHAPTER IV.

We have seen the direct evidence on which the genuineness of the several writings comprised in the New Testament may be established. The next proposition to be proved is, that the statement there contained is the same, as that believed by those who were living at the time, both in Jerusalem and elsewhere. If we are satisfied that the Evangelists have delivered a true account of facts, as they were generally reported and believed at the time, their credit as historians is not to be impeached, because those

facts are of a miraculous nature. Their duty, as historians, was to relate the grounds on which the belief of Christianity was built. If they have done this, the improbability of the facts may be a reason for denying the truth of Christianity; but it is no reason for questioning the authority of the history.

We have now then got upon different ground. The question no longer regards the authority of the writers of the New Testament, but the belief of those who lived at the time, and for whose use it was, in the first instance, written. This must be shown on testimony independent of the Evangelists themselves. But if it can be made clear, their veracity as historians will be established.

With respect to the early Christians, I do not remember to have seen any question raised, as to their belief in the miracles attributed to Christ. They have been charged with credulity and ignorance; but these very charges are founded upon the supposition of their having believed the story, which the Apostles and their immediate followers asserted. This inference, supposing the genuineness of the documents in our possession to have been proved, is implied in the very name of Christian. Their belief in the testimony of the Apostles would be certain, even if the four Gospels had not been written.

In the absence of every argument, or presumption, and even of any recorded doubt, it will be sufficient to say that we have the direct evidence of the apostolical fathers, as well as of Justin Martyr, on

this point. The former, indeed, supply us only with a general testimony; but there is not a single important circumstance related by the Evangelists, to which the latter does not refer. The miraculous birth of Christ, his curing all manner of diseases and infirmities, his raising the dead to life, are distinctly affirmed by Justin; whose testimony is the more valuable on this point, that his language is not that of a man bearing witness to things which were disputed, but of one enforcing certain propositions, on the evidence of facts, tacitly assumed by him to be so notorious, as not to render necessary any thing more than a mere general allusion. Now Justin was a native of Samaria, and must have lived within a few miles of the spot on which Jerusalem had stood, until his conversion from Gentilism. His youth, therefore, must have been spent among those, who were not only the contemporaries of the Apostles, but who might, and in some instances probably had, both seen and heard them.

It would be a waste of time to make a parade of quotations from the writings of later Fathers, in confutation of an objection which has never been raised. I shall, therefore, after what has been said, assume that all the early disciples believed Christ to have performed miracles. This is not what we learn from the writings of the New Testament; that which we learn from them, is the nature and circumstances of the miracles, which he was supposed to have wrought. It is the names of the places,

in which the several actions ascribed to him were performed; who the persons were, whom he restored to sight; whose daughter it was, whom he raised from the dead; to whom he appeared after his resurrection; in what manner he was put to death:—these and similar particulars we might have been in ignorance of; but for the history which has been left us by the Evangelists, our knowledge of what was believed would have been general; but the belief itself, of Christ having done many wonderful acts, would be quite certain. Under these circumstances the subject in debate is brought into a narrow compass. It is not whether our Saviour was believed to have been invested with miraculous powers of some sort: of this belief there is no doubt; but only as I must again repeat, what were the miracles, truly or falsely attributed to him, by his followers? This is the information which the Evangelists, speaking as eye-witnesses, profess to give. A person indeed may say, that he admits a belief in miracles of some kind or other, but not in miracles so extraordinary as those which the Evangelists have related. Such a way of thinking is, no doubt, intelligible; but if it be seriously entertained, it should be supported by some specific proof.

If indeed another history of the origin of Christianity was extant, differing materially in particular details from that which is commonly received; or even if there was any other accredited hypothesis for explaining the original belief of mankind, without

the intervention of any supposed miraculous evidence, then something might be gained in the argument, by refusing to admit the authenticity of the Gospel narrative. But in the absence of any counter-statement or hypothesis, to reject a contemporary account, and one which was believed both on the spot and elsewhere, except on some direct proof, or at least some colourable suspicion of misrepresentation, would be contrary to every principle of reason.

In the present instance, this is not attempted. It is not even attempted to say, that any more probable account can be so much as invented. If any one thinks the contrary, let him sit down and try to compose a narrative, offering a more probable solution of the success which Christianity met with in the world, than that which is presented to us in the pages of the New Testament:—he will soon perceive how little would be gained by considering these writings to have been a fabrication, even if all the difficulties in the way of such a supposition were withdrawn. To suppose that idolatry was rooted out of the civilized part of the world, and a pure and peaceful religion, like that of Christ, planted in its room, by the belief of mankind in a set of facts, which, under the civil appellation of "pious frauds," were in truth neither more nor less than the mere conjuring tricks of a few obscure jugglers, living in Judea:—would be an explanation as little conformable with experience, as any miracle could be. But supposing it to be even true, it would not touch the imme-

diate question. This regards the facts which were believed; not the conclusions which were drawn from them, nor the opinion of mankind as to their cause.

But here it may perhaps be observed, that the belief of all mankind, in the account of the origin of Christianity which we have in the New Testament, has here been assumed as a postulate; whereas I ought only to have said that it was believed by a large number of persons living at Jerusalem, and in the country where the miracles are stated to have been wrought. The narrative itself contains an admission, that the larger number of those whom we suppose to have been witnesses in the case, did not join in that belief: Ought not, then, their incredulity to be placed in the opposite balance?

It ought not, and for this reason: that if we are to be guided by the testimony which the narrative of the Evangelists affords, the incredulity here spoken of, did not regard the facts themselves, but only the explanation of them. The very explanation which was proposed by the adverse witnesses presupposes the reality of the facts, and only questions the nature of the authority from which they proceeded. If indeed it had appeared from the history, that many who were present on the spot, or living at Jerusalem at the time, had never seen nor heard of the miracles, this would have been an insurmountable objection; but no such inference can be drawn from any passage in the Gospels; on the

contrary, the evidence there afforded, distinctly presumes the facts to have been notorious and uncontradicted.

The Jews did not at the time, so far as we have any means of judging, nor have they at any period, denied the truth of the facts related in the New Testament. The information which we possess, respecting their opinions on the point, is but scanty; but such as it is, the whole weight of it is in confirmation of what we there read.

The only allusion to Christ or his religion, which we find in the writings of Josephus, is so favourable to the Christian cause, that for this reason, (though for this reason only,) the passage in which it is contained, has been believed to be an interpolation. But if we expunge this passage, how are we to account for the silence of Josephus? He speaks of John the Baptist and of St. James, in terms which indicate no hostility to either; but, except in the instance alluded to, does not so much as even mention the name of Christ or his followers. It will hardly be thought that the omission was accidental; and if it was by *design*, this admission is all that we require.

In the Talmud, there are frequent allusions to the Nazarenes, but not any, I believe, to Jesus himself, or to his history. The earliest writing, in which these are distinctly noticed is, if I am not mistaken, a tract, published by Wagenseil, entitled, "Sepher Toldoth Jeshu," (The Book of the Generation of

Jesus). It is thought to have been a forgery of the thirteenth or fourteenth century, and is, therefore of no value, except as showing that although the Jews, in the age in which it was composed, possessed no account of Christianity pretending to authenticity; yet that their traditional history of its Founder was the same in substance, that is to say, in respect of the leading facts, and of the miraculous character of the actions ascribed to him, as we find in the New Testament. In this book, Christ is described, as having been a wicked magician, who had stolen from the Holy of Holies, the Shem-hamphorash, or ineffable name of God; by virtue of which, he performed a variety of extraordinary feats, some of which the author relates. They are too puerile to detail; but it is important to observe, that precisely the same account of the miracles of Christ, and of the means by which he performed them, is given by the Jew in Celsus, so early as the second century. Insane as the tradition is, yet it has its value, as showing that in the matter of fact, the miraculous powers ascribed to Christ were no part of the controversy between his first disciples and the Jews; and, indeed, never have been.

It was not, we may believe, without meaning, that Maimonides, in his "More Nevochim," is at so much pains to explain, that miracles afford no proof of a divine testimony. Had such a course been open to

him, it would better have answered his purpose to have contended, that only those of Moses were worthy of belief. But Orobio, in Limborch, distinctly tells us, that the Jews never have taken up this ground of argument. He admits, that the evidence of the miraculous actions attributed to Christ is sufficient to satisfy a Christian; but not, he contends, such as ought to convince a Jew: "*Meâ saltem sententiâ satis bonæ sunt et efficaces ut Christiani eas amplectantur, et in suâ fide roborentur; non vero ut Judæi Christiani fiant, ut supra latius probavi.*" And the reason he gives for this distinction is one, which does not touch the question of the truth of the facts, but only their authority, as having been performed in opposition to the law of Moses; which, in the opinion of the Jews, stood upon the supposition of miracles, greater in themselves than the Christian, and supported, as they assert, by equal or superior evidence. The truth, however, of the facts, which the Christians believe, he admits in pointed terms, on the part both of himself and his nation: "*Non crediderunt Judæi, non quia opera illa, quæ in Evangelio narrantur, a Jesu facta esse negabant; sed quia iis se persuaderi non sunt passi, ut Jesum crederent Messiam*[1]."

If we turn from the Jews to the heathen writers of the first and second centuries, there is not only

[1] Limborch de Verit. p. 132. 156.

the same absence of any counter-statement, but there is what amounts to an admission, that the facts related in the New Testament were believed.

It is, perhaps, unfortunate for Christianity, that while so many apologies for it have come down to us from the early Fathers of the Church, the writings against which they were directed, or which were put forth in reply, have either been lost through neglect, or destroyed through mistaken zeal. We possess, however, in the work of Origen against Celsus, a full knowledge of the line of argument which this last, a writer who must have been born in the early part of the second century, resorted to. "It is but a few years," says he, "since he (Jesus) delivered this doctrine, who is now worshipped by Christians as the Son of God[1]." This was the absurdity with which Celsus charged the Christians, namely, of offering divine worship to a person, who almost within the memory of individuals then alive, had been put to death by the public executioner. "Other persons," says he, "besides Christ, have performed miracles,—as Abarus, the Hyperboræan, who was able to overtake an arrow in its flight; and Aristeas, who died twice and rose again; and Clazomenus, whose soul frequently wandered about the world, separate from his body:—and yet no one," he observes, "ever thought of therefore worshipping any of these as gods[2]." In another place Celsus

[1] Lib. vii. § 34. [2] Lib. i. § 30. 33.

adverts to the resurrection of Christ; but instead of denying the fact itself, he only calls in question the nature of it, contending, that the by-standers were deceived, "for that it was a shadow, and not Christ himself, which they saw[1]." "Admit," says he, "that Christ really performed all the miracles ascribed to him by his followers, what conclusion can be drawn from this, except that he was conversant in those arts, by which, for a few pence, quacks and conjurors perform their wonders in every market-place[2]?"

It is plain, from these extracts, that the difficulty which the first Christians had to contend against, in this part of the question, was totally different from ours. The adversaries of the Gospel in those days took exactly the contrary line of argument from that of modern unbelievers. Instead of maintaining that any deviation from the regular course of nature was incredible, and that no testimony could render such a fact worthy of belief, they argued that miracles furnished no evidence at all of divine power; that they were of common occurrence, and could be performed by thousands, by means of arts which it was a disgrace to practise. Accordingly, they did not meet Christianity boldly and in front, by denying or disproving the facts, on which its authority was supposed by them to rest: the course they took was to set up, what may be called, an opposition. The wonderful actions ascribed to Christ,

[1] Lib. i. § 23. [2] § 68.

they asserted to have been no more wonderful than the actions performed by Pythagoras and Apollonius Tyanæus. This they demonstrated at length, by comparing miracle with miracle; and then concluded, that as mankind had never dreamed of paying divine honors to these illustrious men, merely on account of the surprising effects, which their superior knowledge of natural causes enabled them to accomplish, it was contrary to all reason and common sense, on the part of the Christians, to maintain, on such grounds, the divine pretensions of one, whom they designated, an obscur Jew.

It is, I think, very plain that this reasoning would never have been adopted by such men as Celsus and Porphyry, (the former of whom Origen directly charges with not crediting the fables which he adduces,) except the facts related in the New Testament had been generally believed. And the way in which it is met by Origen and Tertullian, is also worthy of remark. For they do not deny the reality of the miracles said to have been wrought by Apollonius and others: (perhaps because it would have been of no use:) but they endeavour to shew, that there is no ground for attributing them to God. They ask their opponents to state what was the purpose for which they were wrought; to point out any effects resulting from them—contrasting their barrenness in this respect, with the wonderful fruits which had been produced in the world, by the

belief of mankind, in the miracles which Christ performed.

The answer was surely just and solid. I may observe, however, that supposing the fables contained in the histories of Apollonius and Pythagoras, to have been believed by their contemporaries, from the beginning, it would have introduced a difficulty not to be surmounted. If eye-witnesses could have been appealed to, in testimony of occurrences so utterly absurd and impossible, as those to which Celsus and Porphyry advert, it would seem hard to devise any test, by which the truth of a matter of fact, either in present or past times, could be determined.

But it is scarcely necessary to say, that the histories I am alluding to, possess no claims to credit of any kind. The facts which are related in them, were never so much as heard of, in the age in which they are feigned to have happened, but were fabricated long after the events; and seem to have obtained currency among the vulgar, simply on the ground, that if the Christian miracles were true, as does not seem to have been made a question, in that case, it was probable that others might be so likewise.

And here it is not out of place to observe, that the very credulity of the heathens, as evidenced in the writings of Celsus and Porphyry, may be adduced in testimony of the universal credit, which the mi-

racles related in the New Testament, must in their age, have obtained. Before the time of Christ, we hear little or nothing of magic itself, as an art or science, among the heathens, nor of the professors of it, as a body of men. But in the second century, as is evident from Lucian and Apuleius, it had become a regular trade; and seems to have worked upon the imagination of mankind to a degree, which, but for the explanation afforded us in the history of Christianity, would be quite unintelligible. Supposing, however, the facts there contained to have really happened, the result which I have spoken of, would be a natural consequence. Every person who admitted the facts, but denied the conclusions drawn by the Christians, must almost of necessity have embraced a belief, in the efficacy of cabbalistical arts. If the same facts were again, even in this age of the world, to be transacted before our eyes, it seems to me, that the same persuasion would be generally created. Those who, like the Jews and Heathens, should refuse to believe in the reality of any pretended divine purpose, by which a miraculous interference could be explained; and yet were convinced, from the circumstances of the case, that they could not have been the effect of mere collusion,—would be compelled to conclude, either that evil spirits used the agency of certain individuals, or that certain individuals, by means of secret arts, were able to command the agency of evil spirits, for accomplishing objects not within the regular course of nature.

Viewing the matter in this light, the credulity of mankind, in the age immediately succeeding that of the Apostles, instead of affording any presumptive argument against the reality of the facts related in the New Testament, becomes, I say, an argument for believing them to have happened. I do not mean that it is an argument on which we can rest any conclusion, not otherwise capable of proof; but assuming the genuineness of these writings, and that the facts were credited both by friends and enemies, in the age when they occurred, it may justly be contended, that the proneness to believe in superstitious arts, which marked the second century, was a consequence necessarily following from such a supposition, and, therefore, corroborative of its truth.

In what has hitherto been said, I have chiefly had in view to explain the external proofs of authenticity which belong to the historical parts of the New Testament. But even supposing all external proofs to be lost; that we knew nothing of the names of the writers, and that the documents in our profession had existed only in MSS. and had been recently brought to light, for the first time: yet the very composition of the books is stamped with so many internal marks of a living authority, that it would not be impossible from them alone to demonstrate that the history was real; and, moreover, that it had been composed in Jerusalem, by a Jew, who was relating facts, at some of which he must have been present.

This is a large proposition, the full proof of which would embrace a very wide field of argument; but I shall produce some examples of the kind of evidence, to which I am now alluding.

CHAPTER V.

In examining the scheme of evidence, on which the plan of the Old Testament was projected, as developed in a former part of this volume, the reader could not fail to have been struck with the exact adaptation of the narrative contained in the New Testament, to every one of the conditions, which the hypothesis of a preparatory dispensation would require. The degree of knowledge imparted to the Jews, and the degree of ignorance in which they were kept; the prophecies which were understood beforehand, and those which were not understood till afterwards; the facts which had been predicted, and those which had not; the nature of the expectation which had been created, and the limitations of it:—to every one of these points, the events which are related in the New Testament, were adjusted with a theoretical nicety, involving so many proofs of design, as to be more convincing to my own mind, than almost any merely historical evidence. So also with respect to St. Paul's Epistles. The very subject-matter of his

arguments, the topics he does not dwell upon, no less than those he does, demonstrate their date. They could not have been written after the destruction of Jerusalem; because after that event, the controversies in which he was engaged against the Jews, necessarily expired.

The evidence, however, to which I referred at the end of the last chapter, when I said that it was possible to demonstrate the reality of the history which we read in the four Gospels, is not of this kind. It has no relation to any preceding dispensation, but is strictly internal; such as we should be forced to admit, even if we knew nothing of the Old Testament, or of the belief of mankind in the New. Neither was I adverting merely to any general impression left upon the reader's mind, strong as this evidence may be; but to an impression resulting from the composition and contents of specific passages.

As these books purport to have been written by eye-witnesses, and persons who were parties in the events described, it is plain, that if they are spurious, whatever air of truth the narrative may present, must have been the result of artifice and design. In a charge of literary forgery, it is mainly on the proof of this, that the force of the accusation depends. Demonstrate the absence of all design, and the charge of intended imposition falls to the ground. Now, although it is always difficult to prove a negative—to show that in what a writer has related, he did *not*

design and premeditate any fraud or imposition—yet in the case of the New Testament, it may be made clear, I think, that the supposition of the narrative having been a mere invention, is rendered impossible by marks which cannot be mistaken.

The reasoning which I am about to apply, wherever it can be employed, is much more conclusive than any extrinsic evidence, because it is direct, and deduced immediately from the contents of the writing. A remarkable example of its application will be found in Paley's "Horæ Paulinæ." This work is generally considered as the most original and characteristic of any of his writings. Indeed there are few compositions, in any language, more justly to be admired. As a specimen of forensic reasoning, it is unrivalled.

In this book, Paley's proposition is, that between St. Paul's Epistles, and the history of his life, as related in the Acts of the Apostles, there are coincidences and agreements, of such a nature, as that if we suppose these writings to have been put into the hands of a critic, without comment or remark, and destitute of any extrinsic or collateral evidence whatever,—yet it would be possible for him to show, that the "persons and transactions must have been real, the letters authentic, and the narration in the main true."

His argument is, that there are indirect allusions, remote coincidences and agreements, in these two works, too numerous as well as too particular to

be accounted for, from *chance*. If the writings in which they occur, are supposed not to be genuine, then these allusions and coincidences must necessarily have been inserted by *design*. But the contrary of this is apparent: their *undesignedness* is a thing capable of demonstration; and therefore by the terms of his argument, the reality of the history, and the authenticity of the letters, follow as a necessary consequence.

The same argument has been taken up, with more or less success, by other writers, from a comparison of the four Gospels with each other, with the Acts and Epistles, and also with Josephus. I am about to illustrate it, from a source which, in the point of view I am now speaking of, has not attracted attention: I mean the Talmud. It is quite certain that the authors of the New Testament did not borrow from this work, because it was not compiled, until many years after the former must necessarily have been written. It is also as certain as any thing can be, that the compilers of the Talmud did not borrow from the New Testament. Any coincidences therefore to be found between these two books, must of necessity be undesigned. On the part of the Evangelists, the contrary supposition is impossible.

I have more than once remarked, that in considering the evidence of the authenticity of the New Testament, if we keep out of sight the importance attaching to its authority, as an inspired document; (which is a matter regarding the doctrines of the

Gospel, and not the reality of facts;) its credibility does not depend upon the names of the authors, but upon our being able to show, that the facts which it contains were believed at the time, by those who must necessarily have known, if they did happen, and could not have been deceived, if they did not. Did the writers witness what they have related? Was their account believed? These are the questions which it concerns us to answer.

Now, when Justin Martyr refers to these writings, he does not speak of them as the compositions of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, (persons whose names were probably unknown, except to Christians,) but as the "Memoirs," or "Commentaries of the Apostles and their followers," and which, he says, "were called Gospels." These "Memoirs of the Apostles, as well as the writings of the prophets, are read," he tells the emperor, "publicly every Lord's day, in the assemblies of the Christians; and when the reader has ended, the president, according as the time allowed, makes a discourse, exhorting to the imitation of so excellent things."

This passage was written not in the apostolic age, but in the age immediately succeeding; and as it speaks of the practice referred to, as an established custom observed in all Christian assemblies, it is plain that the "Gospels," which Justin mentions, must at that time have been familiarly known. The question then is, were these "Memoirs," or "Commentaries," the same books as are now in our hands,

and which go under the same general name, as in the time of Justin? The ready answer to this is, that the very words of our "Gospels" are quoted by Justin. But even if this decisive proof were away, and all other external proof, yet it may be shown from the contents of the books, that they are the "Commentaries," or "Memoirs," of the "Apostles, or their followers," which Justin speaks of. Or, if this could not be shown, and we were obliged to take up lower ground (and the lowest ground will serve our present purpose as well as the highest,) it can be shown that the books in our hands were written by Jews at Jerusalem; and that the writers have recorded sayings and things, of which one of them, at least, (namely, the author of the first of the four Gospels,) *must* have been an eye and ear witness.

It is a constant tradition in the Church, that St. Matthew's Gospel was written at Jerusalem, for the use of the Jewish Christians. The truth of this tradition is stamped upon every page of the work. That the other Gospels were not written for Jews alone, nor at Jerusalem, is evident; because, when Jewish customs, or laws, or opinions, are alluded to, it is commonly with some explanatory phrases, such as, "for the Jews have a custom," or, "there is at Jerusalem;" evidently indicating that the readers are supposed to be persons requiring to be informed on such points. But though such allusions are much more numerous in St. Matthew's Gospel, than in all the other three put together, yet he always assumes,

on the part of his readers, a knowledge of all circumstantial particulars, whether local or national.

If this Gospel was the forgery of an age subsequent to the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jewish nation, this characteristic feature of St. Matthew's Gospel must evidently have been the effect of *artifice* and *design*. If it was not *design*, (as I do not believe any one will suspect, after considering the passages I am about to adduce,) then it will come within the reasoning of Paley, in his "Horæ Paulinæ,"—only substituting for "undesigned coincidences" the words "undesigned allusions;" and having in view, not so much the miracles of Christ, as his sayings. These, as well as many of the actions ascribed to Christ and to those about him, are related in connection with incidental details, that have often nothing to do with the main subject of the narrative, which alone was in the writer's thoughts. Here, therefore, it is that we must look (if we have any doubts or suspicions in our minds) for the sure, because unconscious traces of the true age in which the author wrote, and of the country to which he belonged.

Any one who will read St. Matthew's Gospel, with the Talmudical Exercitations of Lightfoot or Schoettgen lying before him, will find in almost every page of the evangelist, instances of undesigned allusions, such as I have pointed out. I will begin with the Sermon on the Mount. And we shall better understand the force of some of the instances

I shall adduce from it, if I preface them with two or three remarks of Lightfoot, on the Service of the Synagogue, which will at the same time directly illustrate the point before us.

The first duty of the minister, or, as he was called, "the Angel of the Church," after the service had begun, was to call out seven readers, each of whom read out to the people a separate portion of Scripture. (This custom is indicated in St. Luke[1], where Christ, being in the synagogue at Nazareth, on the Sabbath-day, "stood up for to read.") By the side of him that read the law was placed the Targumist, or interpreter, who rendered what was read out of the Hebrew into the vernacular tongue, enlarging sometimes on the text, in the way of paraphrase. This, together with prayers, formed the morning service. After dinner, the people returned to what may be called a lecture, in which one of their doctors expounded, not the Scripture, but some traditional matter. Concerning this last part of the service, there are three particulars to be noticed. "He that read to the auditors," says Lightfoot, (quoting, as he always does, the words of the *Midrash*, for every particular which he mentions,) "spake not out with an audible voice, but muttered it with a small whisper in somebody's ear, who pronounced it aloud to all the people." Another Jewish custom is mentioned by Lightfoot, from the Talmud, where it is

[1] Ch. iv. 16.

said, that on the Sabbath-eve, the minister, or Angel of the Synagogue, "sounded a trumpet from the roof of a high house, that all might have notice of the coming in of the Sabbath." Now put these two particulars together, and we may understand that passage of St. Matthew[1], where Christ tells his disciples, "What ye hear in the ear, that preach ye on the housetops;" but it is plain that the allusion must have been quite lost to any except a native of Jerusalem or Judea. The proof of this may be seen, by referring to the parallel place of St. Luke[2], who, from not being acquainted with the particulars which Lightfoot has drawn from the Talmud, while giving the true meaning of the words of Christ, would seem to have overlooked, or not apprehended the form of expression which he employed.

But my immediate object, in the above extracts from Lightfoot, was to point attention to that part, where we are told that it was the custom of the Jews, every Sabbath afternoon, to attend a lecture on some doctrinal point, drawn from the traditions of their doctors. We may remember that our Saviour very often introduces the precepts which he delivers, by contrasting them with the doctrines his hearers had before been taught; saying, "Ye have heard that it hath been said of old," or "it hath been said;" which are phrases, Lightfoot tells us, by which the Jews understood that some *tradi-*

[1] Ch. x. 27. [2] Ch. xii. 3.

tion was referred to. I should consider this by itself a strong internal mark, to shew that this Gospel was written, not for the use of Christians, as was plainly the case of the other Gospels, but of Jews. Nevertheless, in the case where the traditions are referred to by name, as it were, and directly condemned, it is just possible to surmise (in a case where the authenticity of the history is in debate) that it was the effect of the art of the writer. But in the great majority of instances, no direct allusion to any contrary tradition is hinted at by St. Matthew. He gives the precept of Christ, but affords no intimation of any reflex application, such as I have mentioned, to particular doctrines and opinions in the minds of the hearers. That is left to be understood, as it would be, if those hearers were Jews. But so little was a knowledge of such application, on the part of the reader, a thing to be taken for granted, except on this supposition, that in nine instances out of ten, no penetration could have divined the fact; nor should we now know it, except for the information which we are able to draw from the Talmud. This, I think, affords a proof of authenticity quite beyond suspicion, and such as not even the most practised author of forged documents would, or (except he had been a Jew) could have hit upon.

Cases of this kind in St. Matthew's Gospel may be found in abundance. For example, our Lord says, "Whosoever shall break one of *these least*

commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." The words of St. Matthew, we may observe, are not one of "the least of these commandments;" but "one of these least commandments," τῶν τούτων τῶν ἐλαχίστων. It is plain, from the context, that by "these least commandments," our Saviour did not mean the commandments of the ceremonial law, but the commandments of the moral law. But then in what sense could he designate the last as "these least commandments?" By referring to Schoettgen's comment on the passage, it will appear that Christ was speaking according to the sense of his hearers, (who had been taught to speak of the moral precepts of the law, as the least commandments,) and not according to his own sense of the words. It is evident, from the way in which the words occur, that something had gone before, which is not recorded by St. Matthew, and which is necessary to explain the meaning of the passage to us, but was not so to those for whom he was writing; this also is an undesigned omission, strongly characteristic of a real transaction.

Again, if we proceed two or three verses further on, in the Sermon on the Mount, our Saviour is made to say, "Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before

the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift[1]." The meaning of this is plain and unambiguous, and of general application. But the circumstantial part of the precept, about leaving the gift at the altar, is purely of Jewish obligation, and must have been delivered to Jews, or not delivered at all. It must also have been delivered in Judea, or at Jerusalem; for no where else could the precept have been obeyed by a Jew. But what custom is it, the knowledge of which is presupposed? "If thou bring thy gift to the altar;"—what gift? what altar? The Old Testament gives us no insight into this passage, and the context leaves us equally at a loss. But on referring to the Talmud, we discover an undesigned allusion to certain doctrines and observances of the Jews, which, being familiarly known to the hearers of Christ, were, for that reason, left unexplained by St. Matthew; shewing that this discourse of Christ must have been actually delivered. It seems from Lightfoot, that the Hebrew lawyers speak much of the causes, which may justify a man in putting off the offering, which he was about to present at the altar. They are chiefly, the discovery of some blemish in the sacrifice, or some uncleanness in the votary. But our Saviour, with a tacit allusion to all this, as "what they had heard of old," states a new cause, and one not mentioned by their law-

[1] Matt. v. 23.

yers: namely, that if a person recollects in himself, not merely an uncleanness or outward unfitness, but that his brother hath aught against him, he is to delay his sacrifice until reconciliation be made. In this precept of Christ, there is internal evidence that it was delivered at Jerusalem to a company of Jews. But even if it was altogether a pure invention of St. Matthew, or whoever was the writer of the Gospel which passes under his name, it must have been the invention of a Jew living at Jerusalem. No one living at Rome or Antioch, or any where out of Judea, would have enjoined the circumstantial part of the precept; or having done so, have left its meaning so obscure.

As we proceed further in the discourse of our Lord, we find that almost every verse contains instances of the same kind as those just produced; in which sayings are ascribed to Christ, founded upon ways of thinking among the Jews, which none but a Jew could know, and which are to us full of obscurity. But the reader feels, that it is an obscurity altogether occasioned by his own ignorance:—it is immediately cleared up upon obtaining a knowledge of the circumstances in which the saying was delivered, and of the sense put upon it by the hearers. Sometimes the narrative supposes a previous conversation or communication. Sometimes the neighbourhood of a particular building, or a particular time of the year, or other incidental matter, not adverted to by the writer, must be supplied by

the reader; and supplied from a knowledge derived from sources of information quite independent of the history, and to which it is quite certain, in the case of the Talmud, that the writer could not have had access. For example, in the 33rd verse, as in the 16th verse of the twenty-third chapter, men are forbidden by Christ to use any forms of adjuration. This is easily understood; but why add, that they are not to swear by heaven, nor by the earth, nor by their heads, nor by the temple, nor by the altar, nor by the gift that was upon the altar, nor by the city of Jerusalem,—except he was addressing persons to whom these forms of swearing were customary? This is not expressed, but only implied. But if we look to Lightfoot, we find that all these oaths were frequent among the Jews; and moreover, a quotation from Maimonides informs us of what St. Matthew omits, (probably as being understood,) viz. the occasion of our Saviour's admonition. "If any swear by heaven, by earth, by the sun, &c., although the mind of the swearer be, under these words to swear by Him who created them, yet this is not an oath. Or if any swear by some of the prophets, or by some of the books of Scripture, although the sense of the swearer be to swear by Him, who sent the prophet, or gave that book, nevertheless this is not an oath." —To the same purpose is the *Midrash* quoted by Lightfoot. R. Judah saith, "He that saith by Jerusalem, saith nothing, unless with an intent purpose he shall vow towards Jesusalem." This was clearly

the occasion of the precept, "Swear not at all; but let your communication be yea, yea, nay, nay,"—an occasion which must have been well understood by those who heard Christ, but which cannot be collected from the account, as given by St. Matthew.

Again, what other people, except the Jewish, would require to be warned against praying in the corners of the streets; or what Jew would have exposed himself to the ridicule of such an action, at Rome or Corinth, or any where except at Jerusalem, or some city of Judea? That such a practice, however, prevailed among the Jews, in the time of our Saviour, is plain from the extracts which Lightfoot produces. R. Johanna said, "I saw R. Jannai standing and praying in the streets of Isippor, and going four cubits, and then praying the additionary prayer."

It would be easy to increase the number of such quotations, which are to be found in almost every line of the Sermon upon the Mount; and which, as it seems to me, not only show that our Lord's discourse must have been a real discourse, but a discourse not meant for readers but *hearers;* and those hearers, Jews living at Jerusalem. But I will satisfy myself with one or more example from this particular portion of St. Matthew's Gospel. The Sermon on the Mount concludes with these words—"It came to pass when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them *as one having authority, and not as the*

scribes." Now, how did the scribes teach, and what did the people here understand, when they said that Christ preached not like them, but as one having authority? The answer to this question is not to be obtained from any passage, either of the Old or New Testament. But if we consult the Preface of Maimonides to the Porta Mosis, wherein he gives an account of the Mischnical and Talmudical doctors, the meaning becomes clear. We there learn, that the office of a Rabbi was, not to offer his own interpretations or opinions, that is, not to "speak as one having authority," but only to hand down the tradition, which has been transmitted, as the Jews believe, from doctor to doctor, and from generation to generation, through the men of the great synagogue up to the time of Moses, and down to Rabbi Jehuda, who compiled the Mischna. "Hillel taught truly," says the Talmud, "and according to the tradition, of the matter in question; but although he discoursed of that question all day long, they received not his doctrine, until he said at last, '*So I heard from Shemata and Abtalion.*'" From this passage it is plain, that when the people said, that "Christ spake not as the scribes, but as one having authority," they meant, that he did not prove what he said, from the sayings of other teachers before him, but as one, who expected to be believed in his own right. If, however, St. Matthew, or whoever was the writer of his Gospel, had been putting into our Saviour's mouth a feigned discourse, instead of sim-

ply recording one, which had been actually delivered, he would not have left the sense of a passage, in which he wished to show the impression it had produced upon the minds of the hearers, wrapped up in an allusion so obscure, as not to be immediately obvious, perhaps even to a Jew, but which must have been quite impenetrable to every other reader.

All the above instances have been taken from our Saviour's Sermon on the Mount; but there is scarcely a page in any part of this particular Gospel, from which examples to the same effect might not be produced:—examples clearly indicating, that our Saviour's sayings must have been real sayings; and this, not from what our Saviour says, so much as from what he is made *not* to say. And I repeat, that unless this last kind of evidence can be convicted of *design*, it is the least fallible test of authenticity which any writing can exhibit.

Examples to the same effect are to be found in that passage where St. Peter asks, "How often his brother was to sin against him, and he forgive him?" As also where Christ is asked, "Which was the great commandment in the law?" And in another place, "Who is my neighbour?" The historian does not say so, but all these were questions regularly mooted among the Jewish doctors. The same is to be observed where it is said, "Blessed are the poor *in spirit*,"—"Blessed are the pure *in heart*,"—"Not that which goeth into a man defileth him." Here also, as in passages without number, which we find

illustrated in Lightfoot, an allusion is made, though nowise indicated by St. Matthew, to opinions and doctrines, which our Saviour was tacitly refuting.

The same may be said of particular words and phrases, some of which are Hebrew words with Greek terminations, as ἀγγαρεύειν, σκανδαλίζειν, ζιζάνια, and numerous others; or else Hebrew idioms translated into Greek, or vulgar proverbs. All these may be set down, as equally indicating the Jewish original of this particular Gospel of St. Matthew, and determining the country in which it was composed. But I pass over these last marks of authenticity, which are numerous, because they have been often noticed, and do not fall in with our immediate argument. In any ordinary case, marks of this kind are considered as conclusive. Nevertheless, the last mentioned instances *may* be the result of premeditation: such a supposition is possible. But I am wishing to show, that there are marks of authenticity in St. Matthew's Gospel, such as do in fact exclude this supposition: in which the suspicion of design is all but *impossible.* Marks, too frequent and numerous to be the effect of *chance;* and so slight and circuitous, so subtle and concealed, as to make the supposition of premeditation not at all more probable. There is, in fact, much more likelihood, in evidence of the nature we are now dwelling upon, of supposing an unconscious allusion in the writer's mind, when no such allusion existed; than that an artifice so refined should, in any instance,

have been purposely resorted to, with a view to impose upon his reader.

A passage which carries the evidence of its genuineness along with it, in a very striking manner, is I think to be found, in the answer of Christ to the Pharisees, when they sought "to entrap him in his talk," by asking him "whether it were lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar or not." The calmness and dignity of our Saviour's answer has been often remarked; but the true point of the question cannot be collected from the words of St. Matthew. Had our Saviour said it was lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, he would have given a handle to the Pharisees to lower his authority with the people, among whom, as we learn both from the Talmud and from the Gospels themselves, such an opinion was unpopular. On the other hand, if he had denied the lawfulness of paying tribute to the Gentiles, he would have exposed himself to the censure of the government. In his reply, he evaded both these difficulties; but according to our notions it was no answer, properly speaking, to the question, but only an escape from the snare laid for him. But as addressed to the Pharisees, the answer had a signification which the words do not convey to our minds. Lightfoot tells us that it was one among the determinations of their schools, that "wheresoever the money of any king is current, there the inhabitants acknowledge that king for their lord. Hence," he goes on to say, "is that passage of the Jerus. Sanhedr. r. *Abigail said to David, What evil*

have I done, or my sons, or my cattle? He answered, Your husband vilifies my kingdom. Are you then, said she, a king? to which he replied, Did not Samuel anoint me for a king? She replied, The money of our lord Saul is current; that is, Is not Saul to be accounted king, while his money is still received commonly by us all?" It would seem, therefore, that our Saviour, in his reply to the Pharisees, not only avoided the snare which was laid for him, but made it dangerous for them to attempt any rejoinder, lest they should retort their own dilemma upon themselves. They did not, accordingly, dare to ask for any explanation; but "marvelled at his answer, and held their peace." They, at once, penetrated his meaning, as St. Matthew expected his readers to do. But if so, his readers must have been Jews. Even if we suppose the allusion to have been premeditated, for the purpose of dressing up his fiction in the colouring of reality, still none except Jewish readers could have been in his eye, since none but they would understand it.

Similar in kind is another passage of St. Matthew's Gospel, which, like the last, has also been related both by St. Mark and St. Luke, where our Saviour is described as coming to the temple, and "overthrowing the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them who sold doves." Had the Apostle ended his account by telling us, that Christ "cast out, all them that sold and bought in the temple," he would have satisfied all the purposes of the narra-

tive; but to what end does he go on to particularize "the money-changers" and their "tables?" Who were the money-changers and the sellers of doves? We find an answer to this question in the Talmud, as quoted by Lightfoot in this place, from which we are sure that the circumstantial addition here appended to the history of this action of Christ, *might* have happened. But no one, not a Jew, could have invented it, without a knowledge of the Talmud. Even if we suppose the fact itself to be a fiction, yet it must have been the fiction of a Jew who had seen the temple of Jerusalem. To suppose the allusion to have been purposely thrown out by some one, who had been *told* of this particular desecration of the temple, while it was standing, is a very improbable and far-fetched explanation; and which, if it were true, would prove that St. Matthew's Gospel must have been written not to deceive heathens or strangers, but persons upon whom it would have been impossible, in that age, to impose a fictitious history.

Let us take another example from Matt. viii. 22, where it is related that one of his disciples said unto him, "Suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead." The comment of Schoettgen shows that this also furnishes the case of an allusion which was understood at the time but not expressed. He informs us from the Talmud that according to the Jewish doctors, a man was bound

only to observe one precept at a time; and that the care of the dead superseded the obligation of attending to any other precept. The man in the above passage, therefore, was speaking as a Jew, when he besought Christ to allow him first to go and bury his father. Our Saviour in his answer is not to be misunderstood, as if he meant to treat this duty slightly, but only to signify, that the *first* duty was, to be his disciple; and that if any other duty was incompatible with this, it was that other, which was to give way. By the "dead" who were to bury their dead, is meant the "mourners," who, it appears from the Talmud, were so called by the Jews. The precept here signified by Christ, does not differ from another frequently inculcated by him,—that whosoever loves father or mother, or friends, or houses, or any other good, more than him, is not worthy of him; but how many circumstances are left to be filled up, before the full application of it, in the particular case, can be made out!

There is no parable in the New Testament more difficult to explain satisfactorily than that of the unjust Steward, of which the moral is, that "we are to make to ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when we fail, they may receive us into everlasting habitations." The meaning would seem to be,—However you may misapply your riches in other respects, however you may waste God's good gifts, yet at least make the poor your friends, by showing mercy and favour to them in this world,

in order that God, for their sake, may show the like to you in the world to come. This seems to be the instruction of the parable; it is made up, however, of ideas and notions so foreign to our ways of thinking, that its meaning is not free from obscurity. But probably it was quite otherwise, to those before whom it was spoken, as the following explanation drawn by Schoettgen from the Talmud will partly evince. "The children of this world," said the Rabbins, "who study only the things of this world, have their portion also in this world: the children of the world to come, who study the things of the next world, have their portion in the world to come." The rich, therefore, having their portion in this world, were considered by the Jews as the children of this world; the poor, by the contrary reason, as the children of the world to come. Accordingly R. Samuel Ben David tells us, "that he had written for the rich, and for the poor. For the poor, that the rich might be induced to assist them in this world; for the rich, that the poor might show them like pity and compassion in the world to come. For the one," says he, "stands in need of the other. The poor need the rich in this world; the rich need the poor in the world to come."

If we were proposing merely to show how much light might be thrown upon the sense of the New Testament by a reference to the Jewish writings, instances such as the last quoted, might be produced to almost any extent. And they would abundantly prove that the New Testament must have had a

Jewish origin; and that to understand fully the import of many parts of it, a knowledge of Jewish customs and opinions, and forms of speech, is required. This fact alone would afford a strong presumptive argument in proof of its authenticity, and almost demonstrate a Jewish origin. But it has been my wish, in the preceding remarks, to adduce evidence showing, that St. Matthew's Gospel must have been the production, not merely of a Jew, not merely of a person relating real transactions, but of one who must have been a witness of what he relates; and who was recording sayings, stamped with so many internal marks of oral delivery, as no writer who was composing from imagination, and not from memory, could have fallen upon by accident, or have invented through design. Taken singly, the passages produced may perhaps not yield a demonstration of this proposition; but in the whole collective amount of their evidence, they warrant this conclusion, almost as certainly as the proofs which Paley has adduced to the same effect, in his Horæ Paulinæ, relative to the authenticity of the Acts of the Apostles. Any apparent difference between the two cases, is more in the skill with which he has managed the argument, than in the greater probability of his proofs.

CHAPTER VI.

Having shown, that the writings of the New Testament possess all the evidence of genuineness and authenticity, both external and internal, which can be exhibited by any historical document relating to events, which happened many hundred years ago:—that is to say, that they were written in the age when the events took place, by individuals, some of whom, there is reason to believe, must have been present at the transactions which they have described, and all of whom profess to have been personally cognizant of their truth; having shown moreover that they were believed, as far as we know, not by the writers only, but generally; and that the proof of these propositions is evidenced not merely by direct testimony, but by the effects produced by this belief, in the age when the events happened, and which effects are still apparent:—it would seem that in this part of the argument, the defence of Christianity was complete. Except it can be shown, that the books were not written by those whose names they bear, or by any contemporary authority, nor believed generally at the time, we have a full right to assume the reality of the history which they contain. The evidence produced is the same in kind, as that on which all other historical facts are believed. It is immeasurably superior in quality, to

what can be produced in support of any besides. Under these circumstances, by every rule of argument, the burthen of proof rests with those who call its truth in question.

We shall, however, in vain look for the proof of any such adverse evidence, in the writings of those, who reject that which has here been under our consideration. Those who assert the credibility of the facts related in the New Testament, are in the situation of persons having to defend a cause against parties who, to use a legal phrase, refuse to put in their plea;—and a very material disadvantage it is. A grave and sincere statement of the difficulties, which attend the hypothesis of a divine revelation in general, or of the particular objections which present themselves against the Christian, is a desideratum in theology, the want of which renders it impossible to lay down any data, which an adversary can be compelled to abide by; the premises he commonly argues from, being so vague and general, as hardly to come within the rules of legitimate reasoning.

I will take my example from Hume's "Essay upon Miracles," a principal merit of which is, that he does not entirely involve himself in generalities, but risks a partial exposure to the shafts of an opponent. In this essay his object is, to show that miracles cannot be made credible on human testimony. Now as it is certain that they have been made credible, according to common apprehension: (for other-

wise his argument would have been superfluous:) the question is, what was the testimony or evidence or reason, call it what we please, on which the belief in the Christian miracles was built? The belief of mankind is a fact which cannot be doubted: how then does he explain its rise?

He tells us that in ordinary cases mankind exert their judgment, but not when the facts are very extraordinary. "We readily," says he, "reject any fact which is unusual and incredible in an ordinary degree; yet in advancing farther, the mind observes not always the same rule; but when any thing is affirmed utterly absurd or miraculous, it rather the more readily admits of such a fact, upon account of that very circumstance, which ought to destroy all its authority. The passion of *surprise* and *wonder*, arising from miracles, being an agreeable emotion, gives a sensible tendency towards the belief of those events, from which it is derived. And this goes so far, that even those who cannot enjoy this pleasure immediately, nor can believe those miraculous events, of which they are informed, yet love to partake of the satisfaction at second-hand, or by rebound, and place a pride and delight in exciting the admiration of others."

This is a general truth, applicable, it would seem, to all cases, and to all mankind, whether wise or unwise. He then goes on to apply it to the particular case of the Christian miracles. "But," continues he, "if the spirit of religion join itself to the

love of wonder, there is an end of common sense; and human testimony, in these circumstances, loses all pretensions to authority. A religionist may be an enthusiast, and imagine he sees what has no reality. He may know his narrative to be false, and yet persevere in it, with the best intentions in the world, for the sake of promoting so holy a cause: or even where this delusion has not place, vanity, excited by so strong a temptation, operates on him more powerfully than on the rest of mankind in any other circumstances; and self-interest with equal force. His auditors may not have, and commonly have not, sufficient judgment to canvass his evidence. What judgment they have, they renounce on principle, in these sublime and mysterious subjects. Or if they were willing to employ it, passion and a heated imagination disturb the regularity of its operations. Their credulity increases his impudence; and his impudence overpowers their credulity."

Now, how is it possible, I would ask, to deal with such reasoning as this? Whether the facts related in the New Testament be true or false, whether the writers were honest or dishonest, whether their narrative was believed by the disciples of Christ only, or by the Jews as well, it will still be certain that mankind are prone to self-delusion, that knaves will practise frauds, and fools believe them. But it is no less true, that such general reflections are not general truths; they will not apply to all individuals. It is not probable that Hume means to say, that the

people of Jerusalem had not eyes and ears, or that they dreamed, what they supposed they saw and heard. If not, what becomes of his argument? For if what he says is true only of certain individuals, under particular circumstances, and not always true, it is plain that his reasoning cannot be employed *pendente lite*, without assuming the question.

It would be deemed a poor style of reasoning in the mouth of one who believed in Christianity, to say,—"But if a scoffing spirit join itself to the love of singularity, there is an end of common sense. A philosopher may be self-opinionated, and imagine he sees proofs which have no reality; he may know his argument to be false, and yet persevere in it, with the best intentions in the world,—or even where this temptation has not place, vanity operates on a philosopher, more powerfully than on the rest of mankind, and interest with equal force; his readers," —and so on. If such language as this was to be put forward under the name of argument, and by way of confuting the adversaries of revelation, it is likely that Hume would treat it with the contempt it would deserve. And yet, we may take upon us to say, it would be quite as sound logic in itself, and quite as much to the point, as the reasoning employed by him to explain the origin and present belief of Christianity in the world.

But omitting all notice of what is mere idle talk and not argument, and directing our attention to that part of Hume's explanation, which has any rela-

tion to the real facts of the case, it would seem that he assumes the belief of mankind in the truth of Christianity from the beginning, but ascribes it to two causes. "It arose," says he, "in fraud and imposture, and was propagated from the agreeableness of the emotions of surprise and wonder." The position on which he builds his explanation is, that though mankind "readily reject any fact which is unusual and incredible in an ordinary degree," unless the proper proof is adduced; yet that, "when any thing is affirmed, which is utterly absurd and miraculous," the pleasure of the emotions which it excites, causes it to be believed without any evidence at all.

This seems to be a whimsical sort of hypothesis, to account for an event of such very grave importance to mankind, as the establishment of Christianity has always been accounted even by the mere historian. The truth of it, however, is at once assumed by Hume, as a matter not to be doubted; whether rightly or not, is unimportant; because, I think, there is direct proof to show, that however satisfactorily it might account for the belief of mankind in various absurd tales, which have sometimes obtained credit, for a time, we must yet resort to some other explanation of their belief in the facts, whether absurd or not, which are repeated in the New Testament.

And first, for the allegation of fraud. This charge, if true, must of course be fixed upon Christ himself. Now we have seen in a former part of the volume, that, as applied to him, it is not merely in a high

degree improbable, but that it is impossible. To render such an accusation intelligible, it must be shown that the whole story of his death was a fabrication, invented to exclude such a notion. But it is unnecessary to do more than advert to the point. This part of Hume's theory relates to the supposed *cause* of the miraculous facts which mankind were prevailed upon to believe, whereas, we are at present considering only the effects. It is plain, however, that Hume meant not only to say, that the effects in question were not miraculous, but that they were not real; that they never happened; that what the Evangelists describe as having been seen and heard by many hundreds, was not really seen or heard by any one.

Now that the events related of Christ were believed by all his disciples, and that we have no evidence to show that they were denied even by his enemies, is as certain as any fact in history can be. The question, therefore, is,—Could many hundreds and thousands of persons, living in and about Jerusalem, have been made to believe that such facts as the Evangelists have related, had taken place under their eyes, or in their immediate neighbourhood, supposing no other foundation for their belief than the mere assertions of Christ, and some dozen individuals, his immediate followers? The answer will depend, in a material degree, upon the nature of the facts. Were they seen only by two or three? Were they exhibited in a room, to a select number of per-

sons? Were they such, as supposing them not to have happened, could not be disproved? Did those, who were immediately concerned, give proofs of their honesty and sincerity? Had they any interest to serve?—All these and many other questions there are, which will occur to every one who reads the New Testament, and which a child may answer. But it is not necessary to enter upon details of this kind: the proposition on which Hume's reasoning is based, refers not to any circumstantial inconsistencies or difficulties. The upshot of his opinion is, not that mankind did not from the beginning believe the miracles of Christ, but that those who did so, instituted no inquiry as to the truth of the facts, but admitted them at once, from the love of the marvellous, on the mere report of persons who were interested to deceive them.

Now, as it is always difficult to prove negative propositions, it is likely we may not succeed in *demonstrating*, that the first Christians did not act in the manner here described. But so far as probable arguments may be depended on, I think the contrary proposition is as capable of proof, as any historical inference can be.

It would be absurd to maintain, that a story is always to be believed, however marvellous, provided a large number of persons, living at the time when it is said to have happened, had agreed to think it true; because, as every one must have observed, it costs most people but little, to believe any thing which

falls in with their interest, or their wishes, or their previous habits of thinking. But the same experience of human nature, on which this observation is founded, also teaches us, that mankind are equally unwilling, and for the like reason, to receive even the most demonstrable truths, if they are in any way opposed to their prejudices. This proposition may safely be predicated, in one degree or another, of every individual, as well as of mankind in general; but in the case of Christianity we have the warrant of the largest experience for the assertion. The history of modern missions has shown that there is nothing in the world more difficult than to persuade a people to renounce the religion in which they were born and educated, however monstrous or absurd its tenets; and this, even in the case where external motives would seem to unite, in recommendation of a more rational belief. If then the contrary of this was experienced to be the fact by the Apostles, as Hume's supposition evidently implies, what reason can he assign for their case, being an exception to the rule? The proneness of mankind to superstition, their love of the marvellous, are the same:—the truths of Christianity, as has before been observed, are the same. Where then is the difference, except in this important point: that in the present day those evidences and arguments are matters of history, and themselves require to be proved; whereas, in the days of the Apostles, they were matters of public

notoriety, and such as every man might know to be true or false, on his own personal knowledge?

It may perhaps be contended, that easy as it would have been for the early Christians to obtain the best evidence, yet they were satisfied with mere hearsay and report. But this ought to be shown, for the presumption lies the other way. Why is Hume to assume, in the face of all that we know of the principles of human nature, that mankind, two thousand years ago, were willing to abandon all the prejudices of every kind in which they had been born and educated,—in defiance too of every intelligible motive, whether of influence, or interest, or ease,—for the sake of a set of opinions, about the truth or falsehood of which, he supposes them at the same time to have been so indifferent, as not to have thought it worth while, even to institute any inquiry?

The supposition seems to me at variance, not only with every stated principle of the human mind, but I should say that it was directly contradicted in the particular case of Christianity, by all the facts which history has preserved relative to its first propagation. And here, I am not speaking of the marvellous rapidity with which it spread throughout the world:—a point which I have already had occasion to dwell upon more particularly:—I am speaking of the conduct of the first disciples of the Gospel; of their actions and whole behaviour, under the influence of the new opinions in religion, which they had embraced with

so much zeal and eagerness. The account which history has given us, not only of the sufferings, but of the character of the first Christians, is not to be reconciled with an explanation, founded on the supposition of their having taken up those opinions, from no other motive than vulgar credulity or mere levity of mind.

It is true, that when men have been taught from their earliest youth to acquiesce in certain systems of opinion, possession of the mind becomes law, and long prescription stands in the place of reason and evidence. But the contrary effect evidently happens in the case of new modes of belief. Here the weight presses on the other side; and if overbalanced at all, it must be by proofs and motives of some kind. But Hume will tell us that the love of the marvellous is also a principle of the human mind, and will likewise sometimes stand in the place of reason and evidence, and even of prescription. If so, it has always been a part of human nature; and yet I know of no example in history, if we except Christianity, where it has effected any sudden and sensible revolution or alteration in the conduct and opinions of mankind. I do not understand how it could perform this, even in the case of a single individual. It hardly sounds like common sense to say, that a man suffered death and torture patiently, or that he renounced all the opinions of his youth, or that he changed the principles of his conduct, from a love of the marvellous. His mind and modes of thinking may have been

biassed by the love of the marvellous, but not radically changed. This effect clearly supposes other and more powerful motives; the operation of some principle of belief distinct from mere popular persuasion; and which, even if founded in error, must yet have rooted itself in some more deeply seated instinct of the mind, than a mere proneness to believe in what is wonderful and supernatural.

The distinction which I am here pointing out seems to have been observed by those who watched the first rise of Christianity. "It is written," says Justin, "that God at first gave the sun for mankind to adore; yet no one was ever found that would submit to die for his belief in the sun. But we may see many in every rank of men, who, on account of the name of Jesus, have borne every extremity of suffering, and are still willing to bear it, rather than deny their faith in him."

It is mentioned by Pliny the Younger, in his celebrated letter to Trajan, to which I formerly referred, and in which he consults the emperor, about the measures which he was to take, for repressing the spreading of Christianity in his province, that he had called before him two servant-maids, and had put them to the torture without success, in order to compel them to worship in the temples of the gods, and to revile the name of Christ. It will not, perhaps, be risking too much to affirm, that if, instead of being deaconesses in the Christian Church, they had been two priestesses of Isis or Osiris, Pliny would have

been spared the disgrace of having resorted to so harsh an extremity.

To the same effect we might adduce the conduct of Socrates before the court of Areopagus, as described by Xenophon and Plato, when he was called upon to clear himself from the charge of having treated with contempt the worship of the Athenian gods. His opinion on the subject of the heathen deities needs not to be stated; but did Socrates maintain his opinion before his judges? Far from it; as indeed why should he? To have died for the truth of a mere philosophical speculation, would have been even more romantic than to have died for "a belief in the sun."

The reason of the difference, in the cases here mentioned, is easily explained; but it strongly marks the fact which I have stated, of the distinction there is between a philosophical conclusion, or a mere popular persuasion, and the reality which the first Christians ascribed to their opinions. And I may add, that not only Justin was struck with the contrast, but it made the same impression, at the time, upon the heathens also. "Is it possible," says Epictetus, speaking of the trust which men ought to repose in Divine Providence, "that a man may become indifferent to the menaces and power of a tyrant, from madness or habit, like the Galilæans, and yet that no one should have learned this intrepidity of mind, from reason and from the demonstration, that God is the ruler of the world?"

I do not adduce the persecutions, which it is well known that the first Christians endured, from the very beginning, on account of their religion, as a proof, that the belief for which they suffered, was true; but only as a presumption, that there must have been some stronger feeling at the bottom of their belief, than a mere abstract love of the marvellous. And to this point, there is in Pliny's letter a more decisive testimony, than even the sufferings and persecutions to which so large a multitude of persons in his province submitted; and that is the remarkable effect which their belief, as he describes it, produced upon their outward conduct.

Pliny tells the emperor of "the contumacy and inflexible obstinacy" of those whom he had summoned before him. Now, although mankind will resist tyranny and injustice, from what oppressive rulers designate obstinacy, and which in one sense is so, yet they do not become just and temperate from mere obstinacy, any more than from the love of the marvellous. Yet to this effect of Christianity, Pliny speaks in distinct terms. The religion itself he describes as a "degraded superstition;" but of the behaviour of its followers, he says, that he had been able to discover nothing particular, except "that they were wont to meet together on a stated day, before it was light, and sing among themselves, alternately, a hymn to Christ as God; binding themselves by a vow not to be guilty of theft, or robbery, or adultery; never to falsify their word, nor to deny

a pledge committed to them, when called upon to restore it."

This last effect, here stated on the testimony of an enemy, though it may not strike the imagination so forcibly, as the sufferings endured by the first Christians, is yet in reality a far more unequivocal proof of the depth and earnestness of their conviction in the reality of their belief. Mankind did not hear for the first time, from the preaching of the Apostles, that they were not to rob, or cheat, or falsify their word, or violate the trust reposed in them. These duties had always been inculcated in the books of philosophers, and enforced by the laws of every civilized people. Yet it seems from the above quotation, that the reasons of the Apostles had been more effective, than either the persuasions of moralists or the threatenings of the magistrate. With how little effect the former had been attended, we learn on high authority. "I know not how it is," says Plato, in the Epinomis, "but it seems to me, that all other kinds of learning may be taught mankind, without much difficulty:—that which it is so difficult to find out, is the way by which they may be taught to be good and honest." The same sentiment, in very similar words, is expressed by Cicero, in his first Tusculan, as being the result also of his observation and experience.

Here then we have an undoubted fact. What neither Pythagoras, nor Socrates, nor Plato, had been

able to accomplish in many hundred years, (for their disciples bound themselves by no vows to observe the duties they had been taught,) was effected in the course of a single generation by the Founder of Christianity, without aid from learning, or rank, or power, or eloquence, or party;—only by the belief, so far as we can know or conjecture, which he impressed upon his followers, of his having been sent from God. "How did it happen," says Origen to Celsus, who had taunted the Christians with the recency of their faith, "that in so few years, so many both of the learned and unlearned had been brought to embrace it; and not to embrace it as a mere speculative truth, but to be willing to lay down their lives rather than renounce it? A physician," he goes on to say, "cannot restore a sick man to health without God's permission; but to reclaim a man from sin of every kind, from lust, from sensuality, from cruelty, from fraud, is a much more difficult task, as any man may know who tries it, than to cure him of bodily ailments. Now had Christ reclaimed only a hundred persons by the strength of his doctrine, it would have been an extraordinary thing; but to have reclaimed thousands and tens of thousands, both Greeks and Barbarians, both rich and poor, both wise and ignorant, from the wickedness in which they were living; and to have brought them to a life of holiness and virtue, is surely as strong an argument of divine power as can be given. He who considers this,"

Origen concludes with observing, " will see that Jesus undertook a more than human task, and what he undertook, he accomplished."

I do not ask an adversary to explain the fact here adduced, (and the truth of which is confirmed by the statement of Pliny,) on the principle which Origen has stated. But I do feel inclined to think, that the more we reflect upon the fact, the more reason we shall see for admitting, that it cannot be explained on the principle which has been advanced by Hume. Mankind, under certain circumstances, and on certain subjects, easily turn from one set of opinions to another; but, as I before observed, they do not readily change their habits of thinking, or their modes and principles of acting. And to suppose that an infinite multitude of persons,—in different parts of the world,—speaking different languages,—and educated in different customs,—should suddenly and at the same time, have all consented (for such is a statement of the fact) to adopt not only new ways of reasoning and believing, but of feeling and acting, from the report of facts happening almost at their door, which, however, they had never taken the trouble to examine, and which they had no motive for believing, except that they were apparently very surprising;—this, I cannot help saying, does seem to me as improbable an explanation of the first rise of the belief of Christianity in the world, as I can well conceive. Nor do I see that the question need be farther prosecuted by the friends of Christianity. A confession

on the part of its adversaries, that their argument demands a supposition like this to rest upon, is all the acknowledgment that we ought to desire.

Let it be remembered, that the facts related in the New Testament are not transactions said to have happened in the moon, or in a dream, or at the siege of Troy. It was a history easy to be verified on the testimony of enemies, as well as of friends; occuring on the very threshold of the generation in which Pliny and Justin lived; endorsed with the names of persons and places well known to every one; pinned down by dates and a minute specification of circumstances. The subject was not a light subject, but one of the gravest importance. The facts were in the highest degree extraordinary, if true; and even if untrue, hardly less extraordinary, owing to the effects, which the opinion of their truth produced upon the public mind; emptying the heathen temples, as Pliny informs Trajan, and putting an end to the sacrifices offered to the gods, even in the remote provinces of the empire. Every thing invited to discussion and inquiry; and the more so, because no learning was then required, nor any troublesome research: the old had only to remember what they had been told by eye-witnesses, and the young to listen, while the same was related to them by the old.

There is preserved in Eusebius, a passage from a writing by one, who is believed to have been a hearer of St. John the Evangelist, which paints this in lively language. It is taken from a work that has

been lost, entitled, "An Explication of the Words of the Lord," and was probably composed just at this period. There can be no question about the authenticity of the extract, for it is also quoted by Irenæus; and it is produced by Eusebius, not in proof of any argument, but simply to show, that John the Presbyter and John the Evangelist were distinct persons. The words of Papias, as there given, are these. "I shall not think it a useless trouble to set down, together with what I clearly learned from the elders, and well remember, my own interpretations also, confirming what I say by them. For I have never taken delight, as most men do, in those who talk a great deal, but in those who speak the truth; nor in those who repeated to me useless precepts, but in them who repeated to us the sayings, which the Lord had entrusted to the keeping of his followers, and which had been handed down to us, from the truth itself. And if at any time I met with one who had conversed with the elders, I inquired about what they said; what Thomas, or James, what Matthew, or John, or any other of the disciples of the Lord; what Aristion, or John the Presbyter, disciples of the Lord, used to teach; for I was of opinion that I could not profit so much by books, as by the living."

This passage is taken from the third book of Eusebius' History, from which it seems that Papias was a believer in the Millennium; a doctrine which Eusebius strongly impugns. Apparently for this

reason, the latter sets him down as a man of small understanding. But this, if true, will not in the slightest degree impeach the value of his testimony to the point now under consideration. I am not saying that the early Christians were men of any superiority of understanding, but only showing that there is no ground for supposing, that they embraced the religion of Christ without inquiry. If it be the fact, that Papias, a man of no superiority of mind or judgment, was yet solicitous to obtain the best information he could, and for this reason sought out those who were eye and ear witnesses, we can have no right to take for granted, that the first disciples in general did not do the same.

But if we adopt the reasoning of Hume's Essay, any inquiry, on the part of the first Christians, into the truth of the facts related in the New Testament, was labour thrown away. They were such as no testimony could authenticate. 'There is not any necessary connexion,' he tells us, 'between the report of witnesses and the evidence of their senses. If we credit the former, it is from experience, and not from reason; and experience teaches us, that it is far more probable that witnesses should deceive, than that God should suspend the laws of nature.'

Now, certainly, it required a great amount of evidence to justify the belief of mankind in the truth of such facts, as we read in the four Gospels. And if the question was raised, in the present day, as to what was the amount of evidence with which

they ought to have been satisfied, there would be room perhaps for much diversity of opinion.

But Hume's position is, that the proof was impossible; that no amount of testimony would have sufficed. And this he founds upon a theorem, the discovery of which, he says, is applicable to the case of all miraculous facts, and "will be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusions, and, consequently, will be useful so long as the world endures." I have shown, in a former part of the present Dissertation, that this theorem of his, on which he pronounces so high an eulogium, is founded altogether upon a misconception of that, which constitutes the miraculousness of a fact. Keeping our eye, however, upon the only point which human testimony can be brought to prove, viz. that which was seen, and heard, and believed, by those who were present, nothing can be more plain, than that, be the fact what it may, the truth of it, abstractedly speaking, may not merely be made credible on the report of witnsses, but be mathematically demonstrated.

To show this, let us take the case adverted to by Hume, of the Indian Prince, who,—upon being informed by the Ambassador of Louis XIV. that in Europe the water, during winter, became so hard and solid, as to bear the weight of those who walked upon it—turned away in disgust, as from a person who was endeavouring to impose upon his credulity. It is clear that the Prince came to a wrong conclusion, but his reasoning was precisely the same as

that by which Hume would reject a miraculous story. The fact was directly contrary to his experience of the known qualities of water; and there was nothing contrary to his experience of mankind, in believing that the ambassador had lied.

But let us suppose that at different times afterwards, he had prosecuted the inquiry, and having conversed with ten or twenty, or fifty persons, from different parts of Europe, who, without any knowledge of, or communication with each other, had all agreed in the same story. In this case the certainty of the fact would amount to demonstration. The improbability of fifty independent witnesses, all agreeing in the same story, supposing that story to have been a mere invention of the ambassador's, would amount to an impossibility. The credibility of the testimony, in this case, has nothing to do with the character of the witnesses. It results from the doctrine of chances; and I doubt whether it would be in the power of numbers to estimate the balance of probability, against the supposition of the fact in question not being true. But if we take the case, not of a single fact, but of a history like that which we read in the Gospels, and suppose it to have been a fiction—the supposition of fifty, or twelve, or two independent witnesses, meaning to deceive, and without any communication with each other, hitting upon one and the same *series* of lies, is an absolute absurdity.

The above example, and the whole of the pre-

ceding argument, sufficiently show how unsafe it is to discuss philosophical questions, as Mr. Hume does, merely as a man of the world, appealing to experience and common sense. It is plain, that when he composed his celebrated Essay upon Miracles, those which he had in his eye, were the famous Jansenist miracles, wrought at the tomb of the Abbé Paris, and which at the time when he was writing, occupied so large a share of public attention. It was easy and natural for him to shape his reasoning with a view to the whole question, extending his conclusions to all facts pretending to a miraculous character. And, no doubt, if we may suppose that the miracles recorded in the New Testament, are to be measured by the same petty rules, as will apply to any vulgar case of ignorant or designing credulity, it might be explanation enough of the credit they obtained, to remind his readers of "the pleasing emotions of wonder and surprise," created by a tale so highly marvellous as the history of Christ.

A moment's reflection, however, ought to have convinced a writer of his acuteness and good sense, that if the first followers of Christianity had been influenced only by a preference of pleasing emotions, those of wonder and surprise would hardly have compensated for the emotions raised up in their minds by the contemplation of poverty, and tortures, and persecution, and death. He had only to read the account which Tacitus has given, of the severe test to which the faith of the first Christians was

exposed, at Rome under Nero, to be satisfied that it was not the mere pleasure felt by the first Christians in reading the account of Christ's death, and resurrection, and ascension into heaven, which decided their conversion to the faith which he delivered, and which we still find established in the world. That these great miracles were credited from the beginning, by those who were living on the spot, at the time when they are said to have taken place; and that the account, now in our possession, was written by living witnesses, of what was believed generally, and not asserted only, by the immediate followers of Christ, has been shown to be as certain as any historical proposition can be. Under these circumstances, it may be justly contended, that it is not a proposition which the unbeliever is at liberty to deny. He may deny the divine authority of the facts related in the New Testament, but not that they really happened.

THE END.

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