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SERMONS

PREACHED BEFORE THE

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

AT ST. MARY'S,

IN THE YEAR MDCC XC.

AT THE

LECTURE

FOUNDED BY THE LATE

REV. JOHN BAMPTON, M.A.

CANON OF SALISBURY.

BY HENRY KETT, M.A.

FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE.

THE SECOND EDITION,

WITH CORRECTIONS AND ADDITIONS.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR F. AND C. RIVINGTON, N° 62, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD; FLETCHER AND COOKE, OXFORD; AND MERRIL AND LUNN, CAMBRIDGE.

M DCC XCII.

IMPRIMATUR,

JOHAN. COOKE,

Vice-Can. Oxon.

C. C. C.
May 16, 1791.

TO THE

RIGHT REVEREND

LEWIS BAGOT, LL. D.

LORD BISHOP OF ST. ASAPH.

My Lord,

THE ſatisfaction, which I feel on being permitted to dedicate the following work to your Lordſhip, is greatly diminiſhed when I reflect upon its deficiency in every point, which to perſons of your refined judgment muſt appear eſſential to correct and elegant compoſition. My ſermons, therefore, can have no ſtronger claim to your patronage, than that, which ariſes from their connexion with thoſe ſacred ſtudies, which amid the moſt important ſcenes of active life, you have ever

ever found leiſure to cultivate. When you formerly preſided over that eminent Society, which owes ſo large a ſhare of its preſent reputation and ſplendour to your ſalutary inſtitutions, your diſcourſes from the pulpit were admirably calculated, by the energetick ſerioufneſs of your delivery, and the judicious ſelection of your topicks, to confirm the Students of Oxford in the genuine principles of Chriſtianity. Your writings have no leſs contributed to the ſame uſeful and honourable end; ſince the Truſtees of Warburton, as well as the Society for the propagation of the Goſpel, have happily afforded you an opportunity of giving ſimilar proofs of your pious labours.

If, my Lord, other reaſons were wanting, to induce me to make this publick addreſs, I ſhould notwithſtanding think myſelf juſtified in ſheltering theſe earlieſt fruits of my eccleſiaſtical ſtudies under your protection. I contemplate in your Lordſhip's character a ſtriking reſemblance, both with reſpect to firmneſs

firmneſs of principles, and zeal for the honour of religion, to thoſe primitive Chriſtians, whoſe conduct I have endeavoured to delineate, and whoſe virtues furniſhed the brighteſt model for the imitation of ſucceeding ages.

I have the honour to be,

My Lord,

Your moſt obedient,

And humble Servant,

HENRY KETT.

Extract from the laſt Will and Teſtament of the late Reverend JOHN BAMPTON, *Canon of* SALISBURY.

" I direct and appoint, that the eight " Divinity Lecture Sermons ſhall be preach- " ed upon either of the following ſubjects— " to confirm and eſtabliſh the Chriſtian Faith, " and to confute all heretics and ſchiſmatics, " upon the divine authority of the Holy Scrip- " tures, &c."

PROPERTY OF
PRINCETON
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY.

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PROPERTY OF
PRINCETON
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SERMON I.

JEREMIAH VI. 16.

Stand ye in the ways and ſee, and aſk for the old paths; where is the good way? and walk therein, and ye ſhall find reſt for your ſouls.

THE Prophet, in the verſes preceding the text, repreſents in a ſtrain of animated and ſtriking deſcription the ſupine indifference of the Jews, not only to the divine commandments, but to the temporal judgments which had been the immediate conſequences of their impiety. Although they had been favoured by the peculiar protection of the Almighty, and convinced of his power and goodneſs by his frequent interference to ſhield them from impending danger, and to ſcatter around them the bleſſings of proſperity, their diſobedience was unchecked by his awful remonſtrances, and their ſtubborneſs was ob-

durate and incorrigible. Deluded by errour, and enſlaved by ſin, they were alike forgetful of the pure precepts of the law, and of the great examples of piety and obedience, which the records of Iſrael held out to their obſervation.

The advice of the Prophet was not leſs adapted to the ſpiritual wants of the Jews, than calculated to diſplay an intimate acquaintance with the infirmities of human nature. Man is ever averſe to that retroſpection which carries with it a ſenſe of his own miſconduct; and in his eagerneſs to graſp the pleaſures of the preſent moment, he liſtens not to the admonitions of paſt experience. Scorning the ſalutary ties of preſcription, he miſtakes novelty for excellence; and reflects not that in proportion as he differs from the wiſe and the exemplary who have gone before him, he may become profligate in ſentiment and degenerate in practiſe. The pride of opinion weakens his reverence for departed virtue, and abates his curioſity *to aſk for the old paths*, which his Predeceſſors trod, even when the purſuit of their ſteps would free him from the tyranny of diſordered paſſions, and confirm the principles of his wavering mind.

At

At a period, diſtinguiſhed as the preſent is, by an eager ſpirit of inveſtigation, it cannot be thought improper, in humble conformity with the advice contained in the text, to leave the beaten fields of literary reſearch, and to explore thoſe paths of Eccleſiaſtical Learning, which are too undeſervedly neglected. While the greateſt diligence is applied to every ſubject which is honoured with the name of antiquity; he cannot fairly be expoſed to cenſure who recommends to general notice thoſe objects of ſpeculation, which combine an inquiry into remote times with the ſurvey of characters ſo renowned for piety and virtue, as the Fathers of the Church. If his purſuit can in any degree counteract the violence of licentious opinions, and check the progreſs of Infidelity, it cannot be derided for being frivolous, or condemned for being unprofitable. But if it ſhould prove an object of higher conſequence, by fixing the attention more ſteadily upon the great ſtandard of moral and religious duty, which is ſet up in the Goſpel of Chriſt; it may fairly be eſteemed the faithful guide to uſeful knowledge, and the powerful auxiliary to true religion.

Whatever relates to thoſe, who have participated with us the common privileges of Chriſtianity, and made the beſt uſe of its ad-

vantages, for the enrichment of their underſtanding, as well as the direction of their conduct; is a ſubject of curious and profitable inquiry. Their characters and actions command our reverence, and their ſentiments fail not to excite our curioſity. We naturally deſire to know what ſenſe they annexed to the ſcriptures; what was their conviction of the divine origin of Chriſtianity; and upon what grounds they embraced the faith themſelves, and recommended it to others.

Objections riſe in various forms to ſtop the progreſs of theſe reſearches. As much diligence has been employed in multiplying their number, and augmenting their force: the ſame diligence may not be wholly unſucceſsful in reducing them to their natural ſize, and in ſhewing that they are very far from being inſurmountable.

The Fathers of the Church then, have been repreſented as unfavourable to the cultivation of rational and manly piety; becauſe we are told, that in their writings occur the reveries of fanaticiſm, and the conjectures of viſionary refinement.

Now, as the uſe which ought to be made of their works conſiſts in adhering to whatever

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is excellent, and diſregarding whatever is frivolous; no danger can be incurred by the judicious ſtudent, if he ſhould meet with ſome ſcattered inſtances of weak argument and unreſtrained imagination. Since there is the wideſt difference between a blind and implicit reverence for every work which is ſanctioned by the name of antiquity, and a ſelection of thoſe parts of its genuine productions which may be made conducive to ſolid improvement and moral benefit. Such a line of diſcrimination is univerſally marked out in all departments of literature and ſcience to make them produce the deſired ends. To reject the expoſitions of the fathers, when they reject the obvious and rational interpretation of ſcripture, is a valuable and unerring rule, and an effectual ſecurity againſt being miſled. The failings of a few, in a few inſtances, ought not to involve the works of all in indiſcriminate and uncandid condemnation. To abandon them becauſe ſome proofs of viſionary refinement are to be found, is equally unreaſonable and unjuſt, as to cenſure the ſtudy of the Hebrew language, on account of the forced conſtructions of Hutchinſon; or to relinquiſh the reſearches of natural philoſophy, on peruſing the fanciful theories of Carteſius.

Moraliſts obſerve that due remarks on the pernicious tendency of vitious indulgence may contribute materially to the regulation of the manners. Purſuing a ſimilar train of reaſoning we maintain, that no ſmall degree of intellectual improvement may be derived from contemplating the progreſs of errour. For if we diſcover the occaſions on which great and enlightened minds have deviated from the paths of right reaſon into the mazes of falſhood, our underſtandings will be gradually weaned from that implicit homage which we too fondly pay to a favourite name, and we ſhall become more ſcrupulous and circumſpect in the admiſſion of opinions which are not founded on the baſis of truth. The ſurvey of ſuch deviations will extinguiſh, likewiſe, the petulance of dogmatiſm, and the pride of conceit. He who obſerves, that writers conſpicuous for vivacity of fancy, extent of learning, and acuteneſs of penetration have ſome times been hurried into weak concluſions, or miſled by trifling ſpeculations; will advance with more deliberate and cautious ſteps in the progreſs of his inquiries; he will be more candid in his obſervations, and more inclined to compaſſionate than to cenſure the infirmity of the human intellect. When in the courſe of his ſtudies he remarks that a great mind has in any inſtance deſerted the dictates

dictates of ſober reaſon for the phantoms of paradox, he will feel a ſenſation of regret ſimilar to that which is excited on ſeeing the virtuous fall a ſacrifice to the allurements of caſual temptation. Comprehenſive knowledge and ſplendid talents afford no conſtant ſecurity againſt the deluſions of fancy, and the wiles of impoſture. Origen gave way to the moſt chimerical expoſitions of ſcripture, and Tertullian embraced the prepoſterous reveries of Montanus. Thus as the great art of life conſiſts in extracting good out of evil; ſo even from the imperfections of theſe writers may be drawn thoſe conſiderations which encourage Humility of mind, and are favourable to genuine Liberality of ſentiment.

Conſiderable learning united with much critical ſkill has been employed, in endeavouring to expoſe the Credulity of the fathers. It has been urged that they have admitted many Facts and Opinions to a place in their writings, which were adopted upon inſufficient grounds.

Upon an impartial examination of the paſſages, upon which this charge principally depends for ſupport, it will appear, that many of the ſuppoſed errours ariſe from miſrepreſentation; that many relate to trifling circum-

ſtances, many are diſperſed among the ſentiments of individuals, and not among the tenets of the church; and have no relation whatever, to publick principles of belief, or publick terms of communion. How therefore theſe peculiarities conſpire to make them generally unſerviceable in the cauſe of religion, it is difficult to comprehend. If any attempts to elevate the fathers to the high rank of the apoſtles, were made by their advocates; if they were affirmed to have been aſſiſted by inſpiration; or to have been endowed, above the common lot of mankind, with infallibility; the objection would, doubtleſs, carry great force againſt ſuch ambitious pretenſions. But we contend only that they deſerve our regard as witneſſes of the opinions of their reſpective ages; as hiſtorians of the facts which were acceſſible to their inquiries; and as teachers whoſe piety and learning eminently diſtinguiſhed them from all their contemporaries. Sharing the imperfections of other writers, they fairly claim the ſame indulgence. The faults imputed to them, ought frequently to be imputed to the times in which they lived; when accuracy of reſearch was often precluded by numerous obſtacles, and when ardent zeal induced them to preſs every circumſtance into their ſervice, which carried with it even the appearance

appearance of truth. If the plea of credulity deſerves to be admitted as a ground of rejection, with equal or perhaps ſuperiour force does it operate againſt ſome of the moſt celebrated authors of Greece and Rome. But while judgment can diſcern the probability of facts; while it can appretiate the credit of witneſſes, and diſcriminate the gradations of evidence; the faults of hiſtorians will be weighed againſt their excellencies, and ſuch of them will unqueſtionably be entitled to high eſteem whoſe veracity preponderates in the balance.

This charge, therefore, cannot in any degree induce us to conclude, that becauſe they admitted ſome diſputable facts with too much precipitation, they therefore embraced Chriſtianity itſelf upon inſufficient grounds.

For ſuppoſing their credulity to have been as exceſſive as ſome writers are willing to repreſent, whence ariſes the probability that it was the baſis of their converſion? Had Chriſtianity been a *cunningly deviſed fable*, calculated to delude the imagination, and laying no reſtraints on the conduct, there would be ſome colour for the charge; but faith in a crucified Redeemer was not a merely ſpeculative point, which required no more than the paſſive

ſive aſſent of the underſtanding. It by no means reſembled an adherence to the Pagan mythology, which charmed the fancy by the beauty of its objects, and even authorized the moſt depraved corruptions of the heart. The Chriſtian convert was obliged to turn aſide from the proſpect of worldly intereſt, to oppoſe the tide of ridicule and perſecution, and to recommend himſelf to the church by a ſeries of exertions the moſt oppoſite to his former purſuits, and the moſt painful to human nature. His ſincerity was called to the ſevereſt trial by the auſterities of mortification, and by the voluntary rejection of ſenſual pleaſure. It was his daily endeavour to correct all his irregular deſires, and it was his ſteadfaſt reſolve to forfeit even life itſelf, rather than recant the vows of baptiſm, and bow before the altar of idolatry. His faith therefore muſt neceſſarily have been the reſult of ſober and ſerious conviction, not of blind and headſtrong credulity. In the exerciſe of his belief he diſcovered an enlightened underſtanding, which yielded a ready aſſent to the evidences of revelation, and followed the dictates of divine truth with alacrity and gladneſs.

The deficiency of the Fathers with reſpect to topicks of morality has likewiſe been much miſre-

misrepresented. They have been charged with deviating from the standard of scripture, and with encouraging the subtleties and evasions of disingenuous casuistry. The accusation, however, carries not with it even the slightest plausibility, except when brought against one Father in particular, whose general sentiments are far from justifying so vague a charge. While their accusers censure the rules of conduct marked out by some of the fathers, they make the candid concession, that their characters and actions were eminent for piety and virtue. This tribute of just applause furnishes us with a strong presumption in favour of the soundness of their instructions; since it is highly improbable, that theory should degenerate into corruption, where practise is consistent with the rules of morality and religion. As a decisive argument in vindication of their ethicks, it ought particularly to be observed, that the most judicious modern writers upon the subject of Jurisprudence have derived information from them, and have gratefully acknowledged the favour. The general principles and particular sentiments of Chrysostom and of Basil have given solidity of argument and copiousness of illustration to the celebrated treatises of Grotius and of Pufendorf.

Even

Even the Author whoſe acute criticiſms, and original remarks have given the greateſt force to his cenſures, has candidly acknowledged that peculiar merit which conſtitutes the ſtrongeſt recommendation of the eccleſiaſtical writers. " They abound in ſtrong and " ſolid proofs of the fundamental principles of " Chriſtianity, and they teach many excellent " things which contribute to the clear under- " ſtanding of the ſcriptures, in which theſe " myſteries are contained. In this reſpect, " their authority is of great uſe, and may " ſerve as a probable argument of the truth."

A declaration ſuch as this, is of no ſmall importance; ſince it manifeſtly points out the great advantage of their teſtimony, by deducing the fundamental principles of the faith through their works. Thus they become eminently uſeful by furniſhing a new and curious illuſtration of the ſcriptures, and by ſupplying a ſafe repoſitory for the doctrines of the goſpel.

From the conceſſions, therefore, of cenſurers themſelves, may be drawn no ſmall degree of encouragement to proſecute eccleſiaſtical ſtudies, and to inveſtigate the labours of the wiſe and good, who zealouſly eſpouſing the

the cauſe of Chriſtianity have written in its vindication, and ſacrificed every worldly object to its glory. In their works may be found ſpecimens of elegant Compoſition to gratify the taſte: intereſting Facts to enlarge the circle of knowledge; and Examples of piety to amend the heart.

The reader of the fathers is convinced that although the prize of literature is borne away by the claſſical authors of Greece and Rome; yet ſimilar beauties diſtinguiſh the compoſitions which are the objects of his purſuit. Neither the graces of ſimplicity, nor the ſplendour of ornament were confined to Xenophon and Plato, nor to Livy and Cicero; for every impartial critick will commend the pure ſtile of Lactantius; the rich imagery, and appoſite illuſtrations of Theodoret; the claſſical fluency of Minucius Felix; the uniform perſpicuity of Baſil; the glowing effuſions of Gregory of Nazianzum; and the exuberant and attracting eloquence of Chryſoſtom, and Cyprian.

To connect the different provinces of literature by new aſſociations, is a pleaſing and a profitable taſk. If ſcience has acted as the uſeful ally to theology, the learning of Greece and

and Rome has the beſt pretenſions to claim the ſame honourable employment in the ſervice of ſacred hiſtory. The works of Polybius, Livy and Diodorus Siculus, throw a ſtrong light upon the prophecies of Iſaiah and Daniel. The relations of Suetonius, Tacitus, and Pliny corroborate the evidence of the goſpels, and illuſtrate the early events of the church. The ſentiments of Plato are no leſs uſeful in developing the principles of the antient hereſies; and even from the ſarcaſtick ſallies of Lucian, and the illiberal repreſentations of Julian, may be derived conſiderable information reſpecting the conduct of their chriſtian contemporaries.

From the fathers we may learn with what unremitting care the Holy Scriptures were preſerved during ſucceſſive ages. The quotations which abound in their works furniſh ſtrong and convincing proofs of the authenticity of the preſent copies. By them we are informed that theſe ſcriptures were zealouſly appealed to and conſulted by writers who were unanimous upon no other ſubject. Their authenticity was held to be indiſputable. They were repeatedly made the arbiters of controverſy, and the guides of faith and practiſe. Hence alſo we eſtimate the veneration in which they

were held, and the vigilance with which they were guarded. Hence we derive the moſt perfect aſſurance and ſtrongeſt evidence that they have eſcaped unmutilated, and uncorrupted from the tumult of Controverſy, the artifice of Fraud, the hoſtility of Paganiſm, and the ravages of Time.

We may not only trace the progreſs of the ſcriptures until the ancient manuſcripts which now exiſt, give the ſtrongeſt aſſurance that no ſubſequent corruption took place; but we may remark likewiſe the various Revolutions of the church. The proſpect of primitive chriſtianity, in all its various ſtates of depreſſion and of triumph, is open to our view. We behold it riſing from the ſhade of obſcurity, oppoſed in its advances to general obſervation by formidable obſtacles, and at length eſtabliſhing an extenſive and ſupreme dominion.

The celebrated work of Euſebius ſtands firſt as a regular hiſtory, in the order both of time and of excellence, to throw light upon this intereſting ſubject. The variety and originality of its contents, as well as the diligence and judgment of the writer, ſuperſede in a great degree, the neceſſity of recurring to other ſources for early intelligence; and ſupply no ſmall conſolation for the loſs of many monuments

monuments of chriſtian antiquity which have long ſince periſhed.

In a ſurvey ſo comprehenſive, examples may be found of the pureſt and moſt exalted virtue. Here we may contemplate the ſtricteſt integrity of conduct, and the moſt unremitting attention to duty; zeal tempered by moderation in oppoſing the encroachments of hereſy, and courage free from raſhneſs in defying the malice of power. To the volumes of claſſical hiſtory we are directed by the wiſdom of our early teachers, for incentives to the practiſe of whatever is fair and good. We admire the tranquil dignity of Socrates, the noble moderation of Cincinnatus, and the unconquerable ſpirit of Hannibal. But is not example more powerfully recommended, and ought it not to have greater efficacy when ſuperiour virtues ſpring from ſuperiour principles, and are productive of more valuable effects? When obedience to the Supreme Being is the leading inducement to action, and the attainment of everlaſting happineſs is its tranſcendant and invaluable end? For this reaſon, the commendation beſtowed upon the illuſtrious characters of prophane hiſtory is languid and tranſitory, when compared with the ſentiments with which we are inſpired, on contemplating

templating the conduct of thoſe who have gone before us in the faith. The ingenuous mind is ſtruck with the perfection of chriſtian principles and with the moſt chearful obedience to the dictates of the goſpel, when it remarks the frugality of the venerable Baſil, who although he was the opulent Metropolitan of Cæſarea, beſtowed all his revenues upon the poor; the noble moderation of Gregory of Nazianzum, who voluntarily reſigned his biſhoprick to preſerve the harmony of the church; the benevolent condeſcenſion of the Empreſs Pulcheria, who frequently retired from the ſplendour of a court, to viſit the abodes of indigence and ſickneſs; and the mildneſs of the amiable and learned Pamphilus, when placidly reſigning himſelf to the flaming pile.

Examples ſuch as theſe, while they rouſe the mind of a Chriſtian to ſacred emulation, have likewiſe an immediate tendency to confirm his Faith. The early Converts had the beſt opportunity to examine the grounds of their religion; ſince they lived ſo near to the period when its divine Author appeared upon earth. As they were prompted to act with ſuch unſhaken conſtancy, upon the moſt trying occaſions of life, they muſt have had full

aſſurance and perfect ſatisfaction for the truth and the importance of all they believed. Their conduct therefore naturally impreſſes upon our minds a ſtronger perſuaſion of the truth of their principles, than the moſt ingenious and acute reaſonings of modern Theologiſts. The arguments in favour of a divine revelation may be oppoſed by the arguments for Deiſm, but the evidence of Facts can never be diſproved. It is level to the capacities of all Mankind, and produces the ſpeedieſt, the cleareſt, and the moſt durable conviction.

Such is the nature of theſe ſtudies, ſuch is the information which they hold out to the inquiſitive, and ſuch are the advantages which they confer on the impartial.

Far be it however from our deſign, to paint them in colours that are too ſplendid, or to beſtow on them the commendation of equal and indiſcriminate excellence. To render the ſtudy of the Fathers truly uſeful, a diſtinction muſt not only be made between the ſeveral works of one Author, but between the works of different Authors of different ages. Without ſubſcribing to the cenſures which are frequently thrown upon the later Fathers of the Church, it may properly be remarked, that the

the manners and cuſtoms, the inſtitutions, and the literature of the two centuries which immediately ſucceeded the Incarnation of our Lord, form objects of infinitely greater importance in the opinion of an eccleſiaſtical Student, than any thing which relates to the following times. The ſeeds of chriſtian degeneracy began to be ſown in the fourth century. At that period, and perhaps not before, there are viſible traces of thoſe rites and eſtabliſhments which encumbered Chriſtianity with burthenſome appendages, and afterwards brought down upon the Church of Rome the juſt and weighty charge of corruption. Many Writers have been led into uncandid and confuſed miſrepreſentation by loſing ſight of this important diſtinction, and by throwing the ſame cenſure upon all the Fathers, have held out fallacious lights to miſlead their unſuſpecting Readers. The failings of a few have been unjuſtly attributed to all; the ſentiments of individuals have been repreſented as the language of communities; and the motives, which actuated degenerate ages, have been imputed to the pureſt times. In vain therefore we may ſometimes look for that accurate delineation of Hiſtory which carefully aſſigns to each period of time its appropriate defects and virtues, and which never blends the diſcordant cha-

racteriſticks of various ages in one confuſed maſs of unqualified generalization.

The utility of the writings of the Fathers is in many reſpects diſputable, if placed in competition with more modern Theologiſts who have brought more extenſive learning and more ſound philoſophy to the elucidation of ſcripture, and have combated the attacks of Infidels with more profound and more ſubtle arguments. The ſtudy of the Oriental languages, in particular, which among the Antients was almoſt intirely confined to Origen and Jerom, and the improvement of the general art of Criticiſm, have given a manifeſt ſuperiority to the Moderns. If however the palm of victory be adjudged to them on account of more extenſive attainments, there is one advantage on the ſide of the earlier Fathers which cannot be counterbalanced. Their antiquity places them in an exalted ſituation, from which they addreſs us in a tone of ſuch ſolemnity as excites our earneſt attention. In the foremoſt rank of Chriſtians ſtand the Apoſtles, to whom we pay that reverential deference which is due to the inſpired Ambaſſadours of Heaven. The next in order are thoſe, who enjoyed the unſpeakable ſatisfaction and peculiar privilege of converſing

familiarly with them, and hearing from their ſacred lips the *words of eternal life*. Their evidence in the cauſe of our religion is truly important and valuable, if we conſider the high improbability of their deviation in any fundamental point from the principles of doctrine and practice laid down by their great Maſters. They will recommend themſelves more ſtrongly to our notice, if we recollect any inſtances in which the government of the primitive Churches was committed to their care. From the qualifications enumerated by St. Paul as requiſite for a charge ſo weighty, we may conclude that the Apoſtles were particularly careful in confining the ſuperintendance of the chriſtian communities to thoſe, who were not only eminent for moral graces, but for rectitude of ſentiment in all the articles of the faith, as well as for peculiar abilities to communicate inſtruction to their flocks. The immediate ſucceſſors of theſe apoſtolical Fathers claim likewiſe great regard, if we conſider their conformity in eſſential points with the precepts of the Goſpel, and the ſentiments of their Predeceſſors. Thus the connections with the Diſciples of our Lord, although they are in ſome degree remote, eſtabliſh the reſpectability, and confirm the credit of the

writers to the firſt and ſecond century; and thus the Apoſtles become not only conſpicuous from their own luſtre, but impart ſplendour to all around them.

Hence from the great ſtore of literature which the Church has accumulated from age to age, there are certain productions which deſerve to be ſelected with peculiar care. The works of thoſe, whoſe names have been recited, are valuable for elegance of Stile, faithfulneſs of Narrative, fervour of Piety, or copiouſneſs of Examples. But allowing the ſtrength of theſe recommendations, we heſitate not to conclude that the firſt attention of an eccleſiaſtical ſtudent is moſt properly directed to Clemens Romanus, Ignatius, Polycarp, Juſtin Martyr, Irenæus, and Athenagoras.

If it be conſidered that their writings immediately ſucceeded the publication of the New Teſtament; that they are the repoſitaries of ſacred Hiſtory which in the order of time claim the neareſt place to the Goſpel; that they are the monuments of the ſincerity of the early Converts, and the evidences of the authenticity of the New Teſtament, they become very intereſting ſubjects of ſpeculation.

tion. We ſhall raiſe theſe works to a much greater height of eſteem if we conſider the ſituations and the attainments of their reſpective Authors. The ages in which they flouriſhed were ſingularly propitious to the acquirement of evangelical knowledge, as they drew chriſtianity from its ſource. Some of them were exalted to the higheſt rank in the Church, and others were diſtinguiſhed by comprehenſive learning. Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp and Irenæus, were Biſhops of the moſt populous and celebrated cities of the Roman empire, and Juſtin and Athenagoras were inſtructed in the wiſdom of the antient Philoſophers. The lives of all were conſecrated to the faith; and ſuch was their unconquerable adherence to the chriſtian cauſe, that Ignatius, Polycarp and Juſtin ſealed its truth with their blood.

The field of information which their works open to our view is wide and intereſting. Here are to be found the prevailing ſentiments of the firſt Chriſtians, the teſtimony borne to the inſpired volume, and the interpretation firſt made of its contents. Here are deſcribed the firſt hereſies, and what meaſures were adopted to confute them; the diſcipline eſta-

bliſhed in the infant Church, the form of its government, and the various and cruel machinations of its enemies. Moreover, in them may be ſeen the earneſtneſs of the primitive Believers for the glory of God, and their ſolicitude for the ſalvation of man; what was their ſupport during the viciſſitudes of life; and what the ground of their hopes, amid the ſufferings of martyrdom.

Such topicks are at all times curious and edifying. In the preſent day an accurate inquiry into them is more particularly ſeaſonable, when the actions and opinions of the firſt Chriſtians have been placed in the moſt unfavourable light, and painted in the darkeſt colours. When one writer prompted by blind partiality to their implacable enemies, has ſtripped them of their moſt diſtinguiſhed virtues, and defrauded them of their juſt praiſe: and when another has elevated the earlieſt Hereticks to the rank of Orthodox Believers, and drawn arguments from the ſuppoſed tenets of the primitive ages, in order to deprive Chriſtianity of its eſſential doctrine, by reducing the Eternal Son of God to the common level of human nature.

Such

Such manifeſt prejudice, and ſuch perverſion of hiſtory, need not diſturb the tranquillity of the timid, nor unſettle the principles of the pious; unleſs truth will relinquiſh her antient conqueſts, and leave her cauſe to be tried at the tribunal of the moſt unjuſt miſrepreſentation.

For the *elegant Hiſtorian of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire* is too precipitate in his deciſions, if he thinks that the Religion which has overcome the aſſaults of violence, and repelled the arguments of ſcepticiſm; which has triumphed over every obſtacle that has impeded its progreſs for the long period of ſeventeen centuries, is at length to be ſhaken by the cavils of ſarcaſm, and ſubverted by the artifices of ſophiſtry.

Before an implicit regard be paid to the indefatigable Author of *the Early Opinions concerning Chriſt*, juſtice and impartiality ſeem to require, that the deciſions of the eccleſiaſtical Writers ſhould be fully and accurately exhibited; and that their evidence ſhould not be tortured by prejudice to ſpeak the language of his favourite hypotheſis.

The air of novelty which is diffuſed over the productions of theſe Writers may operate as an attraction upon the inconſiderate and the unwary. But where novelty is ſometimes ſuppoſed to exiſt, on a cloſer examination, it is not to be found. The dreſs may ſtrike by its ſingularity, but on a more accurate inſpection, the features of ancient errour will be recognized and detected. Many of their ſentiments are the ſame, or nearly the ſame, to thoſe which formerly prevailed. Like a ſubterraneous river they are concealed for a time, and again come forth to view. The fundamental errour of the Unitarians is a modification of the opinion of Socinus, which was derived from the Hereticks of the early ages. Their interpretations of ſcripture, and their ſophiſtical arguments, are either drawn from the works of Zuicker and of Epiſcopius, or from the ample compilations of the Brethren of Poland. The degrading deſcription which the *Hiſtorian of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire* has given of the Jewiſh nation may be traced through the popular narratives of Voltaire, and the obſolete works of Collins and Tindal.

To trace the progreſs of theſe ſentiments and characters, and to aſcertain their original Authors,

Authors, is a pleaſing purſuit to the eccleſiaſtical Student. His deſire to make an accurate eſtimate of the conduct and ſentiments of the primitive Chriſtians gives additional vigour to his reſearches into the pious monuments of antiquity. He compares the antient portrait with the copies of modern artiſts, and carefully examines how far they have preſerved a reſemblance of thoſe original features which he has been ever accuſtomed to contemplate with veneration and delight. In order to take as comprehenſive a ſurvey of the ſubject, as ſeems fully neceſſary for the occaſion; he conſiders the CONDUCT of the Chriſtians of the firſt and ſecond century, by examining the ſix immediate cauſes which co-operated in the propagation of the Goſpel; viz.

1. The MIRACLES wrought in the primitive Church.

2. The APOLOGIES addreſſed to Emperors in vindication of the Chriſtian cauſe.

3. The Zeal of the FIRST PREACHERS in diſſeminating the Knowledge of Chriſtianity.

4. The Fortitude of the early MARTYRS.

5. The

5. The DISCIPLINE of the primitive Church.

6. The Conformity of the MANNERS of the firſt Chriſtians with the precepts of the Goſpel.

He moreover conſiders their SENTIMENTS with reſpect to the evidence given to the New Teſtament; he examines certain Aſſertions made by the Writers before mentioned, and cloſes his Diſquiſition with practical inferences.

Such will be the ſubjects of the following Lectures. The advantages which the ſerious lover of Truth, and the ſincere follower of Chriſt may derive from the inveſtigation, are manifold and important. Juſtice will be rendered to injured merit and to aſperſed innocence; the ſuperintendance of the Almighty in the diffuſion of the Goſpel will be fairly ſtated; the eſtimation, in which the ſacred volume was at firſt held, will be manifeſted; and the faith, which was once delivered to the Saints, will be vindicated and confirmed.

Moreover,

Moreover, this inquiry will enable us to aſcertain the high reſpect which the moſt authentick and moſt antient remains of chriſtian antiquity merit; it will illuſtrate the external evidences of Chriſtianity, demonſtrate that the doctrine of the primitive ages is the doctrine of the Church of England; and thus ultimately confirm the ſteadineſs of our faith, and invigorate the motives of our obedience.

SER-

SERMON II.

MARK XVI. 20.

And they went forth and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word, with ſigns following.

OF all the Revolutions which have taken place upon the great theatre of the world, there is no one ſo calculated to attract the attention of the learned, to rouſe the curioſity of the inquiſitive, or to excite the gratitude of the pious, as that which has been effected by the Eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity. The page of Hiſtory diſplays to us various inſtances, in which conquered nations have been compelled to acknowledge the authority of one mighty Sovereign, and to yield a reluctant and temporary ſubmiſſion to the terrour of his arms. It alſo preſents us with examples of Philoſophers who have diſſemi-

nated diſcoveries of ſcience, and taught ſyſtems of ethicks within the narrow circle of their diſciples. But to ſimplify the leading principles of ſocial and religious obligation, to harmonize them in one comprehenſive plan, to accommodate them to the capacity of every individual, and to propagate them by the gentle arts of perſuaſion, has never been the project of any Legiſlator, or of any Philoſopher. Such a deſign was as far above human ingenuity to contrive, as ſurpaſſing human power to execute. The Plan, and the Execution, were reſerved for the Prince of Peace; and the final cauſe for which he condeſcended to be ſo employed, and for which ſuch eſſential changes have been made in the ſentiments of the moſt enlightened part of the globe, equally includes the Glory of God, and the temporal and eternal Welfare of Mankind.

The obſtacles however which oppoſed the firſt reception of Chriſtianity were ſo numerous and formidable, and the human inſtruments employed for its diffuſion ſo apparently weak and inſufficient, that a compariſon between them will not only ſhew that the paſſions and oppoſition of man far from impeding the divine deſigns, may ultimately become the means of their perfect accompliſhment; but will

will fully demonſtrate the divine origin of Chriſtianity, by diſplaying the powerful aſſiſtance which the Almighty ſupplied for its eſtabliſhment.

The ſimple and illiterate Fiſhermen of Galilee and their Diſciples, in converting a corrupted, were obliged alſo to propitiate an hoſtile world. They diſpelled the bigotry of the Jew, and confuted the cavils of the Philoſopher. Though aſperſed by the ſlander of the malicious, and expoſed to the ſword of the powerful, in a ſhort period of time they induced multitudes of various Nations, who were equally diſtinguiſhed by the peculiarity of their manners, and the diverſity of their language, to forſake the religion of their anceſtors. The converts whom they made, deſerted ceremonies and inſtitutions which were defended by vigorous authority, ſanctified by remote age, and aſſociated with the moſt alluring gratification of the Paſſions. Their minds were purified as well as enlightened by the new Faith which they had embraced, and the incomparable excellency of its precepts was viſible in the rapid growth of private virtues, and the gradual reformation of public enormities.

The Six grand Cauſes by which this Revolution was produced, were as extraordinary

in their nature, as ſalutary in their effects. On ſome occaſions, the divine aſſiſtance was vouchſafed to the firſt chriſtians, and they were endued with the power of working Miracles. The exertions of the Apologiſts were called forth to vindicate the Profeſſors of the faith from ſlander, and to explain the nature and deſign of their Religion. Inſpired by the moſt ardent zeal, the firſt Miſſionaries travelled into various countries to ſow the ſeeds of the goſpel. The fortitude of the moſt eminent Martyrs was brought to the ſevereſt trial by torture and by death. A peculiar form of Government was eſtabliſhed in the infant church, and its inſtitutions were accompanied by that regularity of Manners, which, as it was uniformly conſiſtent with the evangelical precepts, gave to thoſe precepts a powerful recommendation among the Gentiles, and left a bright example for the imitation of ſucceeding ages.

Of all theſe various cauſes combining to produce one great effect, we ſhall firſt conſider the Miraculous Powers.

That Miraculous Powers were exerciſed after the death of the Apoſtles, upon certain occaſions, is a truth ſupported by the unani-

mous and ſucceſſive teſtimony of the Fathers down to the Reign of the Emperour Julian. The particular ſpecies of miracle which the fathers deſcribe as having been moſt frequently wrought, was the expulſion of Evil Spirits from the bodies of Men. If however it ſhould only be ſuppoſed that by demoniacal poſſeſſions are repreſented thoſe diſeaſes which from their violent ſymptoms reſemble the influence of evil ſpirits; ſuch a ſuppoſition can make no difference with reſpect to the ſupernatural operation.

For as no ordinary means of relief were employed, the inſtantaneous Recovery of the perſons afflicted, was altogether miraculous. Theſe wonderful interpoſitions of Providence are recorded too, not as traditionary tales or vague reports, but as events publickly known, and credibly atteſted. The fathers hold them forth as conſpicuous marks of the Truth of chriſtianity, and are ſo far from confining their narrations to the chriſtian communities who might poſſibly be ſuſpected of too great a degree of credulity, that they confidently publiſh them to the Pagans. In their addreſſes to Magiſtrates and to Emperours, they ſtate them as incontrovertible facts, when the detection of falſhood and the diſcovery of im-

poſture, would not only have ſunk the cauſe which they wiſhed to promote in irretrievable diſcredit; but have expoſed them to the indignation and vengeance of inſulted authority.

Modern writers have indulged ſo ſceptical a diſpoſition, as to queſtion the probability of theſe miracles, or rather to deny that they ever were wrought. *The* ingenious *Author of the Life of Cicero* has employed the claſſical purity of his ſtile, and the comprehenſive reach of his underſtanding, in the diſcuſſion of this ſubject. We pay with chearfulneſs the tribute of praiſe to his learning and abilities, but at the ſame time regret their miſapplication and abuſe. While endeavouring to demoliſh the outworks of the Church, he obliquely glanced at the fortreſs itſelf; and while he laboured to invalidate the credit of the fathers, ſeemed careleſs of the effect which his arguments might ultimately produce upon the general evidences of revelation. His obſervations, if admitted in their obvious ſenſe, will lead to conſequences the moſt alarming to Chriſtianity; for they tend to invalidate the certainty of all ſuch effects as exceed the common operations of nature, and differ from all ſuch facts as are the daily objects of the ſenſes. Although he admits with the greateſt plauſibility of

of conceſſion, the truth of the Miracles of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, yet his arguments indirectly weaken their credit. He repreſents as a full and complete view of the poſſible variety which may exiſt in the works of God, only thoſe objects which our feeble intellect can comprehend, and our limited obſervation can ſupply. But by conſenting to ſuch a reſtriction as this we are led to adopt a principle as the reſult of daily experience, which even daily experience itſelf, as it opens a more extenſive proſpect of the phenomena of Nature, and elucidates the hidden properties of Matter, will rectify, and in ſome caſes even viſibly contradict. Such reaſoning would, moreover, confine the agency of the Deity within the narrow bounds of human preſcription, and would even arreſt the power of his arm when extended to diſplay itſelf in ſigns and wonders, and mighty deeds.

Having thus in a ſophiſtical manner aſſailed the credibility of the Facts, the author abovementioned next proceeds to attack the competency of the Witneſſes. Diſſatisfied with the teſtimony of the honeſt, the ſincere, and the pious, he erects a fantaſtick ſtandard of judgment, and ſeems to lay it down as an indiſputable poſition, that the acuteneſs of a

critick and the deliberation of a philoſopher, are neceſſary to diſtinguiſh truth from falſhood, and that a witneſs who ſometimes betrays the marks of credulity, is always weak and generally deceitful. But if ſuch principles be implicitely and indiſcriminately adopted, we ſhall contradict our own mode of conduct in common life, in the courſe of which we expect not the greateſt poſſible degrees of certainty, but determine and act upon high probability. We ſhall inevitably be ſeduced into the moſt complete ſcepticiſm, and ſhall find ourſelves at a loſs for the proper authentication of any facts. The exiſtence of Julius Cæſar, and the event of the battle of Actium will be involved in equal doubt, and expoſed to equal objections with the miracles of Chriſt, and the propagation of chriſtianity.

It is moreover objected that the apoſtolical fathers are ſilent relative to the continuance of miraculous powers, and thence it is inferred that no ſuch powers were poſſeſſed by their contemporaries.

But upon a careful examination we ſhall probably find, that although this ſubject forms no direct and material part of their diſquiſitions, yet ſome ſlight traces and occaſional intimations

timations may be discovered sufficient to abate the confidence of the objector, and make it more probable that miraculous powers were possessed at that time, than that they had actually ceased in the church. Clement, Bishop of Rome, addressed his epistle to the church of Corinth, and describing the prosperous and godly state of the converts, before an alarming dissention had arisen among them, expressly says, "that they were all endued with a plen-" tiful effusion of the Holy Spirit." In what that plentiful effusion consisted, may be best understood from the particular description which St. Paul had not long before given of the various gifts of the Holy Ghost, that were imparted to the Corinthian converts. They were endued with the supernatural power of speaking various languages, of prophecying distant events, and healing diseases.

Ignatius, in his Epistle to the Philadelphians, mentions a particular Revelation which had been made to himself; and in the superscription of his Epistle to the Smyrnæans, alludes to the spiritual gifts which they possessed. Polycarp, the venerable Bishop of Smyrna, congratulates the Church of the Philippians, by declaring, that "God had blessed them with "every good gift, that they had been filled

" with hope and charity, and were deſtitute " of no ſpiritual grace."

If theſe expreſſions ſhould ſeem to afford little aſſiſtance to diſprove the aſſertion, we wiſh not to overrate their force, or draw from them unwarrantable concluſions. Rather than attempt to torture them into a ſenſe which may be thought harſh and overſtrained, we will admit the fact to be as it is ſtated; and conſider what advantage the opponent can derive from a conceſſion apparently ſo important.

Many Epiſtles may be found in the New Teſtament itſelf, in which miracles are not mentioned, even at the preciſe period when they are known to have been actually performed. The 2d Epiſtle to the Theſſalonians, the Epiſtles to the Philippians, Coloſſians, to Titus, to Philemon, and the Hebrews, are univerſally ſilent upon the ſubject, during the time that St. Paul and the other Apoſtles are acknowledged to have exerciſed, and communicated thoſe powers. The inference therefore which is drawn from this negative argument is inconſequential, and cannot be allowed to have any force whatever. It proves only that where the immediate view of the writer was

to

to inculcate ſome didactic, or to defend ſome ſpeculative propoſition, he either ſaw no neceſſity, or felt no deſire to mingle a narrative of fact with the interpretation of doctrine.

In order to ſhake the credit of the Fathers of the ſecond century, they are accuſed of maintaining vague and abſurd traditions. Juſtin Martyr, Irenæus, and Athenagoras are affirmed to have been unanimous in embracing ſuch frivolous doctrines as the approach of the Millenium; the Tranſlation of Enoch into the Paradiſe of Adam; the Production of Demons from Angels and Women; and the Old Age of Chriſt; and hence we are told it follows, that they are not to be credited when they aſſert the continuance of the miraculous Powers.

In the firſt place, we may venture, without incurring the cenſure of precipitate petulance, to doubt the truth of the aſſertion. By what proof is the unanimity of theſe Fathers upon the points in queſtion eſtabliſhed? The greateſt diligence, in the peruſal of their works will probably be ineffectual to make the diſcovery.

Athenagoras, in his Embaſſy for the Chriſtians, and in his Treatiſe on the Reſurrection, is ſilent upon the ſubject of the Millenium.

Juſtin

Juſtin Martyr, in his exhortation to the Greeks, in his Apologies, and in his Dialogues, as well as Athenagoras, neither mentions the Old Age of Chriſt, nor the Tranſlation of Enoch: nor does Irenæus in any paſſage of his Confutation of Hereſies, expreſsly aſſert that Demons were the offspring of Angels and Women.

How far it is fair to reaſon from matters of opinion to matters of fact, is a ſubject not ſufficiently conſidered by the objector. An inconcluſive reaſoner, may ſtill be a competent witneſs. Now even if we ſuppoſe the judgment of theſe Fathers to have been ever ſo unequal to the determination of abſtruſe points, to the interpretation of the difficulties of ſcripture, or to the developement of its myſteries, how can ſuch a defect be an impeachment of their Veracity? They may, notwithſtanding, be credible relators of thoſe things which either immediately occurred to their own obſervation, or were conveyed to them by the workers of the miracles in queſtion, by the ſpectators, or by the perſons for whoſe benefit they were performed. The Apoſtles themſelves were ſometimes remarkable for miſapprehenſion of the diſcourſes of our Lord. They required the moſt obvious parables to be explained to them, and they miſtook

miſtook the alluſion of their Maſter to the leaven of the Phariſees for an alluſion to the means of ordinary ſubſiſtence. Yet ſuch inſtances diminiſh not our veneration for them, as the Hiſtorians of the Son of God. Nor by parity of reaſoning, ought ſuch inſtances to leſſen the credit of the Fathers who immediately ſucceeded them. The ſentiments, therefore, which we may entertain reſpecting their opinions, and their evidence, ought to be kept diſtinct; by which means a deciſion will be made, more juſt to them, and more conſiſtent with candour and impartiality. To exclude their evidence to miracles becauſe they erred in the interpretation of dubious texts, is nearly as unwarrantable, as to declare a witneſs diſqualified to appear in a judicial proceeding, becauſe he does not ſatisfactorily explain the meaning of an intricate law of his country.

Hence it ſeems to follow as a neceſſary Corollary, that as theſe Fathers are competent witneſſes, their atteſtations either muſt be oppoſed by contradictory evidence, or ought to be admitted as deciſive.

From the miſrepreſentations of the ingenious Middleton, whoſe cavils we have endeavoured to expoſe, the *Hiſtorian of the decline*

cline and fall of the Roman Empire derived his objections againſt the miraculous powers ſubſequent to the time of the Apoſtles. He has, it muſt be confeſſed, given ſome embelliſhment, but has added little weight to the arguments of his great Maſter. He aſks what period of time is fixed for the ceſſation of miracles, and how are we to account for the inſenſibility of the chriſtians who then lived, to ſo remarkable a circumſtance?

The miracles may fairly be ſaid to ceaſe, with reſpect to our belief, when we can no longer obtain ſatisfactory evidence of their continuation. The cloſe of the reign of the Emperour Julian is the period at which that evidence begins to fail. Since about that time we diſcover, or imagine we diſcover cauſes for ſuſpicion, we may be allowed to ſuſpend our belief, and to make our deductions from the imperfect evidence which ſucceeds. For this ſtate of mind the learned Origen prepares us, by remarking, that in the Apoſtolical age miracles were frequent; that in the ſucceeding century their number conſiderably decreaſed; and that in the third century only a few traces remained of ſuch ſupernatural interpoſition.

Similar

Similar to the remarks of Origen are the obſervations of Euſebius, at a later period. The ſentiments of Jerom and Chryſoſtom, although not perfectly conſiſtent with themſelves, will enable us to come to a determination. Sometimes they explicitely aſſert, that the extraordinary gifts of the ſpirit were imparted in the early ages, and were gradually withdrawn as chriſtianity was more extenſively propagated and the flouriſhing ſtate of the church leſs and leſs required ſuch ſupport. Sometimes they give particular relations of miracles performed, even in their own days; they confeſs however that the genuineneſs of them was doubted, the fame of them was not ſo extenſively ſpread abroad, and they were not recommended with ſuch authority as to be received without heſitation even by believers themſelves. As no ſuch doubts are expreſſed relative to thoſe of the earlier ages, a clear diſtinction is marked out, which amounts to an indirect acknowledgement of preceding miracles, or at leaſt a ſtrong preſumption in favour of their exiſtence. The chriſtians had for ſome time been attentive to the gradual change which was taking place in the interpoſitions of Providence; and ſo far were they from being inſenſible or careleſs, that they remark the decreaſe and the ceſſation,

ceſſation, with ſufficient accuracy to ſatisfy a reaſonable and unprejudiced mind.

An Event happened in the middle of the fourth Century, which may perhaps not improperly be thought to have cloſed the ſcene of theſe extraordinary interpoſitions. The conduct which produced it was marked by ſingularity of enterprize, and confidence of ſucceſs; and its conſequences were in the greateſt degree wonderful and tremendous, they diſplayed a ſignal proof of the temerity of Man, and of the manifeſt and irreſiſtable power of God.

Meditating the infliction of a fatal wound on chriſtianity, the Emperour Julian determined to rebuild the temple at Jeruſalem, and to reſtore the ancient rites of Judaical Worſhip. His heart was elated with the vain imagination of fruſtrating the Predictions of Chriſt. But the Almighty who gave the Law in Thunder from Mount Sinai, and diſperſed the rebellious Iſraelites, in conformity with the propheſies of his Son, fully manifeſted his power to demonſtrate the truth of revelation. A ſudden Earthquake ſwallowed up the foundations of the new Edifice, and flames aſcended in vaſt columns to the blazing firmament

ment of Heaven. The moſt fierce and unconquerable of the elements was made the inſtrument of divine indignation. All the materials for the building were deſtroyed, and many of the workmen were deprived of life. Thoſe who eſcaped, bore on their bodies the deep marks of the ſcorching fire; and the ground on which the temple ſtood, for many years retained the diſmal veſtiges of ruin and conflagration.

If evidence for the truth of this awful interpoſition be required, our appeal may be made to the univerſal voice of the eccleſiaſtical writers. Some of them lived near the ſpot, others derived their information from thoſe who had viſited it. The teſtimony of the adverſaries to chriſtianity is equally ſtrong. Ammianus Marcellinus, the friend and companion of Julian, a writer equally remarkable for his learning, candour, and impartiality, gives a circumſtantial detail of the event. In dark and ambiguous terms, the Emperour himſelf alludes to it. A learned Rabbi of the fifteenth century, who appears to have collected his materials from Jewiſh traditions, records it; and even the *Hiſtorian of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire*, although he attempts with ſtubborn ſcepticiſm to invalidate

lidate ſome of its proofs, and inſinuates a want of impartial authorities, is compelled not only to acknowledge the general fact, but many of the particular circumſtances by which it was accompanied and diſtinguiſhed.

It may be objected that this is a Miracle of a peculiar kind, as it was the immediate operation of the Supreme Being, without the intervention of human means; and conſequently that it differs materially from other miracles whether of the diſputed or acknowledged claſs.

To this objection we are prepared to anſwer, that although it may differ in the means of its operation, yet it harmonizes with them in reſpect to its deſign, which was the Eſtabliſhment of the Chriſtian Religion.

This was a publick demonſtration of the veracity of the divine prediction. "Jeruſalem "ſhall be trodden down by the Gentiles, until "the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." The decree went forth, and the powers of Heaven and Earth were combined to eſtabliſh it.—Whilſt the *Heathen furiouſly raged and the People imagined a vain thing.* The period of deſolation ordained by the Almighty was not

not yet arrived, and therefore vain was the attempt of man to haſten its approach. Upon the ſame immoveable baſis was built that remarkable promiſe which our Lord made to his diſciples, before his aſcenſion to heaven: —*theſe ſigns ſhall follow them who believe; in my name they ſhall 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.*

That ſuch powers were not intended to be imparted to the apoſtles only, is evident from the context; as the promiſe refers to thoſe who ſhould believe in conſequence of their preaching, without any preciſe limitation as to time, or exception as to perſons. This aſſiſtance was firſt given to the Corinthian Church, to which St. Paul ſent directions for the proper regulation of miraculous endowments. St. James likewiſe, in his catholick epiſtle, recommends the prayers of the Elders of the church, and the performance of a ceremonial rite as certain means to produce the recovery of the ſick. Such examples, by furniſhing a probable argument for the communication of miraculous powers to different ſo-

cieties of chriſtians, confirm the veracity of the fathers.

From conſidering the nature of miracles as being not a contradiction of the great laws of nature, but only a deviation from the ordinary courſe of Providence for ſome ſalutary end, and from obſerving that the Deity can extend his power not merely to the performance of them himſelf, but to the performance of them likewiſe by the agency of mankind; there ariſes no abſurdity from the ſuppoſition, that ſome of the primitive chriſtians were employed for that purpoſe. In the earlieſt ages, when the church was in a low and perſecuted ſtate, when its adherents had no worldly comfort to ſupport their drooping ſpirits, and animate their faith; there ſeems to have been a neceſſity ſufficient to call for this divine aſſiſtance. So that although we are willing to concur with the adverſaries of the fathers, in cenſuring their vague repreſentations of events which ought to have been related in circumſtantial details; yet we are juſtified in aſſerting, in direct oppoſition to their cavils, that the objections, brought from the ſilence of the apoſtolical writers, are inconcluſive; and that the unanimous teſtimony of the ſecond and

and third century deſerves to be received without heſitation, unleſs we violate the firſt principles of hiſtorical credit. We admit, moreover, that the interpoſition of heaven to prevent Julian from rebuilding the Temple at Jeruſalem was the cloſe of miraculous operations for the eſtabliſhment of chriſtianity; and that the promiſes of Chriſt himſelf, the example of the church of Corinth, and the directions of St. Paul and of St. James, confirm and illuſtrate the general argument.

The juſtneſs and the propriety of theſe concluſions may be inferred, in ſome degree, from the conceſſions of thoſe who appear moſt unfavourable to the ſubject. For *the Author of the Inquiry into the miraculous powers*, at the concluſion of his controverſy, found himſelf ſo cloſely preſſed by the arguments of his learned and able opponents, that he changed the ground of conteſt. Inſtead of perſiſting in the unqualified denial of an occaſional diſplay of ſupernatural gifts, by any of the earlieſt chriſtians, which was the leading principle of his firſt work, he maintained, and only maintained in his laſt diſſertation, that there was no ſtanding power in the church which enabled her members to perform miracles on whatever occaſions they pleaſed. This ma-

nifeſt equivocation was an indirect acknowledgement of a defeat, and was a ſignal proof that if ſuch only was the object of his diligent inveſtigations, his learning and his talents had been unprofitably exhauſted in combating a poſition, which even the moſt bigotted friend to chriſtian antiquity had never ſtood forth to defend.

The Utility of miracles in the propagation of the goſpel, ſeems to be ſo obvious, that it requires not to be enlarged upon. We might at firſt conclude that they were calculated to ſucceed where every argument failed. For if the precepts of the goſpel were too pure to engage the minds of the ignorant, and the uncultivated; if its rewards were too refined and ſublime to warm their affections; a miracle was a proof of a divine revelation which was at once calculated to vanquiſh prejudice, and to flaſh conviction in the eyes of the ſpectator. If the dead man was raiſed, or the ſick were inſtantaneouſly healed, Bigotry we ſhould ſuppoſe muſt therefore have deſerted her idols to embrace the croſs of Chriſt, and Perſecution dropping her ſword, muſt have fallen proſtrate to adore that Being who imparted ſuch gifts to men.

But

But proper reflections on the disposition of mankind, and the testimony of evangelical and ecclesiastical history, will rectify this amusing theory. The effects of miracles might be transient, and as it sometimes happens with respect to the more rare phenomena of nature, might leave no lasting impression on the mind. Our Saviour too often experienced in the Jews a stubbornes of prejudice, which reluctantly gave way to the force of his mighty works. His disciples were obliged to contend with equal difficulties among the inhabitants of other nations. The Pagans attributed miracles to the operation of magick, and refused their assent to them, when urged as an evidence of a divine revelation. As the idolatrous priests pretended that supernatural effects were produced by the interposition of their Gods, so the distinction between true and false miracles was liable to be confounded; and the enquirer after truth, from a latent suspicion of fraud even in the most specious, might have recourse to some other proof to fix his choice of a religious persuasion. Among the authentick instances of divine interposition, several were of a private nature, and were more immediately designed for the consolation of individuals, or the support of particular congregations. These and similar causes conspired,

we may ſuppoſe, to prevent that wonderful and laſting effect of miracles which a diſplay of them, more frequent and more conſpicuous than that which is recorded by the fathers of the church, muſt neceſſarily have produced.

Let us now paſs on to conſider the method that was adopted, and the arguments that were adduced by the earlieſt vindicators of chriſtianity, to make the true nature of their profeſſion known to their enemies.

The apologies of the primitive chriſtians were no leſs calculated to prove the zeal and ſincerity of their reſpective authors, than to vindicate the honour of their religion. Chriſtianity, for a long period of time after its firſt appearance in the world, was aſperſed by the virulence of defamation, and oppreſſed by the inſolence of power. The edicts of emperours gave a ſanction to the moſt unjuſtifiable proceedings againſt its followers, and incited the bigotted multitude to kindle the flames of perſecution. Theſe eventful ſcenes were equally calculated to try the patience of the humble and uncomplaining, and to rouſe the courage, and call forth the abilities of the intrepid and the learned. In the firſt rank of the champions of the faith we ſee St. Peter

coming forth to rectify the miſconceptions of the Jews, and to declare the nature of the new diſpenſation. We likewiſe behold St. Paul inſpired with more than mortal boldneſs, whilſt he unfolded the awful ſcene of a future judgment to the trembling Felix. Upon occaſions almoſt equally perilous, Juſtin Martyr and Athenagoras, two of the moſt eminent converts from the ſchools of the philoſophers in the ſecond century, followed theſe illuſtrious examples. From their apologies we find that they combated ſlander with the weapons of truth, that they exhibited the rules of their conduct as they are recorded in the goſpel, and deſcribed with the warmth of charity, and the conſciouſneſs of rectitude, the virtues of their chriſtian contemporaries. With the earneſtneſs of men who were ſinking under the weight of perſecution, they ſolicit the indulgence of that religious toleration which was freely allowed by the Roman Emperours to all the reſt of their ſubjects.

The works of many eminent men, who diſtinguiſhed themſelves in the ſame manner, are unhappily loſt. There is one conſolation, however, which may in ſome degree compenſate for the misfortune, ſince the diligence of Euſebius has reſcued their names, and ſome

fragments of their works, from oblivion. Quadratus, Biſhop of Athens, Ariſtides the Philoſopher, Melito, Biſhop of Sardis, Apollinaris, Biſhop of Hierapolis, and Miltiades, preſented their vindications of chriſtianity reſpectively to Adrian, Aurelian, and Commodus. The frequency of ſuch applications in ſucceſſive reigns, is both a proof of the depreſſed and injured ſtate of chriſtianity, and of the opinion prevalent in the different periods of time when theſe writers pleaded its cauſe, that their labours would produce a proper effect, by diſpelling the prejudices of its enemies, and that the Emperours were not implacable, or deaf to the voice of truth.

Theſe earlieſt advocates of chriſtianity have not eſcaped the ſevere animadverſions of the Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. He laments with pretended concern the ſcantineſs of their talents, and complains of the miſapplication of their arguments to improper ſubjects. "He aſſerts that they ex-
"poſe with ſuperfluous wit and eloquence the
"extravagance of Polytheiſm."

Now, the whole ſyſtem of Polytheiſm was the offspring of fiction, and derived its ſupport from ſuperſtition and fraud. No obſtacles could

could more powerfully retard the progreſs of truth. The luſtre of evangelical light, and the corruption of idolatrous darkneſs, could not maintain a divided empire over the minds of men. The altar of Jupiter, and the ſtandard of the Croſs, could not be erected on the ſame place. *For what concord hath Chriſt with Belial? And what agreement hath the temple of God with Idols?* The prejudices of education, the general habits of life, and the fervour of the paſſions, all united to plead in favour of rites and ceremonies which were cloſely connected with the purſuit of the groſſeſt ſenſuality. In what more important or more neceſſary ſervice, therefore, could the advocates for chriſtianity be employed, than in demoliſhing the fabrick of Paganiſm, in order that chriſtianity might be erected upon its ruins?

Whatever might be the incredulity which the more enlightened Gentiles ſecretly entertained, their external reſpect for their religion was a formidable impediment to the progreſs of the faith; as it rivetted more cloſely the chains of vulgar ſuperſtition. The magiſtrates, however deep their diſſimulation might be, preſerved at leaſt the appearance of devotion, from motives of policy; and the philoſophers, too prudent to make an oſtentatious diſplay

play of their ſceptical tenets, profeſſed the ſame ſpecious veneration for the Gods of their country. The keenneſs of wit was therefore by the chriſtian moſt judiciouſly directed againſt the motley maſs of Polytheiſm which was ſo artfully countenanced by the united examples of the wiſe and the powerful. The force of eloquence was as properly employed in expoſing the plauſible tales of a popular mythology, and in recommending the doctrines and the precepts of a pure and ſpiritual religion.

The Hiſtorian next proceeds to cenſure the apologiſts, becauſe "they inſiſt much more "ſtrongly on the predictions which announced, "than on the miracles which accompanied the "appearance of the Meſſiah."

It is ſomewhat doubtful how far the fact is correctly ſtated, and if it be correctly ſtated, how far the practiſe itſelf is unjuſtifiable. Juſtin Martyr, fully ſenſible of the powerful effect which the repreſentation of miracles was calculated to produce, appealed to the Roman regiſters, which contained a full account of the moſt remarkable tranſactions of our Lord. An additional proof that the miracles of Chriſt were well known, ariſes from conſidering the labours of the preceding advocates for chriſtianity.

tianity. A ſhort time before Juſtin addreſſed his apology to Antoninus Pius, Quadratus, the learned Biſhop of Athens, delivered an elegant oration to Adrian; in which he particularly inſiſted upon the miracles performed by our Lord. He repreſented that they were not of ſhort duration, like the impoſtures which charm the eye of credulity with a momentary deluſion, and produce no permanent effects. Their durarion was not merely limited to the period of our Lord's continuance on earth, but laſted for a ſufficient time to give the fulleſt proof of their reality and efficacioutneſs. He confirms the truth of his aſſertions, by appealing to a fact which was open to common enquiry. He aſſures the Emperour, that ſome perſons who had experienced the miraculous influence of the power of Chriſt, in healing the ſick and raiſing the dead, had even ſurvived until that age.

Since the evidence of miracles had been diſplayed on a recent occaſion, it would have been ſuperfluous for Juſtin Martyr to have reſted the proofs of chriſtianity upon that ground alone, when they might be ſtrongly eſtabliſhed upon another. The evidence of prophecy is ſo clear and concluſive, that it may reaſonably be queſtioned how far the proofs

proofs drawn from miracles, ought to ſuperſede it. The Old Teſtament contains a long ſeries of predictions which are gradually enlarged with more particular circumſtances, and pointed with more ſtriking and appropriate reference to a moſt extraordinary event recorded in the goſpels. Like rays of light proceeding from different points, they all converge in the ſame focus. The hiſtory of Chriſt, related by the evangeliſts, is an exact copy of the prophecies, in which not only the proportion and the outlines are uniformly preſerved, but the ſtriking reſemblance of every feature, and the peculiar effect of every expreſſion are faithfully delineated. A prophecy is indeed a more refined and philoſophical proof, becauſe it appeals to the judgment which delights in the compariſon of general deſcriptions and particular circumſtances with the event which they anticipate. A miracle is more liable to the cavils of doubt; becauſe the poſſibility of its exiſtence may be diſputed, it may be attributed to the artifice of fraud, or the agency of demons. A miracle reſts for its confirmation upon the evidence of men, but a prophecy when fulfilled, may be ſaid to be the immediate evidence of God himſelf. The Ethiopian Eunuch, ſtruck with the pathetic predictions of Iſaiah, expreſſed an eager curioſity

curiosity to know to what person they properly referred. Great was his astonishment, and instantaneous his conversion, when Philip held up to him the picture of the Redeemer, as their compleat and illustrious counterpart. Our Saviour himself appeals not less frequently to the prophets, for an attestation of his divine mission, than to his miracles; and seems to intimate that an inattention to the former, immediately led to the rejection of the latter; —*for if they believe not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.*

Exclusive of the propriety of having recourse to prophetical evidence considered in itself; there are other reasons which justify the introduction of such proof arising from the genius and disposition of the Romans. Their eagerness to explore the events of futurity may be collected from the invectives of their satyrists, the censures of their philosophers, and the narratives of their historians. They practised the arts of divination with ardour, and applied themselves with blind credulity to the occult studies of magick and astrology. The mysterious volume of the Sibyl, supposed to contain the destined revolutions of the empire, was preserved with the greatest

reverence in the capitol, and conſulted in all emergencies of the ſtate. This attachment to the predictions which it contained was improved to great advantage by the moſt celebrated of their poets, in a beautiful anticipation of the happineſs ordained to ſucceed the approaching birth of the Son of Jupiter. If the imagination of the Romans was delighted with the felicity which ſhould ſucceed the reſtoration of the golden age, and with the return of Aſtræa to the earth; with what aſtoniſhment might their minds be impreſſed when they were guided to thoſe ancient writers who foretold the tranquil ſtate of the world at the advent of the Meſſiah, the eſtabliſhment of his ſpiritual and eternal kingdom, and the wide extent of his dominion. Even their own experience could convince them in ſome degree with what exactneſs theſe ſplendid deſcriptions had correſponded with the event. The advance of chriſtianity from an obſcure city of Syria to the metropolis of the empire, and its rapid diffuſion through the provinces, formed an object too ſingular and too conſpicuous to eſcape the publick notice. A perſuaſion which was prevalent at that time contributed likewiſe to juſtify the conduct of the apologiſts, and to awaken an attention to the works of the prophets. For it was generally believed

" that

" that the antient ſacerdotal volumes had fore-
" told that the Eaſt ſhould have the preemi-
" nence, and that thoſe who came from Ju-
" dea ſhould obtain the ſovereignty of the
" world."

It appears therefore upon the whole, that the ſubjects of theſe Apologies are unreaſonably cenſured, ſince they were well calculated to ſilence the clamour and abate the rage of the Pagans. They moreover excited curioſity to inquire into the nature of a religion whoſe profeſſors had been ſo injuriouſly treated, and thus greatly contributed to the converſion of the enlightened and candid part of mankind.

Whilſt the Apologiſts were exerting their talents to confute calumny and prevent perſecution, the chriſtian Miſſionaries were more actively engaged in publiſhing the new revelation to the world.

Of the fidelity with which the Apoſtles executed the final injunction of their divine Maſter, to proclaim to every land the glad tidings of the goſpel, we may form the beſt judgment from the inſpired records. Neither dangers, nor hardſhips, deterred them from any exertion which contributed to the glory of God by the diffuſion

diffuſion of the goſpel of his Son. The ſteadineſs of their conduct, and the ardour of their zeal, are beſt ſeen in the effects of that conduct and of that zeal on the various countries to which they travelled, and the multitudes of different nations whom they converted. The firſt advances towards extending the knowledge of the new diſpenſation beyond Judæa, were made by Philip the Deacon, who met with the greateſt encouragement to proſecute his labours in the converſion of the Samaritans, and the inhabitants of the ſhores of Cæſarea. The diſciples who were driven from Jeruſalem when the perſecution raged after the martyrdom of St. Stephen, converted their flight into an occaſion of triumph, by planting the goſpel in the opulent coaſts of Phœnicia, and in the fertile iſland of Paphos; and in laying the foundation of the ancient and renowned church of Antioch. The labours of St. Paul and of St. Barnabas are recorded with ſufficient particularity to diſplay the unabating vigour of their perſeverance, and the wide extent of their travels. The progreſs of the great apoſtle of the Gentiles may indeed be traced from the banks of the Euphrates, to the metropolis of the Roman world. The celebrated cities of Damaſcus, Epheſus, Corinth, and Athens by the number, and the reſpecta-

bility

bility of their converts, bore teſtimony to his labours.

We are informed by the moſt authentick evidence of eccleſiaſtical hiſtory, that after St. Peter had with the aſſiſtance of St. Paul eſtabliſhed a church at Rome; he directed his attention to thoſe Jews who were diſperſed throughout various provinces of Aſia. St. Mark planted chriſtianity in Egypt, and the coaſts of the Ægean ſea were diſtinguiſhed by the preaching of St. John, who fixed his reſidence at Epheſus, where he compoſed his goſpel. At this period, the moſt effectual means were taken to diſengage habit and prejudice from the popular ſuperſtitions of Paganiſm, to correct their impurities, and to give them a more becoming and more honourable employment in the ſervice of chriſtianity. St. John founded the catechetical ſchool of Epheſus, St. Mark that of Alexandria, and Polycarp that of Smyrna. Here the ſeeds of the goſpel were firſt ſown in the young and ductile mind, before the propenſities of more mature age had obſtructed their growth. The difficulties which might have accompanied inſtruction merely private were leſſened both to the teachers and their diſciples; and the experience of ſucceeding ages has only ſerved

to confirm the conſummate wiſdom and utility of theſe apoſtolical eſtabliſhments, by diſplaying more fully the advantages of early piety and religious education.

From theſe general accounts it is highly probable that even within half a century from the death of our Lord, his religion was diſſeminated over all the Eaſtern part of the Roman Empire. The period of the converſion of the Weſtern provinces is enveloped in great obſcurity, as well as the particular hiſtory of thoſe miſſionaries, who piouſly undertook and accompliſhed it. By the dim light however which is thrown upon this ſubject by the Eccleſiaſtical Writers, we diſtinguiſh the names of Pothinus and Irenæus, who travelled from Aſia into Gaul, and there eſtabliſhed the churches of Vienne and Lyons, which were in the reign of Adrian moſt eminently diſtinguiſhed by the faith and fortitude of their martyrs. In the reign of the Emperor Adrian many other ſucceſſors of the apoſtles viſited remote countries, where they either confirmed the churches already converted, or made new proſelytes to the faith. From the high antiquity of ſome verſions, particularly the Italic, the Syriac and the Æthiopic, we may reaſonably conclude that they left

left copies of the ſcriptures with their converts, and thus furniſhed the means not only of diffuſing the knowledge of chriſtianity, but of delivering it down in its original purity to ſucceeding ages.

In the primitive Miſſionary we may contemplate the greateſt reſolution, productive of the moſt aſſiduous and painful exertions. Impreſſed by the deepeſt ſenſe of duty, and eager to diffuſe that divine light of revelation which burned with undiminiſhed heat in his own breaſt, he diſengaged himſelf from the ſtrong attachments to his native country, and went forth to convert an idolatrous world. As his life was devoted to the intereſts of his religion, all the cauſes by which its pains were aggravated, or its continuance ſhortened, were ſtript of their terrour. His imagination preſented to him the ſcourge, the rack, and the croſs, yet was his reſolution unſhaken by the apprehenſions of perſecution and death. At the loud and ſolemn calls of duty he was looſened even from the ties of conſanguinity; and with a ſpirit not leſs dignified than that of the Roman Hero, he ſuffered principle to predominate over affection, turned aſide from the tears of friendſhip, and was even deaf to the tender ſupplications of love. The bright object of

his ambition was not the barren praiſe of inflexible conſtancy, but the crown of immortal happineſs. The dangers of travel, the precarioufneſs of ſubſiſtence, the perfidy of pretended friends, and the violence of open enemies, were in his eſtimation no more than light afflictions which endure for a moment. Loſt in the ſolitude of the wilderneſs, expoſed to the tempeſts of the ocean, or aſſailed by the outrage of the multitude, he was not deſtitute and forſaken, for the Almighty was his guide, and his comforter. With patience he ſaw the frowns of the great, and heard the ſcoffs of the vulgar. He proclaimed with the unſhaken confidence of truth, the wondrous tidings of the new diſpenſation, and exhorted a guilty race to repentance and amendment. Elate with the accompliſhment of his pious taſk, in bringing many ſheep to the fold of Chriſt, he gloried amid the flames of martyrdom, and breathed out his ſoul with joy.

Such was the ſituation of St. Paul, as well as of many others who ſhared his dangers and met his fate. By their unbroken perſeverance, the knowledge of the Goſpel was diffuſed through thoſe regions, in which the Roman conqueſts had prepared the way. Yet the victorious progreſs which was made by the arms of the moſt

moſt warlike people in the univerſe, in the courſe of a thouſand years, was equalled, or perhaps exceeded, by the chriſtian religion in two centuries. From Judea it conveyed the bleſſings of life and immortality to the moſt remote countries, and reſembled the Nile, which riſing from a diſtant and obſcure ſource, gradually overflows vaſt provinces, and fertilizes every ſoil which is watered by its ſtream.

There is no ſubject which ſeems to have inſpired the early fathers with ſuch exultation, or which they deſcribe with more lively colours of eloquence, than the general diffuſion of the goſpel. It was highly gratifying to their devout minds to obſerve, that the ſpiritual comfort which they enjoyed, was communicated to others; and that the extent of the faith was correſpondent with the declarations of prophecy. From the glowing repreſentations of Tertullian we collect that not more than a century and a half had elapſed from the aſcenſion of Chriſt, when the followers of his religion might be found among all ranks of ſociety; in all cities and villages; in the ſenate, in the camp, and the palace; in the vaſt regions of Aſia, on the coaſts of Africa, in the provinces of Gaul, Germany and Spain; in the parts of Britain inacceſſible to hoſtile

arms; and in countries much more remote from the metropolis of the Roman world.

The Hiſtorian of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire ſeems to labour with much ſolicitude to confine primitive chriſtianity within the narroweſt limits. Whilſt he makes a partial allowance for the exaggeration of Pliny, relative to the number of chriſtians in Bithynia; he condemns a ſimilar exaggeration of Juſtin Martyr as too precipitate and partial. It is the part of candour to allow the ſame indulgence to both, and to recollect that the paſſions of both might be ſo highly inflamed by the different motives of prejudice and fear, as to produce a deſcription not ſtrictly conſiſtent with truth. When the fathers expatiate upon the wide extent of chriſtianity, they aſſume a licentiouſneſs of deſcription, which is not uncommon among the antient writers, of confounding the Roman Empire with the whole habitable earth. It is however ſomewhat remarkable, that even from thoſe records which the Hiſtorian eſteems the moſt indiſputable and authentick, we may find expreſſions to countenance, if not to juſtify the repreſentations of the Fathers. The warm declamation of Juſtin Martyr and of Tertullian, the energetick narrative of Euſebius, and the exact

exact parallel drawn by Chryſoſtom between the Pagans and the Chriſtians, derive very conſiderable ſupport from the expreſs declarations of Suetonius, Tacitus, Pliny, Lucian, and Porphyry.

In thus tracing the progreſs of the goſpel, and eſtimating the zeal of its firſt preachers, a melancholy reflection naturally ariſes in the mind. The countries in which the faith was firſt promulgated, retain at preſent very imperfect marks of its antient diffuſion. The rich provinces of Aſia Minor and Syria, which have been long expoſed to the deſpotiſm of the Ottoman Princes, exhibit only in venerable ruins the antient edifices of magnificence and devotion. Moſt of the ſeven cities immortalized by the writer of the Apocalypſe, diſcover no remaining veſtiges to gratify the eye of the pious traveller. In Damaſcus, renowned in ſacred hiſtory for the converſion of the great Apoſtle of the Gentiles, a Turkiſh Moſque is erected amid the ruins of a Chriſtian Church. Jeruſalem itſelf, the theatre of the ſtupendous and mighty works of the Son of God, exiſts only as a monument of the rapacity and extortion of its infidel tyrants. Even in that holy place where rending rocks and opening graves atteſted the dignity of an expiring Redeemer,

the proud creſcent of Mahomet is diſplayed over the proſtrate banner of the Croſs.

Of this triumphant aſcendancy the hiſtory of the middle ages can ſufficiently explain to us the cauſes. The degenerate chriſtians corrupted that faith which they were bound to have kept unſullied; they introduced thoſe ſuperſtitious rites which they ought to have deſpiſed, and indulged in all thoſe vices, which it was their duty to avoid. Hence the ſceptre departed from them, and hence the wolves were permitted to ravage the fold of Chriſt.

But if chriſtianity has been involved in the great revolutions of empire, the ſeat of her dominion is not deſtroyed, but removed. Her ſound has gone forth into lands which were unknown to the primitive preachers. The vaſt regions of the north of Europe have been long added to the kingdoms of the Meſſiah. In a world unknown to the antients, the wide extended ſhores of America have received the religion, as well as the civilization, of the European coloniſts. The commerce of the Eaſt has afforded an opportunity, which the patrons of a moſt pious inſtitution have embraced, and the coaſts of Malabar can atteſt the ſucceſsful labours of their Miſſionaries.

Thus

Thus the acquiſitions which chriſtianity has made in ſome places, are abundantly more than a counterbalance for her depreſſed ſtate in others; and thus the evidence of its divine origin is eſtabliſhed, by the confirmation of the prophecies which declare that no power ſhould be able to effect its ſubverſion. Obſcure to man are the events of futurity, and veiled in awful myſtery are the councils of the Moſt High; yet from the goodneſs of the Almighty, and the wiſdom of his diſpenſations, we may venture to conclude, that the goſpel will, in ſome future age, be preached in all the world.

To that bliſsful period the benevolent and pious mind wiſhes to extend its eager view, and feels the moſt ſublime gratification by anticipating the immenſe addition which will be made to human happineſs, both temporal and eternal, when the follower of Mahomet, the diſciple of Brama, and the votary of Confucius, with every worſhipper of every Idol, ſhall bow with equal veneration at the name of Jeſus; and when the Chriſtian Religion, like the bright luminary of day, ſhall diffuſe its auſpicious influence over the whole race of Mankind.

SER-

SERMON III.

JEREMIAH I. 19.

They ſhall fight againſt thee, but they ſhall not prevail againſt thee; for I am with thee, ſaith the Lord, to deliver thee.

IN the peruſal of eccleſiaſtical hiſtory we are often ſurprized by obſerving, that men have exiſted ſo ignorant of the human mind, as to imagine that its operations can be controuled by violence. The ſcourge of oppreſſion and the ſword of tyranny may indeed have very powerful effects over the outward actions, and may awe the wretch who is expoſed to them, into ſullen acquieſcence, or reluctant ſilence. But the free born ſoul is ſubject to no ſuch reſtraints; for amidſt the ſevereſt oppreſſion, it exerts the boldeſt energies of thought, and triumphs even in the agonies of torture.

Compulſion

Compulſion eventually defeats its own purpoſe, and either forces the object of its reſentment to wear the temporary maſk of hypocriſy, or excites that reſtleſs and determined reſiſtance of the will which no force can ſubdue. To ſoothe the mind into compliance by the gentle arts of perſuaſion, and to allure it by the flattering proſpect of advantage, is eaſy and practicable; but to reſtrain its inclinations by violence, or to implant opinions repugnant to its judgment, is not leſs impoſſible, than to arreſt the flight of the winged lightning; or to imprint a durable mark upon the ſurface of the ocean.

Such are the reflections which naturally ariſe in our minds, on conſidering the folly of Perſecution. That the meek profeſſors of a pure and peaceful religion ſhould have ever been expoſed to its fury, may, abſtractedly conſidered, be a juſt ſubject of wonder. The inoffenſiveneſs of its inſtitutions, and the benevolence of its principles, gave it the faireſt title to ſecurity and protection. Yet the reception it firſt met with, was far different; for as a proof how much the beſt gift of heaven to mankind was undervalued, the chriſtians of the three firſt centuries were engaged in almoſt a continual ſtruggle, againſt oppreſſion and cruelty.

That

That we may be enabled to form the more compleat idea of this intereſting ſubject, it will be proper to ſurvey the cauſes of the perſecutions, the conduct of the martyrs, and the effects of their fortitude.

Whilſt the chriſtian religion was effectually making its progreſs through various parts of the world, it became an object of ſufficient magnitude and importance, to attract the attention of the Roman government. When firſt ſuperficially noticed in the metropolis of the empire, it was confounded with Judaiſm, and excited only the deriſion of the vulgar, and the contempt of the learned, and the powerful. As ſoon however as the zeal of the chriſtians, in making converts, and the ſimple ceremonies of their worſhip, had diſtinguiſhed them from the adherents to the Moſaical law, they were expoſed to the moſt cruel and moſt unmerited puniſhments. On conſidering the character of Nero, it can excite no ſurprize to obſerve, that the firſt proſecution raged in his ſanguinary reign. Chriſtianity recorded the event as an honour to her cauſe, that the firſt Emperour who deſtroyed her votaries, was the inceſſant foe of exalted merit. For the imputed conflagration of Rome, of which he was himſelf the inſidious and unfeeling author,

they were condemned to the moſt horrid tortures, that ingenious malice could contrive. Their dreadful execution began that long and melancholy catalogue of martyrs which, like the myſtick ſcroll of the prophet, was inſcribed, within and without, with lamentation, and mourning, and woe.

The boaſted harmony of the antient world reſpecting religious worſhip, muſt be underſtood to have exiſted only under certain reſtrictions. The inhabitants of different nations enjoyed the liberty of ſerving their reſpective deities, without moleſtation, or reſtraint. Hence the chriſtians, in their apologies, complain of the injuſtice of their enemies, in not allowing them the common liberty of toleration, which was granted to all the reſt of the world. But when once this privilege paſſed its preſcribed limits, and thoſe who held ſuch tenets as differed from the received opinions of the public, began to propagate them; they became the objects of public animoſity and ſevere puniſhment. Many philoſophers, whoſe free opinions tended to undermine the common veneration for the gods of their country, were doomed either to exile or to death. This was the cauſe of the proſcription of Diagoras, and the chief pretext of the guilt of Socrates.

The Romans, adopting an antient law of Athens, guarded againſt the introduction of foreign rites with ſcrupulous precaution, and in various periods of their hiſtory, rouſed the vigilance of the magiſtrate, to prevent their diffuſion. Tiberius prohibited the exerciſe of the religious ceremonies of other countries, particularly thoſe of Egypt and Judæa. We muſt therefore have recourſe to the general manners of antiquity, to account for their prejudices againſt chriſtianity, and muſt impute the leading cauſe of perſecution to the zeal of the chriſtians in making converts from Paganiſm.

Urged by the pureſt motives of conſcience the chriſtians expreſſed the greateſt abhorrence of idolatry. They not only abſtained with unremitting care from the participation of its rites, but embraced every occaſion to expoſe the prophaneneſs of them, and to gain proſelytes to the truth. Their zealous conduct appeared highly criminal in the eyes of the bigotted magiſtrates, who ſaw the new religion increaſe with alarming rapidity, and were apprehenſive that the number of the converts would endanger the publick peace. Moreover the religious eſtabliſhment of the ſtate was ſuppoſed to be too intimately connected with

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its political conſtitution not to receive a violent convulſion, if this bold innovation was ſuffered to proceed with impunity.

The alarms of the Roman government were equally groundleſs, but more plauſible, when excited either by the frequency of the chriſtian aſſemblies, or the ſecret manner in which they were held. The Emperours ſurveyed the aſſociations of their ſubjects with ſo much jealouſy and ſuſpicion, that they were ſtrictly prohibited, even when holden for purpoſes the moſt inoffenſive and ſalutary. As the meetings of the chriſtians were confounded with factious and diſorderly ſocieties, they were expoſed to rigorous and unjuſt penalties.

To avoid interruption, they met together during the ſilence of the night, or at the dawn of the day. Their choice of ſuch unſeaſonable hours for their devotions gave great alarm to the Romans, ſince the laws from the foundation of the republick, had ſtrictly forbidden nocturnal meetings. In the celebration of the Bacchanalian rites, with which the chriſtian aſſemblies, on account of their external appearance, might poſſibly be confounded, the Senate was alarmed with apprehenſions of danger, on being informed that a multitude was

was often convened in the ſeaſon of darkneſs and repoſe. The baptiſmal vow likewiſe, gave no ſmall cauſe for ſuſpicion, as it was liable to be interpreted into an oath of criminal ſecrecy, and a ratification of treaſonable deſigns.

That the meek and benevolent followers of Jeſus ſhould be miſtaken for the abettors of ſedition, is an evident proof with what a ſuperficial glance the jealous Roman ſurveyed their aſſemblies. His fears of their deſigns were vain, and his ignorance of their conduct was inexcuſable. Had he carefully examined their ſimple rites, and harmleſs tranſactions, he would doubtleſs have paſſed a more equitable judgment, and rather have imputed their conduct to the deluſions of pitiable fanaticiſm, than to the machinations of a malignant and deſtructive ſuperſtition.—*He knew not what ſpirit they were of.* They met not to drain the bowl of intemperance, or to indulge the exceſſes of licentiouſneſs; but to break the ſacred bread of the Euchariſt, and renew their reſolutions of purity and holineſs. They were convened not to fan the flames of inſurrection or meditate dark and ſubtle ſtratagems againſt the State; but to invoke the Moſt High for the proſperity of the Emperour, and pay the

tribute of adoration and prayer to the Prince of Peace.

Whilſt they were thus irreproachable in their conduct and ſteady in their loyalty, their enemies meditated a deciſive blow againſt their reputation, by devoting their moral character to the moſt heinous infamy. The calumnies which were induſtriouſly reported, probably took their riſe from the ſuperficial remarks and obſervations of thoſe, who had been preſent at the celebration of the ſacraments. The ceremony employed in the immerſion of the infant, and the diſtribution of the conſecrated elements, were aggravated by the inventive genius of ſcandal into the licentious indulgences of the orgies of Bacchus, and the horrid and inhuman banquet of Atreus. The diligence of the earlieſt apologiſts was therefore rouſed to confute, and in ſome degree to retort this infamous and glaring imputation; and the developement of its falſhood failed not to acquire new honour to the church, by introducing and warranting the delineation of her virtues.

To the elegant Correſpondent of Trajan we are indebted for an invaluable teſtimony relative to the primitive church. By the converts of

of Bythinia, he was made acquainted with the principles of their faith, and the ceremonies of their worſhip. Although convinced by the cleareſt evidence, that the aſperſions which had been thrown upon them were wholly groundleſs, he ſcrupled not to aſſert in his celebrated Epiſtle to the Emperour, that whatever was the nature of their confeſſion, yet their inflexible obſtinacy and ſtubbornneſs deſerved to be puniſhed. Diſſatisfied with the aſſeverations of numbers who declared the inoffenſive purpoſes for which their aſſemblies were convened, he heſitated not to put two Deaconeſſes to the torture in order to draw forth a confeſſion of ſome imagined guilt.

From a magiſtrate ſo enlightened by learning, ſo converſant with mankind, and ſo compliant upon all other occaſions with the dictates of philanthropy, we naturally expect more candid deciſions, and more mild behaviour. This inconſiſtency with his general conduct and ſentiments is yet more peculiarly ſtriking, if it be conſidered, that the ſame virtues which were exerciſed in the adherence of the pious to their principles, were the ſubjects of admiration and applauſe, when exemplified in the illuſtrious characters of antient heroes and patriots. The partial and inconſi-

derate Pliny denied to the followers of Chriſt, that praiſe, and that eſtimation, which, as a Roman, he muſt neceſſarily feel for the exulting patience of Mutius, the inflexible reſolution of Regulus, and the unconquerable ſpirit of Cato.

Our candour wiſhes to throw a veil over the failings of an illuſtrious character. We look however in vain for even a partial juſtification of Pliny, unleſs we impute his conduct to the inveterate prejudices of the times in which he lived, or to the apprehenſions of a conſcientious magiſtrate, who by exceſſive ſolicitude to diſcharge his duty, is ſometimes hurried into acts of flagrant injuſtice.

An additional reaſon for the perſecution of the chriſtians reſulted from their conduct upon ſome occaſions being interpreted into perſonal diſreſpect to the Emperour. To his name in all ſeaſons of publick feſtivity, libations were made, and in his praiſe, congratulatory ſongs were compoſed. Theſe honours were accompanied by rites, ſimilar to thoſe which were performed to the Deities themſelves. Hence as the chriſtians refuſed to join in this prophane flattery, the invocation of the Imperial name was adopted, as a ſnare for their loyalty, and

and a teſt of their abjuration. A refuſal to comply was interpreted into an avowal of complicated guilt, and furniſhed a plauſible pretext for puniſhing them not only as ſubvertors of the national religion, but as enemies of the ſupreme and eſtabliſhed authority.

The ſeverity of the Edicts enacted againſt them varied according to the temper and paſſions of the different Emperours. Under the cruel Nero and the puſillanimous Domitian, they were rigorous and ſanguinary. The partial clemency of Trajan checked indeed the fury of perſecution; but left the chriſtians expoſed to the malice of informers. Marcus Antoninus the philoſopher liſtened with credulity to the calumnies thrown upon the chriſtians by their enemies, and the effects of his ſeverity were felt from the more ſouthern provinces of France to the moſt diſtant cities of Aſia Minor. Although the laws were often ſilent, yet they were not always repealed. Hence the interval of perſecution, far from becoming a ſtate of tranquility, was a ſeaſon of awful expectation and anxious fear. A temporary calm was no ſecurity againſt the return of more violent ſtorms. The church was kept in a continual ſtate of alarm, and enjoyed no permanent repoſe until the reign of Com-

modus, when the flames of popular fury were at leaſt mitigated, if not extinguiſhed, and when peace reigned for ſome time, in all the churches of the world.

The conſequences of the Imperial edicts were calamitous and deplorable. As often as they were enacted, the rage of perſecution was let looſe, and her way was marked with blood. The furious multitude were inſtigated by the ſuperſtitious prieſts, and the ſelfiſh artiſts, to whom the worſhip of Idols was a ſource of ſubſiſtence and wealth. Often when aſſembled to view the publick games, they demanded, with loud and tumultuous acclamations, a ſacrifice to their inſulted Gods; and crouded the ſpacious amphitheatre, to ſee the innocent Martyrs expoſed to the edge of the ſword, the jaws of the hungry lion, or the more excruciating tortures of the flaming pile. "In the "fight of the unwiſe they ſeemed to die, and "their departure was taken for miſery. For "though they were puniſhed in the ſight of "men, yet was their hope full of immorta-"lity. As they have been chaſtiſed they ſhall "be greatly rewarded, for God proved them "and found them worthy for himſelf. As "gold in the furnace hath he tried them, and "received them as a burnt offering."

Thus

Thus are we led on to conſider in the ſecond place the behaviour of the primitive martyrs in the laſt trying ſcenes of their ſufferings.

Whilſt the moſt eminent and reſpectable adherents to the faith, were devoted to publick executions, the obſcure condition of common converts was generally the cauſe of their ſafety. The Romans adopted the policy of Tarquin, and concluded that by dooming the leaders of the riſing ſect to death, the energy and ſpirit of its inſtitutions might effectually be broken. No plan, it muſt be confeſſed, could promiſe with greater hopes of ſucceſs its complete ruin and extinction. The perſecutors ſeemed to think that by depriving piety of her brighteſt ornaments, and moſt firm ſupports, they ſhould ſtrike terror into the whole body of chriſtians; and either drive them to inſtant deſpair or diſgraceful apoſtacy.

Such were the vain and ſanguine hopes which were formed from the condemnation of Ignatius Biſhop of Antioch, Polycarp Biſhop of Smyrna, and Juſtin, who, with an emphatical alluſion to his unmerited fate, was denominated the Martyr.

A minute account of their pious lives and exemplary deaths has been ably and repeatedly given by various writers. To tranſcribe the particulars of their narrations, is altogether unneceſſary, as they form the moſt ſtriking and moſt obvious parts of the antient martyrologies. It may be more proper on the preſent occaſion to exhibit the leading principles of their conduct, and to place their behaviour in that point of view, which is moſt conſiſtent with the impartiality of truth, and moſt productive of religious edification.

They were unanimouſly actuated by the ſame motives of duty, and expired in the confeſſion of the ſame faith. A firm conviction that the bold avowal of chriſtianity was abſolutely neceſſary to diſplay their ſincerity, and ſecure their eternal happineſs, made them riſe ſuperior to every worldly conſideration. Their behaviour was equally remote from the enthuſiaſm of bigotted zeal, and the raſhneſs of obſtinate folly. They diſdained to ſacrifice the ardent love of their divine Maſter to the allurements of the world. No offers of impunity, no threats of malice, no proſpect of temporal advantage diverted them from the ſtraight though thorny path of duty. To temporize by ſervile conceſſion, or timid retractation, was equally

equally repugnant to their integrity, inconſiſtent with their reſolutions, and injurious to the honour of their cauſe. Supported by the animating ſuccour of the divine grace, they roſe ſuperiour to the fears and the tortures of untimely and agonizing diſſolution. They conſidered their light afflictions as duſt in the balance; and with pious confidence, and ardent deſire, looked up to the author and finiſher of their faith, for the unfading crown of immortality.

On reviewing the conduct of Polycarp and of Juſtin Martyr, we commiſerate their ſufferings, and admire their firmneſs. The language of their profeſſions was temperate and chaſtiſed, and their conduct in the laſt trying ſcenes of life was in every reſpect diſpaſſionate and heroick. In the epiſtles of Ignatius are found more ardent effuſions of zeal: he expreſſes his eagerneſs to ſuffer death, and requeſts the Roman converts not to deſire his deliverance, nor to intercede with the magiſtrates for his diſcharge.

To the Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire ſuch fervour for martyrdom appears unnatural and cenſurable. But let the zealous ſpirit of the Apoſtolical times be

be conſidered, as well as the ſuffering ſtate of chriſtianity, and the ardent temper of Ignatius. The deſire of immortality was the ruling paſſion of his mind, and hurried him into expreſſions of rapture and impatience. His enthuſiaſtic ardour, ſo far from reſulting from a cenſurable motive, aroſe from an exceſs of virtue. He was ſteadfaſtly and unalterably determined to perſevere unto the end, and to crown a long life of unſhaken fidelity with a magnanimous death. He ſought not officiouſly the occaſion of ſuffering; but when the accompliſhment of his ſentence approached, he even diſconcerted the malice of his enemies, and encreaſed the confidence of his friends, by converting that event into a ſubject of pious exultation. He panted for that cloſe of his life from which Socrates, in circumſtances not diſſimilar, diſdained to ſhrink.

The Emperour Trajan intended to inflict the deepeſt wound on chriſtianity, by devoting to public execution one of its moſt eminent Paſtors. It may be concluded therefore, that the interceſſion of the Roman converts for the deliverance of Ignatius would have been vain and fruitleſs. Had their application been ſucceſsful, the favour obtained by it would have been totally repugnant to his principles, as well

well as his wiſhes; ſince he looked forward to his approaching ſufferings as the neceſſary trial of his conſtancy, and the true and unequivocal teſt of his faith. The proſpect of heavenly bliſs, which was the end and the reward of his perſeverance, made the means appear not only tolerable, but attracting; not only to be endured with patience, but to be anticipated with rapture. St. Peter, by whom Ignatius was initiated into the ſervice of the church, had not long before ſealed the truth of the goſpel with his blood. St. Paul had made Rome, and probably the ſame amphitheatre in which Ignatius was to be expoſed to lions, the ſcene of his laſt ſufferings. The Apoſtle of the Gentiles, on a ſimilar occaſion, calmed the grief of his friends, and ſilenced their pathetic remonſtrances, when they foreboded the fatal conſequences of his journey to Jeruſalem. Animated rather than depreſſed by the impending trial of his fortitude and ſincerity, he zealouſly expreſſed his readineſs not only to ſubmit to the rigours of impriſonment, but to endure the pains of death, in order to promote the cauſe of chriſtianity. Moreover, the diſciples of our Lord, after their diſmiſſion from the Jewiſh aſſembly, had converted their ignominious treatment into a ſubject of joy and congratulation. Theſe examples therefore were

were too recent, and too applicable to his own ſituation, not to make the deepeſt impreſſion on the mind of Ignatius. Hence he was inſpired with ſacred emulation, and was encouraged to extend his eager views to that martyrdom which he wiſhed to participate with his great and holy predeceſſors, in full aſſurance of participating with them alſo, its tranſcendent and immortal rewards.

However the ſentiments expreſſed by Ignatius may ſeem to exceed the bounds of calm and quiet reſignation, they are by no means ſingular. Amidſt the multitude of ſimilar inſtances with which later monuments of eccleſiaſtical antiquity abound, our attention is firſt directed to the conduct of Cyprian and Baſil. Their expreſſions, on approaching the ſpot which was deſtined for their execution, were the dictates of joy, rather than of grief. Their death, like that of Ignatius, far from being attended with indications of tame dejection, or ſullen acquieſcence, wore the dignified air of a triumph.

The elegant Author of the inquiry into the miraculous powers of the church has repreſented that the Martyrs were encouraged by peculiar incentives to bear their harſh ſen-

tences with patience and even with joy; because they were animated by the expectation that earthly glory would crown their afflictions; that their memory would be celebrated by panegyrical orations, and annual festivals; that the greatest veneration would be paid to their reliques; and that the merit of their sufferings would be a sufficient expiation of sin. Now, as no traces are to be found of such expectations, in the works of the earliest Fathers, which our plan has led us to consult; it seems more just and more necessary to develope those principles of action which we may conclude with greater certainty to have influenced their conduct.

He whose mind is deeply impressed with the description of the sufferings of the early Martyrs, aggravated as those sufferings were, in many instances, by all the tortures of ingenious cruelty; and endured at the same time with the most unruffled composure; will easily admit, that their extraordinary fortitude arose from the immediate support of the divine grace. He may be led to express his opinion in the following train of representation.

There exists in man an inherent love of life, which is so deeply engraven by the hand of

of nature, that it ſeems to form an eſſential part of the ſoul. Self preſervation is the fundamental law of our being; it is the paſſion which precedes every other in the order of utility, and is implanted by the Creator, as the root, from which every ſocial and religious obligation neceſſarily ſprings.

However ſtrong this principle may be, and however uniformly it might be ſuppoſed to operate in every ſtate of ſociety, the page of hiſtory, and the authentic relation of credible witneſſes, exhibit to us various inſtances in which it is ſometimes counteracted and overcome. The antient inhabitants of northern Europe ſought death with ardent eagerneſs in the field of battle, or welcomed its approach in the decline of age, with expreſſions of ſavage joy. The follower of Brama, to ſhun the wearieſome decay of lingering ſickneſs, anticipates the hour of death, and devotes himſelf to the flames. The Indian remains unmoved amid the dreadful preparations for his lingering execution, and defies, in the agonies of torture, the ingenious cruelty of his foes. The Gentoo, with ſteady pace and unaltered look, aſcends the funeral pile, and becomes a willing ſacrifice to her departed huſband.

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In theſe caſes we behold the effect of national cuſtom and inveterate habit. Such ſelf-devoted victims were trained up from their birth to the contemplation of ſpectacles of torture and death; and their perpetual occurrence operating upon a general obduracy of manners and temper, prepared the way for the unfeeling ſacrifice of life.

On contemplating the ſituation and circumſtances of the early Martyr, his caſe will appear to be widely different: he was generally taken from the eminent ranks of chriſtians; he was born in an enlightened country; his diſpoſition and education inclined him more neceſſarily to the allurements of eaſe and peace; unlike the ſavage, he was a ſtranger to ſcenes of turbulence and blood, and unaccuſtomed to ſituations that called for vigorous exertion, or unremitting and hardy activity; his mind was actuated by keen ſenſibility, which is a quality that never exiſts in a barbarous ſtate of ſociety; he was alive to all the exquiſite endearments of ſocial life, and attached to the world by all thoſe tender ties of friendſhip and affection which hold the heart in the moſt permanent captivity. Hence aroſe a conteſt between the love of God and love of Life; between the ſuggeſtions of conſcience,

ſcience, and the calls of affection; between the claims of rigid duty, and the expoſtulations of violated nature. Nothing leſs therefore than a divine interference ſeems capable of terminating the dubious conteſt, and of making religion triumphant over the reluctance of humanity, and the powerful attractions of the world.

Moreover, the tenderneſs of youth, and the delicacy of the female ſex, were frequently expoſed to the ſame puniſhments. They turned from the faſcinating pleaſures of the world, and met their fate with the ſame unruffled compoſure, which diſtinguiſhed the victims of more mature experience. The conduct of Blandina, among the Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne, was as conſpicuous and exemplary as that of the venerable Pothius. As the ſame temper of mind actuated all the ſufferers, without diſtinction of ſex or age; it becomes more neceſſary to advert to a principle, which from the energy of its effect, and the extent, and the uniformity of its operation, will obviouſly account for ſuch heroick behaviour.

The powerful ſuccour which gave ardour and confidence to the firſt chriſtians, was by no means confined to them. It was graciouſly diſplayed

diſplayed whenever the conſolations and aſſiſtance vouchſafed to the faithful, were equally inſtrumental to the glory of the chriſtian cauſe. The mercy of the Almighty was equally propitious to thoſe whoſe conduct was uniformly diſtinguiſhed by rational piety, and whoſe unremitting zeal prompted them to contend earneſtly for the faith. For evident inſtances of ſimilar aſſiſtance the pious reader of the martyrologies will proceed to appeal to the hiſtory of our own country. He will ſtill continue to maintain, that when the Demon of Papiſtical bigotry raged, and the fires of ſuperſtition blazed in every part of Britain, the aſſertors of the proteſtant faith received powerful ſupport from on high. To this auſpicious ſource his gratitude will attribute the inflexible conſtancy of Hooper, the unruffled ſerenity of Rogers, and the reanimated zeal of Cranmer. Nor, when he looks back to the tranſactions of bigotry which occur in the annals of Oxford, will he think that any other adequate cauſe can be aſſigned for the dignified reſignation of Ridley, and Latimer.

In this divine interference, there appears moſt aſſuredly to be nothing repugnant to the declarations of ſcripture; nothing that offers an affront to the powers of reaſon: ſo far

from it, the ſuppoſition is ſtrictly conſiſtent with the predictions and promiſes of our Lord, who graciouſly diſplayed the glory of his divine perſon, to animate St. Stephen, when ſinking under the violence of his murderers. The particular attention of Providence, to virtue in diſtreſs, was a tenet which reflected honour on the principles of antient philoſophy. Without diſtruſting the firmneſs of the ground on which the general hypotheſis reſts, the caviller may be challenged to prove that ſuch an interpoſition is in any degree derogatory from the honour of the Supreme Being. For he cannot have the hardineſs to aſſert, that it is at all inconſiſtent with the goodneſs and mercy of God, to ſuccour his faithful ſervants in the moſt momentous and trying conflicts of life; more eſpecially, at a time when thoſe momentous and trying conflicts were undergone in atteſtation to that truth, which even his beloved Son died to eſtabliſh.

But however eager the reader of the martyrologies may be, to eſtabliſh his ſentiments in the minds of others; he muſt not precipitately urge his favourite hypotheſis, as an indiſputable truth. Conſidered as a conjecture, it derives ſome probability from the extraordinary nature of the chriſtian diſpenſation itſelf,

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as well as from the extraordinary difficulties which its advocates were forced to encounter. But the evidence for it is leſs complete and leſs ſtriking than might have been expected. The deficiency in this reſpect may lead many into a different train of thinking, and a different mode of accounting for the courage of the martyrs.

Such may impute it to the full conviction with which the martyrs were impreſſed of the goodneſs of their cauſe; to their certain hope of immediate happineſs; to their reluctance to retract from the profeſſion they had ſolemnly made; to the approbation of their own conſcience, and to their deſire of following the example of their predeceſſors, and of leaving an equal example to poſterity.

The ſuppoſitions which we have attempted to ſtate, have a certain degree of evidence and probability to ſupport them. The adoption of either muſt ultimately depend upon particular modes of education, and particular trains of thinking. He who views the providence of the Almighty preſiding over every part of the world, and ſometimes more immediately interpoſing his arm to ſupport his diſtreſſed ſervants, will eagerly embrace the former. He

who is an advocate for the dignity of unaſſiſted reaſon, and aſſerts the unconquerable ſtrength of human reſolution, will not fail to eſpouſe the latter.

Theſe arguments naturally lead us, in the third place, to conſider the Effects produced by the fortitude of the martyrs.

Their conduct was eminently conducive to the diffuſion of chriſtianity. The people, after viewing repeated executions of the faithful, far from adopting the ſentiments of informers and perſecutors, were impreſſed with juſt indignation and exceſſive horror at their unrelenting malice. The tender emotions of pity to the ſufferers were excited in their breaſts, and a ſtrong inclination was awakened to aſk what principles had inſpired them with ſuch undaunted heroiſm. The compaſſion of the multitude rendered them curious, and their curioſity became the happy cauſe of their converſion. Thus was the conſummate wiſdom of the divine decrees exemplified in the wayward and precipitate folly of man. The ſanguinary meaſures adopted to extirpate the new religion, operated as the means of its more rapid diffuſion; and the church, far from ſinking under her repeated loſſes, rapidly augmented the number

of her proſelytes. She reſembled the fruitful vine, which, from the defalcation of ſome branches, produces more rich and more abundant fruit.

Nor did the number of her ſons only encreaſe, but their reſpectability alſo. From the patience of the ſuffering chriſtians, the more contemplative and rational Pagans inferred the innocence of their lives, and the purity of their characters. To them it ſeemed impoſſible that men who undauntedly encountered the pains of premature diſſolution, could be addicted to voluptuouſneſs or ſtained with guilt. For they wiſely concluded, that the indulgence of vitious gratifications inevitably tends to enervate the mind, and to render it incapable of ſuch great and ſtrenuous exertions. Theſe arguments made a deep impreſſion on the minds of many who had been educated in the ſchools of philoſophy; and their converſion failed not to reflect additional luſtre on the chriſtian name.

From the particulars of the preceding diſquiſition it appears, that chriſtianity was long expoſed to dangers which were conſtantly threatening its compleat and irreparable ſubverſion. During its infant ſtate, it was aſ-

ſaulted by the relentleſs rage of the moſt cruel tyrants, whoſe crimes contaminate the annals of hiſtory. The poiſon of ſlander, the ſhaft of ridicule, the ſcoff of contempt, and the ſword of perſecution, were the active but ineffectual inſtruments that were conſtantly employed againſt it. But its great Author permitted not his religion to be extirpated by the malevolence and the infatuation of man; ſince he was graciouſly pleaſed not only to invigorate the minds of his ſuffering ſervants by his all-ſufficient aid; but converted the machinations of their mercileſs foes into the moſt effectual and abundant ſources of the diffuſion of the faith.

If the perſeverance of the early martyrs was thus eminently conducive to the rapid progreſs of the goſpel, it is not difficult to aſcertain, or at leaſt to conjecture, what would have been the conſequences of their recantation and apoſtaſy. The Pagans would have boaſted, that chriſtianity itſelf wanted a ſufficient energy of principle, to arm its followers with intrepidity; and conſequently, that it ſunk much below many inſtitutions confeſſedly of human origin; and was weaker in its attractions than many attachments which have influenced the couragious of all ages, to diſregard the approach

proach of danger, and contemn the frowns of death. This would have been their preſumptive argument againſt its pretenſions to a divine revelation; and if it was a ſyſtem founded on the ingenuity of man, by the violence of man alſo it could have been ſubverted. Satisfied with ſuch ſophiſtry, and elated with the ſucceſs of their firſt attempts, the enemies of the goſpel would obviouſly have proceeded to try the ſame methods, upon the more ignoble adherents to the faith, which had ſucceſsfully been purſued againſt its leaders. Their repeated ſucceſs would have given a ſevere check to the progreſs of chriſtianity. For it muſt have been driven for refuge to the receſſes of remote provinces; and its benefits would have been loſt to multitudes for many generations.

But the perſeverance of the martyrs proves the vigour, as well as the perfection of the chriſtian principles. They rightly underſtood that its great Author never intended to confine its operations within the narrow and degrading limits of worldly prudence and temporizing caution. Their behaviour was ſufficient to convince all ſucceeding ages, that whilſt it can inculcate the love of whatever is laudable, and the deſire of whatever is good; it can likewiſe excite the endurance of all that is ter-

rible, and produce the performance of all that is magnanimous.

From the blind partiality which the frequent contemplation of ſuffering virtue is too apt to diffuſe over the credulous mind, and from too cloſe and vehement a purſuit of thoſe reflections which prove how greatly the progreſs of chriſtianity was accelerated by the fortitude of the firſt proſelytes; the chriſtians of the middle ages were led to attribute a peculiar efficacy to their relicks. They advanced martyrs to the ſame honours which the gratitude of primeval ages had conferred on the founders of ſtates and the inventors of uſeful arts. When, however, the chriſtian of more enlightened times cenſures the miſguided conduct of ſuch weak and ſuperſtitious zealots, let him be careful not to imbibe the oppoſite ſentiments of thoſe, who contemptuouſly overlook or ſtudiouſly depreciate ſuch eminent inſtances of merit. Weighed in the balance of fair and diſpaſſionate judgment, the conduct of the early martyrs appears to have ſhed diſtinguiſhed luſtre on their profeſſion. When a deſertion of the banners of chriſtianity would have been detrimental to her beſt intereſt, they were the firſt who met the encounter of the enemy. By the ardour of their zeal, and

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by the firmneſs of their reſolution, they diſconcerted his continued aſſaults; and though they fell victims to their determined ſteadineſs, became more than conquerors by ſecuring the ultimate triumph of their cauſe. For all who were thus expoſed to danger and to death in the gloomy ſeaſon of perſecution, we cannot fail to cheriſh a high degree of reſpect and honour. They reached the true elevation of the chriſtian character, and adorned the noble inſtitutes of their religion with immoveable attachment, and unſhaken courage. They gave the moſt convincing and moſt valuable proof of their ſincerity, by ſealing the truth with their blood. In every inſtance of their pious reſignation, through a long ſucceſſion of illuſtrious examples, they preſent us with that noble and awful ſpectacle, which is the favourite theme of philoſophical eulogy, and is the moſt intereſting and moſt edifying object which can poſſibly be exhibited to the contemplation of the world:—a virtuous man ſuffering unmerited misfortunes with patience. —*They have fought a good fight, they have finiſhed their courſe, they have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for them a crown of righteouſneſs, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, ſhall give them at that day; and not to them only, but to all that love his appearing.*

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SERMON IV.

EPHESIANS V. 27.

A glorious Church, not having ſpot or wrinkle, or any ſuch thing, but holy and without blemiſh.

THE eſtabliſhment of diſcipline is neceſſary not only to the exiſtence of every community, but alſo to its continuance; as it connects the members by one common bond of aſſociation, and checks internal diſorders by ſalutary and efficacious reſtraints. This principle extends to religious as well as to civil conſtitutions; for though the origin of religion be divine, yet the preſervation of it is committed to human means; and therefore like every other truſt in the moral diſpenſations of providence, it requires ſome directions for the underſtanding, and ſome reſtraints upon the paſſions. The chriſtian church ſeems to have been

been formed upon the model of the Judaical ſynagogue, ſince they agree in many circumſtances of their government. The principles of its polity were immediately founded upon the expreſs declarations of ſcripture, and the conſtant practiſe of the apoſtles. As from no leſs an authority than that of our Lord himſelf, was derived the privilege of initiating converts by the water of baptiſm, and of confirming their faith by eating the bread of the euchariſt; ſo from the conduct of Chriſt's immediate ſucceſſors originated the power of pronouncing the ſentence of excommunication.

This diſcipline, by the unabating vigour with which it was enforced in the infancy of the church, conſtituted a ſure and infallible criterion of the ſincerity of the proſelytes. A conformity of manners with the inſtitutes of the goſpel was expected to be the immediate conſequence of converſion. Hypocriſy could not for any long period of time elude the vigilance of ſtrict obſervation, nor could any flagrant infringement of baptiſmal vows remain unmarked and unpuniſhed. As the reputation of the church intirely depended on the irreproachable conduct of her members, ſhe wiſely preſerved the greateſt diſtinction between

between the exemplary and the profligate. The reſult was highly favourable to her beſt intereſts; for whilſt her unſullied purity of morals ſupplied her friends with the moſt animating ſubject of panegyrick, it gave the moſt unequivocal confutation to the malicious calumny of her enemies.

To miniſters ſelected from the body of the converts, the diſcharge of the ſacred functions was entruſted. As the church was frequently groaning under the ſeverity of perſecution, or filled with the apprehenſions of its approach; and as the moſt eminent chriſtians were the certain victims of popular rage, the ambition of raiſing themſelves to eccleſiaſtical honours muſt have been in a great meaſure repreſſed. Spiritual preeminence was accompanied neither with the comfort of ſecurity, nor the gratification of emolument. So that a purer and more exalted principle neceſſarily predominated in theſe early ages, when a ſituation of more immediate danger made the moſt conſpicuous diſtinction between the paſtor and his flock. Hence a long life of vigilance and piety was often cloſed by a ſudden and cruel death.

If many paſſages of ſcripture ſeem not clearly to aſcertain the difference between the orders

orders of biſhops and of preſbyters; that difference may be beſt illuſtrated and defined, by the early eſtabliſhments. In the beginning of the apocalypſe, the biſhops are peculiarly diſtinguiſhed from all other members of the chriſtian communities; and by a figurative alluſion derived from the ſynagogue, are denominated the angels of the ſeven churches. The letters addreſſed by Ignatius, the venerable prelate of Antioch, to various congregations of Aſia, plainly ſhow that their order was generally eſtabliſhed, and that they were inveſted with peculiar powers of ſuperintendance ſoon after the deceaſe of St. John.

The clear diſtinction which Ignatius marks out between the biſhops, and the preſbyters, is ſupported by the antient acts of the ſame martyr, and of Polycarp. It is confirmed in the ſucceeding part of the century by the epiſtle of the emperor Hadrian to Servianus; by the teſtimony of Dionyſius of Corinth, the epiſtle of the churches of Lyons and Vienne; and by the fragments of Hegeſippus, Polycrates, and Serapion.

Implicit obedience to theſe governours of the church was repreſented as a proper principle of action, and an indiſpenſable branch of duty.

duty. A high degree of deference and even veneration was recommended, as peculiarly due to their character and rank. And without doubt the moſt compleat ſubordination will appear to have been highly neceſſary, on conſidering the perilous ſtate of the early chriſtians. Recently formed into communities, they were at once aſſailed by open violence, and agitated by internal diſcord. No expedient ſeemed better calculated to invigorate their common efforts, and infuſe a ſpirit of unanimity, than a chearful obedience to their eccleſiaſtical guides. The riſing church reſembled a ſmall army ſtationed on hoſtile ground, whoſe only ſecurity againſt the perfidy of inſidious allies, and the aſſault of open enemies, conſiſted in receiving the orders of their leader without murmurs, and following him without complaint.

Among the arduous employments which called forth the activity of the primitive biſhops, no one required more unremitting attention than to confute the errours of hereſy. The alarming diffuſion of falſe doctrines had required the repeated exertions of the apoſtles; and their ſucceſſors found by painful experience, that a great part of their employment muſt neceſſarily conſiſt in eradicating

the noxious tares which the enemies of the true faith ſtill laboured to diſſeminate.

To accommodate the ſacred volume to their own preconceived ideas, and not to ſacrifice their preconceived ideas to the ſacred volume; ſeems to have been the fundamental errour of the early hereticks. The cauſes of their deſertion of the true faith, muſt therefore be traced from their original manners of life, from the bias of corrupt inclinations, from the ſtubborn influence of early habits, and their warm attachment to a ſpurious philoſophy. In ſome, may be diſcerned the ſallies of a licentious imagination, which delights to decorate truth, with the moſt incongruous appendages of fantaſtick mythology; in others, is equally evident a palpable perverſion of ſcripture, interpreted upon the contracted principles of bigotted Judaiſm. They reſembled the philoſophers of Greece, who attributed ſuch characters to their deities as were moſt conformable to the relaxed, or rigid maxims of their favourite ſchools. Thus the Gnoſtick repreſented the perſon of the Meſſiah airy and volatile as his general ſyſtem of theology; whilſt the Ebionite, whoſe mind could not ſoar above ritual and carnal ordinances, ſunk him to a level with his own nature.

Although

Although the Gnoſticks, and the Ebionites were remarkable for an early deſertion of the true faith, they were not contemporaries. So that ineffectual is the attempt which has been made by the Author of the early opinions concerning Chriſt, to heighten their antiquity, by referring them to the time of the apoſtles. As a proof how detrimental to the intereſt of chriſtianity their errours were thought, and how ſerious an alarm was given to the orthodox by their diffuſion, the detail and the confutation of their opinions forms a conſiderable part of the more antient literature of the church.

The Oriental and Platonic philoſophy, ſome fictitious writings of Zoroaſter and Abraham, together with the pretended traditions of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, combined to form the viſionary ſyſtem of the Gnoſticks. Their particular tenets are too extravagant, and too numerous, to admit of repetition, after the minute and curious catalogue which has been given of them, by the eccleſiaſtical writers. The Hiſtorian of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire has diſtinguiſhed them by a circumſtantial account of their opinions, and a favourable repreſentation of their conduct. He has however made an omiſſion which the

rigid impartiality of truth can by no means juſtify, by paſſing over in ſilence thoſe ſects of the Gnoſticks, who were cenſurable for the licentiouſneſs of their morals. If even great allowance be made for the unfavourable relations of Irenæus, and the more dark and diſguſting deſcriptions of Epiphanius; it cannot be imagined, that they were totally deſtitute of a foundation. For the latter of theſe Fathers had every opportunity of aſcertaining the facts which he records, and deſcribes circumſtances which were publickly known. We muſt conclude, therefore, that the ſenſuality of their conduct bore ſome analogy to the extravagance of their opinions. The cenſures, incurred by their profligacy of manners, may be applied, with too much juſtice, to the followers of Marcion, Saturninus, Baſilides, Marcus, and Carpocrates.

As the diſciples of Cerinthus, of Menander, and of Valentinus, held the paſſions to be the moſt dangerous enemies of the ſoul, they mortified them with the moſt rigid auſterity; whilſt thoſe Gnoſtics, who were more relaxed in their principles, indulged them with criminal licentiouſneſs. Such conduct, however oppoſite, may be reconciled to their grand and fundamental tenet; as they held the body to be

be the ſource of evil and corruption, and totally diſtinct and diſunited from the ſoul when purified by religion. They maintained therefore, that the impulſes of the paſſions, however irregular, might be obeyed or diſregarded, without ſpiritual danger, or ſpiritual advantage.

They denied the humanity of Chriſt, from a ſuppoſition that it was highly unworthy of a divine being to be united to impure and groſs matter. They affirmed that what appeared to be his body was a mere phantom, and that his crucifixion was illuſive and viſionary.

To confute theſe paradoxical and erroneous opinions, both Ignatius, Biſhop of Antioch, and Polycarp, Biſhop of Smyrna, impreſſed upon the minds of the chriſtian converts the grand and awful facts of the incarnation, and of the crucifixion. They declare in expreſs terms, and repeat the ſame ſentiments in various paſſages of their epiſtles, that "whoſoever does not confeſs, that our Lord ſuffered upon the croſs, is from Satan. Jeſus Chriſt was truly born, and did eat and drink; was truly perſecuted under Pontius Pilate; was truly crucified and died; and was truly raiſed up by the Father."

The derivation of the name of the Ebionites is involved in ſome obſcurity. It has been ſuppoſed to allude to their indigent condition, or to the degrading opinion which they formed of the Son of God. But probability ſeems upon the whole to incline to the conjecture that it was the appellation of the author of the ſect. They ſprang originally from the Nazarenes, who compoſed a more antient ſociety of Judaizing chriſtians. Theſe two ſects have been very improperly confounded with each other, by the Author of the early opinions concerning Chriſt; although the diſtinctions which ſubſiſted between them is carefully marked out by the antient writers. As a characteriſtick diſtinction, they not only held different opinions of the fundamental articles of faith, but received different goſpels. In the goſpel of the Nazarenes the two firſt chapters of St. Matthew were admitted, which the goſpel of the Ebionites wanted. The Nazarenes not only maintained the miraculous conception of Chriſt, but alſo that he partook in ſome limited degree of the divine nature. The Ebionites held St. Paul in great contempt, as a deſerter of the law of his anceſtors; the Nazarenes, on the contrary, placed him among the moſt eminent teachers of divine truth. The Ebionites maintained that the laws

laws of Moſes ought to be obſerved by all proſelytes to chriſtianity; the Nazarenes, that ſuch an obſervance ſhould be extended only to the deſcendants of Abraham. As a deciſive argument that the Nazarenes held opinions more ſound and more approaching to the true faith than their ſucceſſors the Ebionites, they are not included in the heretical catalogue by the early writers, whereas the Ebionites are diſtinguiſhed by a conſpicuous place.

They drew their opinions from a ſpurious hiſtory of Chriſt, to which reference is probably made in St. Paul's epiſtle to the Galatians. It was their grand object to make an accommodation between the law and the goſpel, by raiſing the former, and depreſſing the latter, and to combine them in one ſyſtem of belief and practiſe, in order to render them equally obligatory. A part of this ſect maintained that the conception of Chriſt was miraculous; whilſt others more preſumptuouſly aſſerted, that he was a mere man, the Son of Joſeph and Mary; and that he was not diſtinguiſhed from mortals by any miraculous circumſtances of birth. Some at leaſt of this latter deſcription are known to have held, that at the time of his baptiſm, the Chriſt, who had been inveſted by the Supreme Being

with the ſovereignty of the world, deſcended upon Jeſus in the form of a dove, and continued the director of his actions to the time of his crucifixion; when he reaſcended to heaven, and left Jeſus expoſed to the pains of unaſſiſted humanity.

As the Ebionites began to riſe into notice at the commencement of the ſecond century, Ignatius and Polycarp aſſiduouſly laboured to extirpate their opinions. That the diviſion of Jeſus Chriſt into two diſtinct perſons was at once unſcriptural and irrational, ſufficiently appears from the expreſſions employed by theſe Fathers to confute the Gnoſticks. There are, however, many other paſſages in their epiſtles, more particularly directed againſt the Ebionites, the ſubſtance of which is conveyed in the following declarations:—"That Jeſus "Chriſt our inſeparable life, is ſent by the will "of the Father. That our God Jeſus Chriſt "was according to the divine diſpenſation con- "ceived of the Virgin, of the family of David, "by the Holy Ghoſt. Again; Be not deceived "by heterodox doctrines, nor with antient "fables, which are unedifying; for if ye con- "tinue to live according to the Jewiſh law, ye "confeſs yourſelves not to have received grace; "ye ought no longer to obſerve ſabbaths, but "keep the Lord's day."

Theſe

Theſe words, in their general import, ſeem equally to affect all the hereſies of that early age, and to be levelled againſt thoſe who denied the miraculous conception, as well as the divinity of Chriſt. The latter part of the quotation, however, is more ſtrictly appropriate. The converts are exhorted to quit their attachment to the law of Moſes, becauſe totally inconſiſtent with the principles of the true faith; and the prejudices attributed to them, are not ſo ſtrictly applicable to any deſcription of Chriſtians, as to the Ebionites.

On a full conſideration of the expreſſions of Ignatius, it may not be improper to apply to them the pertinent remark which Tertullian makes on the firſt epiſtle of St. John. "The "Evangeliſt particularly ſtigmatizes thoſe In- "fidels by the name of Antichriſts, who deny "that Chriſt is come in the fleſh, and who do "not maintain that Jeſus is the Son of God. "The former was the errour of Marcion, the "latter of Ebion."

The cenſures of Juſtin Martyr are directed againſt the ſame hereticks, in his curious dialogue with Trypho the Jew. He deſcribes particularly the errours of the ſect, and his omiſſion of their name is ſimilar to his prac-

tice with reſpect to the evangeliſts, of whom he ſpeaks only in general terms. He marks out the wide diſtinction between the Ebionites and the orthodox believers; adverts to their deſertion of the doctrines of ſcripture for the vain traditions of men. To him their opinions appeared ſo derogatory from the divinity of the Son of God, that he expreſſed his deliberate diſapprobation of their opinions, and ſeems rather inclined to rank them among the believing Jews, than to include them in the number of genuine chriſtians.

Irenæus in his elaborate work, in which he confutes the various ſectaries of the ſecond century, maintains that the Ebionites, by their perverſe and degrading opinions, had wantonly deprived themſelves of the benefits of the incarnation; and were deſerving of the ſame ſevere and full reprehenſion which was due to all other deſerters of the truth. He includes them in the general catalogue of thoſe hereticks "who are ſo unlearned and ignorant of the "diſpenſations of God, particularly of his "gracious deſign reſpecting the redemption "of man, that they are blind to the truth, "and contradict their own ſalvation."

From

From this unanimous oppoſition of the antient fathers of the church it appears how much the ſentiments of the Ebionites were reprobated. To the different pleas which they confidently ſet up, the moſt cogent and unanſwerable arguments were oppoſed. They boaſted of various advantages which they enjoyed in common with the church, and their claims were diſputed with that firmneſs, and vanquiſhed with that irreſiſtible power of confutation, which will ever be the recompenſe of preſumption and errour. Like the church they had traditions: but of what did they conſiſt? Not of the pure and uncorrupted injunctions of the apoſtles; but of the empty and obſolete ceremonies of the Levitical law. Like the church they had prophecies; but how did they interpret them? Not in the ſpirit of the inſpired writers; not by an enlarged and complete view of the predictions that diſplay the exalted nature of the Meſſiah, as well as of thoſe which deſcribe his humiliation; but by a ſervile adherence to the falſe gloſſes of the later and more contracted Rabbins, who maintained him to be a mere man. Like the church they had ſcriptures; but were their ſcriptures the complete and indiſputable productions of truth? So far was this from being the caſe, that they contained

tained not the teſtimony of the beloved diſciple, nor the epiſtles of the great apoſtle of the Gentiles, becauſe they rejected ſuch parts of the canonical code with diſdain. On the contrary, they received a mutilated goſpel of St. Matthew, and peruſed with eager credulity the romantick legends of falſe teachers.

Thus they were ſlow of heart to believe all that the prophets had ſpoken, and all that the apoſtles had teſtified. Whilſt the true chriſtian enlarged his mind with a full conception of his religion, the Ebionite with inflexible obſtinacy ſubmitted to bear the unneceſſary burthens of the law, and with blind perverſeneſs cut off the eſſential principle of the goſpel.

Between the Ebionite and the Mahometan there is a cloſe and ſtriking reſemblance. According to the creed of both, Jeſus Chriſt is a mere man. They practice with ſcrupulous attention the rites of circumciſion and of purification. They both appeal to the authority of ſpurious books; and as the Ebionites value the fabulous travels of Clement, ſo the Mahometans conſult the falſe goſpel of Barnabas. They have a high regard for particular places: The Mahometan indulges the moſt profound veneration for the holy city which contains the

the tomb of his prophet: the Ebionite glows with equal enthuſiaſm on contemplating the proſpect of Jeruſalem.

The pride of Mahomet would have ſuffered the keeneſt mortification, if when he adopted ſome ceremonial parts of the Moſaical law, and degraded the ſublime character of the chriſtian legiſlator, he had reflected, that he ſervilely purſued the ſteps of an obſcure hereſiarch; and that the boldneſs of his enterprizes, and not the fertility of his invention, gave him the beſt title to the admiration of his followers.

Such was the origin of the antient communities of chriſtians. In conformity with the apoſtolical appointment, the ſpiritual governours undertook their ſuperintendance. To their more eſpecial cuſtody, the ſacred volume was committed, and by them the moſt authentick copies of it were preſerved. They performed the ſacred offices of religion, oppoſed the incroachments of hereticks, confirmed the converts in their fidelity, and invited the Pagans to embrace the ſame auſpicious hopes, which they cheriſhed in their own breaſts.

The

The regulations of theſe eſtabliſhments, and the ſalutary influence of their rules, were open to general inſpection. The heathens ſaw effects produced in the church which were more beneficial to ſociety, than the theory of the ſublimeſt philoſopher had promiſed; or the performance of renowned legiſlators had produced. Here was the republick of Plato, without its licentiouſneſs; and the aſylum of Romulus, without its reception of the outcaſts of ſociety. The grand object of the inſtitutions of Lycurgus was the acquirement of barren conqueſt. The conſequence of the ſanguinary decrees of Draco was the depopulation of his country. But the church whilſt ſhe executed judgment, remembered mercy, and the final cauſe of her ſeverity was the extinction of ſin, not the deſtruction of the ſinner. Even in her diſcipline, there was nothing to repel the advances of the timid, nor to confirm the averſion of the prejudiced. The ſentence of excommunication was awful in its circumſtances, and certain in its infliction; but it was not irreverſible. During the ſolemn ſeaſon of penance, indeed, the countenance and the dreſs of the ſpiritual exile diſcovered the ſtrongeſt marks of dejection and ſorrow. But after giving the moſt unequivocal proofs of his ſincere contrition, he was again admitted into the

the church, and his return was welcomed by the moſt ardent congratulations of the pious.

The prudent adminiſtration and ſtrict regularity of eccleſiaſtical diſcipline made the moſt favourable impreſſion on the mind of the Pagans, more particularly, when they obſerved the cloſe conformity of the conduct of the primitive chriſtians with the precepts of the goſpel.

Now, the chriſtian precepts appear to greateſt advantage when contraſted with the laws of the Jews, and the maxims of the Philoſophers.

The moral laws of the Moſaical code breathe much of that ſpirit of philanthropy which conſtitutes the glory of the evangelical ſcheme. Yet the laſt injunction of the Decalogue was liable to be fettered by a partial interpretation, and made ſubſervient to the contracted views of local prejudice. *Thou ſhalt not covet the poſſeſſions of thy neighbour*; might literally be underſtood as a prohibition of ſuch deſires only, as were fixed upon the property of perſons in the ſame vicinity. That the Jews were diſpoſed to conſider this duty as confined to ſo narrow a circle, ſeems probable, not only from the general averſion which

which they discovered against all other nations; but likewise from the question proposed by the inquisitive scribe. Our Lord with his accustomed readiness to instruct, and his peculiar felicity to illustrate, represented the sensibility and the benevolence of the good Samaritan. This interesting picture was admirably adapted to awaken the torpid feelings of a bigotted Jew, and to display to him that sublime scheme of universal affection, in which he was to extend his views of charity beyond his native country, and to consider himself as the general friend of mankind.

The superiority of the gospel over the Mosaical law, appears more fully by considering that the commandments of the latter, are, for the most part, negative; containing rather prohibitions of sin, than incitements to goodness. Whilst the disciple of Moses, adhering to his own principles, advances only the first step in the path of morality; the disciple of Christ leaves him far behind, adds to his innocence much positive excellence, and adorns his character with every virtue. So far from merely not invading the possessions of another man, he reaches out his liberal hand to minister to his necessities: so far from merely not retaliating injuries received, he stands ready

ready to embrace his enemy in the arms of affection, and breathes a fervent ſupplication to heaven, for his temporal and eternal happineſs.

The philoſophers of Greece and Rome preſent us with the moſt convincing proof, how far unenlightened reaſon carried her inveſtigations towards the perfection of ethicks. The powers of intellect which they diſplayed, and the obſtacles which they ſurmounted, before they diſcovered many valuable truths, are not fairly eſtimated, when viewed through the medium of the chriſtian revelation. Their attainments ought to be compared with the ignorance of the multitudes that ſurrounded, and that preceded them. Then will they appear moſt wonderful efforts of the human mind. Then will they become the bright dawn of the intellectual morning which ſhone more and more unto the perfect day.

If moral wiſdom deſcended from heaven to dwell with the moſt enlightened Sage of Athens, ſhe quickly caught the contagion of earthly depravity, and forgot her dignity ſo far as to bend at the ſhrine of ſuperſtition. Her dictates were not built upon any certain foundation, or digeſted in a conſiſtent plan.

They were disgraced with false notions, intermixed with frivolous refinements, and scattered among discordant sects. The indissoluble union of consistency, the powerful attraction of example, and the strong and awakening voice of authority were wanted to give to precept the energy of law. But the most material obstacle to a ready compliance with their instructions was the want of such sanctions as hold the mind in the most permanent subjection, by immediately addressing its hopes and fears.

These defects were distinctly visible to the antients themselves. Aristodemus declared to Socrates that he would willingly worship the Gods, whenever their embassadours descended to inform him what to perform and what to avoid. The enlightened philosopher himself observed, on contemplating the insufficiency of natural reason to reform the world, that the labours of moralists must be vain and ineffectual, unless the Supreme Being would commission some teacher to instruct mankind. The great Roman orator also, expressed an ardent wish for the discovery of a new demonstration to prove that virtue alone was sufficient for happiness. This general dissatisfaction clearly evinces the necessity

neceſſity of a divine revelation, and may be conſidered as the voice of philoſophy complaining of her own defects, and imploring the Supreme Being to point out the path of duty to her impatient and bewildered followers.

By the goſpel, therefore, were ſupplied the deficiencies of all preceding inſtitutions and ſyſtems. The Moſaical code was as far excelled by the religion of Chriſt, as the tabernacle of the wilderneſs was ſurpaſſed by the magnificence of the temple of Solomon.

The maxims of antient wiſdom were not only refined and enlarged, but eſtabliſhed upon a true principle, and made conducive to an exalted end. The ſcattered and feeble ſtars of philoſophy which were viſible during the night of ignorance, were obſcured by the diffuſive effulgence of the evangelical ſun.

To complete the benevolent plan of revelation, the ſame volume which was filled with the moſt pure leſſons of wiſdom, contained likewiſe the moſt perfect exemplification of them. The adorable Son of God condeſcended to recommend his own inſtruction by his own practice, and to exhibit that lively image of

moral perfection which had, indeed, ſublimed the imagination of Plato and of Cicero; but which, antient experience in the wideſt circle of obſervation, had ſought for in vain. The divine teacher not only ſpake, as man never ſpoke, but at once to combine the efficacy of example with the perfection of precept, became the unerring guide to all that was pious, all that was amiable, and all that was great.

If the Pagans were dazzled with the luſtre of his conduct, and ſaw him ſoar to an elevation which mere humanity cannot reach; they were convinced that it was practicable in ſome degree to follow his ſteps when they directed their attention to the early converts, who were no leſs zealous in their profeſſions of fidelity to his commands, than inſtrumental to his glory by their actions.

The baſis of the primitive virtues was a ſteadfaſt and lively Faith, which conſiſted in a perfect conviction of the truth of chriſtianity, preceded by a careful examination of its evidences, and accompanied with a full aſſurance of its rewards. This principle purified their taſte, and exalted their deſires above the groſs pleaſures of ſenſe, and made all ſublunary enjoyments ſeem as duſt in the balance when weighed

weighed againſt the happineſs of eternal life. It diſpelled the miſts which obſtructed their proſpect of heaven; for during the vexations of adverſity, the diſtreſs of perſecution, and the agony of martyrdom, they behaved with the ſame invincible perſuaſion of the truth of the divine promiſes, as if they had beheld their Lord and Maſter coming in the clouds with power and majeſty, and holding out the crowns of everlaſting life to his perſevering followers.

From this faith aroſe that ardent and rational zeal which is ſhewn in a chearful and prompt execution of the commands of God, whatever he enjoined, and an unremitting purſuit of duty wherever it pointed the way. Their conduct was equally remote from the languor of indifference, and the extravagance of fanaticiſm.

In the firſt rank of primitive virtues ſtood Humility, which was the chief characteriſtick of our Lord himſelf, and is the peculiar ornament of his religion. How far the cultivation of it was carried by his early followers, appears from the literary remains of the firſt and ſecond centuries. The writers of that period were not influenced by dogmatical arrogance,

or dictatorial presumption; but uniformly discovered an amiable and unassuming diffidence. Clement Bishop of Rome, although honourably mentioned by St. Paul, as his coadjutor in the faith, aspires to no authority over the Corinthian church, when writing to compose its dissentions; and Ignatius, the venerable Bishop of Antioch, celebrated for his piety and constancy, scarcely presumes to take the name of a disciple of Christ.

The character of many congregations was marked by the same virtue which distinguished their teachers. Gentleness of manners and obedience to authority were the fruits of their instructions. No sufferings in the service of their divine Master induced them to arrogate the smallest degree of merit to themselves, or to think that their conduct entitled them to any distinction, until they had advanced to final perseverance, and finished their course with joy. Armed by humility they were invulnerable against the derision and contumely of their enemies. As they cherished not the conceit of excellence, the pride of rank, nor the insolence of power; vain were the attempts of malevolence and slander, to ruffle their tranquility, and provoke their resentment.

In

In the diffuſion of this virtue we behold the wonderful triumph of chriſtianity over national character, and deeply rooted prejudice. The Romans were elated with the proſpect of their ample dominions, which exceeded the extent of all former conqueſts. Deſcended from anceſtors whoſe achievements, and whoſe virtues ſwelled their breaſts with conſcious dignity, and rich with the ſpoils of the vanquiſhed provinces, they wanted nothing to increaſe their ſenſe of perſonal dignity. The Greeks, equally illuſtrious for the noble exploits of their predeceſſors, and diſtinguiſhed by the cultivation of the moſt elegant arts, beheld with diſdain the barbarous nations that ſurrounded them. The philoſophers although divided into various ſects, yet were all elevated by the ſame ſpirit of ſuperciliouſneſs, and as they ſoared above the multitude in the rejection of vulgar prejudices, and the cultivation of the intellectual powers, they eſteemed themſelves the wiſeſt of mortals. Theſe reſpective propenſities, ſo dear to the human mind becauſe ſo founded on ſelf love, were ſoftened and controuled by the precepts of chriſtianity. The humility of the goſpel checked the preſumption of the proud; and that haughtineſs of ſpirit which had never

before ſubmitted to controul was transformed into complacence and condeſcenſion.

The primitive chriſtians were equally remarkable for the exerciſe of Charity in its moſt enlarged and proper ſenſe. One conſiderable branch of this duty was their genuine liberality of ſentiment. This was as obſervable in their general conduct to the Pagans, as in their publick and private ſupplications to the throne of mercy. In the midſt of the moſt fierce perſecutions they fervently prayed for the preſervation of the Emperour, and the proſperity of the ſtate. When defamed by the inſinuations of the Jews, and mindful of their rebellion againſt their crucified Meſſiah; when expoſed to contempt and calumny on account of the ſcandalous licentiouſneſs of hereticks, they generouſly confeſs, that far from viewing them as objects of hatred and abomination, they entreat the compaſſionate Parent of the world for their amendment and happineſs.

The faireſt and moſt conſpicuous fruit of this comprehenſive virtue was Beneficence. Its effects were not confined to individuals, or to a particular congregation, but extended to the church at large. The accumulation of

property for the relief of the poor in the infancy of the church, as well as the liberal contributions promoted by the apoſtle of the Gentiles, atteſt its early prevalence. Nor did the converts of ſucceeding times degenerate from their predeceſſors. The commendation which was beſtowed on the munificence of the Corinthians by Clement, Biſhop of Rome, was with equal juſtice and ardour returned by Dionyſius the Great. He deſcribes the attention of the Romans to the generous cuſtom which commenced at the firſt diffuſion of the goſpel, of alleviating the neceſſities of diſtant brethren. Nor did their liberality ſtop here, but was reached out to thoſe pious captives who, torn from their ſocial connexions, were condemned for their adherence to the faith, to labour in the impriſonment of the mines. This principle was in ſome inſtances elevated to the height of ardent affection, and led to that diſintereſted ſacrifice of perſonal conſiderations which realizes the attachments of romantic friendſhip. Many reſcued their fellow chriſtians from captivity by voluntarily occupying their places, and others ſold themſelves into bondage, that by the price obtained by the forfeiture of freedom, they might ſupply the neceſſitous with food and raiment. To the Pagans ſuch conduct was at firſt a ſubject of

ſurprize, and afterwards excited the greateſt admiration, when the humanity of the more opulent chriſtians was not confined to the circle of their own community, but extended to the multitude at large. Acts of ſimilar munificence were in ſome degree familiarized to the minds of the Romans, by the expences laviſhed by the opulent and the noble on the ſplendid exhibition of publick games, and the oſtentatious prodigality of entertainments; but the chriſtian liberality was directed to far more beneficial and diſintereſted ends. It was not diſſipated among thoſe who returned the obligation, by ſacrificing their civil rights to the luſt of power or of ambition, but it was conveyed to diſtant lands and foreign cities, to the naked and the hungry, who ſaw not the hand that reached out the kind ſupply, and could make no acknowledgment to their unknown benefactors, but the ardent benediction of gratitude, and the pious ſacrifice of prayer.

The ſarcaſtick Satyriſt of the philoſophers, in a ſtrain of lively but malevolent irony, endeavours to fix the imputation of weakneſs and imprudence on the chriſtians for their generous conduct. The Emperour Julian remarking its attractive influence on the minds of the people, determined to reform the religion of

of polytheiſm, by ingrafting upon its obſervances the pure precepts of the chriſtian law. He confeſſed that nothing had contributed more to the progreſs of chriſtianity, than the kindneſs of the chriſtians to ſtrangers, the decent ſolemnity of their funeral rites, and the ſanctity of their general conduct. It was then to virtues, not pretended but real, that the church was indebted for her enlargement; to virtues, which the moſt acrimonious enemies of the faith combined unintentionally to commend, and by that means ſupply an illuſtrious confirmation of the veracity of thoſe eccleſiaſtical writers who record and extol them.

Whilſt theſe were more particularly conſpicuous, the chriſtians recommended themſelves by their general conduct. Their firm attachment to the eſtabliſhed government, their ſacred adherence to truth and honour, their ſtrict integrity, love of peace, and inoffenſiveneſs, gradually diſpelled the miſts of prejudice and calumny which firſt obſcured the proſpect of chriſtianity, and brought them forward to the general obſervation of the world.

It was evident then that the chriſtians roſe to that elevation of character which is the moſt

moſt difficult to attain, and at the ſame time the moſt valuable to poſſeſs. An elevation, not ſupported by the flattery of ſelf-love, but the firmneſs of conſiſtency. Their practiſe reflected luſtre on their principles, and gave them the moſt perſuaſive recommendation. It was a ſevere and juſt reproach to the Phariſees that "they ſaid, but did not." They ſat in the ſeat of Moſes, and expounded the moral law; but they wore the maſk of hypocriſy, and liſtened not to the cry of the ſupplicating widow. The philoſophers adorned the dictates of wiſdom with the graces of eloquence; but they too often ſullied the purity of their ſchools with the ſtains of immorality. The Philoſopher and the Phariſee might confeſs with a bluſh, that they were far ſurpaſſed, and if ever a ſenſe of real merit touched their breaſts, they bowed with unfeigned deference to the unaſſuming followers of Chriſt.

In the chriſtian character, the oppoſite extremes of torpid apathy and boundleſs gratification were avoided. So that the Stoic might learn to relax his principles with decorum, and the Epicurean to find pleaſure in the purſuit of virtue. They ſaw that the chriſtian directed the natural propenſities of the mind, the

the love of pleaſure, and the love of action, to their nobleſt ends; for he was temperate, juſt, benevolent and pious. Theſe are the qualities which ſhed the moſt ſoft and pleaſing luſtre over the ſcenes of domeſtick as well as publick life, which refine the feelings of nature, and advance the happineſs of ſociety, which adorn the father in the circle of his family, and dignify the ſtateſman in the conſultations of the ſenate. So that ſuch is the wonderful and intimate connexion between the true intereſts of this world and the next, that the ſame virtues which render man uſeful and agreeable among his fellow creatures, are the beſt preparatives and moſt unerring guides to the ſociety of angels.

This imperfect diſplay of the conduct of the firſt chriſtians is not drawn from the ſolitary examples of individuals, or the vague aſſertions of rhetorical declaimers, but from circumſtantial and authentick records, from the apologies of the converts, when on the aſſertion of truth depended all their earthly welfare, from the concurrent atteſtation of the eccleſiaſtical writers, and from the partial relations of their avowed enemies. A diſplay of facts derived from ſuch various ſources, may therefore properly be regarded as the general voice of

of antiquity proclaiming the virtues of true believers to the world, and calling upon poſterity for wonder, applauſe and imitation.

Yet theſe virtues, great and illuſtrious as they are, *the Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* has confined to a bigotted zeal and a timid repentance. Such animating ſubjects would do honour to the talents and the exertions of any writer, becauſe they diſplay the beſt feelings and moſt exalted ſentiments of human nature. Upon this occaſion, the pencil of fiction is not neceſſary to give ſhade and colouring to the outlines of fact, to ſoften the frowns of tyranny, and beautify the features of licentiouſneſs. The virtues of the primitive chriſtians require not thoſe flowers of fancy, nor that ſplendour of eloquence which are vainly laviſhed on the ſuperſtitious folly of Julian, and the conſummate hypocriſy of Mahomet. They modeſtly aſk to be enrolled in the records of impartial truth, *that men may ſee their good works, and glorify their Father which is in heaven.*

To the contemplative ſtateſman the revolutions of government become ſubjects of curious ſpeculation. He conſiders them in their immediate and remote effects upon laws and cuſtoms,

cuſtoms, and how far they contribute to the aggrandiſement of the ſovereign, or the extenſion of the privileges of the people. To the moraliſt, the revolutions of manners appear far more intereſting, as the conſideration of them leads to an intimate acquaintance with the mind; and ſhows to what a degree the fervour of its paſſions may be abated, and the ſtubbornneſs of its prejudices may be bent, by new and ſalutary principles of action. It points out likewiſe how thoſe principles may become productive of the greateſt comfort to individuals, and the greateſt happineſs to ſociety.

The triumph of chriſtianity was completed during three centuries after the aſcenſion of its divine Founder, partly by the ſubverſion of the moſt antient and moſt popular ſuperſtitions which had been ever known to the world, and partly by the gradual revolutions which it produced in publick cuſtoms and private manners. Its ſalutary influence was not only felt by the refined and luxurious citizens of the Roman Empire, but by the ſavage and warlike people of Europe and Aſia, who ſucceſſively came forth in mighty armies to ſubvert the vaſt fabrick of Imperial greatneſs.

As

As it was the firſt glory of the goſpel to call forth into action the moſt benevolent feelings of the mind, the treaſures of its more opulent converts were not laviſhed on votive offerings, and bloody ſacrifices; but were appropriated to the relief of the ſhip-wrecked mariner, the diſtant exile, and the fettered captive. The ſongs of gratitude and the ſupplications of diſtreſs were no longer waſted on ſculptured images, but were addreſſed to the high and lofty one who inhabiteth eternity, and who heareth when the righteous call. The dark and fraudulent oracles of the prieſts were deſerted for the predictions of inſpired prophets, and for the leſſons of the book of life. The parents who formerly expoſed their infant offspring to untimely death, or reared them to maturity, that they might barter their innocence for the wages of proſtitution, awoke to the exquiſite feelings of nature, and led them to the path of holineſs and virtue. The ſlave no longer dreaded the ſtripes of his deſpotick maſter, for as ſoon as he was purified by the water of baptiſm, he aroſe to a ſpiritual equality with him, and was entitled to all the benefits of a free-born citizen. The bloody combats of gladiators, which had long been the favourite ſpectacles of the polite as well as of the vulgar, gave way to amuſements more

more refined, and more conſiſtent with humanity. The licentious feſtival of the Saturnalia was ſuperſeded by the commemoration of the birth of Chriſt; and the feaſts of Flora were aboliſhed for the obſervance of his meritorious paſſion. The prophane myſteries of Ceres and Bacchus, and the horrid barbarity of human ſacrifices, were ſucceeded by the pure and ſimple celebration of baptiſm, and of the euchariſt. The croſs of Calvary, which had been the contemptible inſtrument of the execution of ſlaves, adorned the ſummit of the churches, and was depictured on the ſtandard of the legions. As ſoon as divine honours were paid to Chriſt, the heathen acknowledged the weakneſs of his gods. He liſtened no longer with eager credulity to the ambiguous predictions of the Delphick prieſteſs, or to the oracular ſtreams of Daphne. Whilſt broken arches and proſtrate columns ſpread the floor of the deſerted temples, and the mutilated ſtatues of the gods were monuments of the fall of polytheiſm; numerous edifices of chriſtian devotion were erected, and opened their ſpacious doors to receive the multitude of thronging proſelytes.

The Pagan religion, although aſſiſted by various expedients, gradually gave way to the increaſing

increaſing influence of chriſtianity. Alike inadequate to its popularity and its reformation, was the ſanguinary malice of Nero againſt its aſſailants, and the ingenious devices of Julian to remedy its abuſes. When no longer upheld by the arm of the civil magiſtrate, its internal weakneſs ſunk it to the ground, and the refuſal of idolaters to ſuffer in its defence formed a ſtriking contraſt to the illuſtrious fortitude of the chriſtian martyrs.

The barriers of national enmity and inveterate prejudice, which had for ages obſtructed the intercourſe of mankind, were broken down; and the inhabitants of different countries with benignant looks of eſteem and cordiality, met around the ſocial hearth, or filled the ſolemn aſſembly. The jew, enlightened by the evangelical law, no longer viewed the Gentile with diſdain, or refuſed him the common offices of benevolence: nor did the converted Gentile any longer ſurvey the Jew, as the hater of mankind, and the advocate for an intolerant ſuperſtition. The nations who before the glorious advent of Chriſt had been only diſtinguiſhed by their abject and coarſe barbarity, roſe from the condition of rude ſavages to a higher elevation in the ſcale of reaſon and of morals. The Egyptian idolater ceaſed to bend

bend at the ſhrine of Serapis and Typhon, and to exalt the ſacred animals of his country to the rank of celeſtial ſpirits. The myſterious ſymbols of the ſacerdotal hieroglyphicks were changed for the practical and intelligible precepts of the goſpel. The Parthian and Perſian tribes inſtituted the decent rites of ſepulture, aboliſhed their inceſtuous alliances, and reſtrained the inordinate licence of polygamy. The warlike inhabitants of Scythia, of Germany, of Spain, of Pannonia and Britain forſook their gloomy ſuperſtition for the pure religion of Chriſt, and whilſt its precepts ſoftened their ferocious ſpirit, they imbibed a taſte for literature and for arts. Their adoption of chriſtianity from their Roman foes was at once an ornament of its intrinſick excellence, and of their ardent and ſincere veneration for truth. They relinquiſhed the ſavage proſpect of revelling after death in the gloomy palace of Odin, for the bright hope of a heavenly paradiſe. They no longer ſhed the blood of human victims, at the altar of their ſhapeleſs idols, but bent a willing knee to the God of mercy. The Druids, who were wont to lead the rude inhabitants of Germany and Gaul from the deep receſſes of the foreſts to the field of carnage and death, and inſpired them with the deluſive hope that the ſoul

would reanimate another body, were ſucceeded by peaceful orders of eccleſiaſticks, who taught their converts the real value of life, and the true doctrine of immortality.

Thus as ſoon as the chriſtian religion ſpread its ſacred light around the world, the ſhades of ſuperſtition vaniſhed, the manners of mankind were diſtinguiſhed by gentleneſs and humanity, the rigours of war were ſoftened, the inſolence of conqueſt was curbed, and a ſolid and permanent foundation was laid, for a comprehenſive and equitable ſyſtem of juriſprudence and a general law of nations. The unbounded ſpirit of philanthropy, highly extolled indeed by the antient philoſophers and poets, but never before cultivated, began to operate upon its nobleſt principle, by eſtabliſhing the love of Man upon the love of God. The ſtate of man in all his various circumſtances, connexions, and ſituations was meliorated, the line of his duty was marked out with preciſion, his pains were alleviated by the ſupply of the nobleſt incitements to his fortitude, and his bleſſings were multiplied by new and inexhauſtible ſources of hope. The magnificent and vaſt ſcheme of providence was fully developed, by ſhowing to man the immediate relation of a preſent to a future ſtate

ſtate of exiſtence. The clouds of darkneſs and doubt which had obſcured the proſpect of heaven were removed by the full aſſurances of a glorious immortality. The triumph of vice and the depreſſion of virtue were no longer ſubjects of inexplicable difficulty to human reaſon; but formed conſiſtent parts of that moral ſcheme, the proſpect of which was cloſed by the awful ſcenes of a future retribution. The chriſtian religion united the whole human race by cloſer ties of affection, as children of the ſame Almighty Parent, as partakers of the ſame redemption and heirs of the ſame felicity. It clearly proved its divine origin by purifying the corruption, and exalting the capacity of the mind; by ſubliming its moral energies, and by affording themoſt extenſive ſcope, and holding out the moſt glorious reward for the exerciſe of every virtue.

From the whole of this diſquiſition it appears, what an important object the progreſs of chriſtianity forms in the hiſtory of thoſe people over whom its light was firſt diffuſed, and how highly it deſerves to be brought forward as the cauſe of a revolution in publick and private manners which far ſurpaſſed the powers of man to accompliſh by the exertions

of the greateſt diligence, or the moſt refined policy. We have therefore the juſteſt reaſon to conclude that the providence of the Almighty was not only active in co-operating with its votaries for its eſtabliſhment, but likewiſe in preparing the way for its reception.

The weakneſs of all thoſe cauſes which we have reviewed as immediately conducive to the eſtabliſhment of chriſtianity, as well as a ſurvey of the events which preceded the manifeſtation of the Son of God, concur to produce this conviction. When we recollect how much the diſcipline of the primitive church was broken by diſcord, and perplexed by hereſy; when we calmly conſider the rage of Paganiſm which ſo frequently exerciſed the fortitude of the martyrs; the calumny raiſed againſt the church, which as it was in ſome degree occaſioned by the exceſſes of nominal believers, was inadequately oppoſed by the apologiſts; and the diſſoluteneſs of manners which idolatry allowed ſo hoſtile to the primitive virtues; we muſt neceſſarily be at a loſs for ſome other cauſe, which is fully and completely adequate to the rapid and extenſive propagation of chriſtianity in the two firſt centuries after Chriſt. The neceſſity of having recourſe to this

this cauſe appears more evident from conſidering the violence of prejudice in favour of eſtabliſhments confirmed by habit, and endeared by education, the natural pride of the human heart, which diſdains the puerile condeſcenſion of imbibing moral inſtruction at the age of maturity and reflection, and more than all, the influence of univerſal example, which unites man to man by the cloſeſt ties, and has an immediate and imperceptible influence on every action of life. This formidable tide of prepoſſeſſions and paſſions augmented by all the preceding obſtacles was too impetuous to be oppoſed by human efforts alone.

We can diſcern therefore no other method of finding an eaſy and ſatisfactory ſolution to the difficulty, than by concluding that a long and magnificent ſeries of events were all previouſly arranged for the introduction of chriſtianity.

For a demonſtrative proof that the greateſt empires of the world had a connexion with the advancement of true religion, under the different diſpenſations of Moſes, and of Chriſt, we may appeal to the teſtimony of the antient predictions. Abſorbed by the bright viſions of futurity, the prophet Iſaiah calls by name

on the conquerour of Aſſyria, and the reſtorer of Iſrael, two centuries previous to his birth. To the eye of Daniel, the ſucceſſive monarchies of Perſia, of Macedon, and of Rome were repreſented by the moſt exact diſplay of emblematical imagery. The different periods of the Jewiſh hiſtory, when the Almighty raiſed up the nations as the inſtruments of his vengeance, or of his mercy, will ſhow by what various modes they combined to execute the divine decrees. Sometimes the daughter of Babylon mocked the ſorrows of her captives, whoſe neglect of Jehovah had been the cauſe of their chains: ſometimes when duly humbled by their calamity, their conquerour permitted them to regain the ſeat of their fathers, and to reſtore the glories of the fallen temple.

From the ruins of preceding ſtates aroſe the ſtupendous and auguſt fabrick of the Roman Empire. Though long agitated by the ſtorms of contending factions, it ſurvived every ſhock of domeſtick tumult, and gradually extended its dominion over the moſt populous and warlike regions of the world.

The nations of Europe, of Aſia, and of Africa, which at preſent compoſe formidable kingdoms,

kingdoms, were enrolled in the regiſter of her tributary provinces. The privileges of the conquerours were generouſly extended to the vanquiſhed, and Rome became the common country of her ſubjects. Wherever the legions led the way, a free admiſſion was opened to arts, to laws, and to commerce; and the unreſtrained intercourſe of various nations promoted a general ſpirit of obedience and ſubordination. On the advancement of Auguſtus to the imperial throne, the violence of inteſtine diſorders was extinguiſhed, and the various parts of the empire enjoyed a degree of repoſe unknown to former ages. The love of conqueſt, which had for ſeven ſucceſſive centuries exerciſed the courage of the Romans, ſubſided into ſudden and laſting peace; and the diſpoſition of the firſt emperours to mark out the boundaries of dominion and to ſilence the clamour of arms, produced a ſtrong and aſtoniſhing contraſt to the fierce and ambitious temper of their anceſtors.

In the tendency of all theſe circumſtances to ſome magnificent event, we may clearly diſcern the directing hand of the Creator of the univerſe. To his diſpoſal alone, can properly be attributed that long and complex concatenation of affairs which led the Romans

by regular ſteps to the ſummit of dominion. The conflict of their paſſions, the various revolutions of their government, the ingenuity of the wife, and the ambition of the valiant, cooperated for one tranſcendent purpoſe. It was ultimately for this purpoſe that the legiſlators remedied the political evils which threatened the deſtruction of the Roman State, and laid the firm foundations of general order. For this, her heroes fought with unparalleled advantage, and victory was ever ready to lead her armies to triumph. For this, Scipio gloried in the fall of Carthage, Pompey returned with the ſpoils of Mithridates, and Cæſar bore his triumphant eagle from the plains of Egypt, to the ſhores of Britain. All their great achievements and all their ſplendid events, the boldneſs of their enterprizes and the frequency of their ſucceſs, uniformly pointed to the fullneſs of time when the Son of God was made manifeſt, and were ſo wiſely regulated as to prepare the way for the more eaſy progreſs and more ready reception of the chriſtian faith.

The Almighty King of Kings, with the ſame power which brought the univerſe into exiſtence, ſuperintends from the higheſt heaven all the nations of the earth. He views inſtantaneouſly the moſt aſtoniſhing effects in their remoteſt

remoteſt cauſes, and the long ſeries of ſublunary events, which to the human eye are diſtant and indiſtinct, appear but one object to the rapid glance of his Omniſcience. At his command, the riſe and fall of the mighty empires, whoſe hiſtory comprehends the moſt important tranſactions of mankind, were ſucceſſively diſplayed upon the great theatre of the world. To complete his ſtupendous and beneficent deſigns a new empire was formed, and the government was given to his beloved and adorable Son. Deſcending from the boſom of the Father, and veiling his majeſty in a human form, he graciouſly condeſcended to lay the everlaſting foundations of his kingdom, and directed his followers to erect the vaſt and ſublime ſuperſtructure. Animated by his grace, and directed by his example, his ambaſſadours proclaimed the glad tidings of immortality, his firſt followers profeſſed with boldneſs the ſacred truths of revelation, and his martyrs bled with exultation in its defence. Holineſs, Peace, Charity, and Hope are the fruits of his laws, and all the faithful in the wide circle of the globe are his ſervants and ſubjects. When worldly grandeur ſhall have paſſed away, like the viſions of the night, this ſpiritual empire ſhall unite the regions of paradiſe to her dominion, and flouriſh with encreaſing glory throughout the ages of eternity.

SER-

SERMON V.

ISAIAH XLIII. 9.

Who among the people can declare this, and ſhew us former things? Let them bring forth their witneſſes, that they may be juſtified: or let them hear and ſay, It is truth.

IF the productions of literature be eſtimated by their utility, the moſt elevated place among writers ought to be aſſigned to the hiſtorian. Although the ſeverity of truth marks out for him a more regular line of conduct than the poet, or the orator is required to purſue; yet his obligation to follow her immediate dictates is made eaſy, and even delightful, by proper reflections on the dignity of his labours, and the animating anticipation of the reward which will ſucceed them. It is his peculiar and important province to inveſtigate the latent principles of conduct, and

purſue them to their remoteſt conſequences; to delineate the diverſified picture of actions and characters, and diſplay the revolutions of government, and the fate of empires. If his ſubject be judiciouſly choſen, and his productions be ſtamped with the marks of genius and fidelity, ſucceſſive generations will celebrate his name as the benefactor of mankind, for giving them an imaginary exiſtence in paſt ages, for introducing them to the knowledge of departed excellence, and for enabling them to profit by the conduct of their predeceſſors. His praiſe will be the conſtant theme of their gratitude, whilſt they ſhun the vices, and imitate the virtues, which his works have conſigned to immortality.

This approbation, however, ought to be withheld, in proportion as an author is diſcovered to entertain ſceptical notions, and to diſſeminate them with caution and ſubtlety. Any endeavour to looſen the ties of religious duty, is an affront to the pious principles of education implanted in every cultivated mind; and an act of hoſtility againſt the general intereſts of ſociety. If it has always been eſſential to hiſtorical decorum, for a writer to ſupport the character of the friend to virtue and morality, how flagrant a violation of it, muſt

muſt the attempt of any one be, who undermines the credibility of that Revelation, which is their beſt and firmeſt ſupport?

Such a deſign may not unfairly be imputed to *the Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. His diſinclination to conform to the religious opinions generally received, is ſufficiently evident; for who has diſcovered from the moſt careful peruſal of his works that he is an advocate for any particular eſtabliſhment, or even that he is convinced by the evidences of chriſtianity in general? The want of ſuch a diſcovery can only add to our regret, that the ſplendid powers of an enlightened mind, ſhould be made ſubſervient to ſentiments, the confutation of which has ſo repeatedly added to the triumphs of learning and theology. Although his endeavour to communicate them to the world, by combining them with the hiſtory of a moſt renowned people, may add to their general notoriety, it can produce no commendation from thoſe who look upon infidelity with ſurprize, and upon artifice with averſion.

In the mode by which an eminent Philoſopher of the North divulged his ſceptical opinions, there was a boldneſs which was reſpectable

ſpectable and manly, and which at leaſt entitled him to the praiſe of plain dealing and candour. He attacked chriſtianity in works evidently written for the purpoſe; but when he came forward as an hiſtorian, he ſuſpended his endeavours to invalidate the proofs of revelation; and if a conjecture may be indulged from a conſideration of his arguments at large, his mind appears to have been influenced by a bias favourable to religious eſtabliſhments and ceremonies. The *Hiſtorian of the Roman Empire* purſues a deſign, which, as it is executed by the moſt ingenious ſtratagems, is infinitely more dangerous. His ſcepticiſm is ſometimes inſinuated in the language of diffident heſitation, and is frequently ſo diſtant and ſubtle, as to elude the force of immediate detection. The reader feels unfavourable impreſſions made upon his mind, which he ſcruples to impute to the writer, until repeated inſtances make it evident that it was his deliberate deſign to diſparage our holy religion, and weaken the credit of its advocates. On no occaſion therefore, was it ever more neceſſary, to rouſe the vigilance, and alarm the apprehenſions of all who are charmed by a matchleſs brilliancy of ſtyle, and attracted by the recital of the moſt important events which have occurred in the hiſtory of mankind. *Let them*

them beware leaſt any man ſpoil them by philoſophy and vain deceit, by the rudiments of this world, and not after Chriſt.

The neceſſity of ſuch caution, and the pernicious tendency of ſuch principles, will be fully evident from conſidering how cloſely ſcepticiſm may be connected with a diſregard and even a perverſion of truth. Every hiſtorian profeſſes to hold the ſcales of juſtice with an equal hand; but he will at once, if the weight of prejudice be ſuffered to preponderate, alarm the ſuſpicions of his readers, and forfeits their confidence. For ſuch a deſertion of his duty, no other qualification is an adequate apology. The brilliancy of his imagination, and the acuteneſs of his judgment, the ſtrength of his reaſon, and the extent of his learning, rather aggravate, than diminiſh the fault. His grand and primary object is to convey inſtruction through the medium of narrative, and this purpoſe can never be anſwered by partial repreſentations of conduct, and mutilated ſketches of character. Artifices of this kind transform the venerable portraits of hiſtory into the airy phantoms of romance, and are productive of an injury both to the dead and to the living. The former are degraded from their proper places in the temple

of

of fame, and may be ſtigmatized with cenſure, when their conduct, if exhibited in its true light, would entitle them to praiſe. The latter, may be taught falſe opinions of mankind, and may be led to form principles of conduct ſubverſive of their happineſs and prejudicial to ſociety. As ſuch conſequences are likely to enſue from miſrepreſentation, in what eſteem is that hiſtorian to be held, who poiſons the fountains of antiquity, and recommends them as pure and uncorrupted to the world?

That Gravity is eſſential to the character of an hiſtorian, is a principle that few will be hardy enough to deny. The ſimple and majeſtic grandeur of narrative condeſcends not to form an aſſociation with unbecoming levity. But if the general events of paſt ages require to be recorded in a manner totally free from this unſuitable mixture, it muſt ſurely be much more decorous for a writer to preſerve the moſt ſtrict ſerioufneſs of character, when the ſucceſs of a divine revelation, which has the moſt intimate connexion with the beſt intereſts of mankind, and the mode in which its moſt upright and moſt ſincere advocates have endeavoured to promote its glory, and diffuſe its benefits, form a part of his diſquiſitions.

ſitions. Let us imagine for a moment the divine origin of chriſtianity, and its infinite importance with reſpect to the deareſt intereſts of mankind to be out of the queſtion, and let us place it only on a level with other ſubjects. If in the diſcuſſion of the principles of ſcience, in the developement of the intellectual powers, in commenting on the maxims of legiſlation, or the rules of ethics, if in examining the characters of Newton, of Locke, of Monteſquieu or of Bacon, a writer ſhould indulge the ſallies of humour, ſo far as to ſcoff at what he could not confute, cavil at what he muſt know to be true, and ridicule thoſe whom he ought to reverence; would he not provoke the indignation of the judicious, and incur the cenſure of the diſpaſſionate; and would not they determine that he miſtook irony for argument, that his judgment was a ſlave to the petulance of his wit, and that his conduct was an inſult to propriety, candour and truth?

How far the *Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is liable to this imputation, will appear to every one who peruſes the fifteenth and ſixteenth chapters of his work, and compares them with the original materials from which they are affirmed to

have been compiled. He has deviated from his principal ſubject to deſcribe the progreſs and eſtabliſhment of chriſtianity, and to repreſent the actions and characters of its earlieſt profeſſors. The chain of thoſe events which took place in the reign of Conſtantine is violently broken, to introduce a long and elaborate digreſſion, at the ſame time that the ſcantineſs or ſuſpicious nature of the eccleſiaſtical records, of which he complains, would have furniſhed him with a convenient apology for ſilence upon the ſubject: but that ſilence, which he affirms to be inconſiſtent with religious zeal, is much more inconſiſtent with infidelity. In the chapters before mentioned we obſerve with concern that chriſtianity is vilified in the perſons of its primitive profeſſors. Their real or imaginary failings are aggravated, and at the ſame time that no palliation whatever is afforded to their errours, every art which ingenuity can invent is employed to ſcreen the inhumanity of their enemies. So that on many occaſions, if a juſt and impartial eſtimate be made of the firſt chriſtians, the ſentiments of the hiſtorian will be decidedly oppoſed by the ſentiments of his readers; the virtue which he has degraded will be raiſed to diſtinction, and the indirect or poſitive cenſure which he has expreſſed, will

will be rejected with contempt, or exchanged for general and ardent panegyrick.

To shew how far the monuments of ecclesiastical history can justify such a difference of opinion, has been the attempt made in the preceding lectures. In order to render them more complete, it may be proper to review some passages of the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Such a discussion will prove the weakness of certain opinions, represented as conducive to the propagation of christianity; alleviate the Fathers from a charge of excessive credulity and uncharitableness; and place the cruel proceedings of their persecutors in a proper light.

Among the various instances of misrepresentation with which this particular part of the History of the Decline and Fall abounds, there are Five which immediately force themselves on our notice; we will consider them in the order in which they occur, and conclude this Lecture with some general observations.

The First consists in assigning a visionary cause for the propagation of christianity.

The hiſtorian aſſerts, that the "aſſurance "of a millenium was carefully inculcated by a "ſucceſſion of Fathers, from Juſtin Martyr and "Irenæus, down to Lactantius, who was pre-"ceptor to the ſon of Conſtantine. Though "it might not be univerſally received, it ap-"pears to have been the reigning ſentiment of "the orthodox believers, and it ſeems ſo well "adapted to the deſires and the apprehenſions "of mankind, that it muſt have contributed "in a very conſiderable degree, to the progreſs "of the chriſtian faith."

That this perſuaſion ſhould haſten the progreſs of the chriſtian faith, is an hypotheſis which it is as difficult to ſupport, by the ſuffrage of antiquity, as to reconcile to the conceptions of reaſon. For the belief of the millenium was an expectation grounded on the preconceived ideas and faith of a chriſtian. A competent knowledge of the ſcriptures, a peculiar interpretation of the predictions, both of the prophets, and of our Saviour, and an implicit reliance on the miſtaken ſenſe in which they were underſtood by ſome believers, were previous and neceſſary ſteps to the reception of this opinion. It was therefore an object of hope derived through a ſeries of preparatory circumſtances, from particular tenets, and

and conſequently could have no foundation whatever, until thoſe tenets were embraced.

When the principle is laid down as a cauſe for the propagation of chriſtianity, we naturally require ſomething more ſubſtantial than mere conjecture, to prove the certainty of its exiſtence. But can the hiſtorian appeal to facts to eſtabliſh the truth of his poſition? Where has he obtained, among the remains of primitive antiquity, any poſitive information that the doctrine of the millenium was held out as an allurement for the Gentiles to become converts to the church? We may conclude, that the effects of ſuch a doctrine would have been far different from thoſe which he imputed to it, upon very ſtrong and very reſpectable evidence.

For the learned Origen thought that the opinions entertained by ſome, reſpecting the millenium, were too groſs and ſenſual to form a part of the chriſtian ſyſtem, and that even the Pagan conceptions of a ſtate of felicity were more refined and ſpiritual. So far is he from affording any ſupport to the conjecture of the hiſtorian, as to remark on the contrary, that if the heathens underſtood that ſuch a tenet was countenanced in the church, the

report of it would fix the imputation of weakneſs on chriſtianity, and ſtain the purity of its ſublime doctrines.

To ſay that a ſucceſſion of Fathers inculcated this opinion, from Juſtin Martyr to Lactantius, is an aſſertion which may be controverted without danger of incurring the cenſure of petulant cavil, or precipitate contradiction. That many of them maintained it, will readily be granted; that all inculcated it, will as readily be denied. Tatian wrote a learned treatiſe againſt the Gentiles; Athenagoras, the philoſopher, preſented an elaborate apology to the Emperour Marcus Antoninus, and wrote a diſſertation on the reſurrection. Theophilus, Biſhop of Antioch, inſcribed three argumentative diſquiſitions to his noble friend Autolycus. All theſe, with the copious works of Clemens Alexandrinus and of Cyprian, were written within the interval mentioned. Their authors diſcuſs the received doctrines of the church, and particularly the opinion relative to a future ſtate; yet in what paſſage is the ſlighteſt intimation given of the belief of the millenium, or even of the exiſtence of ſuch a tenet, where is the ſlighteſt mention made? Although the hiſtorian, with a degree of prudence which does credit to his corrections, has

has qualified his vague aſſertions in the laſt edition of his work, and thus eluded the force of a poſitive denial of his ſtatement; yet after all, his preſent text has but feeble pretenſions to the praiſe of perfect accuracy, or manly deciſion of ſentiment.

For if it can be proved that the ſentiments of the chriſtians were equally divided upon the ſubject of the millenium, the ſentiment in queſtion was not the reigning ſentiment. That this equality was highly probable, will appear from the particular relations of Juſtin Martyr and Irenæus, and from the general accounts of other writers.

Juſtin Martyr, in his dialogue with Trypho the Jew, draws his arguments to prove the divine miſſion of our Lord, from the old teſtament. In alluſion to the former part of their converſation, Trypho aſks him, whether he had been induced to bring his proofs from the prophets in favour of the millenium, in conſequence of his ſerious conviction of the approach of that extraordinary period, or merely to ſhew his dexterity in accommodating the prophetical deſcriptions to any ſubject of diſcuſſion, which his fondneſs for argument induced him to advance. "You cannot,"

replies Juſtin, "ſuppoſe me capable of expreſſing opinions which I do not ſincerely maintain; I have on a former occaſion ingenuouſly acknowledged to you, that myſelf and many others, think that the millenium will certainly take place. I have likewiſe informed you, that there are many chriſtians diſtinguiſhed by the purity of their ſentiments, who embrace no ſuch opinion." As Juſtin Martyr was himſelf a zealous advocate for this opinion, it may fairly be concluded that he ſtated the number of thoſe who countenanced him in it, in as favourable a manner as the accuracy of truth would allow. It appears, notwithſtanding, from the paſſage above cited, that thoſe who rejected this opinion, were as numerous as thoſe who maintained it. This makes an important alteration reſpecting the chriſtians of that age, half of whom at leaſt, ſtand thus far acquitted of the charge.

In oppoſition to Irenæus and the millenarians of his age, may be placed many of their contemporaries, whom Irenæus himſelf repeatedly affirms to have conſidered the paſſages of ſcripture, which ſeem to favour this doctrine, as figurative and allegorical. His repreſentation of their ſentiments coincides with that

that of Juſtin Martyr, and affords ſufficient reaſon to conclude, that the opponents of the opinion were as numerous as in the preceding times.

Without the regular citation of other paſſages, it may fairly be collected from thoſe writers who deduce the belief of the millenium from its origin, particularly Euſebius, Epiphanius, and Jerom, that they conceived it to have been limited to certain Fathers of different ages, becauſe they never repreſent it as the predominant tenet of the church at large.

Upon the whole, therefore, it appears, that the hiſtorian had no ſufficient grounds for attributing any efficacy to this opinion in the converſion of mankind, and that the ſuppoſition of its prevalence even in the church to the extent which he deſcribes, is deſtitute of ſupport from eccleſiaſtical hiſtory.

The Second inſtance of miſrepreſentation conſiſts in an attempt to invalidate the truth of prophecy.

" In the primitive church it was univerſally
" believed, that the end of the world and the
" kingdom

" kingdom of heaven were at hand. The near " approach of this wonderful event had been " predicted by the apoſtles; and the tradition " of it was preſerved by their earlieſt diſci- " ples, and thoſe who underſtood in their li- " teral ſenſe the diſcourſes of Chriſt himſelf, " were obliged to expect the ſecond and glo- " rious coming of the Son of Man in the " clouds, before that generation was totally " extinguiſhed, which had beheld his humble " condition upon earth."

Here the hiſtorian evidently betrays an inclination to excite doubts relative to that moſt awful prediction of our Saviour, circumſtantially recorded by all the evangeliſts, which in the opinion of the moſt learned expoſitors, has a double alluſion to the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, and the conſummation of all things. He inſinuates, that it was not fulfilled in the latter ſenſe, when the accompliſhment of it was the ſubject of general expectation among the primitive chriſtians. But what deſcription of them interpreted the diſcourſes of Chriſt in the literal ſenſe he intimates, it is as vain for us to conjecture, as difficult for him to declare.

" It was univerſally believed that the end " of the world and the kingdom of heaven " were

" were at hand." This aſſertion is as deſtitute of proof, as his affirmation " that the near " approach of this wonderful event had been " predicted by the apoſtles." We are fully aware that ſome indefinite expreſſions of St. Peter may be wreſted into an alluſion to it; but that it was not his deſign to foretel the immediate end of the world is evident from his preparing the minds of the converts for a ſeries of approaching trials which were to prove their faith during the eſtabliſhment of chriſtianity. When therefore St. Peter affirms, that *the end of all things is at hand*, he certainly ſpeaks only of the fulfilment of thoſe events which carried with them a full ratification of the truth of chriſtianity, and accordingly, in every ſucceeding age of the church, theſe words have been applied to the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, and the ſubverſion of the Jewiſh Empire. That the apoſtles concluded the end of the world to be far diſtant from their own times, is moreover clear from the expreſs declarations of St. Paul. For as a proof that ſome peculiar expreſſions in his firſt epiſtle to the Theſſalonians were not to be ſtrictly interpreted, as if himſelf and his contemporaries were to live until the ſecond coming of their Lord and Maſter, he ſpeaks on another occaſion of his approaching death,

and

and the future corruptions of the church. *He laboured that he might attain unto the reſurrection of the dead*, and aſſured the Corinthians that *God ſhall raiſe up us alſo by Jeſus, and ſhall preſent us with you.* He explicitly beſeeches the converts *not to be ſoon ſhaken in mind, or to be troubled, neither by ſpirit nor by word, nor by letter, as from us, as that the day of the Lord is at hand.*

To ſay that the tradition of the approaching end of the world was preſerved by the earlieſt diſciples of the apoſtles, is a haſty and groundleſs aſſumption. Of their earlieſt diſciples the moſt eminent were Clemens Romanus, Ignatius, Polycarp, and Irenæus, who in no part of their works which remain, mention their expectation of this event, as if at that time about to happen. Irenæus indeed, held an opinion which ſeems to give ſome colour to theſe miſrepreſentations; for he maintained that the Meſſiah would begin his reign upon earth when the world was ſix thouſand years old. The hiſtorian endeavours to make the ſuppoſed general expectation of the accompliſhment of the prophecy in queſtion coincide with the cloſe of this period. Unfortunately, however, for the object he had in view, his computation of time is as erroneous, as his arguments

arguments are inconclusive. He maintains that the primitive church of Antioch reckoned almost six thousand years from the creation to the birth of Christ. This number, for which no authority is produced, is most probably that of Theophilus Bishop of Antioch, which, according to the most exact statement, is found to be very little more than five thousand five hundred. Thus the historian, not content with the calculation of the Septuagint, which so far exceeds the Era of the creation commonly adopted, has added to one of the longest accounts at that time received, very nearly five hundred years.

If the historian had consulted the works of some of those writers whose names decorate his note upon the passage in question, he would have found sufficient reason to correct his mistatement, and to have expressed more precisely the computations of chronology. Lactantius expressly asserts that six thousand years from the creation of the world were not completed in his time. He flourished in the reign of Constantine the Great, at the distance of two centuries from the successors of the apostles. The insinuation, therefore, of the historian respecting the prophecy, is untrue;

and his attack upon the credulity of the early chriſtians is weak, and eaſy to be repelled.

The prediction of our Lord and his apoſtles reſt upon the ſtrongeſt foundation, even the truths of the Almighty himſelf. They did not foretel that the world would end before the death of the generation to which Chriſt appeared, becauſe, otherwiſe, that event would aſſuredly have been accompliſhed. They predicted, however, among other inſtances of the depravity of future ages, the vain enquiries of miſguided ſcepticks, and the event has fully confirmed their veracity. *Be mindful*, ſaith St. Peter, *that in the laſt day ſhall come ſcoffers, walking after their own luſts, and ſaying, where is the promiſe of his coming? For ſince the Fathers fell aſleep all things continue as from the beginning*,

Let it abate the inſolence of the ſupercilious caviller to reflect on the wiſe and wonderful diſpenſations of providence reſpecting the eſtabliſhment of the goſpel. Even his own efforts to depretiate its truth are included in the ſcheme of the evangelical predictions, and furniſh of themſelves clear arguments for its divine origin.

The Third inſtance of miſrepreſentation conſiſts in an unwarrantable charge of uncharitableneſs againſt the primitive chriſtians.

The hiſtorian remarks that "the condemnation of the wiſeſt and moſt virtuous of "the Pagans, on account of their ignorance "or diſbelief of the divine truth, ſeems to offend the reaſon and the humanity of the "preſent age. But the primitive church, "whoſe faith was of a much firmer conſiſtence, delivered over without heſitation, to "eternal torture, the far greater part of the "human ſpecies."

The primitive church will be found on a fair and cloſe examination, to be more conformable in point of humanity, with the preſent age, than the hiſtorian repreſents. Tertullian is the only father of the church on whoſe authority the above aſſertion is founded. It muſt undoubtedly be cenſured therefore as an impropriety in the hiſtorian to reſt an argument upon a ſingle authority, and to aggravate the deſcription of a warm and precipitate writer, at the ſame time that the fathers who expreſs more calm and more benevolent ſentiments are paſſed over in ſilence. Is it not in the higheſt degree contrary to the principles of

of hiſtorical juſtice to repreſent the language of an individual as a tenet of the whole church? Is it candid in him to place the invectives of that individual in ſuch a light as to make him appear to pronounce condemnation on the Pagan world at large, when his effuſions were principally directed againſt falſe philoſophers, againſt corrupters of morals, and perſecutors of the faith? He profeſſed indeed that he drew a veil over a part of the deſcription which Tertullian gave of their future tortures; but at the ſame time he fully exhibits, and artfully heightens every circumſtance of it, that can excite the averſion, and provoke the indignation of his readers.

In order to aſcertain the more liberal ſentiments of the Fathers, it is to be obſerved, that Juſtin Martyr not only entertained a hope, that Socrates, and thoſe who reſembled him in virtue, would eſcape the divine diſpleaſure in another life; but with a peculiar alluſion to the general benefits imparted by the divine Logos, dignified them with the appellation of chriſtians. With reſpect to the deſtination of the Pagans in general, in another life, it was the opinion of Hermas, Clemens Alexandrinus, Origen, and many others, that Chriſt and his apoſtles preached to their departed ſouls in

in the regions of the dead, and that all thoſe who were converted, were without diſtinction made partakers of the benefits of the paſſion. Whatever may be the propriety of their interpretation of a myſterious paſſage in the firſt epiſtle of St. Peter, upon which this belief was founded, at leaſt it ſhewed their readineſs to frame ſuch an hypotheſis, as might impart to the heathen world, the ſalutary truths of the goſpel. The fair evidence of antiquity is therefore repugnant to the repreſentation of the hiſtorian, and the benign ſentiments of the early chriſtians reſpecting the Pagans who preceded them, are proved to be correſpondent with their wiſhes and prayers for their unconverted contemporaries.

The excellence and the expediency of the evangelical virtues may be inferred even from the contemplation of thoſe minds which act not under their influence; for this ſevere charge, which is founded on no ſufficient authority, and can be proved by no fair argument, would not have been made by the writer, had he been guided by that ſpirit of charity, which he vainly endeavours to detract from the primitive church.

The Fourth inſtance of miſrepreſentation conſiſts in drawing wrong concluſions from facts.

The hiſtorian aſſerts that "the Romans in "the conviction of any of their ſubjects, who "were accuſed of ſo very ſingular a crime as "that of chriſtianity, proceeded with caution "and reluctance."

To eſtabliſh this aſſertion, inferences are drawn from the celebrated letter of Pliny to the Emperour Trajan. From thence, the hiſtorian obſerves, "we may aſſure ourſelves that "when Pliny accepted the government of "Bythinia there were no general laws or de-"crees againſt the chriſtians."

Whoever reads this letter with attention will be more inclined to draw a different inference. Pliny informs the Emperour that he had never been preſent at any judicial examinations of chriſtians. This manifeſtly implies that they had already been brought before magiſtrates, and if brought before magiſtrates, they muſt have been apprehended on ſuſpicion of infringing ſome ſtanding law of the empire. Pliny does not conſult the Emperour whether

the chriſtians were deſerving of legal ſeverity, and therefore were the proper objects of a penal decree; for on this ſubject he was ſufficiently decided by expreſsly declaring that their obſtinacy deſerved to be puniſhed. His reaſon for conſulting the Emperour ſeems to have been this: He was ſolicitous to know whether ſome gradations of puniſhment ſhould not be adopted, and a line of diſtinction be drawn between the young and the old, the recent and the early converts. His ignorance proves nothing contradictory to the exiſtence of laws againſt the chriſtians. He only ſpeaks from his own inexperience, and ſufficiently intimates that he wanted not the eſtabliſhment of a new law, but the modification of an old one, in order that it might more particularly apply to various caſes.

That this was the object of his enquiry will appear in a ſtronger light from weighing the circumſtances of the affair in connection with the teſtimony of other writers. Is it probable that a Roman Proconſul inveſted with the command of an extenſive province, and occupied by the adminiſtration of its weighty and numerous affairs, would have waſted his time in liſtening to accuſations againſt its inhabitants for holding certain ſingular opinions,

which in no degree affected the tranquility of the ſtate, if the infringement of ſome law had not called for his attention? Is it probable that he would have doomed any of its inhabitants to death on the depoſition of officious informers, if a law had not juſtified his deciſions? Had not ſuch been the caſe, he would have followed the example of the impartial Gallio, and have driven both the accuſers, and the accuſed, with impatience from his tribunal. Such conduct would have been far more conſiſtent with the general character of Pliny, than to have been led upon inſufficient grounds into the moſt wanton and unauthorized exerciſe of his power.

Notwithſtanding the Senate had repealed the bloody edicts of Nero and Domitian againſt the chriſtians, yet Trajan at the beginning of his reign, from a deſire to ſecure the rites of Paganiſm from innovation, enacted that all the ſubjects of the empire, ſhould either offer ſacrifice, or ſuffer death.

The authority of the acts of Ignatius, which contain this remarkable fact, is confirmed by the proceedings carried on during the ſame reign againſt Symeon the aged Biſhop of Jeruſalem. He was ſeized by the multitude, and

and brought before the Proconſul of Judea, who deliberately condemned him to be crucified. If the multitude could not have obtained the object of their indignation under a legal ſanction, they would not have brought the venerable martyr before the magiſtrate; and if the magiſtrate had not acted under the influence of the law, he would not have condemned him to an ignominious and cruel death.

With how much precipitation Pliny proceeded againſt thoſe unhappy chriſtians who were brought before him, appears from his own circumſtantial account. He informs us that he ordered thoſe who perſevered in their confeſſion of the chriſtian name, to be led out to ſuffer death, and that he put two women to the torture to extort a confeſſion of ſuſpected guilt. The praiſe of reluctance and caution, ſo profuſely beſtowed upon him by the hiſtorian, would have been more conſiſtent with truth as well as humanity, if Pliny had ſolicited the determination of the Emperour, before he adopted ſuch rigorous meaſures. His conduct can only be accounted for by ſuppoſing he was actuated by a ſenſe of duty to enforce the exiſting laws. If however it ſhould be granted to the hiſtorian, that Pliny

was left entirely to his own diſcretion, and acted not in conformity with any exiſting law, what treatment muſt the chriſtians have experienced from magiſtrates of cruel and inflexible diſpoſitions, if ſuch were the proceedings of one, who was on all other occaſions eminently humane and benevolent?

This queſtion may be beſt reſolved by making ſome remarks on a ſubſequent aſſertion of the hiſtorian, viz. "That the Romans "were moderate in the uſe of puniſhments "inflicted on the chriſtians."

In the conſtitution of laws, there ought always to be ſome proportion obſerved between the crime and the puniſhment. But the Romans, when acting as legiſlators againſt the chriſtians, betrayed the moſt flagrant deſertion of every principle of equity. A member of the church was condemned for holding ſingular opinions, before it was diſcovered whether they would lead him either to the commiſſion of crimes, or to the violation of the publick peace. He was doomed to ſuch inflictions as were barely juſtifiable for the moſt atrocious enormities. Forfeiture of property, impriſonment, exile to ſolitary iſlands, condemnation to the mines, were the moſt lenient ſentences pronounced

pronounced againſt the innocent ſufferers. On other occaſions, their fortitude was brought to a ſeverer trial by the mutilation of limbs, or a death aggravated by the barbarity of inſult, and ſharpened by the ingenuity of torture. To refer to no other proofs, the epiſtle of the churches of Lyons and Vienne, will furniſh as many inſtances of refined cruelty, as of invincible patience. If this be moderation, what is ſeverity? If this be mildneſs, what is rigour? If the inference of the hiſtorian be confirmed by ſuch indiſputable facts, our opinions of the moſt atrocious characters muſt undergo a complete revolution. Nero will be eſteemed a philanthropiſt, Domitian the father of his people, and Decius the protector of chriſtianity.

The Fifth inſtance of miſrepreſentation conſiſts in ſelecting paſſages manifeſtly inconcluſive, and ſuppreſſing others of the ſame writers more deciſive and equally connected with the ſubject.

The hiſtorian remarks that "the learned "Origen, who from his experience as well as "reading was intimately acquainted with the "hiſtory of the chriſtians, declares in the "moſt expreſs terms, that the number of

" martyrs was very inconſiderable. His au-
" thority would be alone ſufficient to annihi-
" late that formidable army of martyrs, whoſe
" relicks, drawn for the moſt part from the
" catacombs of Rome, have repleniſhed ſo
" many churches, and whoſe marvellous
" achievements have been the ſubject of ſo
" many volumes of holy romance. But the
" general aſſertion of Origen may be explained
" and confirmed by the particular teſtimony
" of his friend Dionyſius, who in the immenſe
" city of Alexandria, and under the rigorous
" perſecution of Decius, reckons only ten men
" and ſeven women who ſuffered for the pro-
" feſſion of the chriſtian name."

How far the hiſtorian is juſtifiable in diminiſhing the number of martyrs upon the authority of the writers he has here mentioned, will appear from the following conſiderations. In the treatiſe of Origen againſt Celſus, Celſus objected that chriſtianity had ariſen to diſtinction in the world by ſupporting a ſpirit of ſedition, againſt the eſtabliſhed government of the empire. Origen diſproves the aſſertion by aſſuring him, that the chriſtians, in no attack made by their enemies, had ever reſorted to arms, but on the contrary, had yielded with the greateſt ſubmiſſion to the moſt rigorous execution

execution of the laws. It had, however, he obſerves, pleaſed the divine goodneſs, that few, and ſuch as could eaſily be enumerated, had at different times been cut off, in order to prevent the extermination of chriſtianity. It is obvious to remark on this paſſage, that the expreſſions denoting a ſmall number of martyrs, are to be underſtood with reference to the whole community of chriſtians at large. Although the diſproportion ſubſiſting between them might be very conſiderable, as chriſtians at that time abounded in every province of the Roman Empire, yet the quantity of martyrs might nevertheleſs be in itſelf very great. That Origen himſelf embraced ſuch an opinion is clear from other paſſages. He ſays that every city and every order of men was hoſtile to the chriſtian name. Again, ſpeaking of the conduct of the Pagans of his own age, he obſerves that many who are well convinced that the profeſſion of chriſtianity will be productive of the moſt fatal conſequences, and that a renunciation of it will enſure their ſecurity, have ſhewn their contempt of the world, by enduring with patience the loſs of life. In his commentary on the epiſtle to the Romans, he moreover ſays, that it was common to ſee perſons who ſurrendered themſelves with the greateſt compoſure

ſure to perſecutors, and not only ſubmitted to outrage, but even to death.

If we proceed to examine the ſupport which is given to Origen by Dionyſius of Alexandria, we ſhall find that among his invaluable remains, preſerved in the eccleſiaſtical hiſtory of Euſebius, there is a circumſtantial account of the Decian perſecution in Egypt. A particular relation is given of the tortures and death of ſeventeen perſons. But does he hint that theſe were the only ſufferers, who were expoſed to the fury of the Imperial decree? So far is this from being the caſe, that he mentions in general terms, many other chriſtians, who were likewiſe condemned to die. He particularly relates, that the perſecutors ruſhed into the houſes of the chriſtians, and plundered them of their moſt valuable effects. Such was the exceſſive tumult, that Alexandria exhibited the appearance of a city taken by ſtorm. Many of the brethren fled, and recollecting the conſolatory expreſſions of St. Paul, ſuſtained the loſs of their property with joy. In addition to theſe circumſtances, it is to be remarked that Dionyſius concludes his intereſting narrative with this pathetic expoſtulation. "Why need I deſcribe particu-

"larly

" larly the multitude of thoſe who were driven
" to wander in the deſerts and on the moun-
" tains; who periſhed by the bittereſt afflic-
" tions, by hunger, by thirſt, and by cold;
" or who were cut off by robbers, by diſeaſe,
" and by wild beaſts? Theſe diſaſtrous events
" are not recorded in vain, but that you may
" have an authentick relation of the calamities
" which befel us."

From the whole of this detail we may ſee by what diſingenuous methods the hiſtorian has perverted the plaineſt facts. From a multitude of writers he brings forward Origen to corroborate his hypotheſis of the ſmall number of martyrs, when it is evident that Origen muſt, on ſuch an occaſion, be a very incompetent witneſs. For the moſt cruel perſecutions did not rage whilſt he flouriſhed, or probably not till after his death; and the barbarity with which Decius, Valerian, and Diocleſian depopulated the church, can only be known from later Fathers. By violently disjoining one part of his obſervations from the context, the ſenſe is wreſted into a contradiction of his general ſentiments, as well as of the accounts of other writers. To make his teſtimony, thus tortured, aſſume a more ſpecious air of plauſibility, the hiſtorian contraſts it with the moſt

moſt palpable fictions and dubious martyrologies; he then brings forward Dionyſius of Alexandria, and curtails many circumſtances of his narrative, which were of equal, or rather ſuperiour importance, with reſpect to the cruelties exerciſed by the perſecutors.

After deliberately weighing all this palpable mutilation, and ſophiſtical management, the judicious and the learned may eaſily determine how far it is conſiſtent with truth or juſtice to repoſe an implicit confidence in the ſtatement of antient authorities thus made by the hiſtorian.

Thus has an attempt been made to ſhew that *the Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is a conſummate adept in the arts of miſrepreſentation, and that deſerting the open path of truth, he has attempted to lead his readers into the intricate labyrinths of errour. If the preceding developement be accurate, he has ſullied the purity of chriſtian antiquity by

I. Aſſigning a viſionary, and inefficient cauſe for the propagation of the goſpel.

II. Attempting to invalidate the evidence of prophecy.

III. Un-

III. Unwarrantably imputing uncharitableneſs to the primitive chriſtians.

IV. Drawing wrong concluſions from facts.

V. Selecting paſſages manifeſtly inconcluſive, and ſuppreſſing others of the ſame writers equally connected with the ſubject.

From miſrepreſentation detected under ſuch various diſguiſes, and ſo inſidiouſly operating to the diſparagement of virtue and of piety, it may fairly be concluded that the writer is as unfavourable to the firſt advocates of the chriſtian revelation, as he is deſtitute of that ſenſibility which is ever alive to the unmerited ſufferings of others. He recounts the moſt affecting calamities of the chriſtians with cold indifference, and repreſents them rather as objects of contempt, than of compaſſion and reſpect. He forgets, or he wiſhes to forget, that thoſe who endure misfortunes with magnanimity are the moſt edifying, if not the moſt proper ſubjects of hiſtory; and that a particular account of Ignatius and of Pamphilus, would have done as much honour to his work, as the firmneſs and the piety of Strafford and of Laud have conferred on the productions of Hume. During the peruſal of the fifteenth and ſixteenth chapters of the Roman

Roman Hiſtory, we imagine we are ſurveying the dark deſcriptions of the firſt chriſtians, given by Tacitus, whoſe ignorance of their real character is the beſt apology for his miſrepreſentation. We can with difficulty be perſuaded that we are liſtening to an hiſtorian, who profeſſes to form his judgment of facts and of men, upon the liberal principles of a Philoſopher, and who enjoys all the light, and all the learning of the eighteenth century.

SERMON VI.

GENERAL EPISTLE OF ST. JUDE.

Verſe 3.

Earneſtly contend for the Faith which was once delivered unto the Saints.

THE manner in which the Socinians of the preſent day conduct their controverſy againſt the eſtabliſhed church, is equally extraordinary and artful. For not content with perverting the obvious ſenſe of ſcripture, with torturing every text to their own purpoſe, and with ſlighting the plaineſt declarations of the proper Divinity of Chriſt; they have endeavoured to preſs into their ſervice the proofs ariſing from the belief of the earlieſt chriſtians. This appeal evidently ſhews the veneration in which antiquity is, in reality, held by all parties, and the great advantage which may be derived from its declarations. In conſequence

ſequence of this perſuaſion, the works of thoſe who undertake to repreſent the ſentiments of the primitive writers have been explored with indefatigable diligence by *the Author of the Early Opinions concerning Jeſus Chriſt*; and all the paſſages which ſeem to confirm his argument, are exhibited in the ſtrongeſt and moſt advantageous point of view, with copious comments, and plauſible illuſtrations. His general plan of attack upon the divinity of Chriſt is conducted with a ſingularity of enterprize, of which it is fruitleſs to ſearch for another inſtance. His readers muſt be prepared to reconcile the rage of innovation with the ſubtlety of paradox, and to watch the moſt bold and extraordinary proceſs of hiſtorical experiment. For to their great ſurprize they will find, that the Fathers of the church are made to contradict their own opinions; and that the books which were profeſſedly written for the ſupport of the faith, are changed into the inſtruments of its ſubverſion.

But if the belief of the primitive chriſtians be ſo important, that an endeavour is made to procure its alliance to the Unitarian cauſe, even by diſingenuous arts; it is certainly worthy of all the exertions to retain it, which can fairly be made by its rightful poſſeſſors.

It

It is the valuable property of the church of England, and the reſolution of her ſons to ſtand forth as its guardians and defenders, neither has been, nor will be wanting. We have the animating encouragement of an apoſtolical injunction *to contend for the Faith which was delivered unto the Saints.* We can eaſily have recourſe to the evidences that prove what the nature of that faith was; ſo that to be ſlow in its profeſſion, and irreſolute in its defence, would prove us unworthy of bearing "that holy name by which we are called."

Still however it muſt be candidly confeſſed, that the eccleſiaſtical ſtudent ventures on this diſquiſition with heſitation, and with diffidence. He ſees the powers of ingenuity and diligence combined againſt him. He contemplates, in the author of the work before mentioned, an undaunted boldneſs, which no oppoſition has intimidated; an inflexible perſeverance which has been tried in many a polemical field; and a refined ſophiſtry which can elude the graſp of confutation. But the danger decreaſes as he approaches to the conteſt; for a love of truth, and a ſenſe of duty, encourage him to proceed, even againſt an opponent ſo formidable and ſo experienced.

It will be the object therefore of the following discourse, to attempt a refutation of the three grand principles which form the basis of *the History of the Early Opinions concerning Christ*, viz.

I. That the apostolical Fathers held the simple humanity of Christ.

II. That Justin Martyr corrupted the primitive faith, by the adoption of the Logos of Plato.

III. That the pastors of the church maintained a corrupted faith, whilst the illiterate christians continued to maintain the simple humanity of Christ.

As a necessary preliminary to this discussion, we must carefully mark the distinction which subsists between the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, as contained in scripture, and the opinions formed of it, which we collect from ecclesiastical history. The doctrine stands recorded in everlasting characters, which the folly of man may misinterpret, but his power can never efface. It is asserted in appropriate phraseology, marked by peculiar and plain characters, illustrated by undeniable facts, and confirmed by the fullest testimony. The

member

member of the church of England is desirous of settling the principles of his faith by an immediate appeal to such evidences. He determines the nature of the doctrine in dispute by the rules of legitimate criticism, and the obvious meaning of scriptural language. But his opponent, impatient of that restraint to which these limitations may subject him, adopts a new test by which the doctrine must be tried, far inferiour in point of weight and importance to that which is rejected; inasmuch as he quits contemporary for subsequent evidence, and prefers the attestations of fallible men to the records of inspired evangelists.

Still, however, we are ready to admit that as far as the opinions of men can be of importance to its illustration, those of the primitive christians are so. They had the most favourable opportunities of information, and drank christianity at the fountain head. The records, therefore, which they have left us, are the best comments on the sacred text, as they shew the sense in which it was first understood. Sensible, therefore, of the value of these records, in confirming our interpretation of scripture, we proceed to shew the futility of the above stated assertions.

In the firſt place, let us attempt to prove that the apoſtolical Fathers did not hold the mere humanity of Chriſt.

An opinion very unfavourable to their writings will be formed, if we do not ſo far attend to the particular object of their admonitions, as to place ourſelves in that ſituation from which we can clearly aſcertain their grand ſcope. To him who is not converſant with the hiſtory of the church, and the particular incidents which gave riſe to the epiſtles written by the apoſtolical Fathers, many points may appear to have been ſlightly diſcuſſed, or partially repreſented, which in fact form only the ſubordinate or incidental parts of their deſign. When the infant church was aſſailed by open enemies, and internal diſſentions, her teachers expatiated on the duties of charity, unanimity and ſubordination. We muſt not expect to find in their works any doctrinal points, introduced with ſyſtematic arrangements, or defined with logical preciſion. The primitive compoſitions were ſuited to the circumſtances of the times, and whatever topick was introduced in them, had an immediate reference to the urgent exigencies of the church. In oppoſition to the hereſies of the Gnoſtics and the Ebionites, the great articles of

of faith are ſtated in general terms, not as matters of private opinion, but as ſubjects of received belief. No ingenuity is employed to recommend them, and no arguments are brought for their ſupport, except the clear declarations of ſcripture, which were held to be deciſive and irrefragable. The apoſtolical manner of writing, which is remarkable for plainneſs and energy, and free from philoſophical ſubtlety, or nice refinement, is happily imitated in the literary remains of the apoſtolical Fathers. The unaffected ſimplicity and earneſtneſs of Clement, of Ignatius, and of Polycarp, are very cloſe imitations of St. John and of St. Paul.

The Author of the Early Opinions concerning Chriſt firſt appeals to the authority of theſe writings, then refuſes to acquieſce in the plaineſt ſenſe of paſſages which preſs him with inſuperable difficulties, and afterwards affirms that they are greatly corrupted or entirely ſpurious. This inconſiſtency of ſentiment diſcovers ſtrong indications of diſtruſt in his cauſe, and of doubts in what manner it can be tolerably ſupported. Such an attempt to ſhake the authenticity of theſe writings reſults from a conviction how much, when fairly and fully conſulted, they can prove againſt him.

We are authorized by the moſt learned men of various ages to affirm their genuineneſs, and think the argument in favour of our creed, which may be drawn from the opinion of the firſt and ſecond centuries, too valuable and important to be ſacrificed to hypotheſis without ſolidity, and aſſertion without proof.

The earlieſt, and one of the moſt authentic monuments of eccleſiaſtical antiquity, is the epiſtle ſent by the church of Rome to the church of Corinth, many years before the end of the firſt century. It was written by Clement, Biſhop of Rome, who is numbered by St. Paul among his "fellow labourers," and this epiſtle fully ſhows how deſerving he was to be placed in ſo diſtinguiſhed a rank. The deſign of it was to compoſe a recent diſſenſion, and recommend the reeſtabliſhment of harmony and ſubordination. Now granting for a moment what has been aſſerted, that this epiſtle contains not the doctrine of the Preexiſtence of Chriſt, can it follow from thence that the writer did not maintain it? It was the profeſſed deſign of Clement to write for a particular emergency, and the epiſtle itſelf is not complete. How, therefore, can any concluſion be drawn with reſpect to his ſentiments at large? It is well known that Cyprian, the eloquent

eloquent and pious Biſhop of Carthage, wrote an epiſtle to Antonianus equal in length to the epiſtle of Clement, in which no expreſs mention is made of the divinity of our Lord. If this epiſtle had alone eſcaped the ravages of time, the moſt flagrant injury would have been done to the memory of Cyprian, by a ſuppoſition that he did not maintain this doctrine, when he is well known to have been its moſt zealous advocate. Equally unwarrantable would ſuch a concluſion prove againſt Clemens Romanus. If however the train of his argument, and his expreſs declarations be conſidered, the objector will find that he has no grounds to preſume upon his ſilence. For as a motive to induce the Corinthians to behave with humility, Clement affirms, that "the "ſceptre of the Majeſty of God came not in "the pomp of oſtentation and ſplendour, "though he had it in his power; but in hu-"mility, as the Holy Spirit propheſied con-"cerning him." To infer from theſe expreſſions that it was the deſign of the writer to repreſent our Saviour as a mere man, ſeems an extraordinary perverſion both of language and ſenſe. For if our Saviour was no more than man, how could he with any propriety be entitled to the grand and dignified appellation of the "ſceptre of the Majeſty of God?" and

thus be diſtinguiſhed by a far more eminent title than is ever applied to the prophets who communicated the divine will on earth, or to the higheſt order of angelic beings who execute it in heaven? That his coming "in the "pomp of oſtentation and ſplendour" cannot refer to his publick life alone, but muſt neceſſarily be applicable to his incarnation in general, is ſufficiently evident from the following conſideration. Clement limits his expreſſions to no particular period of our Lord's exiſtence, but ſpeaks in general terms; and in the prophecy of Iſaiah which follows the before mentioned words, his birth is alluded to in the emphatic queſtion, "who ſhall declare "his generation?" If his coming referred only to his working miracles in the capacity of a publick teacher, how could he, who was reſtrained by a commiſſion given to him for that purpoſe alone, be ſaid to have it in his power to aſſume ſuch a character of magnificence and ſplendour as was moſt agreeable to his own inclinations? We are at a loſs for an example to reconcile the paſſage to ſuch a ſuppoſition. Moſes, the greateſt of mortal prophets, had no ſuch privileges; at the command of the Lord he lifted up his rod, and the ſea divided to form a path for the children of Iſrael; but can it be aſſerted with the leaſt

ſhow

ſhow of probability, that he was able to lead them into the land of promiſe? Accordingly, we find that thoſe privileges which exceeded the powers of his commiſſion were neither claimed by himſelf, nor attributed to him by others. The whole paſſage of Clement exactly repreſents the ſenſe of St. Paul's declaration, that *Chriſt being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himſelf of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a ſervant.* As if there was ſome eſſential difference of nature which placed the diſciples infinitely beneath their Maſter, Chriſt is not mentioned ſo much as the direct example for them to follow, as an incitement to the emulation of their fellow-creatures. For Clement proceeds to mention thoſe whoſe conduct came more within the reach of their exertions. "If the Lord ſo "humbled himſelf, what ſhall we do who "are come under the yoke of his grace? Let "us follow thoſe who predicted his advent."

At the commencement of the ſecond century, Ignatius the venerable Biſhop of Antioch, who had been a companion and diſciple of the apoſtles, was conveyed to Rome to ſuffer death for having profeſſed the faith of Chriſt. During his journey, he wrote epiſtles

to

to various churches. To give the precepts of chriſtianity their full weight and importance, by ſhewing the tranſcendent dignity of their Author, he enlarges upon the divinity of our Lord, and to prevent any miſconception reſpecting the perſon whom he deſigns to characterize, he uſes the moſt remarkable preciſion of language. The title of *the Lord* is invariably given both by Ignatius and Polycarp to the Son of God. There is not a ſingle paſſage throughout their epiſtles in which it ſeems with any propriety of application to denominate God the Father. This appropriation however, is by no means ſingular, for the ſame may be aſſerted of the two epiſtles of St. Paul to the Theſſalonians. The writers of the new teſtament frequently apply this term to Chriſt, and in the verſion of the Septuagint it is invariably uſed as an equivalent tranſlation of the Hebrew Jehovah. We are moreover authorized by the teſtimony of many of the antients to ſay, that it was frequently applied even by the Pagans to the ſupreme God.

The objection which is made to the epiſtles of Ignatius by *the Author of the early opinions*, becauſe Euſebius does not mention his name amongſt other authorities for the divinity of Chriſt, will be found on examination to have

no

no weight. Euſebius, when quoting the following words of an antient writer who proves the late origin of the hereſy of Artemon, mentions a few out of many writers, who profeſſed the doctrine of the church. "What "Artemon aſſerts of the mere humanity of "Chriſt would be credible, if the divine "ſcriptures did not contradict him; as well "as the antient works of the brethren, writ-"ten in defence of the truth againſt the He-"reticks, and the Gentiles. We may appeal "to Juſtin, Tatian, and Clement, by whom "Chriſt is deſcribed as God. Who is unac-"quainted with the volumes of Irenæus, "Melito, and other eccleſiaſtical writers, by "whom Chriſt is aſſerted to be both God "and Man? The pſalms likewiſe, and hymns "of the church written at the beginning by "the faithful, celebrate Chriſt the word of "God, and apply to him the attributes of "divinity." If in this full and deciſive paſſage, which is ſufficient of itſelf to annihilate the pretenſions of unitarianiſm to high antiquity, any reſtrictions had been made, and the writer had affirmed that the perſons mentioned, compoſed the whole number of the orthodox writers, the objection would carry great weight; but on the contrary, the expreſſions are ſo general, as to comprize many

more than are individually named, and conſequently Ignatius may be included among the reſt. It was not the deſign of Euſebius to enumerate every writer, any more than to ſpecify the compoſers of the ancient hymns. This indeed is evident from no notice being taken of Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Tertullian, who are well known to have been advocates for the doctrine in queſtion. Conſequently, if Ignatius be excluded becauſe he held not the doctrine, they are excluded for the ſame reaſon, which reduces the objection to a manifeſt abſurdity.

In the ſmaller epiſtles of Ignatius, which are proved to be genuine by many eminent ſcholars of the laſt and preſent century, the divinity of Chriſt is aſſerted and proved in ſuch a manner as was beſt calculated to confute the errours which then began to ariſe. The Epheſians are commended for their diligence, and the motives which had inſtigated them to the performance of their duty. "They were fol-" lowers of God, and excited themſelves by the " blood of God." They are cautioned againſt the impiety of thoſe who made chriſtianity a veil for licentiouſneſs, whilſt their preſumption prompted them to attempt the removal of the failings of others. As an antidote againſt theſe

pretended curers of mental diſorders, he directs them to "one phyſician carnal and ſpiritual, God incarnate, begotten and not made, true life in death, of Mary and of God, firſt paſſible, and then impaſſible."

To ſilence the cavils of the proud, who were offended at the ignominious death of our Lord, he ſtates the pre-eminence of his divine, above his human nature: "Jeſus Chriſt our God was born of Mary, according to the diſpenſation of God, of the family of David, of the Holy Ghoſt." He ſays alſo, that to remove the univerſal darkneſs of the Pagan world, "God became manifeſt in a human form, for the newneſs of eternal life." In order to encourage a diligent attendance on divine ſervice, and to repreſent the importance of the miniſterial offices, he reminds them of Jeſus Chriſt according "to the fleſh of the race of David, the Son of Man, and the Son of God, who was with the Father before all ages, and who finally was made manifeſt." He declares the prophets to have been inſpired, to convince the world of the omniſcience of that Being, "who manifeſted himſelf by Jeſus Chriſt his Son, and his eternal Word; who in all things pleaſed him that ſent him." Convinced of the vanity

nity and wickedneſs of the world, he looks with the eye of faith to heaven, "where our "God, Jeſus Chriſt, being in the Father ap- "peareth the more." Hence likewiſe ariſes his fervent deſire to gain admittance to his Lord and Maſter, by a ſignal trial of his conſtancy, for which reaſon he intreats the Roman converts to make no interceſſion for his life, but to "permit him to imitate the paſſion of his God." Addreſſing the Smyrneans, he makes their ſpiritual improvement a ſubject of pious gratitude. "I glorify Jeſus Chriſt, the God who hath "given you ſuch wiſdom, who really was born "of the race of David, according to the fleſh, "the Son of God. He did eat and drink with "his apoſtles, although ſpiritually united with "the Father. He ſuffered truly, as he alſo "truly raiſed up himſelf." He holds out the future judgment to Polycarp, as a motive to perſeverance in the faith, and concludes his admonitions "with wiſhing him to be well "continually in our God, Jeſus Chriſt. Ex- "pect him who is above all time, eternal, in- "viſible, though for our ſakes made viſible; "he was impalpable and impaſſible, yet for "our ſakes he became ſubject to ſufferings."

If Polycarp, the eminent diſciple of St. John, and the venerable Biſhop of Smyrna, had, in his

his epiſtle to the Philippians, confined his exhortations to the duties of morality alone, ſufficient reaſons might have been diſcovered, to juſtify his ſilence upon points of doctrine. He refers the chriſtian converts to the epiſtle not long before written to them by St. Paul, of whoſe zeal in preaching the goſpel, he makes the moſt honourable mention. He likewiſe aſſerts the ſufficiency of that epiſtle, to edify them in the true faith. As the Philippians, therefore, were ſo well grounded in the doctrine of the proper divinity of Chriſt, there was the leſs neceſſity for Polycarp to expatiate upon it. We may however diſcover the moſt plain traces of this doctrine, concerning which St. Paul had expreſſed himſelf with ſo much preciſion and copiouſneſs. For example, Polycarp exhorts the Philippians "to believe in him "who raiſed our Lord Jeſus Chriſt from the "dead, and gave him glory, and a throne at "his right hand: to whom all things celeſtial "and terreſtrial are ſubject, whom every ſpirit "ſerveth, who is coming as Judge of the living "and dead; whoſe blood God will require of "every one who believes not in him." He declares that "Chriſt has promiſed to raiſe us "from the dead." That the faithful ought "to be ſubject to the church, as unto God "and Chriſt." Again he ſays, "if we entreat

"the

" the Lord to forgive us, we ought alſo to
" forgive: for we are before the eyes of the
" Lord and God, and muſt all ſtand before
" the tribunal of Chriſt: let us therefore ſerve
" him in fear and reverence, as he himſelf
" hath commanded, and the apoſtles who
" preached the goſpel to us, and the prophets
" who foretold the advent of our Lord. If
" we ſuffer for his name, let us glorify him."
In ſhort, he concludes his epiſtle with praying
" that the God and Father of our Lord Jeſus
" Chriſt, and he himſelf our everlaſting High
" Prieſt, the Son of God Jeſus Chriſt, would
" build them up in faith and truth."

No doubt can ariſe as to the intention of Polycarp to attribute the ſubjection of the univerſe to Jeſus Chriſt; the obvious ſenſe and regular order of conſtruction will be outrageouſly violated by any other interpretation of the firſt paſſage above adduced, for the different members of the ſentence are reſpectively correlative to the ſame perſon, and that perſon is Chriſt. That ſuch is the true ſenſe, may moreover be collected from the application which the learned and accurate Author of the credibility of the Goſpel Hiſtory makes of this paſſage, as a parallel text to the celebrated declaration of St. Paul, that *at the name of Chriſt*

Chriſt every knee ſhould bow." Polycarp aſſerts that the Omnipotence of Chriſt will be exerciſed by the reſurrection of the dead, and that the church is ſubject in the ſame manner to the Son as to the Father. Admitting the juſtneſs of our remark, that the appellation of *the Lord* invariably refers to our Saviour in this epiſtle, it is plain likewiſe that he is conſidered not only as the object of prayer, but as the forgiver of injuries. His Omnipreſence is aſſerted to be the ſame as that of the Father, and from thence ariſes an exhortation to reverence and fear him. When he is denominated the *eternal High Prieſt*, his prieſthood ſeems to characterize him as human, and his eternity as divine. The former typically expreſſes his character as mediator and redeemer, and the latter alludes to the attributes, which are common to him with the Father. That ſuch were the ideas of Polycarp will be more fully ſhown from conſidering the cloſe of his animated prayer previous to his martyrdom. " I praiſe and glorify thee " through the eternal High Prieſt Jeſus Chriſt, " thy beloved and bleſſed Son, through whom " to thee, with Him, in the Holy Spirit, be " glory now and for ever."

We now proceed to ſhow, in the Second place, that Juſtin Martyr did not corrupt the purity of the faith by adopting the Logos of Plato.

As far as the features of an author's mind are viſible in his works, it is evident that ſincerity and candour were diſtinguiſhing characteriſtics of Juſtin Martyr. He ſeems on every topick to expreſs his unpremeditated thoughts, in a ſimple and inartificial manner, and to be influenced by a natural ingenuouſneſs, which was ſuperiour to duplicity and evaſion. His ardour in the purſuit of truth, and his alacrity in its profeſſion, will appear in the moſt ſtriking point of view, when we recollect, that the ſincerity of his converſion was brought to the ſevereſt trial, ſince his courageous avowal of the faith was the glorious cauſe of his martyrdom.

After attempting without effect to ſatisfy his curioſity, by exploring the tenets of the Grecian ſages, he proceeded to examine the evidences of revelation, and diſcovered that the chriſtian religion was the only ſafe and excellent philoſophy. He was far from retaining any invincible prejudices in favour of

his former ſtudies, or of being blindly attached to the opinions of Plato. He deliberately weighed the merits of the great founder of the academy, and with a calm and unbiaſſed mind expoſed his contradictions of other philoſophers, and his inconſiſtency with himſelf. Juſtin Martyr expreſsly declared, that "as "Ariſtotle and Plato differed ſo much in ex- "plaining the nature of earthly things, they "are not worthy of credit, when they diſ- "courſe concerning the inviſible world." "If "any one ſhould accurately inſpect the opinions "of Plato, his opinions will be found to be "repugnant to each other; on which account "he cannot eſcape the cenſure of deliberate "falſhood."

Juſtin Martyr moreover repreſents that the conduct of Plato, on his return to Athens from his travels into Egypt, expoſed him to the imputation of duplicity and diſſimulation. For apprehenſive of falling a victim to the popular clamour, which had cauſed the death of Socrates, he profeſſed a "belief in a plu- "rality of Gods, though contrary to the evi- "dence of his firſt principles. Therefore "ſince nothing true can be derived from ſuch "teachers concerning the real nature of God, "it remains that we liſten to the inſpired

" prophets who lived long before the philoſo-
" phers of Greece, and taught nothing from
" their own imagination, but received con-
" ſiſtent and harmonious inſtructions from on
" high. For it is impoſſible that their pre-
" dictions ſhould be the reſult of human in-
" genuity, or be imparted merely by the light
" of nature. In ſublime ſubjects the philoſo-
" phers have no accurate knowledge. What-
" ever is well expreſſed in all reſpects, belongs
" to the diſciples of Chriſt.—We do not think
" the ſame as others; but all others, being de-
" ſirous to reſemble us, aſſert our doctrines."

From this, and a variety of ſimilar paſſages, it is plain that Juſtin's acknowledgment of the excellence of chriſtianity, amounts to a deliberate renunciation of his former philoſophical opinions, relative to the nature of God; and that the force of divine truth had ſo influenced his mind, and corrected his judgment, that he ſaw the defects of Plato in the ſtrongeſt light, and expoſed them to cenſure without reſerve.

Still however we are ready to confeſs that the Platonic philoſophy had many great though ſubordinate claims to his attention. It conveyed ſuch ſublime notions of the Deity, in compariſon

compariſon of all other ſyſtems, that he thought it could not be the production of human ſagacity and invention. He therefore attributed its excellence to the light afforded by the Old Teſtament. The travels of Plato, which extended to Babylon as well as into Egypt, favoured the ſuppoſition that he had conſulted the ſacred volume. From this ſource Juſtin Martyr imagined that the philoſopher had borrowed his moſt ſublime ſpeculations, and more particularly the doctrine of the chriſtian Trinity. He continually reaſons upon this ſuppoſition, and from thence deduces all thoſe conſtructions of the Platonic writings, and accommodations of them to ſcripture, which, to a mind uninfluenced by the ſame bias, muſt neceſſarily appear forced and unnatural. In his exhortation addreſſed to the Greeks, and his apologies dedicated to the Emperours, which form the moſt conſiderable part of his remaining works, he recommends the prophecies as an introduction to chriſtianity. He endeavours to prove that the philoſophy, of which the Greeks and Romans were ſuch ardent admirers, was indebted for all its excellence to the ſacred books of the Jews. "Plato derived from Moſes that pe-
"culiar name of the deity, which ſo ſtrongly
"indicates his ſelf-exiſtence and eternity. His

" doctrine reſpecting the divine ideas was bor-
" rowed from the commands of the Almighty
" to Moſes, who was commiſſioned to con-
" ſtruct the ark of the covenant correſpondent
" with the archetype, which was ſhown to
" him on the mountain. By the prophets he
" was inſtructed to give the ſublime deſcrip-
" tion of Jupiter, when he drove his winged
" chariot through heaven, for he had read
" that the glory of the Lord went forth upon
" the cherubim, and the cherubim lifted up
" their wings, and the glory of the Lord was
" upon them."

From a proper attention to theſe paſſages, it is evident that the writings of Juſtin Martyr have been groſsly miſconceived, or unfairly miſrepreſented; and the reverſe of what has been confidently aſſerted will be found to be the true ſtate of the caſe. It was not his object to accommodate the ſcriptures to Plato, but to accommodate the writings of Plato to the ſcriptures. With reſpect to the articles of his chriſtian belief, he ſtates fundamental doctrines in clear and direct terms, as he received them by the tradition of the church, and as he collected them from the ſaced books.

We

We are now advanced to the moſt critical point of the argument. That Juſtin Martyr endeavoured to bend the tenets of the academy to the principles of chriſtianity, we are ready to affirm. That he corrupted the chriſtian faith by the introduction of Platonic ideas, we are inclined moſt confidently and moſt unequivocally to deny. We cannot fail in this ſtage of the diſquiſition to remark the evaſion to which *the Author of the early opinions* has recourſe. He is aware that the cloſe examination of the genuine principles of the academy will produce the ſubverſion of his hypotheſis; for in what part of the works of Plato is the ſlighteſt mention made of the perſonification of a Logos? And therefore he ſuddenly changes the ground of conteſt. After fatiguing our attention with a deſign to delude our judgment by an oſtentatious parade of the ſentiments of Plato, and his followers; after raiſing our expectations, to ſuppoſe that Juſtin Martyr will be detected in ingrafting Platoniſm upon Chriſtianity, he inſinuates that he adopted the Logos from Philo, who improved upon the principles of Plato. So that from the conceſſions of the author himſelf, Juſtin Martyr is proved to have been a Platoniſt in name only, and with equal reaſon might be denominated a Pagan, becauſe previous to

his converſion, he had conformed to the popular ſuperſtitions of his country.

Let us not be deterred by the evaſion of the enemy, from purſuing him in his retreat, and examining whether the poſt, to which he flies, be more tenable than that which he has ſagaciouſly quitted.

Philo, an eminent Jew of Alexandria, who flouriſhed in the time of the apoſtles, in different parts of his works makes uſe of the word Logos, to which he affixes various ſenſes. Sometimes it denotes the mind of God, ſometimes the inviſible world, according to the pattern of which, the viſible world was made, and in other places only wiſdom, an attribute of the deity. When it is uſed to ſignify an emanation of the divine mind, it is deſcribed as an effect not permanent but occaſional. In its higheſt ſenſe, the Logos is the moſt antient Angel, the perfect Image of God, who revealed to Abraham the divine will.

However probable it may be that Philo derived ſome of thoſe ideas annexed to the Logos from Plato, he could not borrow from him the application of it to a Perſon. His deſcriptions therefore of the divine Being, whom he inveſts

inveſts with ſuch lofty attributes, muſt be derived from ſome other ſources, which will be found not to be remote from our obſervation. In the pentateuch and the prophets, whoſe ſenſe Philo laboured to refine by allegory, ſeveral paſſages occur, which obſcurely intimate the agency of the divine Word in the creation of the world, and in many ſubſequent diſpenſations. In the pſalms, the Son of God is more clearly revealed, in terms expreſſive of the higheſt dignity and exaltation. According to the gloſſes of the antient Rabbinical writers, this was the Son of God, who was of the ſame ſubſtance with the Father, and who exiſted from all eternity. So that as from them the elevated deſcriptions of Philo are undoubtedly derived; vain and ineffectual is the ſearch for that doctrine among the ſchools of Greece, which the ſchools of Greece never taught.

A tradition has prevailed in the church from a remote period, that St. Peter was preaching the goſpel at Rome, during the time that Philo reſided there in the quality of ambaſſadour to the Emperour Caligula. He contracted an intimate acquaintance with the great apoſtle, and from the high eſteem which he entertained for the ſanctity of his manners, was induced to make honourable mention of the

the diſciples of St. Mark, who were at that time educated in the celebrated ſchool of Alexandria. It is not improbable that his intercourſe with the chriſtians might enlarge his ideas upon the ſubject in queſtion, and raiſe his mind to a more adequate conception of the nature and attributes of the chriſtian Logos.

But of any adoption of the ſentiments or approbation of the principles of Philo by Juſtin Martyr, where is the poſitive proof? In his authentic works, where is he even once mentioned? If however we grant for the ſake of argument, that all the writings of Philo were as well known to Juſtin Martyr, as the *Author of the early opinions* may be willing to ſuppoſe, is it probable that his ſentiments, merely as ſuch, would have been implicitly embraced? Philo was a Jew, who had frequent opportunities of being converted to chriſtianity, yet he reſiſted or ſlighted its evidences. His attachment to the law of Moſes was ſo firm, that he laboured to eſtabliſh its authority and give it the moſt refined interpretation. Thus tenacious of his religion, he held out no inducements to the chriſtians to adopt his opinions. Whatever elevation of character he attributed to the divine Logos, he

he never ſpoke of him as the promiſed and expected Meſſiah. However converſant he might be with the predictions of the inſpired prophets, and animated by their deſcriptions, he is altogether ſilent as to the Redeemer of Iſrael. The Fathers muſt clearly have perceived, that all his forced refinements and airy ſpeculations were built upon the Old Teſtament. What therefore could induce them to borrow from the commentary, when they were in poſſeſſion of the text? Why ſhould they imitate an unſkilful copy, when they poſſeſſed the bright and maſterly original? They had Moſes and the prophets to announce the future kingdom of the Son of God, and gradually to unfold his power and glory; they had the evangeliſts and the apoſtles, who jointly recorded his advent, fully developed his character, and clearly diſplayed his attributes.

If Juſtin Martyr had corrupted the doctrines of chriſtianity, how comes it to paſs that all the contemporary chriſtians, all the Fathers who were not educated in the ſchools of Plato, have paſſed over ſo ſtriking an event in ſilence? We muſt conclude that the members of every church were groſsly ignorant, or culpably indifferent; that they knew not the meaning of the ſacred names of Father, Son, and

and Holy Spirit, which they conſtantly repeated, and continually employed in all the publick and private acts of devotion. We muſt ſuppoſe that all the biſhops and paſtors, who have given ſuch numerous proofs of their defence of the truth againſt the incroachment of every innovation, were plunged in the moſt profound lethargy, or abandoned to the moſt culpable indifference. We muſt ſuppoſe, moreover, that the authority of Juſtin extended over the whole chriſtian church, and that it unanimouſly obeyed his call to embrace a new faith. We muſt ſuppoſe that the peaceful philoſopher of Paleſtine, produced the conſequences without purſuing the meaſures of the bloody prophet of Arabia, and effected that revolution of opinion without the aid of the ſword, which the ſword itſelf, deſtructive as it was in the hand of Mahomet, could never fully accompliſh.

If Juſtin Martyr had been guilty of the charge of corrupting the primitive faith, the ſame rigorous ſentence would have been pronounced againſt him, which was directed againſt Cerinthus, Marcion, Baſilides, Paulus of Samoſata, and other hereſiarchs of the early ages. As ſoon as they began to diſſeminate their tenets, they were cut off from the communion of

of the faithful, and their errours were combated by the united powers of ſcripture and reaſon. If the diſciple Tatian, notwithſtanding his learning and acuteneſs, was enrolled in the heretical regiſter, for what reaſon was his maſter forgiven for a fault, which in the opinion of the church, the moſt ſplendid powers of genius, the greateſt acquiſitions of knowledge, the warmeſt profeſſions of zeal, and even martyrdom itſelf could not expiate.

To this argument Irenæus adds the moſt ſatisfactory confirmation, when he refutes the Valentinians. When they affirm that all objects of ſenſe are only the "images of thoſe "things which really exiſt, they only repeat "the ſentiments of Plato. They transform "his ideas into Eons, and make them the "creators of the archetypal world, which "that philoſopher invented. This opinion, "together with the corruption and depravity "of Marcion and Saturninus, was embraced "by Tatian, who after the death of his maſ-"ter was ſo elated with a vain conſciouſneſs "of his ſuperiour attainments, that he laid "the foundation of a new ſect."

From a complete ſurvey of the ſuppoſed Platoniſm of Juſtin Martyr in all the various points

points of view from which it can fairly be ſeen, it appears evidently not to affect in the ſmalleſt degree the value of the teſtimony, which he bears to the faith. His avowed ſentiments, as well as his general character, equally militate againſt the accuſation. The tenets of Plato, as far as they can clearly be aſcertained, bear only a diſtant and faint reſemblance to the chriſtian doctrines. It does not appear that Juſtin was acquainted with the works of Philo, and if he was, they were not of ſufficient importance in compariſon with the ſcriptures for him to borrow from them. To aſſert therefore, that he had recourſe to theſe authors to aſſiſt him in the alteration of his creed, is a groundleſs aſſumption, alike deſtitute of all probability and of ſatisfactory evidence.

In the Third place, we proceed to prove, that the Paſtors of the church did not maintain a corrupt faith, whilſt the other chriſtians continued to be Unitarians.

That the great body of chriſtians in the primitive times maintained a belief, relative to the nature of Chriſt, which was contrary to that of their teachers, ſeems as highly improbable in itſelf, as it is incapable of proof from fair

fair and full authorities. It is highly improbable in itſelf, becauſe every one of thoſe teachers who wrote as well as diſcourſed on the articles of the faith is thus made an artful innovator, and muſt have endeavoured to work upon the credulity of the world by repreſenting what were merely the corrupt perverſions of his own mind, inſtead of the genuine doctrines of the church. Such conduct ſtands expoſed to the complicated imputation of matchleſs effrontery, profound hypocriſy, and deliberate falſhood; and is replete with all that can ſully the reputation, and undermine the credit of a man and a chriſtian. But ſo totally repugnant are ſuch injurious ſuſpicions to the general character and conduct of the eccleſiaſtical writers, to their proteſtations and ſincerity, to their integrity and piety, to their fear of God, and their charity to man, that the candid and the judicious will be diſpoſed to diſmiſs without examination, any hypotheſis which is ſupported upon ſuch diſingenuous inſinuations.

The vindication of Juſtin Martyr from the charges juſt confuted more particularly tends to ſubvert this aſſertion; for if he was not inſtrumental to the corruption of the faith, the pretended diverſity is attributed to no oſtenſible

oſtenſible author, and derived from no acknowledged ſource. As however direct proof will corroborate the preceding obſervations, we will endeavour to ſtate a few paſſages ſelected from a conſiderable number, which ſtrongly, directly, and unequivocally ſupport them. Juſtin Martyr in his firſt apology endeavours to reconcile the faith inculcated in the ſcriptures to thoſe who were attached to the popular philoſophy, by ſhowing that Plato derived ſome of his principles from the books of Moſes. "We do not," ſays he, "therefore, "derive the opinions which we maintain from "others, but all others derive them from us. "Among chriſtians, you may hear and learn "theſe things, even from thoſe who are un-"acquainted with the firſt principles of learn-"ing, who are vulgar and untutored in ſpeech, "but wiſe and faithful in mind; from the in-"firm, and thoſe who are deprived of ſight; "ſo that you may be ſenſible, that theſe "things were not the production of human "ingenuity, but were declared in the power "of God."

This remarkable proof of the reception of the chriſtian creed among all ranks has been miſrepreſented by *the Author of the early opinions*, but it is too clear to be miſunderſtood.

The

The previous obſervations on the Moſaical hiſtory of the creation, do not conſtitute the main argument, but is merely an incidental circumſtance of it. It is not the point in debate, but a ſubject of illuſtration introduced to reconcile the heathens to that faith which the viſionary ſyſtem of Marcion was deſigned to ſubvert. Juſtin Martyr therefore clearly deſigned to repreſent how much the moſt illiterate of the chriſtians ſurpaſſed the moſt learned of the philoſophers. To ſay that they ſurpaſſed the philoſophers, by poſſeſſing the Moſaical account of the creation, is no proof of their ſuperiority, for it was a general opinion of the primitive church that Plato himſelf derived his principles from the pentateuch, and the prophetical writings. But to affirm that they had full evidence of the ſublime doctrines of chriſtianity, which had eluded the diſcovery of unenlightened wiſdom, is a declaration of ſuperiority which is alike conſiſtent with the context, and with the reality of the fact itſelf.

Not long before the cloſe of the ſecond century, Irenæus deſcribes the actual ſtate of the faith at that time, and in a full and ſatisfactory paſſage expatiates on the unity of its principles, and the univerſality of its extent.

" The Church, although diſperſed throughout " the world, having heard the preaching of " the apoſtles, and embraced their belief, pre- " ſerves it with the ſame diligence as if her " members compoſed only one family. This " it unanimouſly preaches and delivers as with " one mouth. The languages of man are di- " verſe, but the power of the tradition is one " and the ſame. As there is only a ſingle ſun " to illuminate the world, ſo the goſpel ap- " pears in all places, and enlightens thoſe who " are willing to come to the knowledge of the " truth. For neither do the churches planted " in Germany believe or deliver any other, " nor thoſe that are in Spain, in Gaul, in the " Eaſt, in Egypt, in Libya, or in Judæa. " Nor do any of thoſe who preſide in the " congregations, whatever be his eloquence. " profeſs a different creed; nor will any one " who is unlearned detract from this tra- " dition."

The whole controverſy might fairly be ſet- tled by an appeal to the cloſe of this memo- rable paſſage. Irenæus, as if aware that ſome inſinuations might be thrown out of a diver- ſity of opinion in the church, diſcriminates between the members who compoſed it with reſpect to their ſituation and talents, and de-

clares that however they differed in ſuch reſpects, their principles of faith were ſtill the ſame. This is a teſtimony in favour of the early belief which cannot be evaded, and among all the proofs which antiquity can furniſh, is one of the moſt convincing and irrefragable.

About twenty years after the time of Irenæus, Tertullian makes a ſimilar reference to the general belief, in order to point out a clear diſtinction between the novelty of hereſy, and the antiquity of the genuine faith. "The "doctrines which are generally preached, that "is what Chriſt has revealed, can by no other "means be proved than by the churches "founded by the apoſtles, and either edified "by their perſonal or written inſtructions. It "is evident therefore that all doctrine which "agrees with thoſe apoſtolical churches is "conſiſtent with truth. So that without "doubt, that muſt be embraced which the "chriſtians have received from the apoſtles, "the apoſtles from Chriſt, and Chriſt from "God."

In order to render Tertullian conſiſtent with himſelf, it is neceſſary to advert to his obſervations in another part of his works. The Author of the early Opinions has given

ſuch a colour to a paſſage extracted from the treatiſe againſt Praxeas, as to make the mere humanity of Chriſt appear to have been the belief of the great body of the chriſtians who lived in the ſecond century. A careful examination of the ſubject at large, will free Tertullian from a palpable miſrepreſentation, and ſhow that the paſſage in queſtion is ſo far from being capable of the ſenſe alledged, that it proves a point which is directly the reverſe; ſince the perſons who are aſſerted to have held the mere humanity, were advocates in the higheſt ſenſe for the divinity of Chriſt. Praxeas maintained that Jeſus Chriſt was no other than the ſupreme God, that he was born of the Virgin, and that he actually ſuffered death upon the croſs. This errour, which its author had carefully diſſeminated during his journey from Aſia to Rome, is combated by Tertullian with metaphyſical ſubtlety of argument, and manly vehemence of declamation. Deſirous of giving a juſt idea of the capacity and talents of the advocates of Praxeas, he obſerves, that they were perſons of that plain underſtanding, which uſually characterized the majority of believers, who might, without any great impropriety of language, be called dull and ſenſeleſs. Such men, he obſerves, when firſt weaned from the errours

of Polytheiſm, and converted to the belief of God, expreſſed ſome reluctance againſt the myſtery of the Trinity. Praxeas took advantage of this diſpoſition of the common people, to inculcate his erroneous tenets. His diſciples boaſting that they only were the worſhippers of one God, accuſed the orthodox believers of Tritheiſm. Such was their weakneſs as not to diſcern that by confounding the perſons of the Deity, and making Jeſus Chriſt the ſole God, they ran into a palpable errour, and that the creed of the church properly explained, was the true faith. The Latin converts of Praxeas, whom he had made in Italy, and the Greek whom he had made in Aſia, repeated the terms of theology which he perverted, with as much clamour and vehemence, as if they clearly underſtood, and properly maintained them.

By thus taking an enlarged view of the meaning of Tertullian, the paſſage is reſtored to its original ſignification. As tranſlated by *the Author of the early Opinions* it is an inſtance of invalid proof. In his verſion he omits a complete ſentence of the text of Tertullian, which is of great importance to the general ſenſe of the paſſage, becauſe it explains in what an erroneous ſenſe the divine unity was held by thoſe, who in the time of

Tertullian miſtated the catholick faith. This omiſſion rendered it an eaſy taſk to turn the general purport of the argument out of its natural courſe, and to throw an air of plauſibility over a weak opinion. By cutting off this paſſage from his liſt of proofs, the author is deprived of his fundamental ſupport; for of all the antient evidences which he preſſes into his ſervice, there is no one which he exhibits with more oſtentation, which he decorates with greater parade of argument, or which he introduces with greater confidence of ſucceſs. The chriſtians mentioned by Tertullian as the followers of Praxeas were as remarkable for their deviation from the opinion of the modern unitarian, as from the true faith of the church; unleſs the modern unitarian will reverſe his creed, and maintain him to be God whom he labours to prove to have been mere man. If he thus becomes the diſciple of Praxeas, he muſt be combated with the weapons with which Praxeas was defeated, and the treatiſe of Tertullian inſtead of furniſhing him with armour againſt the church, will become the inſtrument of his deſtruction.

All the authorities which have been conſidered, form a chain of evidence, including a period of more than ſixty years, which is ſtrong

ſtrong and cloſely connected. The declarations ſtated are ſtrictly and undeniably to the purpoſe. For it is very particularly to be obſerved, that the Fathers are not ſpeaking of any points of chriſtianity independent of the faith. They are not diſcourſing on the prevalence of the chriſtian morality, or the eſtabliſhment of its poſitive inſtitutions, but on the unanimous conſent of the catholick church in their belief in the proper divinity of the Son of God, as conſtituting one of the fundamental principles of their religion.

Fortunately for the determination of the preſent queſtion, we are not obliged to confine our inquiries to the church alone for evidence of its primitive belief. Although the prophane writers ſurveyed chriſtianity with a ſuperficial eye, ſome ſcattered notices of its principles may be collected from their works, which however general, are very important. Contemporary with Ignatius was the learned and accompliſhed Pliny. He found as ſoon as he entered upon the proconſulſhip of Bythinia, that chriſtianity had prevailed among all ranks of its inhabitants. He was officially informed of the grand object of their religious ſolemnities, as well as of their inſtitutions and manners. " They met on ſtated days before the

" dawn, and ſang choral hymns to Chriſt as " a God."

Contemporary with Juſtin Martyr was Lucian the Syrian. In his hiſtory of the death of Peregrinus he obſerves, " that the chriſtians " deſpiſe all things, and even death itſelf, in " hopes of immortality. For their firſt Legiſ- " lator made them believe they were all bre- " thren. They adore their crucified Saviour, " and live according to the laws of their own " religion."

In the dialogue entitled Philopatris, which is aſcribed to Lucian, there is a paſſage which more fully expreſſes the faith of the chriſtians of that age. It was the evident deſign of the writer to ridicule the catholick doctrines. The characters introduced as converſing are a chriſtian and a heathen. The former propoſes to the latter, that inſtead of invoking Jupiter, he ſhould ſupplicate " the moſt High God, the " Son of the Father, and the Spirit proceeding " from the Father." The heathen replied, that this was a belief which he could not comprehend. The value of this teſtimony may riſe in the opinion of ſome, when it is recollected that ſuch was the deference paid to it by Socinus, that he eſteemed it the moſt undeniable

undeniable evidence which antiquity gave to the prevalence of the doctrine of the Trinity.

And here we could multiply the number of our proofs. We might appeal to the atteſtation given by the chriſtians to the worſhip of Chriſt, when accuſed by the Pagans of a deſign to pay divine honour to the relicks of the martyred Polycarp. We could advert to the practiſe of the Jewiſh converts, who in the reign of Adrian reſided at Jeruſalem, and maintained Chriſt to be God: and we could dwell with more copious obſervations upon the teſtimony of the Emperour Julian, who expreſsly maintained that St. John was induced to aſſert the divinity of Chriſt in his goſpel, from obſerving that a conſiderable number of the Greeks and Romans had already embraced that opinion. But a minute inquiry into theſe important atteſtations would demand more time than is allowed to diſcourſes like the preſent. We recommend them to the earneſt attention of thoſe who deny the early prevalence of the doctrine in queſtion among all ranks of chriſtians, and we heſitate not to aſk in the ſame terms indeed, but not with the culpable precipitation of the Jews, *what need have we of any further witneſs?* An appeal is made by our opponents to the general opinion

opinion of the firſt chriſtians. We have carefully inveſtigated the proofs for that opinion, and find them to be as ſtrong and as conſiſtent as can be adduced for the ſupport of any fact in antient hiſtory. The witneſſes did not collect their information from vague reports, conveyed through ſuſpicious channels, neither did they live in places remote from moſt of the countries of which they ſpeak, or truſt to the tradition of former ages. Their teſtimony is for the moſt part, the reſult of actual obſervation. The friends of the church are ſupported by their avowed enemies, and thoſe who diſagreed upon all other ſubjects, combine to eſtabliſh the argument in queſtion. At the ſame time that Ignatius vouches for the churches on the coaſts of Aſia, Pliny cooperates with him by his account of chriſtianity in the ſpacious province of Bythinia. Juſtin Martyr extended his obſervations from Paleſtine to Rome; Irenæus travelled from Aſia to Gaul; and Tertullian was well acquainted with the congregations of Africa. Within the period of time that theſe writers give a ſtatement of the faith in all theſe countries, Lucian does the ſame for the extenſive kingdom of Pontus, and not only brings an additional proof of its wide diffuſion, but corroborates the credit of the writers who aſſert its uniformity. Their general

general evidences give us for that period of time, in which the corruption has been aſſerted to have taken place, a diſtinct view of unanimity in the moſt remarkable parts of the antient world.

To conclude—The proper conſideration of the preſent ſubject would lead us into a much wider field of diſcuſſion, than is conſiſtent with the limits marked out for diſquiſitions like the preſent. Let what has been advanced, be thought ſufficient to ſhow the weakneſs of their efforts, who attempt to wreſt from the church of England the ſupport of the primitive chriſtians in the faith which ſhe profeſſes. We have reviewed the cleareſt proofs that the apoſtolical Fathers maintained the nature of Chriſt to be human and divine; that he was God incarnate; that the incommunicable attributes of omniſcience and omnipotence, and the divine prerogatives of glory, praiſe, and power, are frequently and fully aſcribed to him.

We have ſeen the weakneſs of the aſperſions thrown upon Juſtin Martyr; we have remarked that he built his faith neither upon the profound diſquiſitions of Plato, nor the airy ſpeculations of Philo; but upon the ſolid and clear teſtimony of the apoſtles and evangeliſts;

geliſts; and that every page of his works is expreſſive of the ſame exalted ideas of the Son of God. We have obſerved that the authority of Irenæus, in a particular paſſage, is ſufficient to decide the point in queſtion; and that the Pagan writers, among whom the Emperour Julian ought particularly to be diſtinguiſhed, are important and conſiſtent witneſſes of the truth of our aſſertions.

Thus the friends and the enemies of chriſtianity have concurred to record in general the prevalence of that faith, which has been illuſtrated in detail. The ſentiments, therefore, of the primitive church appear to have been unanimous; and vain is it for the gainſayer to attempt to eſtabliſh a difference among thoſe, who, influenced by the power of the ſame truth, united in the moſt perfect harmony.

SER-

SERMON VII.

2 TIMOTHY III. 15.

All Scripture is given by inſpiration of God.

THE glad tidings of the goſpel were neither confined to the Jewiſh people, nor to the generation which was eminently honoured by the appearance of the Meſſiah. It was the great object of his miſſion to eſtabliſh a church collected from the various parts of the world, and to extend its duration from age to age. Chriſtianity was manifeſtly deſigned by its great Author for an eternal monument of the divine will, intended to ſurvive the decay of human inſtitutions, and to eſcape even from the wreck of empires, uninjured and triumphant. This was the light appointed to ſhine upon every one that cometh into the world, that *all fleſh might ſee the ſalvation of God.*

In

In order therefore that an intention ſo gracious and beneficial, might be moſt effectually fulfilled, the hiſtory of our Saviour, the tranſactions of the apoſtles after his aſcenſion, and their inſtructions upon particular emergencies, were committed to writing; by which expedient, the purity and the duration of the chriſtian principles have undoubtedly been ſecured, more particularly if it be conſidered that the frequent and ſanguinary perſecutions, which raged in the primitive times, endangered the continuance of the faith, and that numerous hereſies threatened its corruption. Even its eſcape from theſe early alarms was no ſecurity for its final preſervation. In paſſing down to ſucceſſive ages, it was liable to contract that mixture with falſhood, which is inſeparable from oral tradition, and to loſe by continued corruptions its original ſpirit and purity.

The motives which induced the Sacred Writers to undertake their literary labours, may in ſome degree be aſcertained from their reſpective ſituations. The urgent neceſſity of impreſſing the faith with exactneſs on the minds of early converts, among whom errours of an alarming tendency had actually taken root, called loudly upon ſome of them for written inſtructions.

inſtructions. Publick as well as private ſolicitations induced others to ſtamp on their writings the indelible characters of Chriſtianity, and place it out of the reach of innovation.

The goſpels and epiſtles are intended to perpetuate the important truths they contain, and to ſupply the place of thoſe holy witneſſes whoſe names they bear. They breathe the ſame ſpirit of ſimplicity, zeal and godlineſs, which diſtinguiſhed their authors, *who being dead, yet ſpeak; who endeavoured that after their deceaſe, we might have theſe things always in remembrance.* They fulfil in a ſecondary, though important ſenſe, the gracious promiſe of our Saviour, that his animating preſence ſhould continue in his church, for *they are with us always, even unto the end of the world.*

There is the ſtrongeſt reaſon to conclude, that the books of undoubted authority were expeditiouſly circulated. They were not addreſſed to individuals in whoſe poſſeſſion they continued in concealment, but to the rulers of large congregations; or more uſually to large congregations themſelves, before whom they were frequently recited. They were communicated

municated with pious diligence from church to church, and their reciprocal notoriety was ſometimes haſtened by apoſtolical injunctions. Thoſe who received them, had full aſſurance of their authenticity from thoſe who delivered them, and the multiplication of copies not only contributed to make them more generally known, but effectually ſecured them from the laſting injuries of interpolation.

That the goſpels and epiſtles were generally known ſoon after they were communicated to different churches, may be concluded from the intereſting nature of their contents. Novelty in general is calculated to excite attention. In the preſent caſe, in which novelty conſiſted in the developement of a recent revelation of the divine will, the moſt eager curioſity was rouſed into action. The new converts likewiſe ſought after theſe authentick documents of their faith with ardour, and divulged them with zeal. They drank the waters of life themſelves, and conveyed it to the thirſty who were at a diſtance. The teſtimony of hiſtory confirms the truth of theſe obſervations. The works of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which had been for ſome time well known to Chriſtians in general, were

were ſanctioned by the expreſs concurrence of St. John, previous to the compoſition of his own goſpel, and the moſt authentick evidence remains, that at a period not later than thirty years after his death, all the goſpels were recited on ſtated days in the general aſſemblies of the faithful.

As ſoon as they were thus divulged, they were held in the higheſt eſtimation, as the rule of faith, and practice. They were particularly conſulted by teachers to confirm their admonitions, by diſputants to eſtabliſh their arguments, and by apologiſts to vindicate their cauſe. For ſuch ſupport, Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, Juſtin Martyr and Irenæus were eminently indebted to them. The atteſtations which they afforded to thoſe books of ſcripture, which they had occaſion to cite, are curious and important, as they furniſh a ſtrong argument for their integrity and authenticity. Many paſſages are very ſimilar, others exactly repreſent thoſe which occur in our preſent copies. From what is known, concluſions may fairly be drawn reſpecting that which is not. Hence it may be preſumed, that the revolutions of ſeventeen centuries have left the New Teſtament in the ſame ſtate as in the primitive times. The difficulty of inter-

mediate corruption has not only been increaſed in proportion to the multiplication of copies, but in proportion likewiſe to the number of thoſe who inſerted any part of the ſacred text into their writings. Hence an argument is furniſhed, that the ſtream which was not polluted at the fountain head, ſtill runs pure and uncontaminated. If we are able to prove that it was not polluted at the fountain head, by ſhewing that the early Fathers uſed and quoted our ſcriptures, a complete and unbroken chain of evidence might be formed, and no generation be left without witneſſes to the genuineneſs of the Chriſtian records.

I. Since this inveſtigation is ſo curious and important, an attempt will be made to remove the objections raiſed againſt the high probability of the apoſtolical Fathers having uſed our goſpels.

II. It is intended to ſhew that the apoſtolical Fathers, as well as Juſtin Martyr and Irenæus, made quotations from moſt of the epiſtles.

III. The perſuaſion of the primitive church that the ſacred writers were divinely inſpired, will be ſhown; and the reaſonableneſs of the perſuaſion

perſuaſion will be confirmed by additional arguments.

The noble author of the Letters on Hiſtory, whoſe ſpecious eloquence is frequently the diſguiſe of unfounded aſſertions, maintains, "that the Fathers of the firſt century either "made uſe of different goſpels from ours, or "the paſſages which reſemble thoſe that oc-"cur in our goſpels, were preſerved by un-"written tradition. To ſay that they had the "works of our evangeliſts before them, is a "manifeſt abuſe of hiſtory, as they never ex-"preſsly mention their names."

It is an object of importance to examine theſe aſſertions with particular attention, becauſe they include the ſtrongeſt objections that can be brought againſt the opinion moſt reaſonable to be maintained, reſpecting the early reception of the New Teſtament.

The Firſt charge to be conſidered is, that "the Fathers of the firſt century might make "uſe of different goſpels from ours."

This ſuppoſition at firſt ſight appears highly improbable to thoſe who recollect that Polycarp was the diſciple of St. John, that Ignatius

was inſtructed by ſeveral of the apoſtles, and that Clement was a fellow labourer of St. Paul, who was accompanied during his travels by the evangeliſt St. Luke. Connexions ſo intimate with theſe eminent inſtructors would naturally produce a high veneration for their ſentiments, and a decided and excluſive predilection of their works. Hence ariſes the extreme improbability of their having recourſe to any other goſpels than ſuch as were written or authenticated by thoſe from whom they received the firſt principles of the faith.

The improbability becomes much greater if it be conſidered, that the authors of apocryphal goſpels were either contemporary with the apoſtolical Fathers, or lived at a later period. If they lived at a later period, the ſuppoſition of the writer falls weak and inconcluſive to the ground: if they were contemporaries, the works of theſe heretical writers could be immediately referred to their reſpective ſources, and their omiſſions or interpolations of the true goſpels be inſtantly detected by being brought to the teſt of the uncorrupted originals. That this taſk was zealouſly performed, may fairly be preſumed from the frequent alluſions which are made to the hereſies of Ebion and Cerinthus, and the frequent cautions

cautions which are given to guard againſt their errours. To maintain that the apoſtolical Fathers were betrayed into the prepoſterous and weak inconſiſtency of borrowing from thoſe whom they inceſſantly attacked, is to give a ſanction to the abſurdity of thoſe hereticks who made Cerinthus the author of St. John's goſpel, when it evidently contains a refutation of his principles.

The objections may now be fairly reduced to this dilemma: either the apoſtolical Fathers derived ſeveral paſſages which occur in their remains, from unwritten tradition, or they made uſe of our goſpels.

In caſe the objector ſuppoſed, that if unwritten tradition was the ſource from which the apoſtolical Fathers derived their information, the certainty of the evangelical facts, or the reputation of the evangeliſts would be diminiſhed, he muſt have been intirely ignorant of their works, which manifeſtly eſtabliſh the one, and encreaſe the other.

For let us grant, that ſuch was really the caſe. It may even then be aſſerted upon ſafe grounds, that the apoſtolical Fathers contributed no inconſiderable aſſiſtance to eſtabliſh

the credibility of the goſpel hiſtory. The leading facts relative to the Author of Chriſtianity, and the principal topicks of his inſtructions, may be clearly collected from their writings. For in them are recorded the miraculous conception of our Lord, the preciſe time of his appearance on earth, his inſtitutions, his commands, the virtues which he diſplayed, and the duties which he recommended, his exerciſe of miraculous powers, his death, reſurrection, and aſcenſion, the importance of his miſſion, the tranſcendant benefits derived to mankind from his ſufferings, and more eſpecially a full and poſitive acknowledgment of his divine nature. In conſequence of this detail, which, with many other particulars of the ſame kind, may be collected from their epiſtles, the apoſtolical Fathers are to be conſidered, as witneſſes unacquainted with the writings of the evangeliſts, and deriving all their information on religious ſubjects, from the perſonal inſtructions of the apoſtles. The bare ſuppoſition has the air of an abſurdity, but for the ſake of the preceding conceſſion, their ignorance, improbable as it is, ſhall be allowed. Their remains are even in this caſe undeniable vouchers of apoſtolical conſiſtency, and prove that the inſtructions and the writings of the inſpired teachers, proceeded

ceeded originally from the ſame ſpirit of divine truth. Thus Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp become doubly important as they ſtand in relation to the tranſactions of our Saviour, and to the records of his biographers. From them is received an independant detail of actions and precepts of the higheſt antiquity and reſpectability, and their general coincidence with the evangeliſts is as ſtrong an evidence for the truths of the goſpel, as any atteſtation given to the narratives of its writers.

Having thus ſhewn that the reſult of the conceſſion would be far from proving unfavourable to the evangelical hiſtory, let us proceed to prove that the apoſtolical Fathers quoted our goſpels.

To grant an opponent ſome part of his requiſition is frequently of ſmall advantage to his cauſe. We are willing to allow, that the apoſtolical Fathers do not expreſs the names of the evangeliſts. But does it therefore follow by any fair inference, that they are not quoted, becauſe they are not named? By no means. St. Paul does not name Aratus, Menander, or Epimenides, yet it is unanimouſly allowed that their expreſſions may clearly be traced in his epiſtles. The antient authors of the letter

from the churches of Vienne and Lyons, as well as Juſtin Martyr, maintain a profound ſilence with reſpect to the names of the evangeliſts, although the identical ſentences of ſcripture abound in their productions. The authenticity of the larger epiſtles of Ignatius, as well as of the apoſtolical conſtitutions, has been diſputed, in conſequence of the oſtentatious and unneceſſary mention of the evangeliſts. The objections againſt them have proceeded from the violation of a principle, laid down by the criticks, that the omiſſion of names is a ſtriking characteriſtick of the apoſtolical times. The conduct of the Fathers under conſideration, was conſiſtent and uniform. Continued pages are cited from the Old, and various paſſages from the New Teſtament; yet whilſt the peculiar ſentiments and ſtyle indiſputably aſcertain the reſpective writers, their names are equally omitted. Thus the portraits of eminent perſons may ſtrike the eye with ſuch exact reſemblance, that the ſpectator ſcarcely requires to be informed whoſe features they are, which are preſented to his view.

But although the names of the evangeliſts do not occur, the traces of their goſpels are very numerous and very evident. Ignatius mentions

mentions the goſpel, as if written, ſeveral times, more particularly in his epiſtles to the Smyrnæans, and Philadelphians. In his epiſtle to the latter, two paſſages occur which more pointedly indicate the hiſtory of our Lord as recorded by the evangeliſts. In the courſe of his cenſures of the Gnoſticks, who denied the reality of Chriſt's ſufferings, he ſays, "That "neither the prophecies, the law of Moſes, "nor the goſpel down to the preſent time had "convinced them of their errours." "The "prophets call for attention, but more parti- "cularly the goſpel in which the paſſion and "the reſurrection are manifeſted to us." "Fly "to the goſpel as to the perſon of Chriſt, "and to the apoſtles as the preſbytery of the "church." By way of illuſtration it may be remarked that this mode of expreſſion cloſely correſponds with the ſtyle of the next century, when there could be no doubt as to the preciſe import of the word goſpel. Tertullian declares "that from the law, the prophets, "the goſpel, and apoſtolical writings, we "ought to learn our faith."

From the frequent alluſions of the apoſtolical fathers, it ſeems highly probable that they refer to a collection of thoſe books of which there was never any doubt in the church,

church, and which appear to have had an extenſive circulation, and to have met with an early and general reception, among all the Chriſtian congregations. We are not however authorized to make a general and unqualified aſſertion, that the evidence brought in favour of this collection, is always clear and equally ſtrong. Clement makes particular and frequent uſe of the goſpel of St. Matthew, and of St. Luke. He ſometimes exhibits paſſages of the former with ſuch correctneſs, as to give them a claim to be adopted in preference to the common readings. If his alluſions to the latter were diſtant and vague, they would be rendered in a great degree fixed and determinate, as he has undoubted references to the Acts of the Apoſtles, which were publiſhed ſome time ſubſequent to the former treatiſe addreſſed to Theophilus.

Ignatius and Polycarp took a wider range of citation, as the goſpel of St. John was publiſhed before they wrote. They ſtudiouſly adopted many of his phraſes, and followed his train of expreſſion. How far the goſpel of St. Mark is cited by any of them, it is very difficult to determine. The ſhades of diſtinction between what is quoted from his goſpel, and from that of St. Matthew are ſo ſlight, that

that they are frequently liable to be confounded by the moſt diſcerning eye. That which is borrowed from the one, may be attributed to the other, without the danger of incurring the charge of a want of critical diſcernment from thoſe who are converſant with the works of Juſtin Martyr. The ſame ambiguity of reference is obſervable in Clement, as well as in the others. The propriety of aſſigning to St. Mark ſome paſſages quoted in Clement's epiſtle, is confirmed by recollecting that St. Mark was a diſciple of St. Peter, as well as Clement, and that his goſpel was written at Rome, of which place Clement was biſhop.

If borrowed ideas be cited by an author, not in identical, but correſpondent terms, the paſſage in which they are found undoubtedly conſtitutes the eſſence of a quotation. This appears to have been the opinion of the ſacred writers, who quote the Old Teſtament from memory, and frequently repreſent the main import of a paſſage, without confining themſelves to literal expreſſions. In the Old Teſtament itſelf, the repetition of texts is far from being perfectly the ſame. The apoſtolical Fathers adopted a practice which was authorized by ſuch venerable examples, as will appear

appear from ſome very remarkable paſſages of Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp, in which are reſpectively contained the ſubſtance of a quotation from St. Luke, and the exact words both of St. Matthew, and St. John.

If their opportunities of information be conſidered, as well as the plain veſtiges of the evangelical hiſtory, which abound in their works; it ſeems moſt reaſonable to conclude that the apoſtolical Fathers made uſe of our goſpels; that they mentioned them under certain general denominations; ſometimes adduced paſſages from them with that vague repreſentation which ariſes from imperfect recollection, and ſometimes cited them with that preciſion, which indicates a recent and aſſiduous peruſal. That the paſſages before ſtated, and many others of the ſame kind, which ſo preciſely repreſent the conduct and the ſentiments of our Lord were borrowed from tradition, amounts to nothing more than a precipitate conjecture; whereas, the proof of their being derived from our goſpels is built upon ſtrong and ſatisfactory arguments.

The aſſiſtance received from the epiſtles of the ſacred writers for the eſtabliſhment of the faith, and the regulation of practice, is evident

from the continual uſe made of them by the primitive writers. The firſt epiſtle to the Corinthians is expreſsly aſcribed to St. Paul by Clement. Polycarp makes plain alluſions to the Philippians, and Theſſalonians; and refers, under the appellation of holy ſcriptures, to the epiſtle to the Epheſians, as well as to the other works which at that time compoſed the apoſtolical canon. The epiſtle to the Romans, as may be collected from the teſtimony of Tertullian, was preſerved in the archives of their church, when Clement preſided over it. His alluſions to it are numerous and clear. So great has been his accuracy in ſtating ſome expreſſions, that an eminent editor of the Greek Teſtament has been enabled to correct ſeveral corrupt readings, which the negligence of tranſcribers had introduced into many copies of that epiſtle. His alluſions and direct citations are likewiſe very ſtrong and important proofs of the early notoriety and credit of the epiſtle to the Hebrews.

From the particular epiſtles which are expreſsly named, or clearly referred to, ſometimes the train of argument in different words, and ſometimes the exact expreſſions are derived. The practice reſpecting many others is preciſely the ſame. Many of the other epiſtles, though

though leſs clearly referred to, appear notwithſtanding to have been imitated by theſe writers. Numerous paſſages occur in which the epiſtolary phraſes are accommodated to new ſubjects, and incorporated with the ſtile of each writer. In Clement and Ignatius, may more particularly be diſcerned evident traces of St. Paul. The adoption of his ſentiments communicates peculiar animation to their thoughts, and energy to their language. They delight in the amplification of his ideas, and that they expand them with conſiderable ſucceſs is evident from ſeveral paſſages.

We have ſeen from the preceding obſervations, that the diſciples of the apoſtles were well acquainted with the greater part of the ſacred writings. Among their immediate deſcendants, no one was more eminent for zeal in the cauſe of chriſtianity, or faithful atteſtation to its records, than Juſtin Martyr. He ſpeaks of the works of the evangeliſts, under the general denomination of memoirs and goſpels. He follows the example of his predeceſſors in the omiſſion of names, and cites the precepts of the goſpel, as the expreſs injunctions of Chriſt himſelf. Of the numerous ſcriptural paſſages which occur in his works, many convey general ſentiments without an adherence

adherence to literal expreſſions, and many repreſent them with conſiderable preciſion.

During the age in which this writer flouriſhed, the goſpels were publickly recited on the Lord's day in the aſſemblies of the Chriſtians. This curious fact aſcertains the high antiquity of a cuſtom which has prevailed throughout the univerſal church. It likewiſe proves the great eſtimation and wide diffuſion of the goſpels, ſo early as the middle of the ſecond century.

Irenæus, biſhop of Lyons, the author of an elaborate confutation of the Gnoſtick hereſies, left an ample account of the New Teſtament, which he calls with peculiar propriety of diſtinction, the evangelical and apoſtolical writings. He aſſigns many reaſons for the goſpels being only four in number, and his citations of them are very copious. He relates the different occaſions on which they were compoſed, gives diſtinct characters of the evangeliſts, and proves that their endowments for their undertakings were imparted from on high. It is particularly to be remarked, that he uſually mentions the name of the author from whom he derives his ſcriptural authorities; becauſe the practice of this writer fixes the

the era of formal quotation. The ſucceeding Fathers of the church followed this example with little variation, and it is much to be regretted that ſo explicit a mode of reference was not introduced at a more early period, that every circumſtance might have concurred to place the atteſtation of the apoſtolical Fathers intirely out of the reach of cavil and controverſy. The books which Irenæus ſo particularly deſcribes and ſo fully quotes, muſt have been received from his immediate predeceſſors; from none of whom he is ſo likely to have received them as from Polycarp, who was his preceptor, and the friend of Ignatius. In theſe apoſtolical Fathers we find paſſages ſimilar to expreſſions in our goſpels. The concluſion therefore is, that they, as well as the perſons to whom they afterwards communicated the ſacred books, have quoted the New Teſtament.

Having taken a curſory ſurvey of the evidence given by the moſt authentick writers of the firſt and ſecond centuries to the New Teſtament, it is now proper to draw the line of diſcrimination between thoſe parts of it, which they cite, and thoſe, which they omit.

The

The allusions to the gospels of St. Matthew, St. Luke, and St. John, even in the apostolical Fathers, are very clear. St. Mark may not be so conspicuous, for reasons already given. By Justin and Irenæus all the four are fully and satisfactorily quoted. Of the Acts of the Apostles, the citations are very full, particularly in the epistle of Clement, the apologies and dialogue of Justin Martyr, and the treatise of Irenæus. The revelation of St. John is accurately described by Justin Martyr, and frequently quoted by Irenæus. All such notices must appear very important and valuable, when we consider with proper attention the integrity of the writers, their high antiquity, and their favourable opportunities of information.

Among the epistles those which are most used are the epistles to the Corinthians. The epistle to the Hebrews was evidently well known to Clement. All the rest are either alluded to, or expressly cited, except the epistles to Titus and Philemon: the epistle of James, the second of Peter, the second and third of John, and the epistle of St. Jude, are omitted by all these writers. For this silence it is not difficult to assign satisfactory reasons. The smallness and private nature of the epistle

to Philemon, might prevent it from being cited. The third, if not the ſecond epiſtle of St. John, was written to a private perſon, and might remain for ſome time unknown to the church at large. The remoteneſs of Crete retarded the circulation of the epiſtle to Titus, and as the original copies of the catholick epiſtles belonged to no church in particular, it might not in the infancy of the church be eaſy to aſcertain their authenticity.

How many of the above-mentioned epiſtles were known to the primitive Fathers, it is difficult to aſcertain. It is highly improbable that they were unacquainted with all of them. The curious and minute obſerver, from the frequent uſage of ſome remarkable words, may contend that Ignatius had read the epiſtle to Philemon, as well as that addreſſed to Titus; and from a ſimilarity of thought, he may conclude that Irenæus, when he wrote the paſſage in his treatiſe on the Gnoſtick hereſies, relative to the efficacy of good works, recollected the epiſtle of St. James.

Among other reaſons for which we have reaſon to regret the loſs of ſeveral works of Juſtin Martyr; may be mentioned, the important teſtimony, which they would probably

have afforded to our goſpels and epiſtles. If the epiſtles of Polycarp had alone eſcaped the ravages of time, they would have furniſhed ample, and perhaps ſufficient proofs of the early notoriety and credit of the ſacred writings; ſince in his remaining epiſtle, ſhort as it is, he refers to more than half the productions of which the New Teſtament is compoſed.

No diſtance of time, no remoteneſs of place, prevented the unanimous appeal which theſe writers made to the original ſcriptures. Their atteſtations give and receive mutual confirmation and mutual luſtre. Clement flouriſhed at Rome, Ignatius at Antioch, Polycarp at Smyrna, Juſtin Martyr in Syria and Rome, and Irenæus in Gaul. If circumſtances conſpired to bring ſome of them acquainted with each other, their integrity and piety exclude the ſlighteſt ſuppoſition that they entertained an unreaſonable prejudice in favour of the New Teſtament, or united to raiſe its credit by diſhonourable combination. Rejecting all other records, which were invented only to give a plauſible ſanction to hereſy, they unanimouſly received thoſe which were ſtamped with the image, and marked with the ſuperſcription of truth. One was not a preacher of the goſpel

of Ebion, and another an advocate for the theogony of the Gnoſticks. *They followed not cunningly deviſed fables, but built upon the foundation of the apoſtles, Jeſus Chriſt himſelf being the chief corner ſtone.*

The goſpels and epiſtles are never introduced with heſitation or apprehenſion, leſt doubts ſhould ariſe in the minds of Chriſtians relative to their authority. Appeal is made to them, as to a ſacred and immoveable ſtandard of truth, which is eſtabliſhed by the conſent of all. The language therefore of the early Fathers, is the language of the church. With one voice they proclaim the reception of the ſcriptures, and with one conſent revere them, and them alone, as authentick and ſacred.

To confirm theſe obſervations it is proper to remark, that the epiſtle of Clement was written not only with the approbation, but in the name of the whole church of Rome. Polycarp addreſſed the Philippians in conjunction with all the preſbyters of Smyrna. The epiſtles of Ignatius were written under the inſpection of the companions of his painful journey from Antioch to Rome, and of the Chriſtians whom he viſited by the way. Juſtin Martyr in his apologies, makes a publick addreſs

addreſs to the emperours in vindication of the whole body of Chriſtians. The confutation of the Gnoſtick hereſy by Irenæus, derives its greateſt authority and weight from ſuppoſing that he ſpeaks the prevailing language, and adduces the general arguments of the church.

Of the uniformity of faith which may be obſerved in the paſtors as well as in their flocks, it is curious to aſcertain the cauſe. The univerſal reception of the ſame ſacred books, is an obvious and ſatisfactory reaſon among others. The high regard paid to theſe books was founded on a general perſuaſion, that the authors of them wrote under the immediate influence of divine inſpiration. "The "Word who was the creator of the univerſe, "who ſitteth upon the cherubim, and up-"holdeth all things, even he who was mani-"feſt to the world, hath given to us a fourfold "goſpel, which is communicated by the holy "ſpirit."

This perſuaſion ſo ſublimely expreſſed in the words of Iræneus, which was common to the church at large, was rational and judicious. It aroſe partly from the harmony which prevailed between the apoſtolical writings, and the apoſtolical tradition, which for no incon-

ſiderable period faithfully repreſented the principles of Chriſtianity; and partly from the miraculous powers which were enjoyed by the apoſtles on every occaſion that was inſtantaneouſly or ultimately conducive to the intereſts of the goſpel.

They had alſo a *more ſure word of prophecy* to eſtabliſh this conviction, for our Lord kindly anticipating the imminent conſternation of his diſciples, and graciouſly deſiring to ſupply his own abſence by adequate comforts; promiſed that the holy ſpirit ſhould *bring all things to their remembrance*. Hence they were armed with courage equal to every outward danger, and endued with knowledge equal to every intellectual difficulty. The holy ſpirit revived in their minds the precepts of their Lord, and completed the ſcheme of evangelical inſtruction. As its aſſiſtance was extended to every branch of the apoſtolical miſſion, an exact narrative of our Lord's conduct and tranſactions, neceſſarily formed a grand and important object of its infallible communications.

The expediency of the divine interference to preſerve the writings of the apoſtles from inaccuracy and miſrepreſentation may ſtrike us with greater force, if we examine the nature of

of hiſtorical evidence to the truth of facts and opinions.

Fidelity of deſcription, and accuracy of narrative, are highly neceſſary for him who undertakes to record the tranſactions of antient times. Yet of the writers who are eminent for their hiſtorical productions, many have been betrayed into inconſiſtency and contradiction. The unwearied diligence of Plutarch, the elaborate conciſeneſs of Tacitus, the extenſive reſearches of Dion Caſſius and of Joſephus, did not ſecure them againſt occaſional deviations from truth. If their talents, however reſpectable, and their erudition, however profound, left them ſtill expoſed to errour; what cauſe leſs than ſupernatural can be aſſigned why men, remarkable for defect of education and ſlowneſs of apprehenſion, as the diſciples of Chriſt were, ſhould be qualified to give a ſtatement of facts altogether harmonious and conſiſtent, and to reach the height of hiſtorical excellence which was unattainable by ſuperiour minds?

The apoſtles have not only avoided errour, with regard to facts, but miſrepreſentations, with regard to opinions. To the general conduct of the writers of old, they have furniſhed

a ſtriking and illuſtrious exception. Every admirer of antient philoſophy laments how often in his ſearch after the characteriſtic marks of any particular ſect, he finds himſelf bewildered in the labyrinth of uncertainty. The careleſs writer may blend thoſe tenets, which as they are totally different in their nature, and derived from diſtinct ſources, ought to be kept for ever ſeparate. The neglect of accurate inquiry, may not unfairly be imputed to Plutarch, when he aſſerts that Plato held the doctrine of a good and an evil principle. The ſame fault is likewiſe to be imputed to that ſublime philoſopher himſelf, who, hurried away by too great an eagerneſs to dignify a favourite ſentiment with the authority of a celebrated name, afforded grounds for juſt complaint to Socrates, who accuſed him of having confounded his tenets with thoſe of preceding ſages. Nor can the great Ariſtotle, notwithſtanding the depth of his underſtanding, and the extent of his knowledge, be freed from a ſimilar charge. He has aſſerted, that the Deity of Zenophanes was corporeal, although the tenour of his arguments plainly lead to the oppoſite concluſion. Now, after theſe deviations from accurate repreſentation in men of the moſt enlarged and enlightened minds, who could diſcern the nice diſtinctions of metaphyſical

phyſical principles, and feel the neceſſity of ſtating them with exactneſs, how was it poſſible that the illiterate fiſhermen of Galilee could communicate, without ſupernatural aſſiſtance, the preciſe rules of the moſt perfect ethicks, and the ſublime doctrines of the moſt refined theology?

To fix the degree of inſpiration which was imparted to the writers of the New Teſtament, is an object of much greater conſequence than to explain the method in which it was conveyed. That the apoſtles were conſtantly under the divine influence, that ſuch influence extended to ſcrupulous correctneſs in every particular, and rendered them perfectly infallible in the writings they have left us, is an opinion which its advocates will find it difficult to eſtabliſh. Aware of the many objections which may be brought againſt them, it is not for ſuch an hypotheſis that we ought precipitately to contend. There ſeems however nothing repugnant to reaſon, nothing inconſiſtent with the circumſtances of the caſe in ſuppoſing, that the Holy Spirit guarded the ſacred writers from errour in the grand outlines of their narration, in the ſtatement of precepts, and the developement of doctrines.

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A divine aſſiſtance thus favourably imparted, ſeems to have anſwered the great end of its communication without extending to the revelation of other points. It at once accounts ſatisfactorily for thoſe ſlight deviations from exact uniformity which the advocates of infidelity have magnified into apparent importance, and diſplayed with oſtentatious parade. In the more minute circumſtances of facts, the ſacred writers are left to the reſources of their own unaſſiſted memory and experience, and conſequently are reduced to the level of all other credible hiſtorians. Upon thoſe momentous points which contribute to form an infallible rule and ſtandard of faith and practice, they were guided by the hand of divine wiſdom into all truth, and ſoar to a height of credibility which no human writer can attain.

He who peruſes the ſcriptures with the ſlighteſt degree of attention, muſt be ſtruck by a radical peculiarity of narrative and ſentiment. There is ſometimes a greatneſs of thought which ſurpaſſes the conceptions of human genius, and ſometimes an unaffected artleſſneſs, which attracts by its novelty, and delights by its ſweetneſs. Conſidered ſolely as compoſitions calculated to pleaſe the fancy by lively

lively repreſentations, to ſatisfy the judgment by exact probability, and intereſt the feelings by affecting repreſentations, they deſerve to ſhare our attention with the claſſical remains of Greece and Rome. In the works of the evangeliſts may be found inſtances of that captivating ſimplicity of narration, which we admire in Xenophon; and in the epiſtles of St. Paul, are many examples of that ſublime impetuoſity of argument, which we applaud in Demoſthenes. Here however the ſimilarity muſt end. One circumſtance there is, in which the New Teſtament riſes to an elevation, which no other book can reach. Here preſides the majeſty of Truth in unadorned but awful ſtate, and never turns aſide to the blandiſhments of Flattery, nor liſtens to the whiſpers of Defamation. Here alone ſhe preſerves the ſame benign but unchangeable aſpect, and points with equal impartiality, to the apoſtles at one time, deſerting Chriſt, and at another, riſquing life by the bold profeſſion of his goſpel; to Peter now proteſting his unalterable fidelity, and now denying his Lord.

Every ſincere chriſtian will contemplate this characteriſtick with ſentiments of veneration and delight, and will think it a preſumptive argument, that when he peruſes ſcripture,

ſcripture, *the place whereon he ſtands is holy ground.* He regards thoſe who deny its celeſtial origin for the ſake of reducing its contents to the low ſtandard of their own degrading opinion, as audacious and deluded innovators, whoſe temerity excites his aſtoniſhment, and whoſe infatuation awakens his pity. Satisfied with the external as well as internal evidence, he receives with implicit confidence this invaluable treaſure, and conſiders inſpiration as the angelick guard placed by heaven around the book of life, to ſecure it from the attacks of preſumptuous and aſpiring man.

SERMON VIII.

HEBREWS XII. 1.

Wherefore ſeeing we are compaſſed about with ſo great a Cloud of Witneſſes, let us lay aſide every Weight, and the Sin which doth ſo eaſily beſet us; and let us run with Patience the Race that is ſet before us; looking unto Jeſus, the Author and Finiſher of our Faith.

IT may be remarked in all political inſtitutions, that laws are never heard with ſo much attention, nor obeyed with ſo much alacrity, as immediately after their firſt promulgation. Their obſervance is more agreeable to the inclinations of mankind at that, rather than any ſubſequent period of time, by reaſon of the compariſon made between the advantages which they ſecure, and the urgent inconveniences which they remove. This obſervation

ſervation will be found to hold good not only in political but religious eſtabliſhments, for Chriſtianity itſelf was never embraced with more genuine ſincerity, nor adorned with more pure morals, than during the earlieſt ages of the church. The perfect freedom of the goſpel became the moſt valuable acquiſition to thoſe who had laboured under the yoke of the Jewiſh or Pagan ceremonies; and the dreary proſpects of ſuperſtition were eagerly exchanged for the glorious light of life and immortality.

The view of ſociety and manners which eccleſiaſtical hiſtory preſents during the primitive times, is particularly worthy of attention. We behold the church deriving its eſtabliſhment from the apoſtles, and even from Chriſt himſelf, diſtinguiſhed equally from the Pagans, who were its avowed enemies, and from the hereticks, who were its inſidious friends. To the former, in its publick remonſtrances it was ingenuous without weakneſs, and prudent without diſſimulation; to the latter, in its confutations of their errours, it was condeſcending without timidity, and reſolute without harſhneſs. Regardleſs of the diſtinctions of rank or fortune, it invited all to take refuge from the corruptions of idolatry in its hoſpitable aſylum, and to participate the comfort

comfort of preſent tranquillity, and the hope of future happineſs. Its paſtors, eminent for virtue and learning, taught with the confidence of full conviction thoſe doctrines, which they received from the moſt indiſputable authority; and made the edification of their flocks the moſt important object of their ambition. Their power was exerciſed for the moſt ſalutary purpoſes, and they laboured with unremitting aſſiduity for the correction of ſinners, the reconciliation of enemies, and the converſion of infidels. No variation prevailed in the reſtrictions of diſcipline, or the confeſſion of faith, ſince one ſyſtem of government and one creed were not only adopted by the members of the ſame church, but by all the churches diſperſed throughout the world.

Such uniformity appears the more extraordinary, when we recollect that it was not promoted by the machinations of human policy, nor enforced by the authority of the civil power: for this was the period, during which Chriſtianity was ſupported merely by its own native ſtrength, and made the moſt rapid advances towards a complete eſtabliſhment amid the threats of legal prohibitions, and the intolerance of polytheiſm. The vigorous tree planted by the Son of God flouriſhed and caſt

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its grateful ſhade over the nations; whilſt by the ſtrength of its roots and the firmneſs of its bulk it ſurvived the repeated violence of winds and ſtorms.

The converſion of the Emperour Conſtantine was eminently favourable to the church; for from that glorious event ſhe dated the origin of her external ſplendour, and her ſecurity. The Chriſtians, however, who had been trained in the rigid ſchool of perſecution to the exerciſe of every diſtinguiſhed virtue, were ſucceeded by thoſe who felt the pernicious effects of proſperity. The purity of their morals was gradually ſtained with licentiouſneſs, their harmony was broken by unedifying diſputations, and the vigour of their diſcipline was relaxed by irreſolution.

The clouds of bigotry in the middle ages overſpread the world, and the inſtitutions, opinions and ceremonies, which were then by degrees introduced, not only encumbered Chriſtianity with uſeleſs appendages, but cauſed a heavy depreſſion of the powers of the mind. A long night of intellectual darkneſs prevailed, before mankind were ſufficiently rouſed from the dreams of ſuperſtition to accompliſh an auſpicious reformation.

Whether we conſider the various cauſes that gave riſe to this event, or the means by which it was accompliſhed; the extenſive field of action which it opened to the underſtanding, by the expulſion of ſpiritual tyranny, the extraordinary diſcoveries which preceded, or the matchleſs exertions of intellect which followed, it may fairly be conſidered as one of the greateſt occurrences recorded in the annals of time. True ſcience derived its origin from this reſtoration of true Chriſtianity, and learning, which had ſhared its corruption and decay, aroſe with new vigour on its revival. Their aſſociation not only afforded mutual ſupport, but proved that reaſon, when advanced to the higheſt ſtate of improvement, is moſt congenial with revelation, and that the latter never appears to more advantage, than when viewed by the ſtrongeſt light which the former can impart. The benefits likewiſe conferred on ſociety at large were ſimilar to thoſe which had been happily experienced during the firſt propagation of the goſpel. The ſacred oracles were laid open to all, and the fulleſt opportunities were afforded to the laity as well as the clergy, of becoming acquainted with the pure and uncorrupted principles of duty. Nor was this the only feature of reſemblance to the antient times; for the general conformity of

our eſtabliſhment to the primitive church has been celebrated by its own members at home, and its admirers abroad, as its moſt illuſtrious, and moſt diſtinguiſhing characteriſtick.

Prepared by a cloſe and ardent peruſal of ſcripture, and impreſſed with due reſpect for the authority of the early Fathers, as its moſt faithful interpreters, the great Reformers of England came forth to execute their pious taſk. Their judgment was conſpicuous both in expunging from the proteſtant ritual a long train of unedifying ceremonies, and in retaining the moſt decorous uſages of worſhip. We feel a pious ſatisfaction in contemplating and enumerating the ſalutary effects of their labours, more particularly as long experience has afforded ample proofs of their inſeparable connexion with the beſt and moſt exalted intereſts of the nation.

The plan of our religious inſtitutions was formed by fervent piety, and executed with profound judgment. The fundamental articles of the faith, which they preſcribe, are ſtrictly conſiſtent with ſcripture, are recommended by the belief of the antient Fathers, and ratified by the decrees of the moſt reſpectable councils. The ſacred edifices, whilſt they are di-

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veſted of the gawdy decorations, and puerile ornaments of Popery, are furniſhed with thoſe appendages which give dignity to publick worſhip, and diſtinguiſh the functions of its miniſters from ordinary occupations. A code of devotional exerciſes is eſtabliſhed, far ſuperiour to all other ſacred compoſitions of human origin for ſimple energy of language, pure fervour of piety, and evangelical tenour of ſentiment. For theſe diſtinguiſhing qualities it is principally indebted to thoſe venerable forms of ſupplication, which were breathed from the lips of ſaints and martyrs, and conſecrated to the ſervice of the church by holy men of the earlieſt ages. It gives the moſt expreſſive and pathetick utterance to the wants and deſires of the devout ſuppliant, and enables him to fulfil with perfect conſiſtency, the various duties of rational and ſteady devotion. Engaged in the repetition of our prayers, he avoids the wild rhapſodies of the Methodiſt, and the cold addreſſes of the Preſbyterian. Thus he is freed from the irregularity and abruptneſs of extemporaneous effuſions, which are unknown until the moment they are uttered, and which as ſoon as uttered, the judgmen of the critick muſt always condemn as incoherent, and the conſcience of the pious muſt frequently reject as unſcriptural. The

hierarchy, deriving its origin from the apoſtles, is confirmed by primitive uſage, and recommended by the utility of clerical gradations. The political conſtitution of the country, in return for the alliance which it has formed with the church, derives from the aſſociation additional ſecurity for the obſervance of the laws, and the preſervation of order. The unmoleſted profeſſion and free exerciſe of their particular worſhip are allowed to all who diſſent from the eſtabliſhment. The prudent toleration which is allowed, equally avoids the dangerous extremes of cruel perſecution, which breaks the ties of charity; and of that unbounded indulgence, which may convert religion into an engine of ambition. Thus pious in her profeſſions, uncorrupt in her inſtitutions, and judicious in her reſtraints, our church is to the ſectariſt no real ſtumbling-block, and to the ſceptick no more than imaginary fooliſhneſs.

While we ſurvey in our own religious inſtitutions the fundamental articles of belief, and principles of government, which diſtinguiſhed the antient Chriſtians; while we recogniſe in our forms of prayer the traces of their devotion, and practiſe the decent rites which they inſtituted; we declare by our conformity

conformity the greateſt approbation of their conduct and ſentiments upon ſubjects the moſt important. We are alſo more forcibly impreſſed by the propriety of our reſearches into the means by which they propagated the faith; and we moreover feel a greater ſatisfaction in diſplaying their virtues, and in vindicating them from the miſrepreſentation of prejudiced and uncandid writers.

Attentive to the voice of antiquity, and ſolicitous for the honour of our religion, we have endeavoured to invalidate the objections of *the Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and to rectify his deviations from truth.

The proofs in favour of the continuance of miracles for ſome time after the death of the apoſtles, remain in full force, notwithſtanding the ingenuity which was exerted to ſhake their credibility. They are deſtitute neither of the arguments, nor the authority of modern writers to ſupport them, and if the ſcepticiſm, injudiciouſly imputed to the preſent age, be ſo ſtubborn, and deeply rooted in the minds of Gibbon and of Middleton; from a number of thoſe whoſe opinions are more flexible by the force of evidence, we may ſelect Moſheim and

Jortin. Theſe are writers who cannot fairly be accuſed either of bigotry or credulity; and if any diſcuſſion ought to be decided by the ſole voice of authority, where can the eccleſiaſtical ſtudent, in the wideſt extent of his reſearches, find more candour, deeper learning, or more ſound and diſpaſſionate judgment?

The apologies of the primitive Chriſtians have been ſet in a proper light, and their ſubjects appear to have been more judiciouſly choſen, than the blindneſs of prejudice and the faſtidiouſneſs of criticiſm were inclined to admit. The writers of them deſerve to be reſtored to the rank to which former ages had raiſed them, and they ought alſo to be conſidered as important allies in the ſervice of Chriſtianity.

The primitive Chriſtians are reſtored to the ſtation ſo eminently due to their merit, and from the number of their virtues, which we have endeavoured to elucidate, we may fairly conclude, that their motives were more pure than the Hiſtorian has repreſented. Even their avowed enemies have left us ample teſtimonies of their exemplary conduct, and we cannot venture, without the juſt imputation of the moſt unreaſonable prejudice, to depreciate

ciate the characters which they have drawn. The candour of the preſent age might reaſonably be called in queſtion if we withheld that tribute to merit, which was chearfully paid by a Lucian and a Julian.

If our repreſentations be conformable to the evidence of antient writers, what becomes of that ſtate of ſcepticiſm which the Hiſtorian has deſcribed as propitious to the diffuſion of Chriſtianity? It is found to have exiſted only among the philoſophers, and the ſmall circle to which their opinions were confined; and conſequently ſupplies a very inadequate idea of the general diſpoſition of their contemporaries.

We have developed the various cauſes of antient perſecution, and ſhown that the magnanimity of the followers of Jeſus was tried by the moſt painful tortures. It has appeared in direct contradiction to the aſſertions of the Hiſtorian, how little Paganiſm encouraged the advances of Chriſtianity by an indifference to ſuperſtitious eſtabliſhments. We have obſerved that the heathen aſſumed a fierce and lowering aſpect, and menaced the approach of the believer with outrage and even with death; that Perſecution unſheathed her ſword, and

compelled the innocent martyr either to offer incenſe upon the altar of her Gods, or to fall a bleeding victim at her feet.

By a particular diſcuſſion of ſome aſſertions of this Hiſtorian, which materially affect the characters of the early Chriſtians, we have detected the futility of his charges, and as we may infer the general tenour of his unfair repreſentations from thoſe ſpecimens, we may conclude that the fifteenth and ſixteenth chapters are altogether unworthy of the rank they hold in his work, and ought to be conſigned by every friend of juſtice and truth to neglect and oblivion.

We have endeavoured not only to mark the firſt advances of Chriſtianity in the world, but to delineate a picture of its influence on ſociety, and the important alterations, which it effected in publick inſtitutions and private manners; how it removed the inconveniencies and unhappineſs of early times, and meliorated the general condition of human life throughout the ſucceeding ages.

We have brought evidences to prove the early reception of the books of the New Teſtament; we have aſcertained the high eſteem

in which they were held, and both ſtated and confirmed the ſentiments of the earlieſt Chriſtians with reſpect to the inſpiration of the ſacred writers.

We have moreover attempted, in our deſcription of the hereticks who deſtroyed the harmony of the Chriſtian church, to give an accurate ſtatement of the opinions of the Ebionites, with an immediate view to rectify the miſrepreſentation of the *Hiſtorian of the early opinions concerning Chriſt*. We have ſeen that their pretenſions to the higheſt antiquity, were ill founded; and that they met with direct oppoſition from the ſucceſſive writers of the primitive church.

We have ventured to combat his fundamental principles relative to that moſt important article of faith, the Divinity of our Lord and Saviour. We have reſcued the early Chriſtians from his miſrepreſentations, and ſhown that their opinions when fully developed are moſt favourable to the church of England.

It has appeared to what degree the Ebionites endeavoured to diveſt our Lord of his divinity, after that the Gnoſticks had attempted to explain away his humanity. The philoſophers

philoſophers of the preſent day at once arrogate the refined ſpeculations and comprehenſive knowledge of the latter, and model the hereſy of the former into a more degrading ſyſtem of their own. But their labour is as fruitleſs when ſoliciting the ſupport of ſcripture, as their pretenſions have been proved to be arrogant and weak, when boaſting of the concurrence of the early ages. The evangeliſts and the apoſtles, the confeſſors and martyrs, the paſtors and the univerſal church in the plain language of her original creeds, diſavow the errours of Unitarianiſm, and pronounce with one voice its full condemnation.

But however ſatisfactory it may be to diſpel the miſts of prejudice, and give a clear and cloudleſs proſpect of hiſtorical truth, the preceding diſquiſitions are not confined to the arguments of fruitleſs controverſy, or the recital of unedifying facts. On the contrary, they open a wide field of the moſt profitable ſpeculation, and may excite a more earneſt attention to the calls of duty. The faireſt and moſt excellent examples are held up to our inſpection, let us view them with deference, and imitate them with fidelity; let us be followers of the primitive Chriſtians, even as they were of the apoſtles and of Chriſt.

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In the ardour of their zeal and the liveliness of their faith, the first Christians appear to have excelled all the generations which succeeded them. Many Christians of the present times, however they may believe all that the apostles have spoken, are too liable to the imputation of remissness, by not adding virtue to their faith. To the evidences of revelation they give only that languid assent of the understanding, which is destitute of the warm and invigorating approbation of the heart. If all embraced with cordial affection the gospel of Christ as the dearest pledge of divine love, we should then behold in the conduct of every one that ardent piety to God, that universal charity to man, that meek endurance of insults and injuries, that strict temperance, perfect content and unruffled tranquility, that firmness of principle and resignation of will which the Saviour of the world recommended in his discourses, and exemplified in his conduct. But the diligence of labour and the ardour of hope which ought to be shown in the exercise of these virtues, are directed to unworthy objects. For they too often assist ambition to climb the giddy heights of power, dissipation to seek the flowery paths of pleasure, avarice to amass her wealth, and the passions to overleap the bounds of duty. Let

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the alacrity of mankind, which is ſo apparent in all theſe purſuits, be transferred to religion, and its injunctions will appear the moſt engaging incitements to goodneſs. The difficulties of religious practice will be alleviated, and we ſhall enjoy the full reliſh of its pure and ſublime gratifications. When employed in executing the commands of God, we ſhall never drag the heavy chain of reluctant compliance, but ſhall tread the path of duty with delight, and glory in the perfect freedom of the goſpel.

We have in the preceding diſcourſes remarked the profound humility, which was the moſt ſtriking ornament of the primitive church. This virtue diſtinguiſhes Chriſtianity from all other religions, more than any duty which it recommends. Duly influenced by this we are convinced that the brighteſt faculties of mind, the greateſt attainments of learning, the faireſt gifts of nature, the higheſt rank of honour, or the moſt profuſe bounty of fortune, afford no grounds for pride or preſumption. They are all primarily derived from the goodneſs of God, and are to be ultimately dedicated to his honour and ſervice. Our various wants and infirmities contribute likewiſe to convince us of the expediency of

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this duty, and hourly to ſuggeſt to us our conſtant dependance upon the Supreme Being. Our Saviour himſelf, by every action of his life inculcated its obſervance, and furniſhed the moſt perſuaſive arguments to *learn of him who was meek and lowly*.

But more particularly the humility which is ſo ſtrongly recommended in the goſpel is calculated to ſubdue the pride of the intellectual powers, and check the ſallies of ambitious reaſon. We ought therefore to bring to the ſevereſt teſt of examination the plauſible arguments of thoſe pretenders to ſuperiour knowledge who affect to contemn, or attempt to mutilate the revelations of the divine will. We ought to meet their prophane ſarcaſms with contempt, and reject their ſubtle inſinuations with diſdain. For we may be well aſſured that the cavils, which are wantonly thrown out at the articles of our holy faith, reſult only from the pride and ſelf-ſufficiency of the human underſtanding. The caviller makes his own limited capacity the meaſure of his creed, and reaſons upon the moſt weak of all principles, for he will not believe what he cannot comprehend. Inſtigated by preſumptuous eagerneſs to reject the myſteries relative to the divine Eſſence, he confounds

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the proofs of an article of belief with the nature of it. All however who have the judgment to diſcern and the ingenuouſneſs to acknowledge the imperfections of the intellectual powers, will readily aſſent to the truth of many things, although they are incompetent to the ſolution of the difficulties which attend them.

We believe that there is a God who is an eternal Being endued with every perfection that the mind of man can conceive; but in what manner this Almighty Being exiſts, how his preſcience can be fully reconciled with the free agency of man, how the high and lofty One who reigns in heaven above, can at the ſame point of time be univerſally preſent in every part of the creation, and yet be unextended, is a labyrinth of perplexity to our minds, for which our conceptions can furniſh us with no clue. The mathematician informs us that a line may be ſuppoſed to approach perpetually towards another, without a poſſibility of ever reaching it. The ignorant may treat the aſſertion with ridicule as abſurd, but certain it is, that the problem is capable of demonſtration. The diſcovery of the circulation of the blood gave new and ſurprizing inſight into the internal fabrick of the human

frame; but where is the acute chemiſt who after his moſt laborious decompoſitions of this vital fluid, can tell what cauſe produces its firſt motion, or for what reaſon its action is leſs voluntary than that of the lungs?

Let the Philoſopher therefore ſuſpend awhile his operations againſt Chriſtianity, let him direct the acuteneſs of his diſcernment and the toil of his application to develope the obſcurities of metaphyſical, mathematical, and natural truth, before he ſcornfully rejects the myſteries of faith becauſe they are not reducible to the ſtandard of his faculties, and becauſe the limit which terminates his proſpect is not the boundary of the univerſe.

Wiſdom has never been more fully juſtified by her children, and her true intereſt has never been more ſucceſsfully purſued, than when they have aſcertained with preciſion their own powers of mind, applied them to acceſſible objects, and confeſſed the immeaſurable diſtance between things human and divine. Unlike the vaunting ſcioliſts of the preſent day, they preſumed not to tear the veil of the ſanctuary and ruſh into the holy of holies, but firmly confiding in the evidence of divine revelation, at due diſtance adored its awful myſteries.

myſteries. The great, the wiſe, and the learned of the preſent times ought to think it no degradation to be meek and lowly of heart, when a perfect ſubmiſſion of the underſtanding to divine truth was the characteriſtick of the moſt ſublime poet, the moſt profound philoſopher, the moſt devout phyſiologiſt, and the moſt correct moraliſt who have adorned the circle of modern literature. All ought ſurely to bend with awe before the throne of the divine Majeſty, and acquieſce in the ſcriptural repreſentations of the divine eſſence, when they conſider the ſound and unſhaken principles of Milton, of Bacon, of Boyle and of Johnſon.

From purſuing a courſe far different from theſe teachers of truth and maſters of ſolid erudition, the antient hereticks adopted all thoſe errours which degraded them from the rank of ſound reaſoners, and rendered them unworthy of communion with orthodox Chriſtians. They exalted the tenets of their darling philoſophy to exceſſive conſequence, incorporated them with the principles of Chriſtianity, and adopted only that part of the creed, which could be accommodated to their own hypotheſis. They corrupted thoſe doctrines which they could not comprehend, and placed the viſionary

viſionary refinements of the human intellect upon the ſame level with the revelations of divine truth.

By a ſimilar abuſe of the powers of an enlightened underſtanding, *the Hiſtorian of the Early Opinions concerning Chriſt*, under pretence of reforming abuſes, darkens the glorious picture of the goſpel; under pretence of obliterating the ſtains, which its doctrines have contracted by the injuries of time, he mutilates the features of the moſt auguſt perſonage whom the ſacred writers hold up to our view. He gives an idea of the Saviour of the world no leſs inadequate and imperfect than might be formed of the bright luminary of day when diveſted of his beams, and deprived of his luſtre by the temporary obſcurity of a total eclipſe.

The Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire may be charged with a ſimilar perverſion of his talents. Eager to cavil where he cannot confute, and to inſinuate that, which he dares not to avow, he is regardleſs of the conſequences which might enſue from the ſucceſs of his endeavours to depreciate Chriſtianity. For if there be ſtill ſo much wickedneſs in the world, notwithſtanding the general knowledge of revelation that is diſſe-

minated among us, how deplorable would the ſtate of ſociety become, if its glorious light were totally extinguiſhed? What obſtacles would then ſtop the torrent of vice, which, although oppoſed by the firm bulwark of religion, now ſwells with impetuoſity and rage? If the unbeliever would turn his attention to the ineſtimable benefits which Chriſtianity confers on mankind, if he would duly conſider the aid it affords to the political inſtitutions of his country, its ſalutary influence upon the conduct where laws cannot reach the commiſſion of ſin, its genial effects on the habits and relations of ſocial life, its direct and obvious tendency to make men happy in themſelves and uſeful to others, he could not ſeriouſly deſire its debaſement. Nor can he wiſh to ſee his countrymen diſengaged from the ties of a pious education, and totally abandoned to licentiouſneſs and libertiniſm, unleſs he has forfeited his right to the character of a good citizen, and is ſo much influenced by the malignity of a miſanthropiſt as to rejoice in the ignorance and wretchedneſs of mankind.

Upon a fair eſtimate of the benevolent ſpirit of antiquity as well as of that which marks the preſent times, we maintain with ſatisfaction as well as with juſtice, that in the moſt conſpicuous

conſpicuous and ſplendid acts of charity the modern Chriſtian has no reaſon to retire with apprehenſions of inferiority from a compariſon with the antient believer. The example, which was held out by a Roman matron, who erected a fabrick for the cure of diſeaſes, has been very frequently followed, and variouſly improved upon. The ample and coſtly edifices, conſecrated to health in every part of this kingdom, are as ſalutary to the poor whom they ſupply with that relief, which they could not otherwiſe procure; as they are honourable to the rich, who could not by the adoption of any other expedient, render their bounty ſo extenſively beneficial. The humane of the preſent age liſten with eagerneſs to the various and remote cries of diſtreſs, extend their concern to mental as well as corporeal diſeaſes, and combine in their plans of benevolence the immediate comfort of individuals with the beſt intereſt of ſociety. A benevolent zeal for the ſpiritual welfare of the youthful poor has gone forth, and multitudes of them are taught to devote that ſacred day to the duties of piety and the acquirement of uſeful learning, which was formerly waſted in idleneſs and vice. By an inſtitution not leſs novel in its plan, than excellent in its conſequences, the offſpring of the condemned criminal and

deſtitute mendicant are reſcued from the corruptions of their wretched parents, and receive the bounty of ſubſiſtence with the light of education. The children of the bleak provinces and barren iſles of North Britain are taught the elements of learning and religion, and thus are enabled to repel the force of popular ſuperſtitions with new vigour of mind, and acquire new patience to reconcile them to the ſeverity of their climate. Of the various meaſures, which have been purſued in the metropolis of the empire, to alleviate and remove the diſtreſſes of mankind, ſeveral have been adopted by the country at large. Thus the tide of riches poſſeſſed in ſuch ſuperiour abundance by many inhabitants of this country, are taught to flow through various channels for the relief of the indigent. Every ſupply which they afford may be conſidered as an important advantage to ſociety, becauſe the moſt helpleſs are relieved, the moſt uſeful part of the community are reſtored to their ordinary occupations, and by the general effects of munificence, the quantity of human miſery is leſſened. Still, however, the triumph of the preſent age, as well as the great and important work of Chriſtian charity, is incomplete, unleſs liberality be a bleſſing to him who gives, as well as to him who receives. This it cannot be

be in its fulleſt and moſt deſirable ſenſe, if the principle which rouſes him to action be not the love of God, and the deſire of obtaining his favour. This motive was the glory of the primitive church, and rendered it a pattern peculiarly worthy of the imitation of poſterity. Whilſt oſtentation courts the publick notice, and gives with ready hand, that applauſe may follow its ſteps; whilſt profuſion ſcatters her ſtores thoughtleſsly and without diſtinction; whilſt ſenſibility feels only a momentary impulſe of compaſſion when the object of diſtreſs is at hand; the humanity of the goſpel is calculated to ſupply all deficiencies, and to extend its impartial and ready aſſiſtance to all caſes of wretchedneſs, want and calamity, without reſtraint or diſtinction. The enlarged and liberal ſpirit of the evangelical promiſes is moſt abundantly ſhown, as well by giving to every one the power of ſharing its advantages, as by holding forth a ſure recompence for the ſlighteſt exerciſe of Chriſtian kindneſs, ſince *whoſoever giveth even a cup of cold water in the name of Chriſt, ſhall in no wiſe loſe his reward.*

When we contemplate the perilous ſituation of the Chriſtians of the firſt ages of the church, we ought to pour forth the moſt ar-

dent expreſſions of gratitude to heaven, that we live in an age when the profeſſion of our religion does not involve us in perſonal danger, nor ſubject us to the confiſcation of property, and the loſs of life. We ſtand on the peaceful ſhore, and view in the remote proſpect of antient times the ſtorms which agitated the primitive converts upon the ſea of perſecution. Compared with ſuch circumſtances of diſtreſs and difficulty we are bleſſed with perfect tranquillity, true comfort and ſolid happineſs. Still however it is not a ſtate of ſloth, and inactivity. We have duties to perform, leſs rigorous and painful indeed, but not leſs obligatory, or leſs connected with our eternal intereſt. Our warfare is not the warfare of the primitive Chriſtians. They ſaw the authority of the magiſtrate and the turbulence of the multitude leagued againſt them in the moſt formidable confederacy. *The heathen furiouſly raged, and the rulers took counſel againſt the Lord and againſt his followers:* we on the contrary are protected by the laws of our country, and enjoy the bleſſings of a liberal eſtabliſhment. They went forth, to attack the powers of darkneſs, to ſubvert the empire of ſuperſtition, and ſubdue the world to the dominion of Chriſt. It is our taſk to check the progreſs of infidelity, to oppoſe the torrent of licentiouſneſs

tiouſneſs and errour, and ſhow the ſoundneſs of our principles by the integrity of our conduct.

Thoſe who thus follow the example of the great and good, who have gone before them, will, as they advance in virtue, advance likewiſe in wiſdom. They will improve in the comprehenſiveneſs of their views and the clearneſs of their underſtandings. They will feel a growing conviction that an adherence to Chriſtianity is juſt and rational, eſpecially when they remark that far from yielding to other religious inſtitutions, its value is never more apparent than when it is weighed in the balance againſt them.

Let therefore the learned and the inquiſitive explore all the treaſures of human wiſdom, and all the repoſitories of religious inſtruction; let them revolve the philoſophical productions of Greece and Rome, the koran of Mahomet, the laws of Confucius and the inſtitutes of Brama, and after a careful inveſtigation of their excellence, let them confeſs with juſtice and with gratitude, that they fall as low in compariſon with the goſpel of Chriſt, as the character and the nature of their authors were inferiour to the Saviour of the world. For where, we may confidently aſk, in the wideſt

extent of their reſearches, will they find the founder of a religion foretold by a long and ſplendid train of prophecies, and recommended to univerſal reception by ſuch an aſtoniſhing diſplay of miracles? Where will they find a religion ſo rapidly and ſo widely ſpreading itſelf in a ſhort period after its firſt promulgation, and ſubduing all oppoſition by the irreſiſtible lovelineſs of truth? Where, in ſhort, if not in the goſpel, will they find a plan ſo perfectly and wonderfully adapted to enlighten ignorance, to correct the errours of reaſon, to purify the affections, to excite the moſt ardent aſpirations of hope, to exalt the happineſs of man to the higheſt pitch of rational gratification, and to diffuſe the glory of God through the whole extent of the univerſe.

As we thus enjoy the advantages of a religious inſtitution ſo far ſuperiour to all others, what manner of men ought we to be in all holineſs and godly converſation? Let the important truths which ſhine with ſuch unrivalled luſtre, and of which we have ſuch ſatisfactory evidence, influence our general conduct. Let our adherence to them ſuperſede every earthly conſideration, and let the love of God triumph over every attachment to the occupations and the pleaſures of the world.

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Let charity by indiſſoluble ties unite us to all mankind, and not only warm our hearts with the moſt benevolent ſentiments, but ſtimulate us to the performance of every generous action. Let the precepts of the goſpel ſo ſhine in our conduct, that the infidel and the gainſayer may be led to confeſs the divine origin of our religion by its viſible effect on the actions of its profeſſors.

Finally—Let us exalt our minds to thoſe ſublime proſpects which are open to the eye of faith, and which are eminently capable of encouraging the exerciſe of our virtues, and of ſecuring our final perſeverance. Let us always be mindful that while we fill up the meaſure of our reſpective duties, and encreaſe our reliſh for the pure gratifications of religion, we become gradually leſs unworthy to be admitted into the glorious ſociety of heaven; and that in proportion as we adhere to the faith which was once delivered unto the ſaints, and produce its genuine fruits; in proportion as we imitate that ſacred band of primitive Chriſtians who ſtood forth as the guardians of their religion againſt all oppoſition; in proportion as we concur with them in copying the bright example of our common Lord and Maſter, we encreaſe our holy hope of divine favour and

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our pious confidence in the divine mercy; we diminiſh our apprehenſions of the awful day of retribution, and are better prepared to unite with the bleſſed aſſembly of juſt men made perfect, in aſcribing glory and honour, and power to Him that ſitteth upon the throne for ever and ever.

THE END.

NOTES

AND

AUTHORITIES.

IT has been obſerved, and the obſervation was made without the leaſt intention of detracting from the merit of thoſe reſpectable Writers who have preceded me, that the line which I marked out for myſelf in theſe Lectures, was peculiarly conformable to the directions of Mr. Bampton. Some of the principal ſubjects mentioned in his Will, however apparently different from each other, are combined in one Plan.

Page 8. l. 22. *Sharing the imperfections of other Writers, they fairly claim the ſame indulgence*] Reverentia, quam Patribus debemus, hoc unum a nobis poſtulat, ut iis hallucinantibus ignoſcamus, utque bonâ fide et imprudentiâ eos errâſſe et loquutos eſſe putemus. Clerici Eccl. Hiſt. p. 601.

Nam et labuntur aliquando et oneri cedunt, et indulgent ingeniorum ſuorum voluptati, nec ſemper intendunt animum, et nonnunquam fatigantur: cum Ciceroni dormitare interim Demoſthenes, Horatio etiam Homerus videatur. Quintilianus, lib. 10. c. 1.

P. 11. l. 24. *The general principles and particular ſentiments of Chryſoſtom and Baſil*] Waterland's Importance of the Doctrine of the Trinity, p. 428. Grotius de Jure Belli et Pacis in Prefatione.

P. 12. l. 6. *They abound in ſtrong and ſolid proofs of the fundamental principles of Chriſtianity*] Daillé on the right uſe of the Fathers. Eng. Tranſlation, B. ii. p. 184. Waterland's Importance of the Trinity, p. 426.

P. 17. l. 6. *The frugality of the venerable Baſil, the noble moderation of Gregory of Nazianzum, the benevolent condeſcenſion of the Empreſs Pulcheria, and the mildneſs of the amiable and learned Pamphilus*] Theodoreti Hiſt. Eccl. lib. 5. c. 3. Cave's Primitive Chriſtianity, p. 3. c. 3. Lardner has collected the detached paſſages of Euſebius and of Jerom, which relate to Pamphilus. He has concluded his liſt, with a character of that incomparable Chriſtian, drawn with his uſual ſimplicity of language, and accuracy of obſervation. Credibility, Vol. 7. p. 304, 335.

Lardner's Account may be farther illuſtrated by the elegant Quotation from Simeon Motaphraſtes in the Notes of Valeſius. Annotationes in Euſeb. p. 180.

P. 20. l. 23. *In the foremoſt rank of Chriſtians ſand the Apoſtles*] Potteri Prælectiones, Vol. 2. p. 234.

234. Beveregii Codex Canonum vind. in Proœmio. Grotius de Jure B. et P. in proleg.

P. 22. l. 8. *The works of thoſe whoſe names have been recited*] Many of theſe Works are ſo voluminous, that the attention of the Eccleſiaſtical Student muſt of courſe be confined to particular parts of them. The following ſelection would, perhaps, give no very inadequate idea of the general merits of their authors. The apology of Tertullian, the Dialogue of Minucius Felix, the Commentaries of Origen, and his books againſt Celſus, the Epiſtles of Cyprian, the Inſtitutions of Lactantius, the Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory and Evangelical Preparation of Euſebius, the Homilies of Baſil, the Orations of Gregory of Nazianzum, the Commentaries and Epiſtles of Jerom, the City of God by Auſtin, the Duty of the Prieſthood by Chryſoſtom, the Commentaries and Homilies of Theodoret, and the Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtories of Socrates and Sozomen.

P. 23. l. 18. *Ignatius, Polycarp and Juſtin ſealed the truth with their blood*] Euſebii Ecc. Hiſt. lib. 3. c. 36. lib. 4. c. 15, 16. Ruinarti Acta Sancti Ignatii, p. 9. Epiſtola Eccleſiæ Smyrnenſis, p. 28. Acta Sancti Juſtini, p. 43. Clerici Eccl. Hiſt. p. 693, 726.

P. 36. l. 21. *The degrading deſcription which the Hiſtorian has given of the Jewiſh Nation*] Jews Letters to Voltaire, p. 5. &c. Dictionnaire Philoſophique, Articles Chriſtianiſme, Hiſtoire des Rois Juifs, et Moiſe, &c. &c.

P. 34. l. 5. *That miraculous powers were exerciſed after the death of the Apoſtles upon certain occaſions,*

is a fact ſupported by the unanimous and ſucceſſive teſtimony of the Fathers, down to the reign of the Emperor Julian] The following are the moſt important teſtimonies which have occurred in the courſe of my inveſtigation of this curious and intereſting ſubject.—Clementis Romani Epiſt. ad Corinth. cap. 2 et 48. Ignatii Epiſt. ad Smyrn. in Salutatione. Epiſt. ad Philadelph. Epiſt. ad Trallian. S. 5. Juſtini Mart. Dialogus, p. 247, 302. Irenæi, lib. 2. c. 56, 57. Tertulliani Apol. c. 23. Ejuſdem ad Scapulam, c. 2, 4. Euſebii Eccl. Hiſt. lib. 3. c. 37. 39. lib. 5. cap. 3, 7. Ejuſdem Demonſtratio Evan. lib. 3. Origenes contra Celſum, lib. 1, 2, 3 et 7. Chryſoſtomi Opera, tom. 3. p. 65. Edit. Benedict. Arnobius contra Gentes, lib. 1. Fabricii lux Evangelii, p. 169, 199. Waterland's Importance of the Trinity, p. 382, 383. Clerici Hiſt. Eccl. p. 533.

I feel inclined to adopt the ſentiments of Tillemont upon this ſubject. Nous aimerions mieux, tant qu'on n'aura point de preuve claire et convaincante de la fauſſeté de cette opinion, nous tromper avec les ecrevains qui precedent, que d'être obligé d'accuſer d'une credulité indiſcrete un grande nombre des plus illuſtres Maitres de l'Egliſe. Tillemont. Hiſt. Eccleſ. tom. 1. p. 178.

P. 38. l. 19. *It is objected that the Apoſtolical Fathers are ſilent relative to the continuance of miraculous powers*] Middleton's Inquiry, vol. 1. p. 121. Jortin's Remarks on Eccl. Hiſt. vol. 2. p. 43, 46, 49, &c. Clementis Epiſtola, Sect. 2.

P. 41. l. 7. *Juſtin Martyr, Irenæus, and Athenagoras are ſaid to have been unanimous in embracing frivolous*

frivolous doctrines, &c.] Middleton's Inquiry, vol. 1. p. 189, 190.

P. 44. l. 6. *How are we to account for the insensibility of Christians to the cessation of miracles?*] Gibbon, vol. 1. p. 477. Chrysostomi Op. tom. 3. p. 65.

Σημεια δε τȣ̃ ἁγιȣ πνευματος κατ' αρχας μεν τῆς Ιησȣ διδασκαλιας, μετα δε την αναληψιν αυτȣ̃ πλειονα εδεικνυτο, ὑςερον δε ελαττονα· πλην δε νυν ετι ιχνη αυτȣ παρ' ολιγȣς. Origen. contra Celsum, lib. 7.

Possum quidem dicere necessaria prius fuisse miracula, quam crederet mundus, ad hoc, ut crederet mundus. Quisquis adhuc prodigia, ut credat, inquirit, magnum est ipse prodigium, qui, mundo, credente, non credit. August. de Civit. Dei, l. 22. c. 8.

P. 46. l. 14. *The Emperor Julian determined to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem*] Warburton's Julian. Gibbon, vol. 2, p. 388.

P. 51. l. 15. *The elegant Author of the Inquiry into the miraculous Powers, at the conclusion of his controversy*] Compare vol. 1. Introductory Discourse, with vol. 2. p. 251. Mosheim, Sæculum 2^{dum}. p. 221, 222, &c.

P. 55. l. 28. *The diligence of Eusebius has rescued their names and some fragments of their works from oblivion*] Eccl. Hist. lib. 4. c. 3, 26.

P. 56. l. 22. *The Apologists expose with superfluous wit and eloquence the extravagance of Polytheism.*] Gibbon, vol. 1. p. 517. For proofs of the attachment which even the Philosophers showed to the established Religion of their country, see Hume's Essays, vol. 2. p. 464. Philosophi quamvis philo-

sophando

ſophando Deos negarent, attamen in cultu externo religionis, non ſecus ac Plebecula, ſe gerebant; nec ullos novos Deos quos aliter colerent, inducebant. Clerici Hiſt. Eccl. p. 547.

P. 58. l. 14. *The Apologiſts inſiſt much more ſtrongly on the predictions which announced, than on the miracles which accompanied the appearance of the Meſſiah.*] Gibbon, vol. 1. p. 517. Juſtini Martyris Apol. 1ma. p. 55, 61, 71. Euſebii Ecc. Hiſt. lib. 4. c. 3. Juſtini Martyris Apol. 1. p. 48. Irenæus, lib. 2. c. 57. Lactantius, lib. 5. c. 3. Watſon's Apology, p. 242.

P. 61. l. 19. *The eagerneſs of the Romans to explore the events of futurity, may be collected from the invectives of their Satyriſts, the cenſures of their Philoſophers, and the narratives of their Hiſtorians.*] Juvenalis, Sat. 3. ver. 42. Sat. 6. ver. 550. Cicero de Naturâ Deorum, lib. 3. Idem, De divinatione lib. 1. et 2. Taciti Annales, lib. 4 et 6. Aulus Gellius, lib. 14. c. 1.

Nullo tempore vaticiniorum inſanius fuit ſtudium quam ſub extrema Reipublicæ Romanæ tempora, primoſque Imperatores: cum bellorum civilium calamitates hominum animos terroribus omnis generis agitatos ad varia portentorum, prodigiorum & vaticiniorum ludibria convertiſſent.

Heyne in Virgil: Tom. 1. p. 66.

P. 62. l. 5. *The moſt celebrated of their Poets anticipated the happineſs ordained to ſucceed the approaching Birth of the Son of Jupiter*] I am fully aware that it is a point undetermined by the Criticks, to what perſon the fourth Eclogue may moſt properly be applied.

By

By ſome we are aſſured that Druſus was intended; others ſay Saloninus, or his Brother Aſinius Gallus, the Sons of Pollio. As the queſtion is left undecided, I thought it beſt to adopt the language of Virgil himſelf, and call the predicted Infant the Son of Jupiter. The Emperor Conſtantine heſitated not to apply this Eclogue immediately to the Meſſiah, and paraphraſed it in a looſe Greek verſion, as if he conſidered it of almoſt equal authority with the propheſies of the Old Teſtament. Conſtant. Orat. ad Sanctos, C. 19 & 20. Valeſii Annotationes in eadem. We are the leſs ſurprized at his looking upon Virgil as a Prophet, when we recollect that Chronology is not unfavourable to the ſuppoſition of his having been ſo; for the Poem in queſtion was written near forty years before the Birth of Chriſt. Conſidering the eagerneſs of Conſtantine to preſs claſſical poetry into the ſervice of Chriſtianity, we cannot wonder that he ſaw, or fancied he ſaw the Virgin Mary, the fall of the Serpent, the Birth of Chriſt, and the effects of his advent very clearly repreſented in ſuch expreſſive and beautiful lines as theſe—

Jam redit & *Virgo*, redeunt Saturnia regna,
Te duce, ſi qua manent ſceleris veſtigia noſtri,
Jurita perpetuâ ſolvent formidine terras.
Ille deûm vitam adcipiet, diviſque videbit
Permixtos heroas, & ipſe videbitur illis.
Pacatumque reget patriis vertutibus orbem.
Occidet & *Serpens*, & fallax herba veneni
Occidet; *Aſſyrium* vulgò naſcetur amomum.
Eclog. 4. l. 6, &c.

The lofty ſtile in which Virgil ſpeaks of the Infant about to be born, the elevated rank in which he is placed, and the ſplendid train of Metaphor with which he is introduced, are ſurely unlike that ſpecies of Imagery and Sentiment which occur in his other Poems. To judge properly of this, compare the account of the Birth of this Child, with the Birth of Marcellus, to whom the Poet was certainly deſirous of paying every compliment that could exalt his character, and ſoothe the grief of his parents for his untimely death. His encomium reaches no farther than to celebrate him as a youth who ſhould fill his family with the moſt ſanguine expectations of his Valour and Renown. Theſe qualities are repreſented by ſuch ſpecifick and appropriate Imagery as give a diſtinct Portrait of a Roman Hero trampling on his proſtrate Foes. Æneid, lib. 6. V. 878. But the Perſonage who is the ſubject of the Eclogue is of far more elevated rank, and even ſoars above the nobleſt of the mortal Race. He is the offspring of the Supreme God, and the effect of his coming into the world is not limited to a ſingle country or people. His influence is not felt by ſpreading the ravages of war, but by conferring on mankind the bleſſings of peace. He was deſtined to reform a degenerate world, and to govern it with the virtues of his Father, whilſt the wonderful changes made in the face of Nature were to atteſt the return of the golden Age. Such a train of deſcription as this is unuſually lofty and dignified, and the Poet was raiſed above the general tenour of his correct and elegant ſentiments. Perhaps the compariſon I have attempted to make

between the character of the Son of Jupiter and the Son of Auguſtus may ſtrengthen the arguments of thoſe who maintain that Virgil was converſant with the Writings of the Old Teſtament. Or ſuppoſing only that he drew his ideas from the predictions of the Sibylls, there might be many oriental deſcriptions and images contained in them which were derived from that ſource.

P. 65. l. 3. *We are informed by the moſt authentick evidence of Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory*] Euſeb. Ecc. Hiſt. lib. 3. c. 37. Moſheim de Rebus ante Conſtant. Sæc. 2. p. 224.

See the curious Catalogue of 142 authors, Greek, Latin, French, Engliſh and German, who have commented upon the Travels of the Apoſtles. Fabricii Lux Evangelii, p. 73.

P. 67. l. 6. *In the primitive Miſſionary we may contemplate the greateſt firmneſs of reſolution*] The admirer of Horace will recollect the ſimilar ſituation of Regulus—

Fertur pudicæ conjugis oſculum
Parvoſque natos———
Ab ſe removiſſe, et virilem
Torvus humi poſuiſſe vultum,
Interque mœrentes amicos
Egregius properaret exul.
Atqui ſciebat quæ ſibi barbarus
Tortor pararet.——— HOR. OD. 5. l. 3.

P. 69. l. 7. *There is no ſubject which ſeems to have inſpired the early Fathers with ſuch exultation, or which they deſcribe with more lively powers of eloquence, than the general diffuſion of the Goſpel*] Irenæus, lib. 1.

c. 10. Tertullianus adverſus Judæos, c. 7. Idem in Apologetico, c. 37. Origenes contra Celſum, lib. 1. p. 6, 7, 23. Idem, περι αρχῶν, lib. 4. c. 1. Chryſoſtomi Homilia in Rom. 15, 18. Euſebii Præparatio Evang. c. 3. p. 8. Ουρανιῳ δυναμει και συνεργειᾳ αθροως οἱᾶ τις ἡλιȣ βολη την συμπᾶσαν οικȣμενην ὁ σωτηριος κατηυγαζε λογος. Euſeb. Ecc. Hiſt. lib. 2. c. 3.

P. 70. l. 1. *The Hiſtorian labours with much ſolicitude to confine primitive Chriſtianity within the narroweſt limits*] Chap. 15. paſſim. Compare p. 509 with 512. vol. 1.

P. 77. l. 20. *The firſt perſecution raged in the ſanguinary reign of Nero*] Mr. Gibbon imagines that this perſecution might ariſe, from the Chriſtians being confounded with the lawleſs Banditti of Judas the Gaulonite. It is curious to obſerve that this conjecture, if it be only a conjecture, may be found in Dodwell, Diſſert. Cyprian. XII. 2.

P. 77. l. 26.] *For the imputed Conflagration of Rome, of which he was himſelf the inſidious and unfeeling Author*] In the Tranſlation of the remarkable Paſſage of Tacitus, in which this fact is recorded, Mr. Gibbon is certainly right, and the Correſpondent of Biſhop Watſon is as certainly wrong. Gibbon, C. 16. P. 533, 534. Watſon's Apology, p. 288, &c. The Paſſage alluded to is this. Igitur primò correpti qui fatebantur; deinde indicio eorum multitudo ingens, haud perinde in crimine incendii, *quam odio humani generis* convicti ſunt. That the words printed in Italicks ought to be tranſlated *for their hatred to human kind*, and not that the Chriſtians *were hated by all mankind*, is very evident. They were confounded

with the Jews, who, as Tacitus ſays in another place, exerciſed *adverſus omnes alios hoſtile odium.* It is remarkable that this is the exact character which St. Paul gives them. Ιεδαιων πᾶσιν ανθρωποις εναντιων. 1 Theſſal. c. 2. v. 15. I am happy to confirm my opinion by the Remarks of Le Clerc upon the paſſage in queſtion. Quibus verbis Chriſtianos Tacitus abſolvit incendii, ſed damnat odii in reliquum humanum genus concepti, quod eos non ſatis ſecerneret a Judæis. Hiſt. Eccles. p. 427.

P. 78. l. 8. *The boaſted harmony of the antient world reſpecting religious worſhip muſt be underſtood to have exiſted only under certain reſtrictions*] Gibbon, vol. 1. c. 2. Davis's Vindication, p. 96. Phileleuth. Lipſienſis, p. 159. Athenagoræ Apol. p. 1. Tertulliani Apol. p. 5. Euſeb. Ecc. Hiſt. lib. 2. c. 2. Juſtini Mart. Apol. p. 36. Moſheim de rebus ante Conſtant. p. 6.

P. 80. l. 22. *In the celebration of the Bacchanalian Rites*] S. Conſult. Marcianum. Taylor's Roman Law, p. 547.

P. 82. l. 7. *The calumnies which were induſtriouſly reported probably took their riſe from the ſuperficial remarks of thoſe who had been preſent at the celebration of the Sacraments*] Juſtin. Martyr. Apol. 2. p. 128. The Servants of the Martyrs of Lyons, deſirous of ſaving their lives at the expence of truth, confeſſed, when put to the torture, that their maſters feaſted upon human fleſh. Euſeb. Eccl. Hiſt. lib. 5. c. 1.

P. 85. l. 21. *The interval of Perſecution, far from becoming a ſtate of tranquillity, was a ſeaſon of awful expectation and anxious fear*] The ſituation of the

Chriſtians at ſuch a time, naturally reminds us of the deſcription of Galba, when Otho was advancing againſt him. Agebatur huc illuc Galba, vario turbæ fluctuantis impulſu, completis undique baſilicis et templis, lugubri proſpectu. Neque populi aut plebis ulla vox: ſed attoniti vultus, et converſæ ad omnia aures. Non tumultus non quies, ſed quale magni metûs, et magnæ iræ ſilentium eſt. Taciti Hiſt. lib. 1. Sect. 40.

P. 85. l. 26. *The Church was kept in a continual ſtate of alarm.*] Huc adverti debet, de publicis, gravioribus, et notioribus perſecutionibus loqui qui decies Chriſtianos vexatos eſſe dicunt. In provinciis enim paſſim perpetuo fere vim Chriſtianis a Præſidibus et Plebe allatam eſſe, certiſſimis conſtat teſtimoniis. Moſheim. Inſtitut. c. 5. p. 61.

P. 89. l. 18. *In the Epiſtles of Ignatius are found more ardent effuſions of zeal, which to the Hiſtorian of the Roman Empire appear unnatural and cenſurable.*] Ignatii Epiſtola ad Romanos, Sect. 5. We may apply to Mr. Gibbon, on this occaſion, ſome of the judicious arguments of Le Clerc, which he employs to vindicate the Martyrs from the aſperſions of Marcus Aurelius. Si qui, quod interdum factum negare nolim, crudelitate ſuppliciorum, propinquitate mortis, ſpeque proximæ beatitatis, extra ſe rapti quædam proferebant quæ ſupra vulgi Ethnici captum erant, an tribuenda hæc ſunt παραλαξει, obſtinationi, vel perturbationi? Imò eo aut vitio aut adfectu vel maxime laborabant, qui innocentes excarnificatos occidebant, quod facere nollent, quæ illicita, et a

Deo

Deo improbari pro certo ſtatuebant. Clerici Hiſt. Ecc. p. 694.

P. 92. l. 13. *Amidſt the multitude of ſimilar inſtances, with which later monuments of eccleſiaſtical antiquity abound*] Cotelerii Notæ in Ignatii Epiſt. ad Romanos, p. 26. Pearſoni Vindiciæ Ignat. lib. 2. c. 9.

P. 93. l. 9. *As no traces are to be found of ſuch expectations in the works of the earlieſt Fathers*] Tertulliani Apol. ad finem. Euſeb. Eccl. Hiſt. lib. 6. c. 42. Wake's Apoſtolical Fathers, p. 126. Middleton's Works, vol. 1. p. 333, 334.

P. 96. l. 15. *The conduct of Blandina, among the Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne, was as conſpicuous and as exemplary as that of the venerable Pothinus*] Jortin's Remarks, vol. 2. p. 135.

Every reader of ſenſibility will be inclined to apply the obſervation of Scaliger on the Acts of the Martyrs in general, to the Epiſtle of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne in particular. Eorum lectione piorum animus ita afficitur, ut nunquam ſatur inde recedat: quod quidem ita eſſe, unuſquiſque pro captu ſuo et conſcientiæ modo ſentire poſſit. Certe ego nihil unquam in Hiſtoriâ Eccleſiaſticâ vidi, a cujus lectione commotior recedam, ut non amplius meus eſſe videar. Animad. in Euſebium.

P. 101. l. 1. *The Church reſembled the fruitful vine.*] Ὁποῖον, ἐαν ἀμπελε τις ἐκτεμῃ τα καρποφορησαίνα μερη, εις το ἀναβλαςησαι ἑτερας κλαδας και ευθαλεῖς και καρποφορες ἀναδιδωσι· τον αὐτον τροπον και ἐφ' ἡμῶν γινεται, Juſtin. Martyr. Dial. p. 372.

Nec quicquam proficit exquiſitior quæque crudelitas veſtra, illecebra eſt magis Sectæ. Plures efficimur

mur quoties metimur a vobis. Semen eſt ſanguis Chriſtianorum. Tertullianus in Apol.

P. 101. l. 6. *From the patience of the ſuffering Chriſtians, the more contemplative and rational Pagans inferred the innocence of their lives, and the purity of their characters.*] Και γαρ αυτος εγω τοῖς Πλατωνος χαιρων διδαγμασι διαβαλλομενες ακουων Χριστιανες, ὁρῶν δε αφοβες προς θανατον, και παντα τα νομιζομενα φοβερα, ενενοουν αδυνατον ειναι εκ κακιᾳ και φιληδονιᾳ ὑπαρχειν αυτες. Juſtin. Martyr. Apol. p. 51.

Lactantius declaims with great ſpirit and elegance upon this ſubject. De Juſtitia, lib. 5. c. 13.

P. 113. l. 24. *The Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall has made an omiſſion with reſpect to the Gnoſticks.*] Gibbon, vol. 1. p. 459. Epiphanius, vol. 1. p. 88, &c. Irenæus, lib. 1. c. 23, 24. Euſeb. Ecc. Hiſt. lib. 3. c. 28, 29. Moſheim, vol. 1. p. 65.

P. 116. l. 1. *The derivation of the Ebionites is involved in ſome obſcurity.*] Euſeb. lib. 3. c. 27. Epiphanius Hær. 30. Hieronymus in Epiſt. ad Auguſtinum. Whilſt ſo many writers, both antient and modern, are advocates for the exiſtence of Ebion, I cannot cooperate with Mr. Gibbon, and Dr. Prieſtley, in his annihilation. Compare the authorities cited by Waterland, in his Importance of the Trinity, p. 276, with Early Opinions, p. 177. vol. 3. and Gibbon, Note 22. c. 15. vol. 1. Theodoretus apud Pearſoni Vindicias, p. 2. c. 2. Grabii Notæ in Irenæum, lib. 1. c. 26. Fabricii Lux Evangelii, p. 49. Tertullianus de Præſcrip. adverſus Hæreſ. c. 33.

P. 116. l. 10. *The two Sects of Nazarenes and Ebionites have been very improperly confounded*] Early Opinions,

Opinions, vol. 3. c. 8, &c. Horſley's Letters, p. 130, 378. Horſley's Charge, p. 33, 34. Howes's Obſervations, No. 9. Moſhemii Inſtitutione, c. 5. p. 130, 131. Moſheim de Rebus ante Conſtantinum, 172, S. 58. The conjunction, or rather the confuſion, of the Nazarenes and the Ebionites, is the corner-ſtone of Unitarianiſm. It was firſt laid by Epiſcopius, and overturned by Biſhop Bull. The reader is referred to his Judicium Eccleſiæ Catholicæ, c. 2. for complete ſatisfaction upon this ſubject. The arguments and authorities brought againſt Epiſcopius will apply moſt exactly to Dr. Prieſtley. If Biſhop Bull, the great Champion of the Nicene Faith, was now living, he would exclaim in the words of Æneas,

Suggere tela mihi (non ullum dextera fruſtrà
Torſerit in Rutulos ſteterunt quæ in corpore Graiûm
Iliacis campis.——— Æn. lib. 10. 333.

P. 117. l. 11. *From a ſpurious Hiſtory of Chriſt, the Ebionites drew their opinions*] This ſeems to have been a characteriſtick diſtinction between them and the Nazarenes. Moſheim de Rebus ante Conſt. Sæc. 2. p. 328, 329, 330, 331. Epiphanius Hær. 30. Irenæus, lib. 3. c. 2.

P. 118. l. 18. *Jeſus Chriſt, our inſeparable Life, is ſent by the Will of the Father*] For a variety of paſſages to the ſame purpoſe, ſee Ignatii Epiſt. ad Epheſ. c. 6, 18. ad Magneſ. Sect. 6, 9, 10, 11. ad Philadelph. Sect. 6, 8, 9. ad Smyrn. Sect. 1. Pearſoni Vindic. Ignat. p. 2. c. 5.

P. 119. l. 23. *The cenſures of Juſtin Martyr are directed againſt the ſame Hereticks*] Dr. Prieſtley himſelf acknow-

acknowledges that "Juſtin Martyr makes no men-
"tion of Ebionites, but ſpeaks of the Jewiſh Chriſ-
"tians, which has been proved to be a ſynonimous
"expreſſion." Early Opinions, V. 3. c. 10.

My repreſentation is chiefly drawn from the remarkable paſſage, Dialogus cum Tryphone, p. 234, which has been ſo much the ſubject of diſpute. Although απο τοῦ ἡμετερᾳ γενας uſurps a place in the Text, yet there can be no doubt but that the legitimate reading is ὑμετερᾳ. This is the opinion of Waterland, Thirlby, Bull, and Horſley; and this muſt be the opinion of every candid and impartial critick. The interpretation of the paſſage by Dr. Prieſtley is ſo extremely ſtrained, that it preſerves ſcarcely a ſhadow of ſenſe. In addition to the paſſages cited by Thirlby to ſupport the various reading, may be mentioned εν τῳ γενει ὑμων, p. 241. απο τᾶ γενας τᾶ ὑμετερᾳ, p. 274. The expreſſion, p. 231. of ὑμετερᾳ γενας is applied to the ſame perſons, and fully eſtabliſhes the various reading. See Bulli Defenſio, c. 7. ſect. 7. If the preſent reading be allowed to ſtand, I ſuppoſe the ἡμετερᾳ to have been uſed merely to point out the common extraction of Trypho and of Juſtin Martyr. Trypho was a Jew, and Juſtin was a Samaritan. I ſubmit this conjecture to the learned reader, with the utmoſt deference to his judgment, and the utmoſt diffidence of my own. The kind and tolerant manner in which Juſtin Martyr mentions the Ebionites is moſt ably and ſatisfactorily accounted for by Thirlby, Juſtin Mart. p. 234. ad Notas.

P. 120. l. 13. *Irenæus, in his elaborate work in which he confutes the various Sectaries of the ſecond century*] Lib.

Lib. 5. c. 1. The Ebionites are particularly cenſured in not leſs than ten different paſſages, ſo that Dr. Prieſtley cannot preſume much on the ſlight mention made of them by Irenæus. He confutes their leading tenet when writing againſt Carpocrates and Cerinthus. Lib. 1. c. 25, 26. lib. 3. c. 21. ad Notas. Dr. Prieſtley ſeems to miſtake the temper of Irenæus, and the genius of his age. It was not the practice of the mild and candid Biſhop of Lyons to ſtigmatize Hereticks with opprobrious epithets. So far otherwiſe, that he ſpeaks in the moſt liberal manner of them all, and profeſſes a truly chriſtian regard for them, lib. 3. ad finem.

P. 128. l. 14. *Ariſtodemus declared to the celebrated Sage of Athens*] Xenophon. Memorabilia, lib. 1. c. 4, 15. Platonis Apologia Socratis. Cicero Tuſc. Quæſt. vol. 7. Clerici Hiſt. Ecc. c. 7. ſect. 11, 12, 13.

P. 131. l. 20. *In the firſt rank of primitive virtues ſtood humility*] Clementis Epiſt. ſect. 2. Euſeb. Ecc. Hiſt. lib. 5. c. 24. Tertullian ad Uxorem, lib. 2. c. 4. Ignatii Epiſt. ad Epheſ. ſect. 12. Ejuſdem ad Trallian. ſect. 3. Ejuſdem ad Roman. ſect. 3, 4. Barnabæ Epiſt. ſect. 1, 4, 9, 17, 21. Clerici Hiſt. Eccleſ. p. 467.

P. 134. l. 3. *The primitive Chriſtians were equally remarkable for the exerciſe of charity in its moſt enlarged and proper ſenſe*] Irenæus, lib. 3. c. 46. Juſtini Dialogus cum Tryphone, p. 236, 254, & 323. Edit. Pariſ. Cave's Primitive Chriſtianity, p. 328, &c. &c.

P. 134. l. 22. *The faireſt fruit of this comprehenſive virtue was beneficence*] Clement. Epiſt. ſect. 2. Juſtini Martyris, Apol. 1. p. 98. Euſeb. Ecc. Hiſt. lib. 4. c. 29.

c. 29. Juliani Epiſtola ad Arſacium, 49. Clerici Ecc. Hiſt. p. 630, 698.

P. 135. l. 23. *Many reſcued their fellow Chriſtians from captivity by voluntarily occupying their places.*] Επισαμεθα πολλες εν ημιν παρεδεδοκοτας εαυτες εις δεσμα, ὁπως ἑτερες λυτρωσονται. Πολλοι εαυτες παρεδωκαν εις δαλειαν, και λαβοντες τας τιμας αυτων, ἑτερες εψωμισαν. Clement. Epiſt. ſect. 55. To this paſſage Cotelerius has ſubjoined a very curious note, in which he enumerates various inſtances of this romantick philanthropy.

P. 136. l. 22. *The ſarcaſtick Satyriſt of the Philoſophers*] Watſon's Tracts, vol. 5. p. 201, 229. Julian in Fragment. Orationis. Clerici Ecc. Hiſt. p. 518. ad Notas.

P. 137. l. 17. *Their firm attachment to the eſtabliſhed Government*] Τινες γαρ δε δικαιοτεροι ων δεονται τυχειν, ἡ ὁιτινες περι μεν της αρχης της ὑμετερας ευχομεθα, ινα σωις μεν παρα πατρος κατα το δικαιοτατον διαδηχησθε την βασιλειαν, αυξιν δε και επιδοσιν και ἡ αρχη ὑμων παντων επιχειριων γιγνομενων λαμβανη; τετο δ' εςι και προς ὑμων, ὁπως ἡρεμον και ὑσυχιον βιον διαγοιμεν, (forſan melius διαγοιτε) αυτοι δε παντα τα κεκελευσμενα προθυμως ὑπηρετοιμεν. Athenagoræ Legatio ad finem. Juſtini Martyris Apol. Prima, p. 26. Fabricii Lux Evangelii, p. 194. c. 10. Theophilus ad Autolychum, lib. 1.

P. 138. l. 22. *In the chriſtian character the oppoſite extremes of torpid apathy and boundleſs gratification were avoided.*] The morality of the Fathers, however ſtrict, was certainly of a milder and more amiable caſt than Mr. Gibbon repreſents it to have been. They condemned

demned without doubt the exceſſes of Pleaſure and Luxury in the ſtrongeſt terms. But whilſt we agree that the repreſentation of the Hiſtorian is ſo far juſt, we muſt take care that he does not lead us to miſtake the ardour of their declamation for a recital of facts. He ſays that "our devout Predeceſſors, vainly aſpi- "ring to imitate the perfection of angels, diſdained, "or affected to diſdain, every earthly and corporeal "delight." C. 15. p. 321. Now, we are to take for granted that this account is drawn from Lactantius. But Lactantius does not affirm that he or any other Chriſtian had ever reached ſuch a height of mental mortification, as this fine period expreſſes them to have done. Lactantius does not aſpire to the rank of an Hiſtorian, but only lays down the precepts of chriſtian piety and morality in the more humble character of a Teacher. He does not ſtate a fact, but delivers an admonition. This is plain from his own words. Venio nunc ad id quod eſt ſummum operis hujus & maximum, ut *doceam* quo ritu Deum coli oporteat. Lib. 6. c. 1.

P. 141. l. 15. *The triumph of Chriſtianity was completed partly by the ſubverſion of the moſt antient and moſt popular ſuperſtitions.*] Juſtini Apol. p. 61. Euſebii Præp. Evang. lib. 1. c. 4. Fabricii Lux Evangelii, p. 278.

P. 142. l. 16. *The parents who formerly expoſed their infant offspring, awoke to the exquiſite feelings of Nature*] Juſtini Apol. p. 44. Clerici Hiſt. Ecc. p. 57.

P. 142. l. 26. *The bloody combats of the gladiators, which had long been the favourite ſpectacles of the polite as well as the vulgar*] Euſebii Vita Conſtantini, lib.

lib. 4. c. 21, 25. Plutarchus in Cæsare. Ciceronis Tusc. Quæst. lib. 2.

P. 143. l. 7. *The horrid barbarity of human sacrifices*] Livius, lib. 22, 53. Lactantius, lib. 1. c. 2. Clerici Hist. Ecc. p. 52.

P. 143. l. 14. *As soon as divine honours were paid to Christ, the Heathen acknowledged the weakness of their gods*] Νυνι δε θαυμαζεσιν, ει τοσουτων ετων κατειληφε την Πολιν ἡ νοσος, Ασκληπιε μεν επιδημιας και των αλλων θεων μηκετ' εσης, Ιησε γαρ τιμωμενε, εδημιας τις θεων δημοσιας ωφελειας ησθετο. Porphyrius apud Eusebium. Præp. Evang. lib. 5. c. 1. An Oracle of Apollo Delphicus was given to the Emperour Julian, and is preserved by Cedrenus.

Ειπαΐε τῳ βασιλῆι, χαμαι πεσε δαιδαλος αυλας,
Ουκετι Φοῖβος εχει καλυβαν, ε μαντιδα δαφνην
Ου πηγαν λαλεεσαν, απεσβεσο καν λαλον ὑδωρ.

The elegant Jortin has happily applied his critical talents to the emendation of these curious lines. By their assistance, he was enabled to illustrate the beautiful passage in the Epistle of Ignatius to the Romans, Sect. 7. Jortin's Remarks, vol. 1. p. 356, 359.

P. 143, l. 19. *Whilst broken arches and prostrate columns spread the floors of the deserted temples, the numerous edifices of Christian devotion were erected*] Λελυσθαι μεν και καθηρῆσθαι αυλοῖς ναοῖς και ξοανοις τα πεπαλαιωμενα της των εθνων απανλων πλανης ἱδρυμαλα· ἱερα δε ολως σεμνα και ευσεβειας διδασκαλεια τῳ Παμβασιλει και Δημιεργῳ των ὁλων εν μεσαις πολεσι τε και κωμαις ανεγηγερθαι. Euseb. Præp. Evang. l. 3. c. 4. Idem de Vitâ Constantini, lib. 3.

P. 144.

P. 144. l. 11. *The barriers of national enmity and inveterate prejudice were broken down,* &c. Juſtini Mart. Apol. 1. p. 20. Apol. 2. p. 61.

P. 145. l. 6. *The Parthian and Perſian Tribes inſtituted the decent rites of ſepulture*] Euſeb. Evang. p. 11. c. 4. Τι δ' ερεμεν περι της των Χριϛιανων αιρεϛεως, ης ημεις οι δοξαϛαι πολλοι οντες και εν διαφοροις ανεϛημεν κλιμαϛιν, εν παυλι ηθνει και κλιμαλι, οιλινες πολλοι ουλες ενι ονομαλι κεκλημεθα. Και ουλε οι εν Παρθια Χριϛιανοι πολυγαμεϛι, Παρθοι υπαρχουλες, ουθ' οι εν Μηδια κυϛι παραβαλλεϛι τυς νεκρυς, εχ οι εν Περϛιδι γαμεϛι τας θυγαλερας αυλων, Περϛαι ουλες, &c. Bardeſanes Syrus apud Euſeb. Præp. Evang. lib. 6. c. 10. p. 279.

P. 145. l. 10. *The warlike inhabitants of Scythia, of Germany, of Spain, of Pannonia, of Britain, forſook their gloomy ſuperſtition*] Moſheim de Rebus ante Conſtant. Sæc. 2. c. 2, 3. Sæc. 3. c. 1, 2, 3.

P. 148. l. 3. *The Providence of the Almighty was not only active in cooperating with the votaries of Chriſtianity, but likewiſe in preparing the way for its reception*] Εξ αναγκης αναλρεχειν εκειναζομαι επι την τε αιλιε ζηλησιν, και συνομολυγειν μη αλλως αυλες κεκραληκεναι τε τολμηλαλος η θειολερα και υπερ ανθρωπον δυναμει και συνεργια τε φησανλος αυλοις Μαθλευϛαλε παυλα τα εθνη εν τω ονομαλι με. Euſeb. Demon. Evangel. lib. 3. p. 139.

P. 163. l. 24. *The firſt inſtance of the miſrepreſentations of the Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall conſiſts in aſſigning a viſionary cauſe for the propagation of Chriſtianity*] See Gibbon, vol. 1. p. 472. and compare the firſt and ſecond Editions. Origenis Philocalia, c. 26. Photii Bibliotheca Cod. 232. Juſtini Mart. Dialog. 311. Irenæus, lib. 5. c. 31, 32, 33, 35. Euſeb.

Euſeb. Ecc. Hiſt. lib. 3. c. 39. lib. 7. c. 24. Epiphan. Hæreſ. 77. Hieronymus in Ezech. c. 36. Moſheimii Sæc. 3. p. 270. Perhaps all the Hiſtorian's information upon this ſubject was borrowed from Middleton; evident traces of it may certainly be found in the Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers, vol. 1. p. 153.

P. 169. l. 21. *The ſecond inſtance conſiſts in an attempt to invalidate the truth of Prophecy*] Gibbon, vol. 1. p. 472. Epiſt. Peter 2. c. 3. v. 3. c. 4. v. 7. 12, 13, 14. Gibbon, v. 1. c. 15. Note 61. Compare 1 Theſſ. 4, 17, with 2 Theſſ. 2. 2. 2 Timothy 4. 6. Philip. 3. 11. 2 Corinth. 4. 14. Whitby's Paraphraſe, vol. 2. p. 385.

P. 173. l. 4. *The number, for which no authority is produced, is moſt probably that of Theophilus Biſhop of Antioch.*] Theophilus ad Autolychum, l. 3. p. 135. Petavius de Doctrinâ Temporum, vol. 2. p. 267.

Even Clemens Alexandrinus, whoſe computations include the greateſt number of years, of all the Ante-Nicene Fathers, reckons not more than 5620 years from the Creation to the Birth of Chriſt. He reckons about ten years leſs than the Septuagint of Riccioli.

P. 173. l. 21. *Lactantius expreſsly aſſerts that ſix thouſand years from the Creation of the World were not completed in his time*] Sciant igitur Philoſophi, qui ab exordio mundi ſeculorum millia enumerant, nondum ſextum milleſimum annum eſſe concluſum. Lactantius, lib. 7. c. 14.

P. 175. l. 1. *The third inſtance of miſrepreſentation conſiſts in an unwarrantable charge of uncharitableneſs againſt the primitive Chriſtians*] Gibbon, vol. 1. p. 473, 474.

474. Davis's Examination, p. 29. Casauboni Exercitatio 1ma. in Baronii Annales. Justini Apol. 1. p. 48, 69, 70. Tertullianus de Spectaculis, c. 30. Hermæ Pastoris, lib. 3. c. 14. Notæ Cotelerii in eundem locum. 1 Peter 3. 19. Prideaux's Prælectiones, p. 112. Clementis Alexand. Strom. 2. p. 379.

P. 178. l. 3. and P. 183. l. 18. *The fourth instance of misrepresentation consists in drawing wrong conclusions from facts; and the fifth consists in selecting passages manifestly inconclusive, and suppressing others of the same writers more decisive, and equally connected with the subject*] Gibbon, vol. 1. p. 530, 540. Plinii Epist. 97. lib. 10. Ruinarti Acta sincera Martyrum, p. 11. Tertulliani Apol. c. 12. Euseb. Ecc. Hist. lib. 3. c. 32. Euseb. lib. 5. c. 1. Athenagoras in Legat. c. 1. Mosheim. Sæc. primum, c. 83. p. 106. Clerici Ecc. Hist. p. 702. Cave Hist. Ecc. p. 159.

To the Passages of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, which I have examined in my 5th Lecture, I must here make an addition. Mr. G. insinuates, or seems to insinuate, that the Evidence of the Evangelists is not sufficient to establish the truth of Facts, unless it is supported by the concurrent Testimony of their pagan Contemporary Writers. His observations at the close of his fifteenth Chapter, are these.

" Under the Reign of Tiberius the *whole Earth*,
" or at least a *celebrated* Province of the Roman
" Empire, was involved in a preternatural darkness
" of three hours. Even this miraculous event,
" which ought to have excited the wonder, the curi-
" osity, and the devotion of mankind, *passed without*

" *notice* in an age of Science and Hiſtory. It hap-
" pened during the life time of Seneca and the Elder
" Pliny, *who muſt have experienced the immediate*
" *effects, or received the earlieſt Intelligence of the Pro-*
" *digy*. Each of theſe Philoſophers in a laborious
" work has recorded *all the great Phenomena of Na-*
" *ture, Earthquakes, Meteors, Comets and Eclipſes,*
" *which his indefatigable induſtry could collect*. Both
" the one and the other have omitted to mention the
" greateſt Phenomenon to which the mortal Eye
" has been witneſs, ſince the Creation of the Globe.
" *A diſtinct Chapter of Pliny is devoted to Eclipſes of*
" *an extraordinary nature, and unuſual duration*, but
" he contents himſelf with deſcribing the ſingular
" defect of light, which followed the murder of
" Cæſar, when during the greateſt part of the year,
" the Orb of the Sun appeared pale and without
" ſplendour, V. 1. P. 518.

Now, I ſhall preface my ſtrictures upon this ſpecious and ſophiſtical paſſage by a remark, which however bold, may ſtill be found to be juſt, that there is ſcarcely a ſingle ſentence, or even a member of a ſentence, which is accurately ſtated. Every part of it either offends the judgment of the candid Reader by weakneſs of remark, or inſults his underſtanding by deficiency of argument. In order to prove theſe points more fully, I ſhall throw my detached objections into the form of Notes, and ſubjoin to them ſome general reflections.

The whole Earth] This Clauſe is evidently deſigned to raiſe our ſurprize at the ſilence of the Pagan Writers to the greateſt degree. But the original

language of the Gospels cannot consistently be so understood, as to allow such a latitude of interpretation. It is very clear that many of the supernatural events that happened at the time of the Crucifixion were confined to Jerusalem and its Environs. This has been particularly understood by the most learned Criticks and Expositors with respect to the darkness which then happened. Origen, Vossius, Beza, and many others, are decidedly of this opinion. Our Translators have taken the words of Matthew and Mark in the same limited sense by rendering την γην *the Land*. In St. Luke, indeed, I acknowledge that the word is translated the *Earth*, but in opposition to that expression, may be placed the five Versions cited in Wilson's Testament, in which την γην is rightly and uniformly rendered the land. The usage of the term in this sense is agreeable to the similar usage of other terms, which are nearly synonymous. Lardner has very satisfactorily proved that by πασαν την οικεμενην, Luke c. 2. v. 1. is intended only the *land of Judæa*. Lardner's Cred. V. 3. p. 574. But a stronger, and indeed a decisive argument in favour of the sense we contend for, is furnished by Luke c. 4. v. 25. where the same term, πασαν την γην, cannot possibly be otherwise understood. This is surely sufficient to decide the question with respect to the extent of the darkness, and to expose the artifice of the Historian in introducing this clause of the sentence.

A celebrated *Province of the Roman Empire*] The Epithet *celebrated* is surely misapplied upon this occasion, but the design for which it is introduced is

ſufficiently obvious. Tacitus, whom our Author ſo frequently follows in his praiſe and his cenſure, might have given him another idea, if it had ſuited his purpoſe to have adopted it. Tacitus, when he ſpeaks of the Jews in his moſt handſome manner, calls them ſometimes "deſpectiſſima pars ſervientium," and ſometimes "teterrimam Gentem." Hiſt. lib. 5. c. 9. They are ridiculed by the Satyriſts for their Poverty, Credulity and Superſtition, nor does their Country ſeem to have ſtood very high in the eſtimation of their Conquerors. What Roman Poet has ſung its Praiſes, or what Hiſtorian has ranked it among the Places renowned in antient Story? Sicily was famous for its fertility in corn, but if Judæa was ever mentioned in the detail of the Geographer, he could expatiate only upon its barrenneſs. Ουκ' επιφθονον ον το χωριον, ουδ' ὑπερ ου αν τις εσπȣδασμενως μαχεσαιτο, εςι γαρ πετρῶδες. Strabo, p. 1104. lib. 10. Edit. Caſaub.

It paſſed without notice in an Age of Science and Hiſtory.] In other words it was not recorded by any prophane Author. If Origen, Tertullian and Euſebius are to be credited, it was circumſtantially mentioned by Phlegon, a Pagan Chronologiſt, who flouriſhed in the Reign of the Emperor Hadrian. Origen Tract. 35. In Matthæm. Tertull. Apol. C. 21. Euſeb. Chron. Anno MMXL. If Julius Africanus, a Writer of great eminence and probity, who flouriſhed at the beginning of the third Century is to be believed, an Eclipſe which correſponds with the time of the Paſſion, was recorded by Thallus. Lardner, V. 5. p. 167. We are fully aware that doubts have been ſtarted reſpecting theſe teſtimonies, but

Mr. G.

Mr. G. has much exaggerated theſe doubts by roundly aſſerting, that the teſtimony of Phlegon is given up. The learned are certainly at variance upon the ſubject, but unleſs it can be proved that the citations in Euſebius and Julius Africanus never exiſted in the original Works of Phlegon and Thallus, we are ſurely juſtified in thinking them worthy of credit.

Seneca and Pliny muſt have experienced the immediate effects] By no means, as the Eclipſe was confined to Judæa. Has the Hiſtorian any authority for ſuppoſing that Seneca and Pliny were upon the Spot?

Or received the earlieſt Intelligence] To eſtabliſh this aſſertion it is neceſſary to ſhow, that theſe Naturaliſts had immediate Information from all parts of the Globe, as ſoon as any extraordinary Phenomenon had taken place. Mr. G. ſurely forgets the times of which he is writing, and expreſſes himſelf as if the intercourſe between Rome and her diſtant Provinces was as common and as eaſy as it is at preſent between the different Counties of England and the Metropolis.

Each of theſe Philoſophers, in a laborious work, has recorded all the great Phenomena of Nature, Earthquakes, Meteors, Comets and Eclipſes, which his indefatigable Induſtry could collect.] That this is a magnificent ſentence, and worked up in Mr. G's. beſt manner, we pretend not to deny. All the extraordinary wonders of Heaven above, and Earth beneath, are called together to make it ſtriking, and the indefatigable diligence of Pliny and Seneca is artfully introduced to heighten the general effect of ſurprize at the ſilence of the Pagan Writers relative to the point

in queſtion. The learned World would ſurely be much obliged to Mr. G. to announce where he has diſcovered ſuch works of Pliny and Seneca as come up to his pompous deſcription. *The natural Queſtions* of Seneca are referred to in the Notes on the Decline and Fall; but in the places cited we find no mention whatever of Eclipſes. He ſpeaks indeed of Earthquakes; but he treats that ſubject in a very curſory manner, and does not inſtance more than four or five, becauſe his object was plainly not to write a Hiſtory of them, but to inveſtigate their ſymptoms, cauſes and prognoſticks. The ſame remark applies exactly to Pliny with reſpect to Earthquakes. They are mentioned only to introduce philoſophical obſervations and inquiries. The Hiſtorian therefore has but very feeble props to ſupport his aſſertion. We may reaſonably imagine that if Pliny and Seneca have recorded all the great Phenomena of Nature, they muſt of courſe have explored the Grecian and Roman Hiſtories, which were immediately open to their inquiries. Now let us try an experiment as to what they have derived from thoſe ſources with regard to Eclipſes. Do they mention the total Eclipſe of the Sun, when the celebrated Plague happened at Athens in the firſt Year of the Peloponneſian War? Do they mention the ſolar Eclipſe on the day when the Foundations of Rome were laid. Do they mention the Eclipſe foretold by Thales, by which a Peace was effected between the Medes and the Lydians? It would be too tedious and uſeleſs to aſk for many others which might be mentioned without

any

any fear of our queſtions being anſwered in the Affirmative.

A diſtinct Chapter of Pliny is devoted to Eclipſes of an extraordinary Nature, and unuſual Duration, &c. &c.] This Sentence preſents us with a perfect Specimen of the Anticlimax: it begins with ſtating a general ſubject made up of numerous particulars, and then dwindles down to a ſolitary example.

——— ——— Amphora cœpit,
Inſtitui, currente rotâ cur urceus exit?

One would naturally ſuppoſe from ſo promiſing an exordium, that Pliny had exhauſted the topick of Eclipſes by his full and elaborate detail. The whole Chapter however is literally no more than this, Circulus rubri coloris. L. Julio P. Rutilio Conſulibus fiunt prodigioſi & longiores ſolis defectus, qualis occiſo Dictatore Cæſare, & Antoniano bello, totius penè anni pallore continuo. Plin. Nat. Hiſt. lib. 1. C. 30. Ed. 1669.

But let us now cloſe the ſkirmiſh of objections to particular expreſſions, which might be eaſily prolonged, and come to the conteſt of cloſe Argument. Suppoſing we allow the faſtidious Hiſtorian the liberty of rejecting or admitting the evidence of Thallus and Phlegon as he pleaſes, what will the credibility of the Evangeliſts loſe by the conceſſion? The Hiſtorian cannot ſuppoſe that ſilence is concluſive againſt expreſs and poſitive Teſtimony. If ſo, he will diſannul the facts which he relates himſelf, and prove by negative authorities that thoſe whoſe actions he relates had no actual exiſtence. He ſays that the Chriſtians are totally unnoticed by Seneca, Pliny the

Elder and Plutarch, c. 15. N. 189. But he deſcribes the Chriſtians, at that very period, as compoſing a very numerous body, and attracting the general notice of mankind, by their peculiar eſtabliſhments.

Again, the Hiſtorian it ſeems was at a loſs for teſtimony that was independant of eccleſiaſtical Writers, and ſuch as was wholly unbiaſſed. We are to ſuppoſe then, that if ſuch could have been found, he would have been ſatisfied, and all his ſcruples would have vaniſhed. But we deceive ourſelves by ſo flattering a hope, if we may judge by a ſimilar caſe. For to that wonderful interference of Providence which took place when Julian attempted to rebuild the Temple of Jeruſalem, there is ſuch an independant teſtimony given by Ammianus Marcellinus, and yet the Hiſtorian diſcovers ſtrong ſymptoms of doubt and diſbelief as we have already remarked, Lect. 2. p. 47.

Many good and ſolid reaſons may be aſſigned for the darkneſs at the Crucifixion, being made no mention of by the prophane Writers. The moſt obvious is, that they might have no ſufficient information of it. The Provinces of the Roman Empire were very extenſive, and we find in general that the attention of Writers was chiefly confined to thoſe which were neareſt to the Metropolis. The antient Hiſtorians and Biographers are remarkably conciſe, and ſeldom ſtop to mention occurrences, which although they may have happened during the times of which they write, have no relation whatever to their main ſubject. This was their general Rule, and there is no reaſon for which it ſhould be violated merely to indulge

dulge the caprice of the captious, or ſatisfy the ſcruples of the petulant. There is no more reaſon in the nature of the thing itſelf why the teſtimony of the prophane writers ſhould be called for to ſupport the ſacred, than the ſacred ſhould be called for to ſupport the prophane. We may then retort the Argument, and aſk Mr. G. in our turn, how he can credit the accounts given by Paterculus, Pliny the Elder, V. Maximus and Seneca, when Matthew, Mark, Luke and John take not the leaſt notice of them? Suppoſing that the Roman Writers had received information of the fact in queſtion, would it have been conſiſtent with their principles as Heathens to have mentioned it? They muſt plainly have foreſeen what great advantage would have been given to Chriſtianity by it. Their Readers would naturally have been led to inquire into the character of the extraordinary Perſon, at whoſe death the laws of nature were infringed, and this inquiry, as it opened a more complete view of the new diſpenſation, muſt have led to their converſion.

Hence we collect a very ſatisfactory reaſon for their ſilence. Suppoſing that they knew the fact, and from motives of policy ſuppreſſed it, their ſilence furniſhes as ſtrong a proof of its truth, as their expreſs teſtimony could poſſibly have done.

Upon the whole, we may venture boldly to aſſert, that if even this Fact be deſtitute of ſupport from the prophane writers, it is a deficiency which may eaſily be diſpenſed with. We believe many things upon the evidence of one credible witneſs. But in the caſe before us, we have no leſs than three, whoſe

knowledge of the fact was never denied, whose veracity is indisputable, and integrity not to be impeached. So plainly are the characters of truth marked upon their writings, that every Person of common discernment must see them, and he who is not satisfied as to the certainty of what they relate, must give up all pretensions to a sound Judgment, and be abandoned to the incurable obstinacy of his own forlorn scepticism.

P. 184. l. 13. — *reckons only ten men and seven women*] Mr. G. with his usual indulgence to the frailties of the primitive Christians, says that one of these men was accused of robbery. Note 74. C. 16. Now Dionysius not only says in express terms, that this was a false accusation, but particularly relates, that even the officer who took the unfortunate sufferer into custody, was convinced of his perfect innocence by the clearest proofs. Εσυκοφανλήθη μεν, ὡς δε συνοικος λησῶν. αποδυσαμενος δε ταυλην παρα τῳ ἑκαλονλαρχῳ την αλλοτριωλαλην καλ' αυλε διαβολην ηκε δεσμωλης σπι τον ηγουμενον. Eusеb. Ecc. Hist. lib. 6. c. 41.

P. 194. l. 6. *That the Apostolical Fathers held the simple Humanity of Christ*] Early Opinions, vol. 1. p. 92.

P. 194. *That Justin Martyr corrupted the primitive Faith by the adoption of the Logos of Plato*] Early Opinions, vol. 1. 92. vol. 2. p. 23, 42, 53, &c.

Cicero may not improperly be considered as a faithful Interpreter of Plato, and of course be appealed to as conveying his opinions with considerable accuracy. Yet it is very remarkable, that in his statement of the metaphysical tenets of his Master, there

there is nothing that reſembles the doctrine of a Logos. There are many paſſages in his Philoſophical Works, particularly de Naturâ Deorum, lib. 1. p. 198, 200. where that topick would naturally have been mentioned, had ſuch been the explicit dogma of Plato; but ſo far is Cicero from introducing it, that he was at a loſs in what manner to make the Opinions of Plato conſiſtent with themſelves. Juſtin Martyr and Cicero found this taſk equally arduous, and their labour in performing it equally unſucceſsful. Jam de Platonis inconſtantiâ longum eſt dicere, qui in Timæo, patrem hujus mundi nominari negat poſſe, in Legum autem libris, quid ſit omnino Deus, inquiri oportere non cenſet. P. 200. l. 10. Fol. Lutel. 1565.

Ει δε τις ακριβως τα καθ' αυτες σκοπειν εθελοι, ουδε ταις ἑαυτων δοξαις εμμενειν προηρηνται· ὁ γουν Πλατων τοτε μεν τρεις αρχας τε παντος ειναι λεγει, τοτε δε τεσσαρας. Juſtin. Martyr. Cohort. p. 8, 19, 21. Fol. 1615.

P. 194. *That the Paſtors of the Church maintained a corrupted Faith, whilſt the illiterate Chriſtian continued to maintain the ſimple Humanity of Chriſt*] Early Opinions, vol. 1. p. 244, 286. vol. 3. p. 7, 235, vol. 4. p. 311, &c.

P. 197, l. 16. *The Author of the Early Opinions firſt appeals to the authority of theſe writings, then refuſes to acquieſce in the plaineſt ſenſe of paſſages, which preſs him with inſuperable difficulties; and afterwards affirms that they are greatly corrupted, or intirely ſpurious*] Early Opinions, vol. 1. p. 91. Prieſtley's Letters to Horſley, p. 13. Horſley's Reply, p. 118. Prieſtley's Doctrine

trine of the Atonement, Sect. 5. Horsley's Reply, p. 166, &c.

P. 199. l. 17. *The sceptre of the majesty of God*] Clementis Epist. Sect. 16. Early Opinions, vol. 1. p. 95, 96.

P. 202. l. 24. *The objection made to the Epistles, because Eusebius does not mention the name of Ignatius*, &c.] Early Opinions, vol. 1. p. 108. Euseb. Ecc. Hist. lib. 5. c. 28.

P. 204. l. 14. *The smaller Epistles of Ignatius are proved to be genuine by many eminent scholars of the last and present century*] These Epistles are some of the most curious and valuable remains of apostolical antiquity. It is no wonder that the Socinian is eager to overthrow their authority, when not only every page, but almost every sentence must convince him of his erroneous opinions. Dr. Priestley in his eagerness to depreciate the testimony of Lardner, and to pronounce his own infallible ipse dixit of condemnation, omits intirely the decisions of Cave, Brucker, Huetius, Petavius, Fabricius, Ittigius, Du Pin, Fleury, Tillemont, Cotelerius, Le Clerc, Grotius, Berriman, Waterland, and Bull. "Quid felicissimos eruditissimi Primatis Armachani conatus, "quid conspirantem originalis Græci Codicis a "doctissimo Vossio peropportunè procuratam editi-"onem, quid Hammondi viri optimi consummatissi-"mique lucubrationes commemmorem?" But his silence with respect to Pearson is the most unaccountable and extraordinary. Must Dr. Priestley be reminded at this late period of the controversy, that the honour of a complete triumph over the opponents of

of the authentick Epiſtles of Ignatius, was reſerved for that great and illuſtrious Prelate? He entered into a ſyſtematical diſcuſſion of the inconſiſtent cavils and bold aſſertions of the learned and ingenious Dallæus, who had attempted to prove that the Epiſtles were ſpurious. It is rather the ſpontaneous tribute of juſtice, than the conſtrained language of panegyrick to aſſert, that the "Vindiciæ Ignatianæ" is a work which may claim one of the firſt places among critical diſquiſitions, either of antient or modern times. I except not the profound criticiſms of Bentley, nor the ingenious Remarks of Warton on the Poems of Chatterton.

The author of the Vindiciæ diſplays that happy verſatility of attention, which can eaſily accommodate every literary acquiſition to the preſent purpoſe, and exerts that reſiſtleſs power of argument to which the artifices of ſophiſtry, however ſubtle, and the attachments of prejudice, however rooted, muſt neceſſarily give way. We find not in any part of his Work either the faſtidiouſneſs of the pedant, or the poſitiveneſs of the dogmatiſt; but ſound reaſon without affectation, and ſolid learning without parade. It breathes that uniform ſpirit of candour and moderation, which is peculiarly adapted to liberal controverſy. In a cool and diſpaſſionate manner, every ſubject is diſcuſſed with that exact degree of attention which it deſerves. Its author, on all occaſions ingenuous and impartial, never lays on the falſe colours of miſrepreſentation, never brings forward perſonalities, when he ought to bring proofs; and never attempts to bear down his opponents with raſh and empty

empty aſſertion. The encomium which he has ſo judiciouſly given to Euſebius, may with the utmoſt propriety be applied to himſelf. Ego vero Euſebium tantâ diligentiâ tantoque judicio in examinandis Chriſtianorum primævæ antiquitatis ſcriptis, fuiſſe contendo, ut nemo unquam de ejus fide aut de ſcriptis, quæ ille pro indubitatis habuit, poſtea dubitaverit. Vind. Ignat. Par. 1. c. 8.

Until Dr. Prieſtley ſhall confute the arguments contained in this work, vain will be his attempts to deſtroy the credit of the Epiſtles. When that glorious era of light and ſound criticiſm ſhall arrive, it will then, and not ſooner, be neceſſary for the admirers of the Epiſtles to allege ſome new arguments in their ſupport.

If I were called upon to give an idea of the ſtile of Ignatius, I could not perhaps convey a more proper one, than by adopting the remark of certain criticks upon the language of Cicero. "Homines "inceſſere âudent, ut tumidiorem, et Aſianum, et "redundantem, et in repetitionibus nimium, et in "compoſitione fractum." Quint. lib. 12. c. 10. See Jortin's Remarks, vol. 1. p. 355.

The circumſtances under which theſe Epiſtles were written, are calculated to render them extremely intereſting. An eminent Biſhop of the Primitive Church, venerable for his piety and extreme age, was conducted through the chief cities of the empire to ſuffer for the faith in the publick amphitheatre at Rome. His courage was unbroken by the fatigues of his tedious journey, notwithſtanding the cruelty of his guards, which he endeavoured by every ſolicitation

citation to ſoften. He employed the ſcanty intervals of repoſe which they allowed him, in writing Letters to various Societies of Chriſtians, to whom he gave the laſt and moſt endearing pledges of his affection, and omitted no argument that could animate their hopes and inſpire them with conſtancy equal to his own.

Socrates and Ignatius were both condemned by an unjuſt and cruel ſentence, and were perhaps equally ardent in their attachments to their friends. But there was an immenſe diſparity as well between the grounds of their own hopes, as the nature of thoſe conſolations, which they imparted for their loſs. Socrates, whilſt hovering over the dark abyſs of eternity, was dubious how far to truſt the faint glimmerings of reaſon. As his imperfect conjectures, relative to a future ſtate, had no ſufficient evidence for their ſupport, he could impart no conviction as to its certainty to the minds of others. Ignatius, with all the authority of Revelation to aſſiſt him, recommended the faith, which raiſed him above his own ſufferings, as the only anchor which could ſecure his friends againſt the ſtorms of life. Here then was fully ſhown the triumph of Chriſtianity over Natural Religion. Dim and gloomy were the views of the Heathen Philoſopher, but clear was the proſpect preſented to the Chriſtian of the Crown of Immortality and joy.

P. 207. l. 4. *Polycarp refers the Philippians to the Epiſtle not long before written to them by St. Paul*] Epiſt. Sect. 3, 11.

P. 211.

P. 211. l. 8. *Ariſtotle and Plato differed ſo much in explaining the nature of earthly things*, &c. &c.] Juſtin. Martyr. Cohort. ad Græcos, p. 2, 7, 8, 21, 22. Apol. 2. Dialog. p. 143, 152.

P. 215. l. 21. *After raiſing our expectations to ſuppoſe that Juſtin Martyr will be detected*, &c.] Early Opinions, vol. 1. p. 320. vol. 2. p. 25, 28, 29, 30, 36, &c.

P. 215. l. 23. *He inſinuates that he adopted the Logos from Philo*] Early Opinions, vol. 2. p. 15, 18, 19.

P. 216. l. 8. *Philo, an eminent Jew of Alexandria*] Euſeb. Ecc. Hiſt. lib. 2. c. 5. Cave Script. Ecc. vol. 1. p. 21. Philonis Op. Edit. Colon. p. 3, 5, 71. 552, &c. &c.

P. 217. l. 20. *A tradition has prevailed in the Church*] Photii Bibliotheca, Cod. 105. p. 278.

P. 219. l. 20. *If Juſtin Martyr had corrupted the doctrines of Chriſtianity*, &c.] Baltus ſur la Platoniſme des Peres, paſſim. Irenæus, lib. 1. c. 31.

P. 224. l. 12. *We do not derive the opinions which we maintain from others*, &c.] Juſtini Apol. p. 143. Irenæus, lib. 1. c. 3. Tertullian. De Præſcrip. Hær. p. 238, 243. Idem, adverſus Marcion. l. 4. c. 5. Euſebius contra Hieroclem, p. 540.

P. 227. l. 24. *In order to render Tertullian conſiſtent with himſelf*] Tertullianus adv. Praxeam, p. 634, 635. Cave Scriptores Ecc. p. 93. Prieſtley's Early Opinions, vol. 3. p. 265, 266, 267, &c.

P. 231. l. 22. *Pliny in his Epiſtle, Lucian in his Hiſtory of the Death of Peregrinus, and his Dialogue intitled Philopatris*] Lucianus de Morte Peregrini. Ejuſdem

Ejuſdem Philopatris, Sect. 12. Plinii Epiſt. lib. 10. Epiſt. 97.

P. 233. l. 3. *And here we might multiply the number of our proofs.*] Sulpitii Severi Hiſt. lib. 2. c. 31. Julianus apud Euſeb. lib. 4. c. 15. Cyril, l. 10. p. 327. Euſebii Præparatio Evang. lib. 1. c. 5.

Dr. Prieſtley is much diſpleaſed at Moſheim, for relating that the Chriſtian Converts of Paleſtine deſerted the Laws of Moſes, in conſequence of the Edicts of Hadrian, whilſt they ſtill retained the Orthodox Faith. But ſurely the repreſentation made by Moſheim is warranted by the words of Sulpicius. "Maxima Chriſtianorum in Paleſtinâ degentium pars "a lege Moſis cui antea paruerat deſciſcebat." Moſheim Sæculum ſecundum, p. 324. The "maxima "Chriſtianorum pars, are the pœne omnes qui Chriſ- "tum Deum ſub legis obſervatione credebant" expreſsly mentioned by Sulpicius. The remaining part of Moſheim's ſentence may be inferred from the general repreſentation of Sulpicius, and more particularly from this remark, "Nimirum id Domino "ordinante diſpoſitum, ut legis Servitus a libertate "Fidei atque Eccleſiæ tolleretur." After a cloſe compariſon of the two writers, ſurely no one will be inclined to agree with Dr. P. that Sulpicius Severus is not *favourable* to the account of Moſheim.

Moſheim's willingneſs to find Orthodox Chriſtians *ſomewhere*, which Dr. P. is ſo complaiſant as to impute to him, would never have led that candid and judicious writer to aſſert what he knew to be unfounded. I am diſpoſed to give him full credit for his aſſertion, when he declares, "Neque enim quæ

" ex aliorum opinione, ſed quæ reipsâ, ſi veteres non " fallunt ſcriptores, inter Chriſtianos, geſta eſſent, " referre *volui*."

Præfat. in Res geſtas ante Conſtant.

P. 239. l. 21. *They were not addreſſed to individuals, in whoſe poſſeſſion they continued in concealment*] Coloſſ. 4. 15, 16. Potteri Prælect. vol. 2. p. 31.

P. 240. l. 25. *The Works of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which had been for ſome time well known*] Euſeb. Ecc. Hiſt. lib. 3. c. 24. lib. 6. c. 14. Photii Bibliotheca, No. 254. p. 1403.

P. 243. l. 3. *The noble Author of the Letters on Hiſtory.*] Bolingbroke's Letters, 5. p. 143. Octavo.

P. 246. l. 2. *The leading facts relative to the Author of Chriſtianity, and the leading topicks of his inſtructions may be collected from the writings of the Apoſtolical Fathers.*] Clementis Epiſt. Sect. 7, 16, 21, 35, 36, 38, 42, 46, 48, 49, 58. Polycarpi Epiſt. Sect. 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 12. Ignatius ad Epheſ. Sect. 1, 3, 4, 18, 19, 20. Ad Magneſ. Sect. 7, 8, 9, 11, 13. Ad Trallian. Sect. 9, 10. Ad Roman. Sect. 3, 6. Ad Philadelph. Sect. 4, 8, 9, 10. Ad Smyrn. 1, 2, 3.

P. 248. l. 5. *The authenticity of the larger Epiſtles of Ignatius and of the Apoſtolical Conſtitutions has been diſputed,* &c.] Jortin's Remarks, vol. 1. p. 62. Dupin on the Canon, vol. 2. p. 148. Pearſoni Vindiciæ, p. 1. c. 4. Lardner's Credibility, vol. 10. p. 319. Ed. 1.

P. 251. l. 16. *If borrowed ideas be cited by an author not in identical but correſpondent terms,* &c.] Owen's Mode of Quotation, p. 11. Clerici Differt. 3. p. 542.

P. 252. l. 1. *Some very remarkable paſſages, in which are reſpectively contained the ſubſtance of a quotation from*

St.

St. Luke, and the exact words both of St. Matthew and of St. John] Compare Clementis Epiſt. Sect. 46. with Luke c. 6. v. 36. Ejuſdem Sect. 13. with Matt. c. 7. v. 1. Ignatii Epiſt. ad Magneſ. Sect. 8. with John c. 8. v. 29. and John c. 1. v. 1. Ejuſdem Epiſt. ad Polycarpum, Sect. 2. with Matthew, c. 10. v. 16. Polycarpi Epiſt. Sect. 7. with Matthew, c. 26. v. 41.

P. 253. l. 2. *The firſt Epiſtle to the Corinthians is expreſsly aſcribed to St. Paul by Clement*] Lardner's Credibility, v. 2. p. 63, 85, 201, 202, 220. Millii Prolegomena, p. 17.

P. 254. l. 11. *That Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp frequently expand the ideas of St. Paul with conſiderable ſucceſs, is evident from ſeveral paſſages*] Compare Clement. Epiſt. Sect. 49. with 1 Corinth. c. 13. v. 7, &c. Ignatii Epiſt. ad Polycarp. Sect. 6. with Epheſ. c. 6. v. 13. Clementis Epiſt. Sect. 36 and 55, with Hebrews, c. 1. v. 3. and c. 12. v. 1, &c. Polycarpi Epiſt. Sect. 4. with Hebrews, c. 4. v. 12.

P. 254. l. 19. *No one was more eminent for faithful atteſtation to the records of Chriſtianity than Juſtin Martyr*] Lardner, vol. 2. p. 254. Thirlby in Juſtin, p. 21. Apologia prima, p. 98. It is rather doubtful how far Juſtin Martyr alludes to St. Mark. Jones, Lardner and Thirlby ſuppoſe that he cites his Goſpel in a few inſtances. Compare Mark 3. 16. with Juſtin. Mart. p. 20. Mark 8. 31. with Apol. p. 327. Mark 12. 30. with Apol. p. 25.

P. 255. l. 12. *Irenæus, Biſhop of Lyons, left an ample account of the New Teſtament*] Irenæus, lib. 1. c. 3. lib. 3. c. 1, 10, 11, 14, 15. Lardner, v. 2. p. 343, &c.

P. 258. l. 15. *The curious and minute obſerver, from the frequent uſage of ſome remarkable words, may contend that Ignatius had read the Epiſtle to Philemon, as well as that addreſſed to Titus*] Lardner, vol. 2. p. 173, 174. Irenæus, lib. 5. c. 1. James, c. 2. v. 23.

P. 261. l. 21. *This perſuaſion, ſo ſublimely expreſſed in the words of Irenæus, which was common to the Church at large, was rational and judicious*] Irenæus, lib. 2. c. 46, 47, &c. lib. 3. c. 1, 11, 18, 21. Clement. Epiſt. c. 42, 44, 47. Polycarp. c. 7. Juſtini Apol. p. 97. Potteri Prælectiones, vol. 2. p. 114. Dupin's Canon, vol. 2. p. 12.

P. 263. l. 9. *The unwearied diligence of Plutarch, the elaborate conciſeneſs of Tacitus, the extenſive reſearches of Dion Caſſius, and of Joſephus, did not ſecure them againſt occaſional deviations from truth.*] Stradæ Proluſiones, Sect. 2. lib. 1. Warburton on Prodigies, p. 98. Jortin's Critical Remarks, vol. 2. p. 74.

P. 264. l. 9. *The neglect of accurate inquiry may not unfairly be imputed to Plutarch, when he aſſerts that Plato held the doctrine of a good and of an evil principle.*] Cudworth's Intellectual Syſtem, p. 218, 378. Brucker's Philoſophia Critica, vol. 1. p. 632.

P. 274. l. 2. *The general conformity of our Eſtabliſhment has been celebrated by its own members at home, and its admirers abroad, as its moſt illuſtrious and moſt diſtinguiſhing characteriſtick*] Cave Hiſt. Ecc. in Dedicatione. Qui Eccleſiam habeas in tuo Regno, partim jam olim ita inſtitutam, ut ad florentis quondam Eccleſiæ formam, nulla hodie propius accedat, quam tua, inter vel exceſſu vel defectu peccantes mediam viam ſecuta. Iſaaci

Caſauboni Præfat. in Animad. in Baronii Annales. Grotius de Veritate, p. 312.

P. 282. l. 23. *The faireſt and moſt excellent examples are held up to our imitation*] Operæ pretium eſt ſicut in precepta vitæ a Chriſto et Apoſtolis tradita tanquam in normam, ita in mores et ſanctimoniam primorum Chriſtianorum tanquam in exemplum intueri; quod non ſine fructu et voluptate, facturas mihi perſuadeo candidas et Chriſtum amantes animas. Fabricii Lux Evangelii, p. 195.

If it were neceſſary, at the cloſe of my work, to apologize to the publick for having purſued a train of Study with a view to polemical diſcuſſions; I think I could not juſtify my conduct in terms more appoſite, or ſentiments more rational, than by citing the remarks of the learned Fabricius.

Apoſtoli quidem et horum inſiſtentes veſtigiis alii præclari viri ſubinde aucto adverſariorum numero non dubitarunt pro aſſerendâ, quam profiterentur, religione, vocem adhibere et calamum, ne ulterius tacere diffidentiæ ſignum eſſet, et ut ignari de fundamento ſpei noſtræ docerentur, dubii confirmarentur, nec inimici in objectionum ſuarum argutiis exultarent, falsâque earum ſpecie poſſent incautos decipere. Imprimis vero hoc debere ſe exiſtimarunt Deo et Salvatori ſuo, ut quam ipſe tribuerat vocem ac facultatem eam pro illius gloriâ et veritate vindicandâ impenderent libenter. Non mirum porro eſt hoc veniſſe multis in mentem; quid enim eſſet in

quo

quo libentius verſaretur Chriſtiani hominis meditatio et ſtylus, quam in explicandâ et tuendâ ab objectionibus ſanctiſſimâ religione, ſive ad animum ſuum confirmandum, ſive ad alios erudiendos aut ſtabiliendos, ſive ad inimicorum retudendos impetus et cauſſationes removendas. Nec tamen ideo quiſquam neget veriſſima eſſe certiſſimaque, quæ toties a tot præclaris ingeniis de integro demonſtranda ſumuntur. Religionis Chriſtianæ Veritas, p. 30.

FINIS.

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