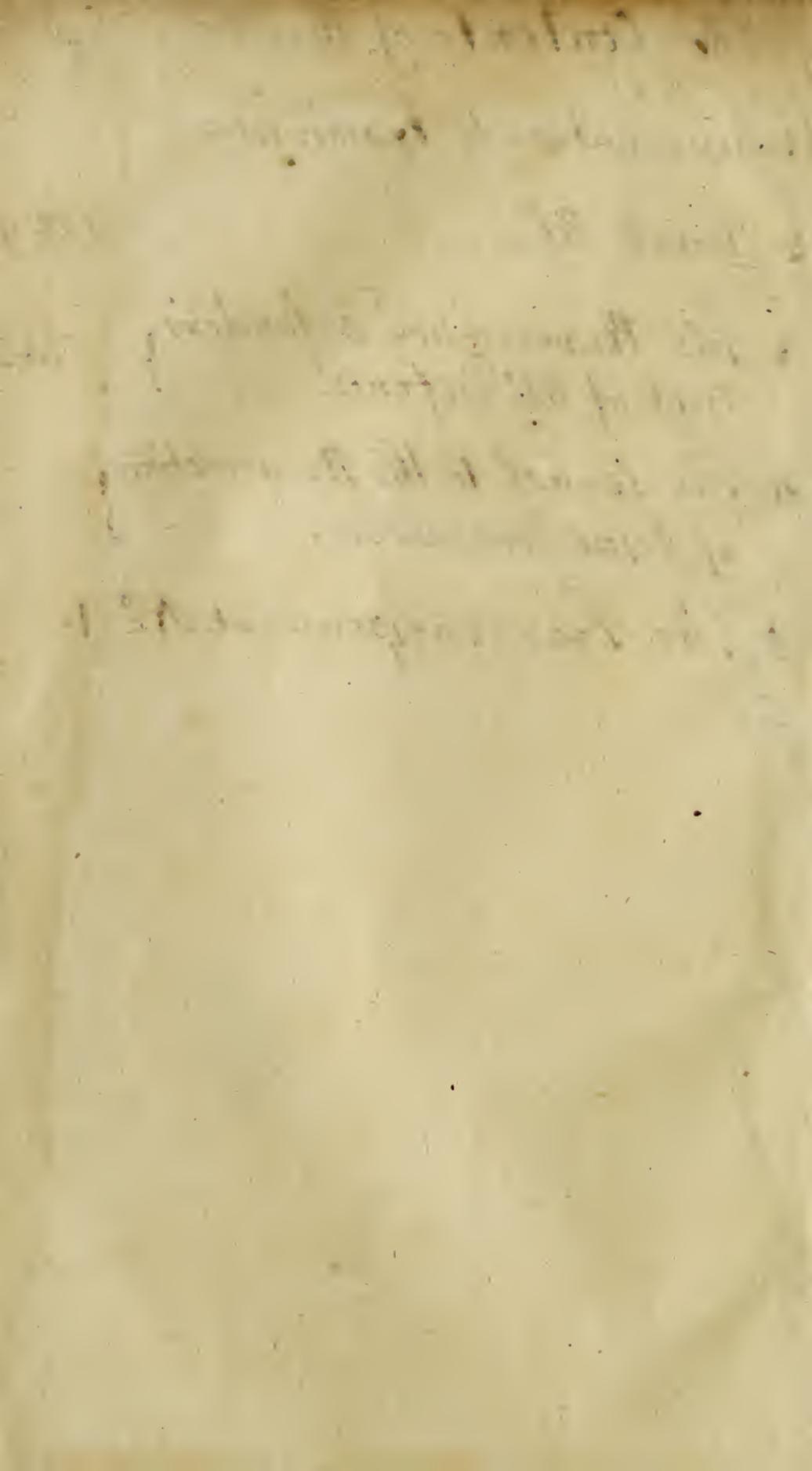


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SUPERNATURALS

E X A M I N E D:

I N F O U R

D I S S E R T A T I O N S

O N T H R E E

T R E A T I S E S:

V I Z.

- I. On the Observations of the History and Evidence of the Resurrection of *Christ*. By *Gilbert West*, Esq;
- II. and III. On Miracles and Prophecies, shewing the Impossibility of the one, and the Falsity of the other; in Answer to Mr. *Jackson's* Letter to DEISTS.
- IV. On the Defence of the Peculiar Institutions and Doctrines of *Christianity*.

by Peter Annet

Take heed lest any man deceive you. MAT. XXIV. 4.

Hunc igitur terrorem animi tenebrasque necesse est,
Non radii solis, neque lucida tela dici
Discutiant, sed naturæ species ratioque. T. LUCRET.

*These fears, this darkness that o'erspreads our souls,
Day can't disperse, but those eternal rules
That from firm premises right reason draws,
And a deep insight into nature's laws.*

L O N D O N:

Printed for F. PAGE, near *St. Paul's*.

T H E
P R E F A C E.

READER,

THE first of these pieces is an answer to Gilbert West, Esq; to let him know, that his works, his gospel works, though great, cannot save him. It must be through faith, to be in a gospel way, not of works, lest any man should boast: for how can ordinary works merit an extraordinary reward? for he can do no more than others; they, like him, have been forced to leave the evidence of the resurrection of JESUS as indefensible as they found it: so that though he has said much, it is little to the purpose; they all prove Solomon's writings to be more true than the Evangelists, viz. That which is crooked cannot be made strait, and that which is wanting, cannot be numbered.

I have been the more bold in exposing my opinion, because I believe it to be the dictates of truth and right reason, and that truth is most conducive to the happiness of mankind: this I believe, because I see that error and falsehood tends to man's unhappiness; though I am not insensible, that every good hath, in its consequences, some
a evil;

evil; and that every error and evil is productive of some good, but with this difference, error being itself an evil, generally and naturally produces evil; and the good that arises from it, is by unavoidable accident, there being no absolute evil; and truth being a good, its productions are generally of the same nature; the evil that arises from it, is by meer necessity: good and evil being only relative properties, naturally and necessarily interwoven in the nature of things; therefore, though truth may be the cause of some evil consequences, as Liberty also is; yet they are, in their consequences, the authors of so much good, that I think none but knaves, madmen, and fools, desire the suppression of truth and liberty, for the little and partial good that arises, or that is likely to arise, by so doing. Banish truth, and you banish sincerity and honesty, consequently all virtue, for all arises from this foundation: banish Liberty, and what will follow, but tyranny, slavery, and violence? if truth and liberty are exiled, all manner of wickedness will abound as an overflowing deluge. In a general desolation, some are gainers, but what good man would wish for it upon that account? We see that wars, fires, tempests, inundations, earthquakes, pestilences, are not absolute evils, but are good to alter and level human affairs; for in the shake and jumble of things, as they make many rich men poor; so by them many poor are made rich; yet he must be a very bad man, that wishes or helps forward these desolations.

It may be said, that truth is not always fit to be uttered; I own that some particular truths, at some particular times, are not; but the general truths of nature, such as are not injurious to good government and social virtues, I think ought to have free course; but that what is contrary, ought not to be propagated nor permitted: for the most excellent human knowledge, is that which shews wherein human happiness consists, and most conduces to it: though I think that every one is not a proper judge wherein consists this sort of knowledge.

I observe upon reflection, in the 56th page, I have said, that all men seek their own good. I would not be understood to mean that every man seeks only his own good, or another's, merely for the sake of himself; but that this is the principal or general, not the only motive of human actions. Man is a machine that is moved by various springs, but I do not think that the machine man, is like man's machine; though he is certainly the machine of nature, or of God's; and I own that he can, by a power in himself, do evil as well as good; but as God, from the perfection of his nature, can do only the best, so he can never blame himself, nor behold what is evil to him, nor be unhappy or displeas'd, which are the same thing in every degree: but man being mutable, and therefore fallible, can know and do evil, as the consequences of his actions experimentally prove: man therefore is free to do both, but God is not; for then God would be mutable and imperfect. Men think God wants power, if he cannot do other-

wise

wise than he does, not considering that such power it is his perfection not to have; for though he has it not, he wants it not; for what is perfect wants nothing. God has all perfect and possible power, but what is contrary to his perfection, is not possible with him. He always acts according to the invariable perfection of his nature, and contrary to that it is impossible for God to act; yet men think God could have made the world better than he has done, if he would; for he can do whatever he will. Why then would he not? Why did he not? What is this but magnifying his power, to diminish his perfection? But the answer is plain and easy, God could not do otherwise than he has done, or cannot do otherwise than he does, because he could not, cannot will otherwise than he does, or than his will is. To suppose then God could have made the world better if he would, What is this but supposing, if God can will what 'tis impossible he should, then he may do what it is impossible he otherwise could? Does not this then amount to an impossibility at last? If God can do better than he does, he must blame himself that he does it not; for sure it must be as easy for him to do the best, as otherwise, but the perfection of his nature must necessitate him always to will and do the best. Because men read that, With God all things are possible, they think it is possible for God to act as foolish as men do, and as romantic as they think; that he can make a camel pass through a needle's eye, or an elephant go through an auger-hole. But the excellency of his nature does not permit him thus to alter his works; he

cannot

cannot will things so contrary to his eternal mind and rule of action; he cannot act so contrary to his constant actions, because he cannot contradict himself. I repeat again, that the perfection of God's nature necessitates him always to one best manner of action. Well, but say they, God is not good at all, if his goodness is not of choice, if he can do no otherwise, if it is of necessity and not voluntary. What is this, but a narrow notion of partial goodness, bringing God's nature down to man's, conceiving goodness in God must be of the same nature as goodness in man, the effect of passion and partiality of mind? Is not the sun light, because it is not always naturally and necessarily luminous? Is not God good, because he is always the same to all, universally, or one universal good? must goodness in God spring from affection, as in man? Let it be proved to be so, and I will assent to it; but I do not see it so in the conduct of his providence, by which only I think we can judge of his nature. Is not that man good, who is naturally just, benevolent, beneficent, humane, and sincere, so that he must offer violence to his nature to act the contrary? If there be affections, there are passions in Deity; and if passions, he is changeable; and if changeable, imperfect; then indeed he may judge wrong, and do wrong; may make bad as well as good; may mend and marr; attempt, and fail in his attempts; may do and undo; repent and be angry; be pleased and displeas'd; happy and unhappy: then if he works wonders, it is not to be wondered at; for, indeed, it would be a wonder if he did not:

not: then it would be no wonder if he ordered nature's laws, and contradicted his own laws and orders. This would be agreeable to a power that can do any thing, and to the exercise of a free power, or the power of a free-will, that can as easily will wrong as right, and evil as good; for if the will is not equally indifferent to both, how is it free? And if it be, what perfection has it? or what perfect invariable rule is its guide? for if one nature predominates, so as to keep under or confine its contrary nature, how is the nature, which is in subjection and confinement, free? or how can the possessor will or act, but according to the guidance of the ruling nature? and this he does indeed most freely; and for this sort of freedom, the authority of St. Paul might be quoted, if we made that our rule; but this makes it neither the more or less true, for things are as they are in themselves, whatever Paul or Peter might think or say about them.

The last of these pieces, is a defence of a Book entitled, Deism fairly stated, and fully vindicated; because I think it is the honest performance of an honest man, and because his answerer seems to me to have more of the subtilty of the serpent in him, than that which is free, open, plain, resplendent, and rational. Olet artificium.

If printing had been as easy to me as writing, these pieces, but more especially those on miracles and prophecies, had made their appearance in public long ago. On these two subjects, indeed, Mr. Chubb has treated in his posthumous works, but

but in a very different manner than what is here done; which were in the printer's hands long before his were. I will venture to say, in favour of these his last productions, that they seem to me to be the result of his last and best judgment of things; expressed with great freedom, in a plain and nervous way of reasoning, as clear as the light; with a coolness like the evening of that day wherein God walked in Eden; which appears to be metaphorically more true here than there: though in these works of his, that great and good man, Mr. Foster, is foiled, and the divine legation of that mighty disputant, Mr. Warburton, is torn to rags, never to be patched up more: and if his thoughts on the scriptures, on divine impressions, on deity, religion, revelation, a future state, &c. are not attempted to be answered, I shall ascribe it to the consciousness men have of failing in the attempt; for though he was not learned in words, his words are fit to instruct most of our learned men. I am,

READER,

Your Well-Wisher

to the way of Truth,

MORAL PHILOSOPHER.

Just Published,

THE HISTORY and CHARACTER of St. *PAUL* examined, in a Letter to THEOPHILUS, a Christian Friend. Occasioned by Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. *PAUL*, in a Letter to *Gilbert West*, Esq; With a Preface, by way of Postscript.

SUPERNATURALS

EXAMINED.

DISSERTATION I.

On the OBSERVATIONS of the history and evidence of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, by Gilbert West, Esq;

THESE Observations are occasioned by the objections made against the evidence in *The resurrection of Jesus considered*; from which, the beginning of his introduction tells us they took their rise; because, tho' satisfied with the abilities of two of his antagonists to that piece, *he was not fully satisfied with their manner of clearing the sacred writings from all the contradictions charged upon them: therefore he set to read and examine for himself; being astonished at finding writers who, for above these 1600 years, have been reputed holy and inspired, charged with such a contrariety in their accounts, as ill agreed with either of those epithets: and because he thinks he has discovered the vanity and weakness of such imputation, I thought fit to examine his discovery.* Such observations as seem to carry argument with them I shall only regard; the rest I pass over, aiming at brevity. As this piece came out after *The resurrection defenders stript of all defence*, it could not be brought in to ring chimes with the rest, and therefore must be tolled by itself;

which makes the music the duller, but the tone is not the less clear and distinct. Since reasons for examination of things are objected against by no disputants, if we allow *the authority of reason* to supercede all other, of what consequence is the list of *great names*, which this author gives, who have been of the believing party? for all religions that have been countenanced, encouraged, and established among a people, must have had the favour of many *great men*. When we seek truth, we are not to regard *names*, but *things*: whether therefore the writer be a *clergyman*, or a *layman*, dignified or without dignity, it matters not: we are not to look to the writer, but to what is written. If a *plowman* speak equal truth with a *bishop*, or a *nobleman*, it deserves equal regard; for tho' there ought to be a deference paid to mens persons, according to their place or merit, Truth should be esteemed the same in all.

I shall not trace this Observator in his long and perplexed method; for if all agree, as he would have it, concerning the evidence of the women; there are unanswerable Objections which he has not cleared up, but puzzled rather by a multitude of words; and some that he has evaded without mentioning, or attempting to clear up. Suppose the matter should turn out, as he has endeavoured to represent it, it is evident the *relaters* were *miserable historians*, to put their readers to so much trouble to know *their* meaning, and reconcile *their* differences. But it will be found by farther observation, and nicer scrutiny, that the matter is *irreconcilable*, and that revelation is such a light to reason, as reason cannot find out.

The *gentleman* takes great pains to force a reconciliation of the disagreeing accounts of the women's evidence of the resurrection of Jesus; as if the

the making them *consistent*, was sufficient to prove the truth of the *whole*; or that the *whole truth* rested on the agreement of those *particular accounts*; not seeming to know, that the truth of facts are not *proved* by the *consistency* of the relations of those facts, but that they are infallibly *disproved* by their *inconsistency*: for it is not so certain, that several accounts of things which *agree* are *true*; as it is certain that wherein they *disagree*, they cannot both be true; and it is possible neither of them may. The manner in which the *observer* has attempted to reconcile the text, in brief, is thus.

Mary Magdalene, the *other Mary*, and *Salome*, go to the sepulchre, as in *St. Mark*, to which *Mary Magdalene* approaching, sees the stone rolled away; she leaves her companions, and runs and tells *Peter* and *John*.

Her companions, in the mean time, enter the sepulchre, see and hear angels, who tell them *Jesus* is risen, and bid them tell it to the disciples; they returning to do as commanded, *Jesus* meets these (*Mary* and *Salome*) by the way.

Before they come to the disciples, *Peter* and *John*, by the information of *Mary Magdalene*, came to the sepulchre; they found it open, and the body gone, but no angel.

Mary Magdalene, who went again with *Peter* and *John*, stays behind at the sepulchre, after they are gone, and there sees angels and *Jesus*, who converse with her, as in *St. John*, and she departs.

Then *Joanna* and women with her, (among whom *Mary Magdalene* was not) come to the sepulchre; they also see and hear angels, and go and tell the disciples; which occasions the disciples with *Peter* to go again to the sepulchre, who see the body gone, as before, and now see angels.

But when *Mary* and *Salome* made their report, this deponent saith not. This scheme is fraught with these disagreements and absurdities.

That *Mary Magdalene* left her companion (or companions) and returned alone to acquaint *Peter* and *John*, and was not one of them, that met *Jesus* by the way, is contrary to St. *Matthew*.

That *Joanna* and the women with her were a different company from *Mary Magdalene* and her company, is contrary to St. *Luke*; and that their report occasioned *Peter*, to go a second time to the sepulchre, is without authority.

That *Peter* and *John* went a second time to see no more than they could at first; or seeing any thing more, heard nothing from the angels, as the women did, tho' they came about the same errand; or that they had any discourse together, are surmises, conjectures, and inventions.

That the angels and *Jesus* sent a message to *Peter*, and the rest of the disciples, to tell them he was risen? yet both the angels and himself got out of the way, when they came to see after him, and yet were there again, as soon as the apostles were departed, is absurd and improbable.

That so great care should be taken by the angels and *Jesus*, to deliver a message to the two *Maries*, or (as the observator will have it) to *Mary* and *Salome*, and yet it was not their report to the apostles, but that of *Joanna* and her party distinct from them, that told the resurrection to the disciples, is an explanation that adds blunder to the history: and that there is no account when they that saw and handled *Jesus* delivered their message at all, according to the *observator*, makes a manifest *omission* and *error* in the historians. But this is a meer contrivance to explain an *inexplicable difficulty*, to make the particular

particular reports agree, which nevertheless they fail to do.

If the women that were with *Mary Magdalene* were gone back from the sepulchre before she returned to it, and in their going saw *Christ*, consequently *they* saw him *first*; and yet *St. Mark* says, *Christ first appeared to Mary Magdalene*.

This author says, that the two disciples going to *Emmaus*, in all likelihood, heard not the report of *Mary Magdalene*, (page 7.) nor that of the other *Mary*, with whom he joins *Salome*; whereas *St. Luke* tells us, it was them by name *which told these things unto the apostles*, and mentions them together as one company.

(Page 79.) The observator says, that *the difficulty upon stating the appearances to be different, and made to different persons, arises chiefly from Mary Magdalene being mentioned as present by every evangelist: but there seems to be this reason for it, she was at the head of the women, and the chief of those who attended our Lord, and followed him from Galilee*. But what authority has this author to contradict the text, and suppose the historians always put down her name as one among them, whether she was there or no. If the text cannot stand upon its own authority, it neither can on his explanation of it. Our *squire*, by a very pretty method, *contradicts* the text to reconcile the *contradictions* of it. But as I believe he knows *Greek* better than *St. Matthew* did, he must needs know what *St. Matthew* knew nothing of, and therefore owns, (p. 24.) that *there are two inaccuracies to be charged upon St. Matthew*.

The first is, that *Mary Magdalene, with the other Mary, saw the angel*. This he may also charge upon *St. Mark* and *Luke*, for they say the same. An *orthodox* man I perceive may *contradict* the text, to make that which is apparently *wrong*, appear *right*;

right; but he that is cautious of error must, *right or wrong*, swallow down the *contradictions* of it.

The second is, that *St. Matthew takes no notice at all of Salome, who was present*. How does the gentleman know she was present? He imagines it. If his imagination is right, how does he excuse these things? why thus: by saying, *the evangelists were illiterate men, not skilled in the rules of eloquence, or grammatical niceties*; yet very often he quotes the *Greek* to prove his point by *grammatical niceties*. Sometimes they are said to have the *extraordinary assistance* of the Holy Spirit, that they may be believed; and at other times, they are represented as not having the *common assistance* of common sense, that they may be excused.

I am not for making a breach where there is none. I do, and always have, pass'd over abundance of little particulars, and trifling matters, that the *defenders* of the resurrection puzzle themselves about to reconcile; but I cannot agree with them that cannot agree with themselves. I cannot believe that *contradictions, absurdities, and disagreements* are true. I never *strain* the text, to make it speak what it does not, or to signify otherwise than it naturally does: I am more willing to see *truth* than *error* in it; and had rather reconcile it, than set it at variance; but I do not think it my duty to receive that as truth, which does not appear like it; or by forced constructions to endeavour to make that appear to be truth, which does not, or allow things to be contrary to what they appear to me: for this is not to find truth, but to falsify it; not to endeavour to see things in the light, but to lock them up in darkness. I am not for *misrepresenting* things, but for *representing* them in a clear and proper manner. I am willing to be convinced by reason; and, when convinced of error, thankfully to acknowledge it.

it. I love truth, tho' it be unfashionable, discountenanced, and despised: enquiry is the way to it.

I proceed to prove, that however these historians disagree in their narrations, *each of them* plainly shews, by his story of the womens going to the sepulchre, that *Mary Magdalene* was one of them that went thither, whether with company more or less, or without, and that each of them intended it for her FIRST time of going there. *Matthew* signifies, that she and another came thither *immediately after the sepulchre was opened*, and not one of them say she was there before. *St. Mark*, that she and two more said among themselves in going, *Who shall roll us away the stone from the sepulchre?* therefore she is not to be supposed to have seen the stone rolled away before. *St. Luke* says, she and others went there, and *carried sweet spices to anoint or embalm the body*; therefore *Mary Magdalene* had not been there before, and saw the body gone, and therefore 'tis evident that each writer intended his own account of *Mary Magdalene's* going to the sepulchre to be the first time of her going there, as well as *St. John*, who tells us only of her going while it was yet dark, and finding the sepulchre open, runs back surprized, and tells it, saying, *They have taken the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.* The time indeed that *St. John* speaks of her going *first* there, will allow for her going again *with other women*, but the other particulars are *irreconcilable* to it; therefore, however *contradictory* their accounts are to one another, 'tis not in the wit of man, without *contradictions* and *absurdities*, to make them otherwise, or reconcile the matter by supposing, as the gentleman does, that *women came at different times, and in different companies to the sepulchre.*

This *observer* says, *Mary Magdalene* went the first time with the other *Mary*, and *Salome*; and as soon as she saw the sepulchre open, leaving them behind, ran and told *Peter* and *John* of it; and neither saw the angels at the sepulchre, nor *Jesus* in her return. Because the story told by St. *John* does not agree with what St. *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke* say, he denies them to be true: and because St. *Matthew*'s story of the watch does not agree with other circumstances in the same evangelist, nor with what is said in all the others, I have denied that story to be true. How then does he by this invention reconcile the evangelists more than I do? We are then agreed that St. *Matthew* is wrong; and one may as well conclude, without any contrivance, to set them right, that *the circumstances of their proofs do not agree*; as by long, tiresome, and vexatious labour to avoid the embarrassment, fall into as great at last; and by taking pains to prove they *do agree*, prove unavoidably, contrary to design, that *they cannot be made to agree*; which renders them more fatally worse, than if there had been no pains taken about them. And since, of the two women that touched him, St. *Matthew* says *Mary Magdalene* was one, which this author, tho' a Believer, says was *not*; it further invalidates the proof, and makes that worse which is already too bad, and in very deed cannot be mended.

The next observation is, that *there were several distinct appearances of angels*, because these appearances too do not agree; but I think 'tis more likely there were *none at all*, and that 'tis as well to be an *unbeliever* upon easy terms, as to take abundance of pains to be a *heretic*, and so distanced from the *orthodox faith*, after all one's labour.

Our *observer* says, *the angels* (*i. e.* the ghosts) did not tell *Mary Magdalene* that *Jesus* was risen, tho'

tho' St. *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke*, say they did; but he only denies what they say, to make them say as he would have them: therefore, *as his methods of interpretation are strained and unnatural, they tend only to discover the greatness of his embarrassment*, as well as of those on his side that have been before him. Tho' he thinks he has done better than they, he is much mistaken. He says, *the angels were not always visible, but appeared and disappeared as they thought proper*. If angels are creatures of mens making, as I apprehend they are, men can do what they will with them: but that substance which is the object of sense, must remain the object of the same sense, while it remains the same substance, if it be not removed, nor intercepted, or there is no certainty in our senses. An angel that vanishes, as bubbles do, is a meer apparition, a phantom, an *ignis fatuus*, an angelic bubble, but not a real substantial angel; if there be any real substance in angels, and if an angel be not a meer phantom, or a creature of man's airy fancy or imagination.

(P. 36, 37.) If any one asks, *For what purpose did the angels descend from heaven?* he tells us, *to fright away the soldiers, and give the women free access to the sepulchre*. But why did not the angels suffer them to stay and see *Christ* rise? No, then they would have blabbed the secret, and we might have had other testimony than that of the faints; if it came any other way, it had been unsanctified: 'tis not for heathens to proclaim, nor for pagans to preach the gospel! Or is it asked, why the angels staid not 'till the women came, before they rolled away the stone, that they might have seen *Christ* rise? No, *Christ* left his linen behind him, for a proof that it was not proper for them to see him rise, nor for him to stay till it was light.

(P. 17.) The observator owns, that *the soldiers saw not Christ come out of the sepulchre, being in a swoon or trance.* The angels were quite rash, hot, and hasty, they flash'd their lightning too soon; one would think it burnt their fingers to contain it. The soldiers themselves said they were *asleep*; St. *Matthew* says, they *became like dead men*, which is much the same, for sleep resembles death: perhaps they might be drunk, and so either in a *swoon*, or *asleep*; and the sacred historian might as probably dream at the end, as at the beginning of his book. Tho' this is sufficient to answer this great book, yet I shall make some further remarks.

The gentleman passes over without notice my arguments against the probability of there being any watch, only he insinuates *, that the setting a guard is true, *because we have no authentic act of the elders and chief priests to the contrary.* This seems to me intended to wave a difficulty that cannot be encounter'd, for the circumstances in our own evangelists contradict their own positive proof. If the chief priests had made such an act that had reached us, we should have said, it had been made by them after St. *Matthew's* gospel was written, in contradiction to him; and it could not be done before, if they knew nothing of it. He says †, *The Sanhedrim, by an express deputation to all the synagogues of the Jews throughout the world, only says, that the disciples of Jesus came by night, and stole away his body, without making any mention of the Roman guards*; therefore, to be sure, they knew of none: this, says he, was by an amendment of theirs, without telling us how it was before the amendment. Another argument given us, that the disciples did not steal away the body, is, *because in the acts of the apostles they*

* Page 345.

† Page 364.

are not charged with it. This makes it the more likely to be fact; because that author has not mentioned such an accusation, which 'tis owned, in *St. Matthew*, they stood *charged* with; and he endeavours to *discharge* it, by the story of watching the sepulchre. The report of the disciples stealing the body away, and saying he was risen, which is confidently believed by the *Jewish* nation *from that day to this*, is a confession that there was not evidence enough to convince them of the truth of the resurrection of *Jesus*, at that time when it was said to be done: yet now, 1700 years after, in a foreign country, the *bare reports*, the *contradictory reports* of we know not *who*, is esteemed sufficient to convince us!

Just as I was writing this, came to see me my old friend *Rabbi Nathan Sabtecha*, a man well versed in the controversy between the *Jews* and *Christians*, to whom I communicated my meditations on this subject; he broke out in the following words, which I took a memorandum of, as follows:

‘ The whole relation of the resurrection of *Jesus* seems to be rather that of dreamers and visionaries, than of matters of fact, it is so confused and blindly told. So absurd and contradictory is your gospel history, that its own relations are its own refutation.

‘ The soldiers made a false report, as we are told by those who will have it that the sepulchre was guarded by soldiers, (which we know nothing of;) but if it was so, did not *Jesus* know it? if not, sure he never rose: if he rose, why did he not by his presence confute it? What did he rise again for, if it was to be a secret? better he had never risen at all, than thus to rise, and secrete himself. How did he prove himself to be *the light of the world*, if he left the world in *darkness* about his

‘ resurrection? the great article of all, and proof of
 ‘ all his other proofs, left unproved! for if he be
 ‘ not risen, O ye Christians! *your faith is vain!*
 ‘ and if he is risen, and we are left in *darkness* about
 ‘ it, ye can neither bring us nor yourselves into the
 ‘ *light of it!*’

I told him that my author said *, that *Christ promised to give that evil generation a sufficient proof of his rising from the grave, after lying three days in it; but that he absolutely denies Christ promised to appear to them.*

‘ I grant it, (said *Rabbi* hastily) nor to any one
 ‘ else. The patchwork promises do not agree with
 ‘ the patchwork performances. So then this was a
 ‘ sufficient proof, without the appearance of it. Sup-
 ‘ pose Dr. *Emmes*’s disciples had affirmed *he rose*
 ‘ *from the dead*, and that some of them had *seen*
 ‘ *him*, as they might have affirmed, could they but
 ‘ have convey’d away his body by night; would
 ‘ *England*, would *London* have thought it a *sufficient*
 ‘ *proof* of his rising from the grave? If this would
 ‘ have been *insufficient* for you, how could the like
 ‘ be *sufficient* for us? Our fathers required a rea-
 ‘ sonable proof of his rising from the dead, and the
 ‘ most reasonable of all proofs was such as the na-
 ‘ ture of the case afforded. This fact, if it was a
 ‘ fact, afforded a *personal* evidence, and no other,
 ‘ and they desired no other; an evidence the most
 ‘ easy to him, and most convincing to them. This
 ‘ would have been the fullest proof, the justest te-
 ‘ stimony, the truest demonstration, the most na-
 ‘ tural, most reasonable, and most proper; every
 ‘ way fit, and no way unfit; in every respect right,
 ‘ and in no respect wrong: the utmost satisfaction
 ‘ they could have, was to have seen and heard him

' as before, such a proof as their senses would not
 ' permit them to deny ; but since that was denied
 ' to them, they had a right, and a very just right,
 ' to deny all other *pretended evidences*. Your
 ' *Christ* declared that we were to believe in him ;
 ' but believing others of him, is not believing in
 ' him.

But (replied I in the observator's sense, expressed
 in page 303) *They had no just pretensions, who
 were unbelievers, and persecuted him, to the evi-
 dence given the others.*

' Yes, (returned he upon me smartly) the more
 ' just pretensions, and he under an indispenfible ob-
 ' ligation to appear to them, above all others ; to
 ' many in common, as much as to one ; to all the
 ' *Jews*, as well as to your apostle *Paul*, who had
 ' been a persecutor ; that *where sin abounded, grace*
 ' *might much more abound* ; that he might shew
 ' himself an impartial being, and a lover of man-
 ' kind ; that he might prove, he could practise
 ' the precepts he taught ; *love ye your enemies, and*
 ' *do good to them that hate you* ; that he might re-
 ' semble him whose son he called himself ; that is,
 ' *the heavenly father, who sends his sun and rain on*
 ' *the just and unjust* ; that he might act according
 ' to his own profession ; that *he was come to seek and*
 ' *to save them that were lost* ; that he might prove
 ' the truth of what he declared, that *he came to call*
 ' *sinners to repentance*. I say, (continued he) ac-
 ' cording to his own precepts and professed prin-
 ' ciples, *Jesus* was under an indispenfible obligation
 ' to appear to that generation of our people ; to his
 ' bitterest and most malignant enemies ; which
 ' must have converted them, causing *joy in heaven*,
 ' according to his own doctrine, and brought im-
 ' mortal honour to himself on earth. Who, (but
 ' christians themselves) can believe otherwise than
 ' we

' we do ;—that *the disciples of Jesus stole him away*
 ' *by night*, if he appeared to none but them ? nay,
 ' it must appear dubious to the thinking part of
 ' christians ; therefore, we have the greatest reason
 ' in the world to believe, the resurrection was made
 ' by those who asserted it. The disciples had the
 ' least cause of any for such an appearance, as they
 ' were believers already, and if they were righteous
 ' men ; for such *need no repentance*. Jesus pro-
 ' fessed, *he came not to call the righteous to repen-*
 ' *tance* : But if the disciples were not righteous men,
 ' what had he made of them all the while he had
 ' been with them ? and what were they the better
 ' for being his disciples ? if they were not righteous
 ' men, what reason have we to believe them ? it
 ' had been better to have converted, and sent his
 ' enemies to preach the gospel, by making disciples
 ' of them that were qualified. If your *Christ* was
 ' *the light of the world*, as he declared himself to
 ' be ; why did he not rise in the light, and enlighten
 ' the world with his presence ? why did he rise and
 ' set in darkness ? why did he arise in the dark, and
 ' afterwards play least in fight ? was he afraid of a
 ' second crucifixion ; where was his miraculous
 ' power ? If *he came into the world, that the world*
 ' *thro' him might believe, and that believing they*
 ' *might be saved*, why did not his works correspond
 ' with his doctrine ? why did he deny us the reason-
 ' able evidences of a well grounded faith ? and how
 ' then can you christians blame us for not believing
 ' *this was he that should come, and that we are not*
 ' *to look for another* ? for what works did he do ?
 ' it is plain our fathers questioned his miracles ; if
 ' they said, *he cast out devils by Beelzebub*, what
 ' could they mean, but that they thought it strata-
 ' gem, and not pure miracle ; that the devil was
 ' put in, before he was cast out by the same art.

' It is certain that miraculous works of real good-
 ' ness, could not be ascribed by them to the devil,
 ' as is confidently pretended. Whatever wonders
 ' are attributed to him in your gospels, it is evident
 ' they were all done in the dark, or out of sight of
 ' any but his friends ; whatever those may have
 ' written, who wrote what they pleased : for they
 ' are all as good as denied, since they own that a
 ' *miracle* was what our fathers wanted, as a proof
 ' of his character. *What sign shewest thou that we*
 ' *may see and believe thee ; what doest thou work,*
 ' was their cry ? and whatever may be by your
 ' gospel historians pretended, *Jesus* himself confes-
 ' sed, *he that doeth truth, cometh to the light, that*
 ' *his works may be manifest ;* and as this was his
 ' own doctrine, it was calling on him to put it
 ' in practice, and to come to the light, that they
 ' might come to the truth ; and know the truth of
 ' his light, and the light of his truth : for as *he*
 ' *that walks in darkness, knows not whither he*
 ' *goes ;* so he that believes in darkness, knows
 ' not the consequence of so blind a faith. A mira-
 ' culous proof of his mission was what they perpetu-
 ' ally called upon him for, as your evangelists
 ' themselves confess ; therefore they never had a
 ' satisfactory one. At length we are told his own
 ' *resurrection* was to be the consummate proof and
 ' and evidence of his mission ; and see how this
 ' proof is proved, and this evidence turns out !
 ' then it is to be proved by *another miracle !* what
 ' does this look like ? the honest man, that can
 ' pay the just demands made upon him in current
 ' coin, will never shuffle off his creditors with bad
 ' bills. If the story of *one miracle* be defective,
 ' how can it be patched up by *another* of a different
 ' kind ? where was the residence of *Jesus* the forty
 ' days he is said to abide on earth after his resur-
 ' rection ?

' rection ? how could he be alive so long among
 ' his disciples, and not be discovered to others ?
 ' why did he not in all that time appear in public as
 ' before ? why did he secrete himself on purpose
 ' to make his resurrection doubted ? why is the
 ' means of salvation made so unreasonable, that we
 ' must believe, what did not appear ? if *Jesus* kept
 ' out of the sight of unbelievers, they could not
 ' be convinced ; and if his rising again was not to
 ' convince them, to what purpose was it ? why did
 ' not the disciples proclaim that *Jesus* was risen,
 ' before they reported he was ascended ; and not to
 ' be seen, while his own appearance could have
 ' proved it ? why did he send his disciples (as they
 ' say he did) to be knocked at head, for telling
 ' people what they could not believe ; when he
 ' might have prevented their ill success only by his
 ' appearance ? which would have prevented their
 ' persecution ;—so their blood is owing to his ill
 ' conduct. The watch (if there was any) denied
 ' his resurrection. What is pretended of the terri-
 ' ble angel and earthquake, was before any disciple
 ' came to the sepulchre, according to *Matthew's*
 ' own account ; how then could the disciples know
 ' any thing of the matter ? did the *soldiers* tell
 ' *them* ? then whom themselves call liars, were the
 ' authors : I dare say the high priests and elders
 ' were not so great with the disciples to acquaint
 ' them with it. Does not this then look like for-
 ' gery, and sufficient of itself to shew of what na-
 ' ture it is, without an authentic act of the elders
 ' and chief priests to the contrary ? and if they re-
 ' ally bribed the soldiers to report what they did,
 ' I would fain be informed how the disciples came
 ' to know it : it appears to me, concluded he,
 ' that the greatest of all gospel miracles is this, that
 ' so mean a plot should have so mighty a success ;
 ' tho'

' tho' this may be accounted for, but I have said enough to you, and too much to most, and indeed I think sufficient to all; " and so he departed.

I think, upon reflection, the *Rabbi* has said all that need be said to reasonable men, and to others 'tis not needful to say any thing; 'tis enough for the former, and every thing said is not sufficient or too much for the latter: yet to corroborate the whole, a few rising considerations claim the reader's regard.

We are told, that *Christ* explained to the two disciples going to *Emmaus*, from *Moses thro' all the prophets, the things concerning himself*: but we are not told what that necessary explanation was; they give us no manner of account what was this revelation made to them; so that *our eyes are still holden that we cannot know him*. And tho' as it seems at another time *he opened their understandings, that they might understand the scriptures*, they, nor their successors, do not open ours, nor tell us any part of what he said; and notwithstanding he commanded them *to speak that in the light, which he spoke to them in darkness*, (Mat. x. 27.) it is kept in the darkness he delivered it. Supposing then they had all the evidence pretended, since we have nothing of the evidence they had, why should we be required to believe as they did? And if the *matter* of their stories be true, that *Jesus* rose from the dead; which fact is not disputed, but the evidence of it, for it is told in so miserable a *manner*, that 'tis evident mistakes are conveyed to us; ~~therefore~~ our faith of it is on a *fallible foundation*, and consequently is not founded on divine inspiration, but on the disagreeing reports of persons, *whom* neither we nor our fathers ever knew, nor *when* nor *where* they were first reported; nor can we have better; and all adverse

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proof,

proof, the *Christians* have, with all their art and power, destroyed. They began the *burning of books* early, *Acts* xix. 19. and as soon as they had power, burnt not only books, but men; to the honour and glory of *Christ's* church, for every church subsists by sacrifice. *Believe or be damned* was the first *Christian* authority, and *believe or be burned* was the next, as soon as they had power to make it and put it in execution. To hate friends and relations for *Christ's* sake, is a true *Christian doctrine*; and consequently, to persecute and burn them for *Christ's* sake, is a true *Christian spirit*. Does not a law to punish a man for not believing a report, afford reason enough to render it suspicious? for 'tis not the nature of *truth* to use any authority but that of *right reason* and *clear evidence*. She never obtrudes herself on trust, nor forces her way by pains and penalties. From those that will not regard her voice, she turns away; their disregard brings on their own disgrace and punishment. Does not the necessity of believing the thing proposed *on hard and rigid terms*, shew the reason of that necessity? for if you don't believe, you will examine; and examination makes frauds as well as truths appear. If the reporters and assertors cannot work upon men's *reason*, they must, *in order to be believed*, work upon their *passions*, for all depends upon *belief*; therefore *he that believes and professes shall be saved!* noble encouragement! and *he that believes not, shall be damned!* dreadful terror! whom they cannot lead, they drive; the *first* takes in all easy good-natured fools, the *other* all tardy timorous ones. So the poor fools of this world are persuaded that by this means they are made rich and wise in faith. Thus those who are governed more by their *passions* than *reason*, the *simple* and *sinners*, who are by much the greater part of the world, are drawn in; these bring numbers in-

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to the church, numbers bring power, and by power the rest are compell'd, at least to pretend belief. Thus *faith*, of one sort or other, like a *spiritual deluge*, has over-run the world. As when the dogs are muzzled, the wolves will destroy the sheep; so silence the wise and experienced, and the incautious will be taken in, and become the prey of men practised in deceit. This may certainly be said of the *mother church*, whatever may be pleaded for her *children*.

(Pag. 203.) This writer owns, that as *St. John* says, TWICE *Jesus came in when the doors were shut, he intended to signify that he came in miraculously, or he would not have mentioned that otherwise trifling circumstance of the doors being shut.* As this Gentleman confesses it requires no great depth of philosophy to understand it impossible, that it cannot be imagined how a solid body can penetrate a solid body, and yet both of them remain the same bodies after as before; 'tis the plainer truth: and tho' it be so, I apprehend that *St. John's* faith was able to remove this mountain: for faith can surmount all contradictions. That a *material* and a *spiritual* body may be the same, or different only at different times, according to the will of the spirit that possesses it, might have been *St. John's* opinion for aught we know, if we may conjecture his faith by the facts he relates. Though, according to this way of thinking, the gentleman merrily says, in this sense, *the spirituality of the walls and doors may be as well inferred as the spirituality of Christ's body*, and imagines that argument would very well have become me; I really think the same, had I first had that unlucky, as he has the *lucky* thought. In me indeed, it would have been as he says, *sophistical, ludicrous, and absurd*; in him I really think it is *witty, pleasant, and a propos*. He seems to grant, (p. 206.) that what is contrary to the laws of na-

ture, cannot be effected: How comes he then to talk of *a power that can control the laws of nature*, (p. 207.) and *opening a passage thro' walls and doors, without making any visible breach in them?* for if this be not effected by some natural means, 'tis as much contrary to the laws of nature, as the other. If the laws of nature are the laws of God, and he can subvert those laws, then God can contradict himself, and every absurdity is possible with him; but if this be impossible, then God can do nothing supernatural. This is a sketch of an answer to his challenge (p. 142.) on the impossibility of Miracles. *Let those that think this point* (says he) *can be made out, try their strength in this argument, which supercedes all other objections that can be made in favour of any miracle.* A dissertation on this subject follows, that answers his challenge.

As to the *three thousand* said to be converted by St. Peter's sermon, I have, in my opinion, heard a *thousand* times better sermons, that I fear have never converted *three*; therefore I am dubious, if the word *thousand* be not an interpolation. If his sermon converted them *all*, then all the others talking with tongues was to no purpose: It may be they talked in the spirit, since 'twas by the spirit they spoke; for we are not told one word that any of them said, besides *Peter*; and if the historian was faithful (which is not to be questioned) undoubtedly he has told us all they said; for if 'tis not to be supposed they omitted any thing against themselves, as they have not mentioned that the *Jew* rulers did not accuse the disciples of stealing away the body of their master, when they were brought before them, therefore there was nothing said by those rulers about it, and therefore the Disciples had no hand in it: I say, as they omitted no circumstance that made against themselves, it cannot be imagined but they faithfully

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inserted every miraculous circumstance, and all the particulars of prodigies that happened in favour of themselves and their mission; therefore not mentioning what the others said, shews, they said nothing.

If this wonderful conversion be true, 'tis no less wonderful that so many, and all at once, believed the resurrection of *Jesus* then, and so few of them have believed any thing of it *since*. The Holy Ghost, if he had gone on, might soon have converted the whole nation by *three thousand* in a day. What hindered this hopeful progress? It was not in man's power to stop his maker's; why then was *his arm shortened*, since he wills that *all men be saved*, and no man can save himself? I apprehend this miracle of the tongues has some mystical meaning; and it seems to me to be this, that as *cloven tongues* sat on the head of the speakers, it shews that the gospel has a *two-fold interpretation*, and that the preachers are *double tongued*, so that the hearers cannot understand the spirit's meaning. The spirit came *like the rushing of a mighty wind*, and has continued to be like that *boisterous element* ever since. There were men gathered together from *every nation under heaven*, that the gospel might be preached to all nations; this is typical of a world of confusion in the church; what believers take for *rhapsody* and *inspiration*, not only unbelievers, but other sort of believers, look upon as *drunkenness* of opinion, and infatuation. There's the same reason the *Christian* church should be typical, as the *Jewish*; for, as my author says, *Inasmuch as the Jewish religion did virtually contain the hopes of the gospel, the religion itself was a prophecy*: so as the *Christian* religion does virtually contain the hopes of the promises of heaven, 'tis itself a prophecy, or a type of *the better covenant of good things to come*; for the good of it is certainly not yet come, nor ever

ever likely to come to men, till men come to heaven.

The *Observer* takes those particulars for granted, that he should prove; and argues from those as if already proved, that you must take for granted: thus from their own accounts of things he attempts to make their stories good, which he but attempts; and from facts not granted, he attempts to prove the grand fact in dispute; which may as well itself be granted, as proofs from the same foundation. This he calls (p. 294.) *a long and scrupulous examination of the several particulars which constitute the evidence of the resurrection*. And then, says he, *I have endeavoured to shew, that never were any facts that could better abide the test*; and concludes, as if he had succeeded, that *never was there a fact more fully proved than the resurrection of Christ*; when at the same time none was ever less, and the *inconsistencies and absurdities* of the relations destroy all proof; and wanting its essentially necessary and natural proof, has no proof in nature. If a man rise from the dead, to be publickly *known*, and was not publickly *seen*, his ends are frustrated by his own inaction, or wrong action: he is non-suited for non-appearance. If *enemies* as well as *friends* have no proof of it, it is but a partial proof. If *Jesus* rose, that men might believe who were *not* his disciples, that end was too weakly effected; for of the *disciples* themselves *some doubted*. What is done in the dark, wants light for its discovery.

This author being reduced by meer necessity to make the evangelists agree; for facts forms conjectures; for they do not agree to insinuate what he does, or countenance his insinuations. When one story, told by several persons, is *irreconcilable*, there is no other way of reconciliation, than to say *they are different stories*, and if that method fail, it
had

had been better never to attempt it. To force a story to *agree* that *does* not, is like forcing a story to be *true* that *is* not. They that can rest satisfied with reports on the credit of the reporters, and believe the possibility of miracles, are capable of believing any thing, if they believe the reporters credible persons. Nothing is more easy than to plant belief in the mind before reason springs up ; and it is difficult in most to eradicate it, when it is deeply rooted by long continuance. This faith is a weed that generally choaks the growth of reason. Is this the revelation that is to enlighten our understandings, that we cannot understand wherein the light of it consists ? that must be shrouded in subterfuges of suppositions and imaginations, to make it so much as have the appearance of that necessary agreement, without which it cannot possibly have the least appearance of truth ?

The *observer* endeavours to prove the fact, by the exact accomplishment of Christ's words * ; tho' a thousand proofs, without the right, will never do ; and this alone, is the only satisfactory one, *viz.* a satisfaction given to the people in common. One of his assertions for proofs is, that *Jesus foretold his death and resurrection* ; tho' he should first have cleared up the objections again these pretended predictions in *The resurrection considered* ; in which is plainly shewn, that those to whom it is said to be foretold, foreknew nothing of the matter ; consequently those predictions were made after, and ascribed to him : and as that of his *resurrection*, so was that of his *death* ; for both are put together in the history ; which *destroys the story of the watch* : but this very *material argument*, our *observer* being not willing to observe, passes over in silence. What is the meaning of this, but that he

knew

knew it was wisest so to do ; for he thought that few who read *The resurrection considered*, would read his observations on it. To answer this single point, two more such volumes as his will be too little.

Another prediction ascribed to *Jesus*, that this author mentions, is *the treachery of Judas*. But *Jesus* appeared to have no foreknowledge of this, when he promised that the twelve apostles, should sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel, *Judas* being one ; tho' I suppose *Judas* has lost his commission since.

The *observer* does not mention two prophecies, ascribed to Christ, which should have been fulfilled long ago, but are not yet come to pass.

1. The temporalities promised his disciples for adhering to him, *Mark* x. 30. That they should receive an hundred fold in this world for whatever they lost at that time, new relations, and large inheritances ; unless they found their new profession of catching men instead of fish bring them in *Cent. per Cent.* and so turn to a very good account. This was not fulfilled otherwise in this world, nor is likely to be, even in faith, unless the old exploded doctrine of the expected *millenium* be revived.

2. The coming of himself in power and glory, with all it's signs and concomitants, which was to have been immediately after the destruction of *Jerusalem*, *Mat.* xxiv. 29. *Mark* xiii. 24. Notwithstanding the disciples were to endure persecutions, they were to be present at that time, either alive or raised up from the dead, *1 Theff.* iv. 13, to the end. *Mat.* xxiv. 4, 15, 23, 25, 33, 42, 44. *Mark* xiii. 5, 7, 9, 18, 21, 23, 29, 33, 35, 37. *Luke* xxi. 8, 9, 12, to 20, 28, 31, 34, 36. and that generation was not to pass until all these prophecies were fulfilled ; and both heaven and earth should sooner fail than this prediction, *Matt.*

xxiv. 34. 35. *Mark* xiii. 30, 31. *Luke* xxi. 32, 33. and when he sent forth his disciples to preach the gospel, he told them (as we read) *Mat.* x. 23. *Ye shall not have gone over all the cities of Judah until the son of man be come*; therefore the apostles called it *the last times*, and *the end of the world*.

I suppose it will be objected, if the prophecies are not of Christ's making, but ascribed to him afterwards; why have they ascribed false prophecies to him? for I made the same objection to *Rabbi Nathan*, who returned me this answer.

' The prophecies that the messiah shall be a
' personal king in this world, are too plain to ad-
' mit of any equivocation, or explain away by
' mystery. It is so *expressly* predicted, that if this
' is not to be depended on to be literally accomplished,
' there is not any prophecy to be depended upon;
' so that when we *Jews* are able to give up this, we
' shall give up all the rest for chimeras or imposi-
' tion. It was impossible to persuade our nation
' otherwise, nor did ever *Jesus* attempt it. There-
' fore when he was crucified, it was plain he could
' not be that messiah which was expected. What was
' then to be done to keep up the forlorn hopes of the
' disciples? what, but to secure his body where no
' eye could see it, and give out he was risen and as-
' cended, in their sight to heaven, and that he had
' promised he would come again armed with pow-
' er, reward his adherents, punish all his and their
' adversaries, give to his friends estates and places
' under his government for a thousand years, that
' *Jerusalem* should be renewed, and the temple re-
' built, tho' then subjected to the *Gentiles*, and be
' made the glory of the whole earth, and the seat
' of universal monarchy. They that believed
' *Jesus* was rose from the dead, were capable of
' believing all the rest: for what is impossible to a

‘ miraculous power? and with this bait the disciples
 ‘ caught men. It is our steady faith in God by his
 ‘ prophets, and our faithfulness to God’s laws,
 ‘ given to us by *Moses*, maugre all persecutions in
 ‘ this world, that keeps us still *a distinct people from*
 ‘ *all others*; and from those we have *suffered* most,
 ‘ by whom we ought to have been *favoured* most;
 ‘ those I mean (said he) that *borrow* their religion
 ‘ from us; and have by their own confession *the*
 ‘ *means of salvation from our race*. Admit we did
 ‘ wrong in crucifying him, we did it *ignorantly in*
 ‘ *unbelief* (for which *Paul* obtained mercy;) and
 ‘ the gospel owns, that *it was so ordained to be for*
 ‘ *your salvation*; and what were our fathers that
 ‘ they could withstand God, if we are given over to
 ‘ infidelity and hardness of heart by him; how can
 ‘ we frustrate his will, who *does what he will in the*
 ‘ *armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of*
 ‘ *the earth, and who can stop his hand, or say unto*
 ‘ *him, what doest thou?* But we, *against hope, be-*
 ‘ *lieve in hope*; which proves us to be the *children*
 ‘ of Abraham; and therefore those to whom the
 ‘ promises are made.’ Then with a solemn sigh,
 and an involuntary tear that dropt as he spake, ‘ O
 ‘ righteous Lord Jehovah, said he, remember *Israel*
 ‘ thy chosen, and *Jacob* thine inheritance.’ And
 turned away to weep forth what he could not utter.
 The most sincere christian cannot be more sincere-
 than he.

It argues the utmost partiality and blindness to
 affirm, as this author does, (p. 307.) that *the*
apostles and evangelists were the authors of the Scrip-
tures whose names they bear; we have the concurrent
attestation of all the earliest writers of the church,
deduced by an uninterrupted and uncontrolled tradi-
tion, from the very times of the apostles, which is such
an authentication of those sacred records, as is not

to be overturned by bare presumption, and a surmised and unproved charge of forgery. The charge of forgery is not a bare presumption and surmise : it has been owned by believers themselves, as in *The resurrection re-considered*, (p. 49, 50.) It is bare presumption to assert confidently, that we have an uninterrupted and uncontrolled tradition to the contrary ; for there is no reason to presume it. Besides Dr. Mills has discovered a passage, giving an account of a general alteration of the four gospels, in the sixth century, recorded by Timuis, an African bishop, who flourished in that age, (see Cave's hist. lit. p. 415.) in his *Chronicon*, which was printed by Canisius, at Ingolstadt, in 1600, and by Joseph Scaliger, in his edition of the *Chronicon of Eusebius*. The passage is this : *in the consulship of Massalia, at the command of the emperor Anastasius, the holy gospels, as written, idiotis evangelistis, are corrected and amended.* Dr. Mills likewise tells us, that St. Isidore, bishop of Seville, relates the same in his *Chronicon*. This shews how incorrupted our sacred records are ; and I think that corruptions or absurdities, concerning watching the sepulchre, are so plainly shewn, in *The resurrection of Jesus considered*, as evidently display such forgeries or errors from some quarter, which are indefensible. If they carry this proof with them, we need not run back for many ages to prove they have it not, from a church abounding with forgery and corruptions, and every impiety ; and therefore a most undoubted incorruptible repository of pure and unspotted truth ! It is most fit and satisfactory however, that it's own intrinsic nature should speak it's worth ; let it stand the test of human judgment, and be judged as that says men are to be ; *by it's words be it justified or condemned.* I know not whether the sacred writings, as they are called, are those of the

writers whose names they bear, or not ; and if they are, I know not *who* nor *what* those men were, but their bare names only ; therefore cannot take things related on the credit of I know not who, that were the relaters. It is not reasonable I should be obliged to take that for truth, which has not the appearance of it, upon trust to those that might be either men cunning or foolish, honest or dishonest, for aught any man in the world now knows, or can possibly know about them : therefore I think the authority that ought to govern our minds and manners should be reasonable, or the authority of evident truth and and reason only.

Permit me to mention somewhat *in favour of the evangelists*, and conclude ; and there is no doubt, but most of my readers will believe, that for me *so to do*, is a sign of drawing near a conclusion.

Tho' the holy ghost was promised to bring all things to the remembrance of the disciples, he was not always present ; for St. Paul says, 1 Cor. vii. 12. *Now I speak not the Lord* : if the Lord had been then present, sure St. Paul would have given him the pre-eminence of speech, and been silent while the Lord spoke ; and therefore he might not be present to the sacred historians, at the time when they wrote ; and so slips and errors might creep in : and if he was present, they were but men, and therefore fallible ; for tho' the better half of *Christ* was GOD ; he was subject to the infirmities of manhood, and to be provoked to say many things, (*Luke xi. 53.*) which perhaps he would not otherwise have said, and which the writers do not seem to have recorded, tho' *in him* it is said *dwelt the fulness of the Godhead bodily*, (which is not true manifestly ; for if so, all God was in him, and all the creation besides subsisted without God, and consequently existed without God, and is independent

dent of him ;) yet tho' it were so, the manhood prevailed over the godhead, at a time when the manhood wanted it's assistance most ;—in the time of his sufferings. The apostle *Paul*, who boasted he had as much of the *holy ghost* as any man, next to his master, had *sin always present with him*. And if the holy ghost did bring all things to the remembrance of the writers ; yet how could they have patience to write all that the holy ghost remembered them of, when St. *John* (xxi. 24, 25.) tells us, that *if all the things were written that Jesus did, he supposes that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written*. And the world now is scarce able to bear or regard all the *pros* and *cons* about it. With this I shall finish, as St. *John* did, who knew when he had said enough ; and in so doing imitate the blessed example of one of the greatest saints, in one of the very best things done by him.

SUPER.

SUPERNATURALS

EXAMINED.

DISSERTATION II.

On Mr. JACKSON'S Letter to DEISTS:
Shewing the IMPOSSIBILITY of Miracles and
Prophecies.

In a Dialogue between a Christian and a Deist.

The INTRODUCTORY DISCOURSE.

C. **A**T your request, Sir, I come to pay this friendly visit.

D. I thank you, Sir, and am prepared to entertain you in a friendly manner. In this arbour, fit for retirement, pray sit down ; let friends be free ; it is the life of friendship ; there is not any thing more agreeable to me, than to contemplate and converse ; here is good wine, which, discretionally used, is fit to keep alive the good spirit of our conversation.

C. The place, the season, and the person are all pleasing to me ; but what the end may be, I know not, and I fear not ; seeing the means are good.

D. My mind has conceived, and labours to be delivered.

C.

C. I am afraid your teeming mind is big with some *monstrous production* ; let me be neither mid-wife, nor nurse ; but I will sit by you, while you deliver yourself.

D. That will do as well : but that which you rashly conjecture to be a *monster*, is *truth*.

C. Then it is *truth* gives you pain.

D. I am only in pain to be delivered ; but it is a pleasing pain, like that of *love*.

C. If you are not big with a *monster*, it is a *miracle*.

D. If you are not a *christian*, you are a *conjuror* ; you have luckily hit the nail on the head ; *miracle* is the subject : the hare is started, and now the game begins : let nothing divert us from the pursuit. Have you read Mr. *Jackson's address to deists* ?

C. I have.

D. How do you like it ?

C. Very well.

D. I am glad of it ; then you are to make use of his arguments against me : here is the book.

C. This looks like giving me both *sword and challenge*, which however I do not except against, seeing *the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but spiritual*.

D. Well then, if you should be beat with your own weapons, keep your temper invulnerable.

C. I am not so weak as to suffer *you* to wound me : you shall find me as *brave* as you are *fierce* : let your *light* break forth, your *fire* cannot hurt me ; I have *christian* patience.

D. And I have *philosophical* temper, which is near of kin : I have considered the subject in the most *unprejudiced* manner, I am capable ; and shall always have the greatest respect for better judgment when I see it ; not being fond of *conquest*, for the
fake

take of *opinion*; but desire to be convinced of truth, and to embrace it, for truth I love; and regard not whether it be called *faith*, or *infidelity*. If the darkness be on my side, therefore, it is charity to lead me out of it, who am willing to inform, and be informed, for my own satisfaction, and the benefit of those I converse with.

C. I have always had a good opinion of your *sincerity*, but the *christian* world have but a bad opinion of your *sentiments*, I will not call it *faith*, for in that we find you are wanting, when weighed in the scales of christianity.

D. In those ballances, that side towards him that holds them, always preponderates: I solemnly declare, I am *a lover of wisdom*, however *small* may be my share of it; and I delight in that understanding, which produces a virtuous freedom and tranquillity of mind.

C. The inequality of *christian* judgment that appears to you, proceeds from your eyes not being enlightened with faith. You may say what you will; but if you do not *believe*, you will not *be believed*: but go on with your dish of discourse, and talk to the point.

D. I apprehended my intended subject, which is the IMPOSSIBILITY of *miracles*, may be a field for curious enquiries, and therefore worthy the consideration of an inquisitive mind, that hunts after the inestimable treasure of useful knowledge.

C. Great lights do sometimes arise from small sparks: that subject is good which is productive of good.

D. The *rage of enthusiasm*, and *prejudice of bigotry*, have done much mischief, and been the shame of religion. This subject may be a means to expel in some degree this *contagion*, that has so *infected* the world.

C. You expect great glory then for your bold undertaking.

D. Nothing less than *immortal!* This is the ambition of believers that plead no merit, and profess humility; and, without flattering modesty, unbelievers are as ambitious as they. THE RESURRECTION CONSIDERED, and the other treatises on that subject, have obtained an *invincible conquest*, and put all believing adversaries to *everlasting silence*, and why should not I expect a *triumph*, if truth be on my side? But whether so, or not, I joy in the *liberty* that is productive of truth, the peculiar glory of THE GEORGEAN REIGN. I intend a philosophical enquiry of a general nature. Let the *unprejudiced* and *understanding* judge; for such only can discern the difference between the *natural beauty* and *power of truth*, and any other thing, by whatever name dignified or distinguished, wearing its mask and appearance which passes for *truth* upon *trust*.—Mr. Jackson's arguments are such as include all that others have said, and more, in defence of the *possibility of miracles*; who, undertaking to reason with philosophical freedom on that head, I take the liberty to resume the consideration thereof in the same manner.

C. I think you may be very well reconciled to the *Christian* religion, in the reasonable light Mr. Jackson describes it.

D. He indeed dresses it up in the light of *Deism*. If it was its *natural* complexion, and not a *painted beauty*, and all true as he represents it, *Deists* may be persuaded to believe that *art* is almost as beautiful as *nature*. Many fine things may be said of *any* religion, by men of skill, that take only the *best* part, and make the *best* of it: but a religion delivered in an *extraordinary* manner from God, should be like him, not *partially*, but *totally good*; not ob-

scure and intricate, but clear and plain, intelligent and harmonious. If the many good things he says about the *Christian* religion, were *true* as well as *good*, they would exceedingly tend to promote the honour of it, and reconcile it to them to whom he makes his *address*.

C. Mr. *Jackson* says, you are “ the first he knows of, that ever said it was inconsistent with the divine attributes, and the rules of truth and certainty, that God should work miracles ; ” and I think, indeed, you are somewhat *singular* in this point, as I have heard by several.

D. I assure you, Sir, I affect not *singularity*, and suppose I am not the *only one* that thinks so : but it may be a *novelty* to those that have not considered it, that have suck’d in *supernatural nourishment* from their *ecclesiastical mothers breasts*, and are still delighted with it ; but to those that *chew the cud*, it is *indigestible food*.

C. And you are one of the clean beasts ! we all feed in our own way. What is meat to others, is bones to you ; or, as the common proverb aptly expresses it, One man’s meat is another man’s poison. But pray, *Sir*, how do you intend to manage this argument ? for you must be the manager. In what order will you proceed ? Let us come to order, that when one point is discussed, we may go upon another.

D. Very well proposed, Sir ; then, in treating this subject, let the examination be,

First, *Whether miracles are consistent with the course of nature ?*

Secondly, *Whether they are consistent with the attributes of Deity ?*

Thirdly, *Whether they are fit or necessary ?*

Fourthly, *Whether they do not destroy the foundation of truth and certainty ? and are capable of the same evidence as other historical facts ?*

Fifthly,

Fifthly, *Whether the disbelief of miracles be infidelity and atheism?*

C. Grand points! I suppose you expect to carry all before you. *Audacious* attempts have often *shameful* overthrows.

D. *Fortuna juvat audacès*. At the end of every one of these mental entertainments, let a refreshing glass be administered to the *outward man*; for they that would keep their tenants in their houses, must keep their houses in repair.

C. While I hear you talk like a *beaten philosopher*, I have no antipathy to living like a *christian*.

D. But I shall discourse on a good subject.

C. Many a one does so, and makes bad work of it. However, good talking should always be attended with good living.

D. And reasonable *thinking* is nourished by reasonable *drinking*.

C. I *fall in* with you; and when friends *fall out*, it is not friendly.

D. That's a self-evident truth, and needs not our proof.

C. Nor will it be friendly in us to prove the truth of it.

D. Those things that are not proper to prove, it is best to take for granted.

C. Do so by miracles.

D. *Christians* don't attempt to prove them because they think them *not proper*, but because they *cannot*. That subject which can neither be *proved* nor *disproved*, is a very dark one, and ought to be dismissed.

C. That you make not dark work of it, brighten up your intellects with a chearful glass.

D. I will do so, my friend; and as I expect no *supernatural* aid, I will make use of the *natural*, and dismiss this introductory discourse.

DISCOURSE I.

D. NOW, if you please, Sir, we will begin with the enquiry, *Whether miracles are consistent with the course of nature?*

C. What general definition do you give of a miracle?

D. A miracle has been generally allowed to be a *supernatural operation, or the work of a power above nature.*

C. But some moderns think otherwise; among them is your Mr. *Jackson*, whose reasons are to be my rule. He says, (p. 17.) ‘The course of nature is really the immediate incessant operation or agency of God himself in the whole creation; and what is called a *miracle*, is as much a part of God’s providential government, and as much a part of the course of nature, as any other: the difference is, the ordinary powers of nature are *visible* and *manifest* in their effects at all times, and in all places, but the extraordinary, at some particular times, by effects superior to human agency, or common natural causes for moral ends.’

D. What do you think Mr. *Jackson* means by this? for I would take him by his true intent and meaning. *Fair* argument scorns all manner of foul dealing.

C. I apprehend he means this, that *miracles* are as much a part of the course of nature, as any other natural productions are; only they are wrought at some particular times, and on some extraordinary occasions.

D. But every thing in the course of nature, so far as we can judge, has its *revolution* by the flux and reflux of things; if *miracles* are a part of the
course

course of nature, they must revolve as the course of nature does. For, by this order of things, *the thing which has been, is that which shall be, and that which is done, is that which shall be done, and there is no new thing under the sun.* But as this is not true, applied to *miracles*, so there is no cause in nature that can produce them. How does Mr. Jackson know that *a miracle is a part of the course of nature*; since he never wrought nor saw one, nor knows any that did? And as he is a stranger to the work, he must be the same as to the power or manner of doing it.—Whatever is *accountable* by the course of nature, is not miraculous; and what is done in an *unaccountable* manner, who can *account* for?—If a *natural* work may be done for a *moral* end, or if *false* prophets can work *miracles*, the end for which a work is wrought, makes it not a *miracle*: *morality*, therefore, is no more essential to a *miracle*, than a *miracle* is essential to *morality*.

C. Mr. Jackson says, (p. 19, &c.) ‘Miracles no more alter nature, or destroy the laws of it, than the power and will of human agents do.—The cure of a man any way diseased, by a word or a touch only, is no more contrary to the course of nature, nor inconsistent with it, than the cure of these diseases by human means is: nature is only restored, in one case, by *extraordinary divine power*, and in the other by *human art*.—If human art can alter the course of nature, without destroying the laws of truth or nature, surely we must admit, that the power of God can do so in a way superior to human agency.’

D. I wish the gentleman had told us what he meant by *the laws of nature* being altered by *human art*. In curing diseases, it is not the case. The best physician is only nature’s handmaid; he cannot cure the least malady, unless nature lead the way,
and

and co-operate with his skill and endeavours, and by her assistance, a *lucky old woman* may effect a cure. That a *holy* or a *royal* touch ever brought found health to a distemper'd patient, requires *better proof* than *bare reports*. This is said to be done by *extraordinary divine power*, the other by *human art*; if both these are consistent with the *course of nature*, the power is *one* and the *same*: but this is as hard to *prove* as to *perform*. When we see the thing done, we shall be better able to reason about it.

C. 'A resurrection of dead bodies is no more contrary to the nature of things, than the resurrection of dead corn.'

D. True; for seeds once dead cannot grow, tho' it be said, *If a corn of wheat fall into the ground, and die not, it abideth alone, (or is barren) but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit*; tho' this, I suppose, was according to the philosophy of those times.

C. 'Reason will easily, if attended to, inform us, that the raising a dead body is as possible, as the giving life to one in a natural way is; and there is no more superior power exerted in one case, than in the other.—It is the same divine power which gave life, and preserves it, that restores a dead body to life again.'

D. It is easy to *say* and *imagine* things, but how does this appear to be true? If the one was as *easy* to nature as the other, why should not one be done as *oft* as the other? He owns, that there is no power but what is according to the course of nature; but who ever heard that by the course of nature any dead body ever came to life again? If there is no more superior power exerted in one case than in the other, 'tis amazing that so many children should be *daily born*, and that no dead bodies ever *get up and walk*.

walk. Was this doctrine true, one might reasonably expect resurrections as often as births. But all the *reason* and *sense* men have, if *attended* to, inform us by *facts*, that tho' parents communicate *life* to their posterity in a natural way, no body once dead is ever raised again to life, the one is *commonly* and *constantly* done, and the other *never*; that it admits of no proof: how happens this? but because there is a power in nature to do the one, and not the other.

C. But is there not a divine power that can do it?

D. What, contrary to the powers of nature? all such power was given up before by Mr. Jackson; you hear that even with him, power natural and divine is the same. *It is the same divine power*, says he, *which gave life and preserves it, that restores a dead body to life again*; I grant the former is either *natural* or *divine*, as you please to call it; for *both with me are one*; but there is no power to do the latter, because *not natural*, therefore *not divine*. All the difference between *natural* and *divine* power is only as it is applied to *things natural* or *divine*, the *power* is the same: therefore this distinction is needless, if it is *the same divine power which gave life, and preserves it, that restores a dead body to life again*.—Reason cannot inform us, that what is contrary to the course of nature may be; it is faith informs us this. If this course be *the immediate incessant operation of God himself in the whole creation*, no greater or different power can be, none more *immediate*, or more *incessant*, for these words admit of no degrees of comparison; there can then be no *supernatural* interposition: by this the *possibility* of all *miracles* are excluded.

C. That is, if they are contrary to the course of nature.

D.

D. And such all miracles are, as by describing them will appear. Those we are required to believe, are not of that sort as are a part of the course of nature; as *the raising the dead to life; the constant motion of the sun or earth standing still at the word of command; the sun's going back fifteen degrees, when requested; a sea parting, and making two walls, with a broad road betwixt, for a nation to go thro' between them on dry ground; the growing of oil in a cruse, as fast as it could be emptied into other vessels, till all were full that could be got, and the growing of meal in a barrel all the time of a famine; destroying men by fire from heaven, at the word of command, the fire not being able to burn some men, nor the water to drown others: a man's living three days in the belly of a fish in the sea; making bread and fish faster than ten thousand hungry people could eat them; seeing all the kingdoms of the round world from the top of a mountain, and all this in a moment; inspiring illiterate men, that spoke their own mother tongue barbarously, with knowledge to talk all manner of languages under heaven, without learning any, and to write in the most learned grammatically; and these people's enabling others to do the same, by only laying their hands upon their heads; a spirit's catching a man up in the air, and setting him down at a distant town, &c. &c. &c.* Such facts are certainly all inconsistent with, and some of them plainly contrary to the general course of nature.

C. But Mr. Jackson says, a miracle is as much a part of the course of nature, as any other works not miraculous, only more uncommon, and superior to human agency:

D. If a miracle be thus defined, all manner of *strange and uncommon* circumstances are *miraculous*; and we have plenty of miracles in all ages of one kind or other; but they are not esteemed *miracles*,
nor

nor any *particular providence*, but by the most ignorant. He that can do, by natural powers, what no other person can, only shews himself to be the *greater artist*. A display of *art*, by *natural power*, is no demonstration of *supernatural authority*. What *credentials* does he shew, that he is in a *peculiar manner* sent of God, to direct and govern mankind, who does no more than another man could do, did he know but his peculiar art? If this be a sufficient qualification to authorize a man's *divinity*, every cunning artificer, who is the author of a *new art*, is thus qualified. Is this any *credential* that he comes from God more than another man? Are natural arts any *testimonials* of a divine extraction or commission? Do superior *arts* invest a man with superior *divinity*, or prove him to be so invested? Or is meer *moral goodness*, which is common to all good men, a proof of an *uncommon mission* from God? Him that we ought to esteem *most eminently* of God, should *most eminently* display those attributes we adore in the Deity, of wisdom, power and goodness, equally mixt and manifest. What Mr. Jackson asserts, that a *miraculous work is a part of the course of nature*, is the better to defend the *possibility* of them in a philosophical way of reasoning, yet he seems obliged to give it up; for as he elsewhere expresses it, to work a miracle is (p. 15.) to *alter nature*, and (p. 16.) to *interpose a power otherwise than by a natural means*. The author of *the resurrection cleared*, says (p. 147.) a *miracle is contrary to the course of nature*, and (p. 150.) he calls it a *superceding and suspending the general course of nature*, and says, that it is *the essence of a miracle to be contrary to the course of nature*.

C. But 'miracles make no alteration in the general system.'

D. If they did, the general system of things would be overturned.

C. Therefore the laws (or power) that produce miracles, injure not the laws of nature in general ;
 ‘ because these laws have not a *necessary chain of*
 ‘ *causes and effects*, or have a necessary dependence
 ‘ on each other, and the general course of things
 ‘ still go on in a regular and uniform manner ;
 ‘ therefore the rectifying or *altering the natural*
 ‘ *course of things*, by an immediate, divine, or su-
 ‘ pernatural power, is only a different exercise of
 ‘ the same power, by which the course of nature is
 ‘ sustained and preserved.’

D. All the variations, or different exercises of nature’s powers, are owing to the different means or circumstances of operations ; they are constantly the same, when the subjects and circumstances are the same. The *same causes* always produce the *same effects*. Nature has no power to act contrary to her invariable rule of action. There is no power in man, that can enable him to walk on the water, as on land ; nor can water bear his weight : for it is a law in nature, that *all bodies, specifically heavier than a fluid, sink in it, with a celerity proportionable to the difference of their gravities*. If therefore this law be contradicted, it cannot be occasioned by a *different exercise* of nature’s powers, but must be ascribed to a *power different* than is in nature. When the causes of things come to be accounted for by natural means, however they seemed before, they afterwards cease to be accounted miracles. Such would be the case, if a dead man could be raised to life, by the power of nature or art : nor would the *operator* be esteemed a *worker of miracles*, when the method was known by practice, tho’ it might make the dead and living wonder. He that can do by natural powers, what none else can,
 only

only shews himself to be the *greater artist* ; but this is no demonstration of *supernatural authority* : so that miracles must be by a supernatural power, or they cannot be at all. And I intend to demonstrate, by *invincible reasons*, the *impossibility* of such a power.

C. But first of all make use of *natural power* to recruit your own ability ; for if you do not *inspire*, you will certainly *expire* : after breathing your *bad* spirit out, put a little *good* in, that it may be better.

D. With all my heart, I am desirous to mend ; and you shall see, that I am willing to become better.

C. I see you are, if this be the way.

D. It is the way yourself prescribed, and I follow the prescription.

C. You are resolved to agree in being my patient, when you cannot be my doctor.

D. That so we may agree one way or another.

D I S C O U R S E III.

D. **H**AVING signified my sentiments, that miracles are not wrought by the laws of nature ; my next intention is to shew, that *to change the course of nature, is inconsistent with the attributes of God*.

C. How so ? ‘ To suppose that God cannot alter the settled laws of nature, which himself formed, is a direct and evident contradiction ; for if he cannot alter them, it is because they are essentially necessary, and independent of him ; and then he

‘ did not form them, or is the author of nature,
 ‘ which is *atheism*. This is a demonstrative proof
 ‘ of the possibility of miracles *a priori*, and the his-
 ‘ tory of mankind proves the possibility of them *a*
 ‘ *posteriori*.’

D. God has *settled* the laws of nature by his *wisdom* and *power*, and therefore cannot alter them consistent with his perfections : this is a demonstrative proof of the impossibility of miracles *a priori* ; and, if the *effects* change, so must the *cause* : if the *laws* alter, so must the *lawgiver*. This proves the same *a posteriori* ; which histories of miracles do not, for that, which is the point in question, can be no proof.

C. Pray explain this more fully.

D. To suppose that God can alter the settled laws of nature, which himself formed, is to suppose his *will* and *wisdom* *mutable* ; and that they are not the *best laws* of the *most perfect being* ; for if he is the author of them, they must be as *immutable* as he is ; so that he cannot alter them to make them *better*, and will not alter them to make them *worse*. Neither of these can be agreeable to his attributes. If the course of nature is not the *best*, the *only best*, and *fittest* that could be ; it is not the offspring of *perfect wisdom*, nor was it settled by *divine will* ; and then God is not the author of nature, if the laws thereof can be altered : for if the laws of nature are God’s laws, he cannot alter them in *any degree*, without being in *some degree* changeable. If all nature is under the direction of an *immutable mind*, what can make a change in that direction ? God must be allowed to be eternal, therefore he necessarily exists, and is necessarily whatever he is ; therefore it is not in his own power to change himself ; it is his perfection to be *immutable* ;

table; for if his nature could possibly change, it might err; for whatever is changeable, is not perfect. Besides an *eternal* and a *perfect nature* must necessarily be *unchangeable*: and as long as the first moving cause is the same, all subsequent and second causes can never vary.

C. 'If it was inconsistent with the attributes of God, to alter the settled laws of nature, this world would not have been at all, or must have been eternal.'

D. It does not follow: for this world, for aught I see at present, might have been formed out of pre-existent matter; perhaps out of some other worn out world or worlds, by the common course of nature, gradually, as the parts of it are constantly growing, changing, and decaying, which seems to indicate that the nature of the whole, is the same as the nature of all the parts which compose it. As by the destruction of some parts, others are produced, so it may be with worlds: Thus the forming *this world*, may be no more altering nature, than forming the *parts* of it, as every world is but *part* of the universe. We see all the parts perpetually decaying and renewing; and as the whole is but a collection of all the parts, so may the greater parts be as well as the lesser. Tho' this is but *conjecture*, yet what have we of the world's original that is any thing else? As little do we know of the production of the world, as a young child does of his own production.

C. You argue that God's perfection consists in his unchangeableness, and that of his laws, in being like the lawgiver: but the things that *we make*, would demonstrate *our imperfection*, if we could not alter them, and make them as we would have them; and in like manner, therefore, is it not reasonable

sonable to think, that ‘ the perfection of the works
 ‘ of God, consists not in making them unchange-
 ‘ able ; but in rendering them capable of being
 ‘ changed by his power and will, from one degree
 ‘ of perfection to another ; and to suit the different
 ‘ ends and states to which he designed them in dif-
 ‘ ferent ages and durations by his original immu-
 ‘ table counsel and will ;—therefore not inconsistent
 ‘ with his unchangeableness.’

D. If God, by length of duration, becomes *better* or *wiser* himself ; then he does wisely to make his *works* alterable as his will is ; and if his will is alterable, he does so ; this is as a wise man, who is *growing in wisdom* does : but if the same state of perfection be always in God, he does always best ; and has one end and design in every different age and duration ; and always pursues that one, and the same *best end and design*, by one and the same *best means* ; which man cannot do, because his wisdom is not perfect ; but perfect wisdom and power can do no otherwise than pursue the *best end* in the *best manner* ; therefore cannot alter either. If God ever determined for moral ends and reasons to interpose, if needful, by a different method, than that of his standard laws ; it must be either because he could not foresee the *consequences*, which is like blundering in the dark ; or he foresaw it would be needful ; and then it looks like a blunder in the design, and contrivance ; or he foreknew and determined his *own works* should not answer his *own ends*, without his mending work, which is worst of all. That God, either *with or without design*, let men alone to go on in their old way, ’till they were ruined, and could not recover themselves, nor he them, without extraordinary interposition of supernatural power, is a supposition injurious to the attributes of the deity. If God designed at certain periods

periods of duration, to mend his ordinary, by an extraordinary work to procure from man extraordinary faith and dependence on him; it proves indeed they depend on *absolute will*, not on *absolute wisdom*; that by his *common* laws he suffered men to become totally bad, that he might get honour by mending him, if possible, in an *uncommon* manner. It becomes a wise governor, that his laws be all the same, and his government all of a piece. Laws that require altering and mending, imply a defect in the lawgiver. To confirm this, I shall repeat a passage from Mr. *Peter Bayle*, in his books on comets, *viz.*

‘ Nothing is more unworthy a general cause,
 ‘ which puts all others in action, by a simple and
 ‘ uniform law, than violating this law at every turn
 ‘ to prevent the surmises and suppositions that weak
 ‘ and ignorant men may run into. Nothing gives
 ‘ a higher idea of a prince, than seeing him, when
 ‘ once he has enacted wholesome laws, maintain
 ‘ them with vigour towards all, and against all;
 ‘ without allowing the least restriction on the inter-
 ‘ rested recommendation of a favourite, or out of re-
 ‘ gard to any particular person. And of all things
 ‘ apt to throw a state into utter confusion, that
 ‘ which compasses the point most effectually, is
 ‘ undoubtedly *the dispensing with established laws*;
 ‘ changing, clipping, stretching or cramping them,
 ‘ according as the private views of parties find their
 ‘ account in such alterations. It is manifest besides,
 ‘ that the necessity a legislator is under of mending
 ‘ his laws by explanations, interpolations, infer-
 ‘ tions of clauses, and sometimes a downright re-
 ‘ peal, supposes a narrowness of understanding,
 ‘ incapable of foreseeing the inconveniences that must
 ‘ arise in the execution of those laws. The longer
 ‘ a law subsists without alteration, the more it dis-
 ‘ cerns

cerns the great and distant views of the legislator. Is it fit that Almighty God, after he has created some causes free, and others necessary, by an intermixture admirably fitted for manifesting the wonders of his infinite wisdom, establish laws agreeable to the nature of those free causes, yet so little fixed, that the next fit of spleen or ill humour in any one might entirely subvert them to their destruction? The governor of a small town must expose himself to contempt, if he changed his rules and orders as often as any of the corporation thought fit to grumble. And shall God, whose laws are calculated for a *general design*, that perhaps what we see of the universe is only an underplot in the general action, be obliged to derogate from those laws, because they do not hit one man's fancy to-day, and another's to-morrow.'

C. But suppose an original design of proceeding to a greater or other sort of perfection in a natural and regular manner?

D. Then the *whole* must proceed gradually to introduce that *new system* designed in the original draft; the whole nature of things must change together to require it. Thus no room is found in this new scheme for the introduction of miracles; for whatever is by a natural and gradual process, is not miraculous.

C. Pray come to a conclusion.

D. I conclude then, that *the laws of nature being the laws of God, they are as unchangeable as he is*, both in the design and execution; and that a miracle being contrary to the course of nature, is inconsistent with the attributes of God; and therefore it is utterly impossible, in the reason and nature of God and things, that any should be wrought.

I fear, friend, I have quite tired your *Christian* patience, you seem to be somewhat uneasy.

C. I have had a great deal of *patience*; I can hardly call it *Christian*, to hear so much of such *heathen Philosophy*.

D. Perhaps your uneasiness has made you wakeful. Many a patient soul has dozed under the word preached.

C. Then it has been for want of a quickening spirit.

D. But that we don't want. Refreshment exhilarates the mind. A good spirit is no enemy to philosophy; and you are no enemy to a good spirit: so that philosophy and you are agreed.

C. I find you are resolved to make me agree with you by one means or other. It would expose me to just censure, should I put a wrong construction on the good meaning of my friend, or blame his freedom for maintaining what he conceives to be true and good, tho' I cannot join in the same sentiments. An attempt to discover truth, and expose it to public trial, is laudable; or the propagation of Christianity is indefensible. As every good Christian would have the liberty to propagate Christianity, because he conceives it to be true, so we should do to men, as we would they should do unto us, (*i. e.*) grant them that liberty, we ourselves desire, of divulging their sentiments, as we would be indulged in divulging ours.

D. This liberty men have a natural right to, tho' they are oftentimes unnaturally debarr'd of it.

DISCOURSE III.

NOW, if you please, let us enquire, *Whether it be fit or necessary for God, at any time, to work miracles?* What say you in behalf of it?

C. I say this, that ‘the providential government of God is that of a *moral government* over *free agents*, in whose power it is to disturb the natural system, and bring many evils into it by superstition, tyranny, oppression, persecution, fraud, &c. It cannot but be fit for God, as a moral governor, to interpose his power to remedy those evils, by delivering and supporting the injured innocent and virtuous, by other than natural means, or the ordinary course of things, and correcting or punishing the impious, or unjust, by immediate or extraordinary acts of his power.’

D. It seems very unfit that God, as a *moral governor*, should give man so mischievous a power, which is capable of disturbing the *natural system*, and bringing many evils into it. But if it was best that man should have such power, then it is best that such things should be. If it would have been best otherwise, why was it not? It is better that evil should not be, than permitted to be, to be remedied. But is it remedied? Surely no. Why then there has been no remedy exhibited. This is making the world dream of a *doctor*, when it has had none. ’Tis meer quackery to persuade men that *physic* is needful, when none can make them better. Since the constitution of the world is unalterable, to say it is wrong, is only complaining of God’s government, or of providence. When things are as well as they can be, it is a folly to grumble and complain.

C. What then, cannot men be made better?

D. Yes, some may, but as to mankind in general, they are as they ever were; some good, some bad; some growing better, some worse; sometimes moral, sometimes immoral; now foolish, then wise; here they hit they mark, there blunder; sleep in this country, and in another seem to rouse themselves out of their lethargy; keep awake for a few ages, and after dream again for a few ages more; and such like is the constitution of mankind, and likely ever to be.

C. And is this best?

D. Yes certainly, since it can't be better, and nothing has ever spoiled the constitution of man more than the false pretensions of mending it. If God did not like to see the world as it is, he would not have made it as it is: for how can he give being to what displeases him? this is acting foolishly, and making himself unhappy. Man complains because *he is offended*, and thinks *God is offended* also as he is, because he thinks God is like himself: for his ideas are limited to his nature and constitution, they go with him where-ever he goes, ~~and mix themselves with his ideas~~, that's the reason man is so inclined to idolatry, and so many false gods have been put upon man, and have tyrannized over the mind. *Man* always worships *man*, for he knows no being above himself. If his God has not *human form and nature*, he knows not what form or nature to ascribe to his God, and adores he knows not what.

C. What notion have you then of God?

D. That he is a being of infinite perfection, but I confess I don't know what it is, but I know what it is not, and against that I argue. Perfection I admire and adore.

C. Then you adore you know not what, as well as others.

D. I own it, and the reason is, because I am a *man* as well as you, and, having *finite* powers, cannot comprehend what is *infinite*. All things may be *good*, for aught I know, but I know they are not all *good* to me, for I am not *wholly good*, nor can I see them so, because I cannot see as God does.

C. You said, man's God is always *in idea a man*, or he knows not what he is ; but we say, that God has no body, parts, nor passions.

D. So say I, but then I cannot describe what that is. And tho' you say so too, if one tell you that God therefore is not *displeased*, or cannot be *angry* with sin, having infinite *perfection*, (for *anger* and *displeasure* are *imperfections*) you are so *displeased* and *angry* with him that says so, that he seems to you to deny the being of God.

C. I am not, but must own that most men are. However, we do as you do, imagine God to be such as we conceive is fit for a God to be.

D. And that it is fit he should do such things as you think are fit for him to do. So you make the system of the world a cobling piece of work, and then think it is fit that God should mend it. I won't call this *Atheism*, but I think there is little of God in it, or rather nothing becoming him. It is fitting that the wisest being do things in the best manner ; and having so done, it is not fit he should *alter* them.—If the *ordinary* course of nature is the *immediate act* of the power of God, how can it want any *extraordinary* mending, by any different act? If it do, it is no wonder if things are ever mending, and never mended.—If God *attempted* to mend man's nature, and has not done it, the *means* were not proper, and his *attempt* was vain. The reasons that make it seem fit for God to interpose his power to remedy human evils once, will make it appear necessary for him always to interpose.

C. But history informs us that he has interposed, if there be any truth in the history of miracles.

D. And done *no good* by such interposition; this is slur upon slur, or blot upon blot. Not to do things well at first, then to mend them afterwards, and make them never the better.

C. You mistake, things were well made at first by the maker; but man has made them bad by his *free-will*.

D. What pity it is man ever had free-will. Can any thing produce evil but evil? If evil be the consequence, what was the cause?

C. Good, the evil consequent was accidental.

D. Not designed?

C. Not absolutely, but left in a state of indifference.

D. Be it so; then man's evil is not absolute evil; it is not evil to God, but indifferent respecting him; what reason is there then for his interposing or mending? for, *in this light*, things are as God designed them, therefore 'tis not fit that God, as a *moral Governor*, should interpose his power to remedy what he thought fit to do, or to enable man to do, which is all one; for all man's power is from his maker.

C. But man has *abused* his power, which God fore-knew he would do, and therefore before-hand provided a remedy.

D. If man *abused* the power God *gave* him, nothing can better mend the matter than to *take it away* again; since God foresaw the bad effects, it had been better to give it with a more sparing hand; to have been *less generous* would have been *more merciful*: but if it was done, and there was no recalling what was past, a *remedy*, you say, was provided; where is the *remedy*? I see none.

C.

C. How should you? 'tis only seen by the eye of faith, and you have none; your light of reason, as you call it, has put that eye out..

D. I have a *natural*, but not a *miraculous* faith; because I cannot see that miracles have mended the world, therefore I cannot conceive they were ever wrought: for I believe God does not work in vain. Whatever he is the cause of has its certain effect. He cannot be disappointed in his designs. Nor can I believe that miracles are proper means to mend mankind: for mens hearts and actions cannot be *better*, till their minds are *rationally informed*. Miracles are works of *power*, which strike an awe on mens minds, but 'tis *clear reason* must inform the judgment. Reason is more fit to direct men's judgments right, than works of wonder; which tho' they make a mob gape and stare, do not *give* them rational faculties, nor *mend* them; since they do not mend the works of nature, nor direct men to a clue of reasoning, as they are independent of the great chain of nature. Sudden surprize and astonishment, while it lasts, is more apt to *spoil* the thinking faculty, than *improve* it. At best, this curb to nature lasts no longer than the surprize affects the passions, which is *vague*; but the information of the mind, by natural deductions and demonstration, is *permanent*. That cannot mend the *heart* in a *moral* sense, which does not mend the *mind* in an *intelligent* one. If *virtue* be founded on *wisdom*, enlarging mens intellectual capacities, and illuminating their understandings, will make them in love with virtue: but if men are to be governed by the slavish fear of an arbitrary capricious power, 'tis best working on their passions by fearful and wonderful actions, or the stories of them, which bewilder their benighted souls in the intricate maze, or dark wilderness of a blind faith. Such means, therefore, so
 unfit

unfit for the end, are not fit for God to use. If the *ordinary course* of things required *miracles*, the original contrivance was weak: If it was foreseen such patch-work would be necessary, why was it not prevented? 'Tis better to prevent evil than mend it; and to bring in a bill of *repairs*, when no *reparations* are manifest, looks too much like *fraud*. But to say, God acts always *wisest* and *best*, and that as *He* is, so are his *laws*, *invariably the same*, is to say the *best* we can, and what becomes us *best* to say; and if so, then I think there never was, nor can be any *miracles*, or occasion for them; and we may venture to say, God never did what is not fit for him to do.

C. What (p. 17.) ' if God raises a dead body ' for an evidence of his providence to those who deny it, or think him not concerned in the affairs of ' the world, or for a testimony to *true religion* against an established *superstition* and *idolatry*; is ' not such a miracle fit for the wise and good God ' to work for the good of men? Let any *Deist* ' shew, if he can, how this is contrary to the laws ' of nature, or the reason of things, and inconsistent with the divine attributes.'

D. If this be *fit*, it must be because the common nature of things is *unfit* to prove a deity; but if the works of God are fit to prove a God, where is the reason that a dead body should be raised to life, contrary to the laws of nature, to satisfy *infidels*? Is it fit that God, to oblige them, should reverse the laws of nature, which himself has established by his *power*, and ordered by his *wisdom*? Is no other method *proper*, but one so *improper*? Of what importance is this creature man, or his worship, to God, that to convince him of the existence, conduct, and government of his maker, it is fit that God should alter his method, and change the laws
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of his government? Is it reasonable that God should humour man in so foolish a manner, to go out of his own way of *wisdom* to convince man that he is *wise*, and to *govern* the world in a different manner than he does, to make man sensible that he *governs* it at all? Is it reasonable that God should go *backward*, in order to prove to man that he is going *forward*?

C. But every man ought to believe a deity.

D. Every man *must* believe what appears to him to be true, and can believe no otherwise; therefore belief cannot be a duty, no more than 'tis a duty for all men to see; he that can see, will; but he that is blind, cannot. To make belief *meritorious*, or the want of it *criminal*, is a mark of imposture; for truth requires a reasonable conviction, not a blind obedience.

C. Well, be that as it will, (p. 15.) "Men, by abusing their natural powers, have brought such disorder into the moral state of man, that his natural powers are too weak to restore him to answer the ends of virtue and religion; therefore a *supernatural aid*, and a *divine teacher*, were necessary to reform the corruptions of man's nature, and restore the knowledge and practice of true religion, on which his happiness depends."

D. Mankind was never in so lapsed or deplorable a condition, as to need *supernatural aid*, or had it; for his manners were never *supernaturally* reformed, or otherwise than by *natural* means. Though some men always think *stupidly*, and act *wickedly*, yet there are always those that think *wisely*, and act *justly*, who are fit to instruct the rest. Though not one man is impeccable and infallible, yet there is always *wisdom* and *virtue* enough among the *whole* to direct the *whole*: but those only are capable of *reformation*, who are capable of *information*. Whom
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the *clearest reasons* are ineffectual to *convince*, the *most powerful miracles* cannot *convert*; and if they could, that conversion must be without conviction, and therefore cannot render them morally just and good. Those that pretend to *extraordinary* assistance, what *extraordinary* creatures do they turn out? and what *wonderful good men* have *wonderful works* produced? Natural reason was always sufficient, and always present with some to instruct others. Below nature's help, therefore, the human nature never fell, and consequently was recoverable by it. In no age of the world, or plantation of it, were wise and good men *wholly* wanting, or moral conduct *unknowable*: nor in any part of the world, when mens vices were at the highest, were they otherwise reformed than by *natural means*, if ever they were reformed at all; for they struggled thro' and overcame cruel oppressions, persecutions, tyrannies, and evils of every kind, by the heroic exertion of their natural powers; or for want thereof, fell under the evils they suffered to reign, or were not able to extricate themselves from. Whoever reads the history of mankind will find, that the common nature of man, as well as that of the world, was ever the same; and that no supernatural pretensions have mended it at all. *Wisdom* and *folly*, *learning* and *ignorance*, *virtue* and *vice*, *slavery* and *freedom*, ever were, and remain, and rule alternately in *persons*, *places*, and *kingdoms*. None ever were *wholly good*, or *wholly evil*, but the superiority of one over the other, by turns, or in certain cases, prevailed. All seek their *own good*, according to their different conceptions of it, as their different natures incline to, motives induce, and circumstances permit. This is the fixed rule of human conduct.

C. Is there no room then to hope for supernatural aid, wholly to vanquish evil powers?

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D.

D. None. If there was, there could be no evil power existing; for what natural power can resist a supernatural, that can supercede and suspend the general course of nature? What denominates a creature free, is the sense it has of seeking its own imaginary good. And as each seeks its own private or particular benefit, so the weaker is obliged to give place to the stronger, as the destruction of one body affords matter and room for raising another out of its ruins; and as every thing destroys some other for its nourishment or support, so no one thing can be supported without prejudice or loss to another. Hence is the origin of good and evil, and hence they are both *necessary* and *unavoidable*, as things are constituted. And the perpetual changes all things incessantly undergo, prevent particular evils from being general, or everlasting.

C. Are the common, ordinary, or *natural means* then, fit and sufficient to enable men to answer the ends of virtue and religion, without *supernatural assistance*?

D. If the *well-beaten path of nature* is not most fit for men to travel in, nor sufficient to lead them to happiness, the *supernatural* is nevertheless unfit and *insufficient*, being so *mysterious* and *invisible*, that men cannot agree *where* or *what* the path is, and the *evidences* of it are as *uncertain* and *unknown*; which men, tho' they strain their eyes, can never see; and those of the quickest and strongest sight see least. As soon as men in good earnest set about employing their powers aright, to examine freely, judge impartially, and act righteously, they will find themselves grow in judgment and true virtue, each according to his ability, by natural helps, without a *divine instructor*, or *supernatural aid*, which cannot lead any man one step beyond what nature permits, nor ever did: for all pretended inspiration,

piration, that has found men fools, has ever left them so. This sort of God's government of the world, fully justifies him, without affording us *supernatural assistance*, and teaches man not to expect it, nor to justify himself in doing evil for the want of it: tho' as all men have not faculties alike, so all men cannot improve them alike. Moreover, if the *creature* cannot frustrate the *Creator's* ends, then men's natural powers could never be rendered so weak as to fail of effecting it: but if the creature can *frustrate* the *Creator's* intentions, God is not *sufficiently* wise and powerful, or man is *wiser* than the omniscient, and *stronger* than the omnipotent. To say then that *men, by abusing their natural powers, have introduced such disorder into their moral state, that those powers are too weak to answer the ends of virtue and religion, therefore a supernatural aid was necessary*, is imputing *weakness* or *folly* to God, whether *he intended* man's natural powers should answer God's ends, or *did not intend it*; for by the *one* his intentions are not answered, if extraordinary power be *necessary* to rectify it, and by the *other* he did not intend to do what was *necessary*. To suppose God did not intend that *natural means* should answer the ends of virtue and religion, then the *supernatural* were *always* necessary, and should *always* be employed, then *miracles* and *miraculous inspiration* ought *never to cease*. To suppose God as a *wise* and *good governor*, in establishing his laws, gave his creatures liberty to break thro' them, and for that reason was obliged to do something *extraordinary*, and take *new measures* to repair the breach, that his designs might not be defeated, brings reflection on the divine conduct; for *wisdom* never takes a round-about extra-natural way to do what may be done by a direct and natural. To suppose that God made no provision against a boundless in-

undation of mischief that man's free agency might occasion, but that of altering his measures by *miraculous interposition*, is a weak supposition, and highly injurious to the honour of God. Every man's experience teaches him, this boundless freedom is restrained by general laws and particular circumstances. If something *extraordinary* was necessary to repair the breach that man had made, it was but a very *ordinary* fence; the Creator had NOT *set a hedge about him, and about all that he had*. If evil, *designed* or *undesigned* by the governor, was suffered to break thro', so as to render mighty and wonderful repairs needful, it highly reflects on the *conduct* of the *governor*, and also in not *continuing* those reparations that are so highly necessary; for many have broke thro' the hedge again, and feed on *forbidden pasture*, so that the *spiritual shepherds* threaten them with being *pounded*, because the holy city of the letter is trodden down by unbelievers! If works of wonder, *miraculous* or *prophetical*, are agreeable to God's wisdom and power, to do or say, it must reflect on his goodness not to display them *now*, when they are as much wanted, and as necessary as ever they were, since bad men are as wicked, fools are as credulous, knaves as fraudulent, and honest rational men as unbelieving as ever. Never was more need of the *sensible proof* and *demonstration of miracles*, for they admit of no other proof. If they are necessary in *one* age, they are necessary in *every* age; for if all men should *believe the same*, they should have the *same grounds* for their *belief*; but if reason be sufficient, there is no need of miracles.

C. I believe you have been copious enough on this head. Whether your adversaries may think the argument cogent enough, I know not; but, in my opinion, it is time to conclude this discourse.

D. Well then, I shall make this application of my doctrine (and tho' I could say much more, I will not tire you) that from what has been said, *it appears to be inconsistent with the nature of God, the mundane and human constitution, that miracles are at all fit or necessary.*

C. Now a chearful glass is *necessary* for our *constitutions*; I'll begin, and wash your doctrine down.

D. This way fuddle-caps forget out of church all that they heard in it.

C. It is pardonable, if what they hear is not worth remembering.

D. Or if it spoils good reasoning, or innocent mirth.

C. Which we, by agreement, enjoy.

D. And by this means agreeably entertain each other.

C. *Truth* and *good-nature* never disagree.

D. Happy is the friendship that is founded on these.

DISCOURSE IV.

D. **W**E are now to enquire, *whether miracles do not destroy the foundation of truth and certainty, and are as capable of the same evidence as other historical facts.* What have you to say on the affirmative side of the question?

C. I am authorized to say, (p. 21.) that “no-thing more exposes a man’s understanding, than to argue, either that *miracles destroy the law of nature, and the foundation of all truth and certainty, and are also inconsistent with the divine attributes*; or to say, that miracles, which are the proper objects of our senses, may not be as well attested, and with as much certainty, as any other fact whatsoever.”

D.

D. Miracles have been proved to be operations *contrary* to the laws of nature ; therefore they *destroy the foundation of all truth and certainty*, for that *only* the law of nature is, and they have been also shewn to be *inconsistent with the divine attributes*. If a miraculous story be as *probable* as one that is not miraculous ; if a supernatural action be as *possible* as a natural one, then it may be as well attested as any other fact. But if men's senses may be *deceived*, or their understanding, which forms their belief ; or if men may *lye*, may see *false visions*, or see the vision of their fancies, and if a voice may be heard by the imagination only of the hearer ; which are things that no-body that has understanding can deny, then *miraculous stories cannot be attested with as much certainty as any other facts*. If miracles are *not* the proper objects of sense, because they cannot possibly be at all, then they cannot be attested with any certainty at all. How many people have imagined they have *seen, heard, and felt* what never was, and continued to *believe the reality* of what has been only their own conceptions ? and the more people give way to *fancies*, the more *fanciful* they will be ; the more imposition is given *place* to, the more *place* it has in human minds, and the more they will be imposed on. How many people have been punished and put to death for *witchcraft* ? and when there was a law against it, people believed it ; but now that law is annulled, there is *no witchcraft* to be found : So if *miracles* were not *believed*, men would find no reason to *believe* them, for *their faith is the only reason for the possibility of their existence*.

C. But sure “ our senses are as good judges in
 “ *miraculous* as in *common* cases, and those miracles
 “ which are the proper objects of our senses, may
 “ be as well attested, and with as much certainty as
 “ any other fact.”

D. Let us then have some *sensible* demonstration of them, without which our *senses* are no judges; and then it will be time enough to examine the judgment of our senses. But if miracles can convert the world, or if all the *believing* part of the world were to turn *infidels*, for want of a *sensible miracle*, not one could be produced to save the world, or what is more to christian priests, to save their *livings* and *dignities*. O! that I could dare any of them to work a miracle! I am resolved to do all that lies in my power to provoke them, either to work miracles, or to prove the possibility of them.

C. I hope some of them will give you a *Rowland for your Oliver*. What a *Goliab* are you, to defy the armies of the living God!

D. I don't defy the armies of the *living* God, for I deny there is any such God living that can work miracles, but, *Elijah*-like, I defy them to prove by a miracle *their* God is alive, or that *God himself* has any thing to do with *miracles*, or with *them* in any *extraordinary manner*.

C. Whatever may be your opinion, it is certainly the opinion of others, that (p. 23.) "miracles are capable of the same evidence, and have equal right to be believed upon human credible testimony, with any other historical facts."

D. That testimony cannot be *credible* which relates *incredible* things; therefore the relators of such have not an *equal* right to be believed, as those that relate any *other* historical facts. We are to guard not only against being imposed on *wittingly* by men that find their account in deceiving mankind, but against the *unwitting* deceivers, who have no interest in deception, but have been deceived themselves, who have *faith* and *zeal* enough to swear their own *fancies* are *facts*.

C. Such things are owing to distemper'd imaginations.

D.

D. From which no man can be sure he is not liable to at one time or another.

C. But imposture cannot chuse its time to play upon us in our unguarded hours.

D. If it did, no man can be secure of his reason : as we say, If every thief knew his opportunity, no man could be safe.

C. Pray, Sir, shew me, in a more ample manner, why miracles are not capable of the same evidence as other historical facts.

D. Because, in many cases, we cannot by our *senses* be so good judges of them ; and if we cannot so well trust to our own *senses* in the case, surely we ought not to trust to *report* ; and less still to the *report* of those *strangers* that *party* and *interest* only make to be *authentic*. Suppose for instance, that a *miracle-monger* and a *dexterous juggler* both perform *alike things to appearance*, tho' the one be *real*, and the other *delusory*, while the evidence of the facts seems to be equal on both sides ; who but those that are skilled in the *one*, or the *other*, can distinguish the *one* from the *other* ? How many juggling tricks of heathen and popish priests are recorded in history for *miracles* ; and other *impositions* for the wonderful works of their gods and saints, all for the honour and glory of religion, and sometimes to subdue mens minds to virtue : are they capable of the same evidence as other historical facts ? how easy is it for a pious soul to be induced to believe *notorious frauds*, that have the face of *piety*, and seem done to promote it ! are the reports of strange things, which they are not in a condition to make a true judgment of, *equal* to those of other historical facts ? tho' *all* historical facts recorded, are not true, yet there is a vast difference between the *probable* and *improbable*. If a man tells me he came over *Westminster-Bridge* to-day, it may be true,

true, tho' a little objection may lie against it, because it is not quite finished, which may occasion some further questions, in order to be better satisfied of the truth of it; but if he tells me he took a running jump, at low tide, and leapt it over just by the bridge, I know it to be *impossible*, therefore a *lye*, and enquire no more about it. Is this *latter* story as credible as the *former*? no sure, tho' I may know the relater, and know him to be an honest man, that is not used to lye; and tho' it be attested by many others. I ought to have *extraordinary evidence*, to induce me to believe *extraordinary things*, that are *supernatural*, which cannot be so credible as ordinary things which are *natural*. In cases where there is difficulty and danger in trusting to ones *own* senses and judgment, there is much more in trusting to the senses and judgment of *others*, and confiding in *their* report; therefore such reports are not as capable of the *same* evidence, nor as fit to be believed as other historical facts. Since we are warned against the impositions of *false* miracles, we have certainly a right to enquire what are *true*, and whether any? and therefore we should be *most careful* of trusting those that are *most capable* of deceiving. Not only the *histories of miracles* should be cautiously received, but the performer of them; for as a man possessed of uncontrollable power is not a proper person to be trusted with my *property*, neither is such a person proper to be *the director of my judgment*, who can by his *power* play upon my *weakness*, by his *art* impose upon my *understanding*, and by his *tricks* deceive my *senses*. A miracle worker has it in his power to do all these things. Men are often deceived *without a wonder*, but *wonders* are very capable of deceiving; and therefore a wonder-working man may be a powerful deceiver. He

that can *alter things*, or the *nature* of them in any case, can also alter the *appearances* of things, by either of which the rules of *truth* and *certainity* are destroyed; because either *the observer is deceived*, or there is no tract left for his *judgment*; for what *confounds* the order of nature must *confound* man's judgment. When a point is to be proved by *miracle*, we give up *reason* to *authority*, and by the same means, if it can be done, it may raise any sort of *deity*, or establish any *doctrine*. Suppose but the *power* and *possibility* of deception in a *miraculous operator*, which I think may be reasonably supposed, and then there is not the same reason to believe a miracle, as in cases, where *no possibility* of such power is; for the *appearances* of things are more easily changed, than the *reality* of them; therefore miracles are not capable of the *same* evidence, nor have an *equal right* to be believed as other historical facts, let the evidence be reputed ever so credible. Both a *miracle worker* and *the reporters of miracles*, are of all mankind the *least* fit to put confidence in, and the *most* to be guarded against; because we ought always to be on our guard against the *appearance* and *possibility* of *deception*; therefore the *miracle-worker*, the *work*, and *reporter* have not an *equal right* to be believed, nor are as credible as other common facts, by those that would neither be imposed upon, nor impose on others. Common sense teaches us, that stories *probable* and *improbable* are not on the *same* foundation, nor have or deserve *equal credit*. Besides, an easy belief upon *hearsay*, a *surprize*, *incurious enquiry*, the *fondness of novelty*, and of *telling a surprizing tale*, *loving that others should believe as we do*; add to these *downright fibbing for pleasure or profit*, render the *stories of miracles*, not so credible as other
historical

historical facts. It is certain that nothing has been more pernicious and deadly to the reason, freedom, and happiness of mankind, than men's giving up their understandings to the faith of wonderful stories. It has introduced and established spiritual tyranny in teachers, and slavery in believers.

C. But how do miracles destroy the foundations of truth and certainty?

D. Miracles having been shewn to be operations contrary to the course of nature; if that course has been confounded once, we know not how often it may be done, nor where the confusion may end; and then there can be no dependence on the course of nature; which are the only laws to man of truth and certainty; and if what is *invariable* fail, and give us the lye, what can be depended on? Those laws that are *certain to all men*, are the same in all ages; but a miraculous power breaks thro' those otherwise immutable laws; consequently, by manifesting it's own power, manifestly destroys all other powers, that without such controlling force are certain and invariable; but if subject thereto, a *precarious power governs all, and precarious evidence must direct all*, which clearly destroys the rules of truth and certainty. Since *inconstant* miraculous interpositions do not agree with the *constant* course of nature, that the *senses* and *reason* of man are directed by; they are destructive of *rational principles*, that are founded thereon: therefore *miracles destroy all natural rules of truth and certainty*. If then *all* certainty consists in *natural* rules, what certainty or foundation have *supernatural*? and what the superstructures, when the foundation does not exist, or ceases to be? therefore miracles should exist as long as the doctrines founded thereon.

C. (Page 23.) But it is thought ' very unrea-
 sonable to alledge that miracles must be always ne-
 cessary to convince men of God's will, which they
 were at first wrought to make known.'

D. What in the nature of things cannot be, cannot by the nature of things be proved ; and being so, miracles are *always* necessary to prove themselves ; they being *no links of the great chain of nature*, should have a chain of their own : for nothing can prove a miracle but a miracle. Before the *reality* of them be admitted by history, the *possibility* of them should be proved by demonstrative facts of the *like kind* ; for I cannot see they admit of any *other* proof. The *uncertain accounts of fallible tradition* can be none : such a foundation many different religions have laid claim to, but the miracles of *one* party are never owned by those of *another* : therefore *past* miracles require *present* to confirm them ; nothing else can prove their *possibility* ; they, being *supernatural acts*, surpass all *natural reason and credit* ; consequently require a confirmation of the same kind. If then they were *ever*, they are *always* necessary. Are they not as necessary *now* to propagate the gospel in *America*, as they were *once* in *Asia* ? Is not the *reason* the same in *one* place as in *another*, when the *end* is the same ; to produce faith among those that know not the gospel ? the *Spaniards* are of that church which still makes pretension to miracles ; were these pretensions right, they might have made as many *converts*, in *America*, as their *cannons* destroyed ; but this shews their *impotence*, because they made no use of this pretended power, *when* and *where* it was most wanted. And as for us, we do nothing to convert them, our missionaries leaving their miraculous power behind them, and not carrying reasons sufficient to repel
 their

their objections. But what think you? are miracles productive of faith, or does faith produce miracles?

C. They strengthen each other: we read, *these things were done that you might believe*: thus miracles produce faith; and faith is said to be productive of miracles; *all things are possible to him that believeth*.

D. An evangelical circle! *faith* and *miracles* hang together; so where there is no *faith*, there are no *miracles*; and if where there are no *miracles* there is no *faith*; this infidel generation is not to be wondered at. If *faith* attends the power of working *miracles*, and *miracles* attend on *faith*: if there be *faith* now, there must be *miracles* now; for if *faith* be the same it *used to be*, it may do what it *used to do*; and believers may work miracles as well *now*, as they did in *former times*. If they cannot *now*, why should we believe they *ever* did; for if the *same faith* remains, the *same power* remains; if it do not, *faith* is become impotent and vain. If *faith* is the *same* it ever was, it *never* did work miracles, because it cannot *now*. If *faith now* is not the same it *was*, it is not the *true faith*. If it does not produce the *works* of *faith*, it is dead; and surely it may be said to such, *your faith is vain, and ye are yet in your sins*. Faith founded on supernaturals should be attended by supernatural evidence. Therefore there is always the same necessity for their being; and there is as much reason to expect them *now*, as to believe they were *formerly*; otherwise if *faith* could perform wonders *once*, and can or cannot produce the same sort of fruits *now*, it is a miracle there is no miracle; because if it naturally can, yet cannot, because it does not; and if it cannot, the same *faith* yet is, and is not. If one should from hence conclude, that there is not the least grain of *true faith* existing, one would

would think it is enough to make *believers* look about them.—Hence it appears that the history of miracles require an evidence of the *same kind* to render the credibility of them reasonable.

C. You will never persuade *believers* to this.

D. And *unbelievers* will never be persuaded otherwise.

C. Then there is no *reconciling* them: What have you been doing all this while?

D. Only shewing the *difference* there is between them.

C. And that is as great as the *gulf* that is between *Heaven* and *Hell*.

D. But the gulph is navigable from C. to D. if *reason* be the pilot.

C. Then you cannot *ascend* to us.

D. Because we want the *topsail of imagination*. It is in vain to strive against the stream of common sense, to believe contrary to *reason*, and attempt to act contrary to *nature*; could we do *that* we should work miracles.

C. Well then I would have you endeavour to fetch it up with a wet sail: a few glasses will help imagination, and sometimes do wonders. But nature and reason teach that there should be no difference between friends.

D. The doctrine is good, let us confirm it. Come on; a lasting establishment to true friendship.

C. I will plight you my troth.

D. Kifs glasses, and join hands.

C. And the bargain is sealed.

D. I deliver this as my act and deed.

C. It is good in law.

D. And both parties are agreed.

DISCOURSE V.

D. **N**OW let us proceed and enquire, *whether the disbelief of miracles be irreligion and atheism?*

C. Mr. Jackson thinks it is ; and says, (page 14) ‘ This author, I suppose, is not aware, that what he hath said against miracles, is not pleading the cause of *deism*, but of *atheism*.’

D. What I have said against miracles, is in vindication of the *divine attributes*, and sentiments drawn from the *perfections of the deity*; which tho’ they destroy the *possibility* of miracles, is not pleading the cause of *atheism*.

C. (Page 15) He says, ‘ To suppose that God cannot alter the settled laws of nature, which he himself formed is a direct and evident contradiction ; for if he cannot alter them, it must be because they are essentially necessary and independent of him ; and then he did not form them, or is the author of nature, which is *atheism*.’

D. Mr. Jackson might as well argue, that if God cannot change his own will, he is not possessed of almighty power. To suppose that God can alter the laws of nature, formed by his wisdom and settled by his power, I conceive to be a *direct and evident contradiction*; because they are immutable attributes ; therefore am far from saying God is *not the author of nature*, or being guilty of *atheism* : but to say God’s power and wisdom may be so far defeated, so as to make it necessary for God to alter his measures, makes him *defective* in both *power* and *wisdom*.

C. (Page 16) ‘ Surely, (says he) this author never considered, or *well* considered, that the providential

‘ tial government of God is that of a *moral* govern-
 ‘ ment over *free* agents ; to deny this, is direct and
 ‘ evident *atheism*, which I would not suspect him
 ‘ guilty of.’

D. Surely Mr. *Jackson* never well considered,
 that several sorts of christians deny man’s *free*
agency, and that it is too severe to charge them all
 upon that account *with direct and evident atheism* :
this I would not suspect him to intend. How far
 man is, or is not *free*, as it is not the subject of
 my present enquiry, and has been the contest of
 ages, I will not now take upon me determine ; nor
 do I presume to be infallible.

C. He adds (page 16, 17.) that ‘ your reasoning by
 ‘ necessary consequence infers either *absolute fatality*,
 ‘ and necessary fixed course of things, without a *de-*
 ‘ *ity* operating and presiding in the world ; or that
 ‘ there are no such *agents* as *man* in it, but that the
 ‘ whole of our being is *meer passive matter and mo-*
 ‘ *tion*, either of which ends in *atheism*. And again
 ‘ (page 30.) ‘ All this author’s reasoning against
 ‘ the *possibility* of miracles, is not only weak and
 ‘ unphilosophical, but in consequence supposes a
 ‘ *fatality*, and necessary connection of causes and
 ‘ effects, independent of God’s power and will, to
 ‘ be the laws of nature, which is manifest *atheism*.’

D. It is evident from my foregoing discourse,
 that *the laws of nature are dependent on God’s*
power and will ; nor does the consequence of deny-
 ing miracles infer an *absolute fatality*, without a
deity co-operating and presiding in the world. I
 have granted all along, and reasoned from Mr.
Jackson’s own principles, that *the course of nature*
is the immediate incessant operation or agency of God
himself in the whole creation ; and unless *atheism* be
 inferred from hence, I think, I cannot be found
 guilty of it.

C. This gentleman concludes, (p. 23.) that “ he who does not believe that God can, or does, interpose in the affairs of men, in the publick concerns of states and kingdoms, and in more private and particular cases also, must consequently think all *prayer* insignificant and useles, and all religious worship to be vain; which is not to be a *Deist*, but an *Atheist*.”

D. I have been used to think, that nothing is *atheism*, but the disbelief of a *God*, or an *intelligent cause*; but, according to this gentleman’s opinion, the not believing *miracles*, or that *God cannot alter his settled laws*, or that *man is not a free agent*, or the disbelief of the force of *prayer*, and the *interposition of a particular providence*; and, I fear, was he to proceed, he will call it *atheism*, not to believe every thing that he thinks to be a necessary point in religion.

C. Well then, I find you are not pleased to be thought an *atheist*: But what say you to prayer?

D. It is a tender point.

C. I find then it touches you, and fear you are guilty. Can you lay your hand upon your heart, and say, *Not guilty, upon my honour*?

D. Ay, pass over this subject, and let us talk of honour.

C. It is going from the point; no, no, you shall not ramble; come, speak to the accusation.

D. Pray, urge me not, I beg to be excused.

C. No excuse can be granted: Do you beg to be excused, because you embrace a notion you *cannot defend*? or are you dastardly, and *dare not*? Or are your sentiments unjustifiable and wicked, and therefore you *will not*, being willing to indulge a vicious mind? One of these they will be thought to be, unless you plead in your own defence; which is manly and becoming, ’tis what you ought to do;

and the world expects you to *be open in your plea*, as you have been all along on the subject of miracles. Is it not better you produce your reasons, if you have any, than be condemned unheard. You may possibly be in an error, but by divulging it, you may be better advised. Your *free defence* is therefore required, and your *foolish prayers* must be rejected.

D. Just so it is with man's prayers to *almighty God*. *If we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us*, that is, he regards us, or answers our prayers then, and then only: but he is not to be reasoned into it by man, as I may be by you; the *creature* cannot direct the *creator*. *We ask and receive not, when we ask amiss*, for God's wisdom is not directed by *ours*; nor is he, who is the spring of all motion, moved by *our* solicitations; nor can he be prevailed upon to govern *us* according to *our* wills, but his own. *He is of one mind, and who can change him?* not the prayers of men: he must be the most changeable of all beings, if their prayers could prevail. *His measures* are not altered by *our* supplications; nor is *his* conduct by *our* entreaties. God requires not *our* best informations, directions, or solicitations, in any point that concerns *his* governing the world, or *us*. I cannot believe we are wise enough to counsel *him*, or that *we* can, by any means, induce *him* to do, or refrain the doing, whatever *his* will or wisdom directs, whether *we* petition for or against it. It is not consistent with the attributes of God, to regard the prayers of all the men in the world together, to suspend or supercede one tittle of the laws of nature, the production of his unalterable wisdom and eternal will, or to do any thing contrary to his immutable rule of action. It is a higher degree of piety and obedience, and the humblest adoration of the Deity, to submit to his judgment

ment what is best for us, than to direct it by our prayers.

C. *Wisdom* and *virtue* are fit for man to *pray for*, and for God, as a *wise* and *good* being, to *give*. St. James says, *If any man want wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.* Surely it is *laudable* to pray for things *lawful*.

D. It is a sign of a *good mind* to desire *good things*, and as the mind is ardently concerned to acquire those good things it pants after, it will use its *utmost endeavours* to obtain them by all the means in its power: what it is in circumstances of attaining, it will attain, by making *proper* use of its *best* abilities *rightly* applied; but these things do not come by *prayer*. Prayer is only the discovery, or rather the overflowing of a pious zeal to that good thing thirsted after, if it be fervent and sincere; if not, it is no prayer at all. Prayer shews the powers of the soul are set to work, and according to its fervour and power, it will seek all ways to effect its end, and, if possible, do it some way: but it is wrong to expect things in a wrong way. If wisdom could be had by prayer, at least by vocal prayer, I think even all men would be wise: but the *ugly* may as well pray for *beauty*, and have it, as those that have no natural capacity for wisdom, to obtain it by prayer. *Wisdom* is not attainable but by *much labour of the mind*; *reading, experience, observation, conversation, cogitation, and care*, are the proper means; without these, or some of these, it is impossible to be had; to which a natural ability must be joined, or faculty of understanding. And *virtue* is acquired by exerting, in a proper manner, at proper seasons, those useful parts and qualities as alone can distinguish and display *the friendly and benevolent, heroic and magnanimous nature*. To expect

pect *wisdom* or *virtue* to be poured into the soul by prayer, is altogether as vain as for a husbandman to expect his ground should yield him a plentiful harvest of corn, without *manuring, cultivating, and sowing*, because he devoutly prays for it; or, which will effect as much, the sacrificing some of his last crop in the middle of his field, or elsewhere.

C. We don't expect things *natural*, but in a *natural* way; but *supernatural grace* we expect in a *supernatural way*, by prayer to God.

D. But if there be nothing supernatural, as 'tis reasonable to believe, if there be no supernatural proof of it, then every thing is to be expected in a natural way. Such prayers are the effect of *enthusiasm*, and only tend to promote it, by increasing this fever of the mind to keep up the delirium; therefore, in this case, the *oftener* they are *repeated*, and with the *greater ardour*, 'tis so much the worse.

C. Is all prayer then in vain, and none to be used?

D. When prayer is well used, it is not in vain. It keeps up a dependance on deity in the minds of the people, and so may be a means to help to subdue the mind to virtue, and submission to God's will. It is a custom that has nothing of evil in it, if we let every one pray their own way. In affliction, it may give ease to the mind, to vent our griefs in cries and tears. In affluence, it may have a tendency to keep the mind from being too lofty. In a middle state, to keep us in the mean. For favours received, it becomes men to be thankful. For kings, and those in authority, that have a right to demand our prayers, and our service, it is becoming to shew obedience; and more prudent to join with those that expect or require it, than to suffer injuries for too stiff a nonconformity, or to resist a power we cannot conquer. We may express our good wishes,

wishes, as well as wish for good things, but with *resignation* to the all-wise director. When by prayer men are excited to just and proper action, or to make use of right and proper means, to obtain in a right manner what they desire or pray for, without any expectation of it merely by prayer; then prayer is not in vain. We should not expect to change God's mind, but exert our own. What begins in prayer, should end in right action. Praying may be compared to seamen casting anchor on a rock, which having done, they pull as if they would hale the rock to them, but they hale themselves to the rock.

C. I understand by this, that in your opinion it may be fit for the public devotion of people in society; and if we pray for what is in the power of our own endeavours, and the concurrent nature of things to obtain, and make a proper use of our own abilities, to answer that end, we may have whatever we request; but if not, we ask and receive not, or pray in vain, as to obtaining any thing from God, by that means only.

D. You understand me right. In all other cases, *Christians* may see how *impotent* is prayer, in that of *the beloved son of God, with whom the father was always well pleased*, as the gospel expresses it; who tho' he prayed to be delivered from an intolerable torment and ignominy, with the greatest earnestness and agonies that ever man prayed, it was all in vain, he was forced to resign his will to God's. Our *best devotion* then is, *resignation to God's will*, using our best endeavours to do what is best to be done; for (James i. 17.) *in God is no variableness, nor shadow of change.* Job xxiii. 13. *He is of one mind, and who can turn him?* Dan. iv. 5. *He does what he will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stop his hand, or say unto him, What dost thou?* C.

C. Why do you quote *scripture* for this?

D. To enforce that truth on your mind, which to me is true *without scripture*, and being so, *scripture* makes it neither more nor less true.

C. But you have said little or nothing on prophecy: How do you prove the impossibility of that?

D. This is proved by the former arguments: for miracles and prophecies both standing on a supernatural foundation, if that fall, so must all that is built upon it. If there be no supernatural power, there can be no fore-knowledge of things to come, beyond what the powers and prospect of things in nature afford. And if ever God did inspire mankind with the knowledge of future things, to reclaim sinners, and convince unbelievers, the same reasons remaining as before, prophecies should still be, if ever they were; for the same cause will produce the same effects as well *now* as *formerly*; the same power, will, and wisdom, will always have the same operations in the same circumstances. If any thing has been ineffectual in its consequences, to answer the design that set it to work, and therefore it has not been repeated; it has been owing to the want of wisdom, foresight, and power, to render it effectual. Prophecies and miracles, if they are natural works, would have their revolutions, as other natural things have; if they are supernatural works, as nothing can resist their being, so nothing can resist their consequences: and whatever can certainly be fore-known, must certainly be, and cannot depend upon things unknown, as the uncertain events of man's free-will; for if it did, it might not be, and so could not be certainly foreknown; therefore, they that contend for the one, destroy the other. If any man could be possessed of the spirit of God, he must be possessed of all those qualities

ties the spirit of God hath, but this is impossible; therefore no man can have the spirit of God, without which no man can prophesy.

C. But may not a man have the *gifts* and *graces* of it, in an eminent degree, communicated to him by the *spirit*; as we see one man exceeds another in *natural* wisdom, why not in *spiritual*? And why may not God acquaint a man with future events, as well as one man may tell another what he knows will be brought about some time hence, by knowing that design which the other is a stranger to?

D. Doubtless, God may afford *gifts* and *graces* to one man in an eminent degree above another, in *spiritual* wisdom, as well as *natural*, but then these have the *same foundation*. In the man 'tis *ability*, which when applied to natural things, 'tis called *natural* wisdom (acquired is natural too, for 'tis only nature improved) and 'tis called *spiritual* wisdom, when men's abilities of understanding are applied to things that are called spiritual. What is above nature is above man, he being a part of nature's productions, therefore in man can be nothing supernatural. All that man can conceive of God must be natural, for he can have no supernatural conceptions; and all that man can receive from God, must be in a natural way, for out of that, neither God nor man can find a path, because there is no such way cast up by the wisdom or power of God, as hath been proved. Every ability in man is a gift of God's spirit or nature, yet all, as they are natural, come to him in a natural way, nor can he receive them any other ways; for his whole existence and subsistence depend constantly on natural means, every creature being a link of the great chain of nature, and God any other way has no relation to creatures, nor they to him. There is, therefore, nothing can come between nature and the creature, or between
God

God and nature. The creator is related to the creature by his power of formation, and the power by the means, which are all natural and unalterable in the general scheme and operation. If there be a greater power discoverable than what appears to be, and such power be fit to be discovered, why is it not? if it be unfit, then *to us* it never can be discovered, and consequently there cannot appear, or be, any greater power than is apparent; and so *almighty power*, as it has to do with man or creatures, cannot be *supernatural*. Therefore prophecies and miracles have no foundation in God, but have been created by man's imagination in their false ideas of God, or have been made the abilities of those false Gods that men have set up, that their uncontrollable power might strike profound awe and terror in the distorted conceptions of their abject supplicants.

C. I expect your conclusion.

D. And you shall have it. To conclude then; it is clear that the disbelief of miracles and prophecies is not atheism, but better founded on the attributes of deity, than the belief of them; and that reason, directed by the evidence of our senses, the nature of God, and of the constant course of things, are better rules to judge of them than the idle wanderings of luxuriant fancy, the bold presumptions of towering faith, or the vain pretensions of men, that lead to *certain delusion*, but no *certain truth*. And whatever the evidence for miracles may be, or be supposed, I agree with Mr. Jackson, that *they are not equal to reason and natural truth*. Thus, after all, 'tis confessed, that DEISM, OR THE RELIGION OF NATURE HAS NO EQUAL, even by those that would set up something above it, which is repugnant to it.

C. I think the church is but little obliged to you for these sentiments.

D.

D. The church is not injured by them.

C. How so?

D. That church which is established by law, will be so established as long as the law remains; and those sentiments that are established by reason and evidence, will remain as long as the reason and evidence are clear, and may make their appearance. Besides, people will generally adhere to education and custom, as they always did; and if enquiring men did not become *Deists*, they would be *Dissenters*, who, tho' nearer in principle, make a greater rent; for these set up their altars, or worship, against the altars of the church, but *Deists* set up none, they generally go to church, and conform to the devotion in fashion. *Contemptible schism* is scorned by *infidelity*. I am sure the dissenting meetings have been less filled since the growth of *deism*, than when the contention was warm between the church and dissenters, in *Sacheverel's* time.

C. The *Dissenters* then are little obliged to *Deists*, for thinning their congregations.

D. They are very much for delivering them from the *enthusiasm of separation*, and suffering on that account, as the points in which they differ not being worthy of it, nor likely to produce the expected reward, since their errors are as great in principles wherein they agree, as in those wherein they disagree; therefore they are obliged to our informing them, that 'tis better to lay aside *separation* and *bigotry*, than suffer for rigorously opposing that *superstition* which they have not power to stand against; and if different judgments offend the church, the church may, for its support, seek and execute that power which will destroy it. As things go on in their present easy situation, the church thrives, and is filled without compulsion.

C. *Deists* are but indifferent churchmen.

D. Interest may make them as good as many of the clergy. Every one, of whatever religion he is, is so made by *interest*, spiritual or temporal, real or imaginary. Separate churches, or sects, are joined by so many distinct interests. Give the clergy their dues, according to law, and they may be easy, if they can let others be the same, whether many or few come to church; for some will come always, and some will never come. As people are always differently made, and of different minds, the clergy cannot make them all of one mind; therefore, for them to be so easy as not to molest others by any discommendable methods, will render them more happy in themselves, more agreeable to others, and better promote the church's prosperity, while *pride* and *faction* render them contemptible.

C. I suppose you are now delivered of your conception, which you believe to be truth.

D. I am, and do so believe; therefore, if I err, it is thro' faith and ignorance, which generally go together.

C. Now you err, for it is thro' want of faith.

D. I have the faith to believe I do not err in this point; but, faith or no faith, we are all liable to error, and he is generally the most, that thinks himself least.

C. So that there is no security in any state.

D. Because we find *infallibility* nowhere; and since there is no infallible judgment in man, no man ought to act the part of an *infallible judge*, to condemn any principles, but as he is capable of proving them false by the force of reason; to *that* authority I appeal, by *that* I desire to be tried.

C. And may you so be by the best and most impartial judges, for I will be none in the affair. Since every one believes what he conceives to be right, and uncertainty attends all human concerns, I think

all

all men ought to be allowed the freedom of disclosing their opinions, and disputing for them; that mere speculations cannot be of any damning nature; and that not *notions* of what is right or wrong, but right or wrong *practice* only makes men better or worse, and for that alone they should be valued or despised. It is my opinion, that *truth* and *liberty* must stand and fall together; therefore, he that loves the *one*, cannot be an enemy to the *other*. If your sentiments are *right*, may they *prosper*; if they are *wrong*, may they be *damm'd*, but your soul saved.

D. A glass of consolation e'er we part; and, dear neighbour, let the lips of truth and friendship kiss each other.

C. Like bounty and benevolence.

D. Philosophy and wine refresh both soul and body.

C. Cheerful subjects, when attended with friendship, and carried on with discretion. But, notwithstanding all your reasoning on this point, I believe you are certainly in an error; and hope you will be convinced of it, if you are. Miracles have been attested by the *best* men in all ages, and the possibility of them not denied by the *wisest*, to whom I leave the judgment of these things: tho' mean men may disclose neglected truth; to the discovery of which I wish success, that honesty may not be discountenanced. Though your sentiments and mine do not agree, I sincerely respect you as a long and intimate acquaintance, and therefore, dearest of dear friends, adieu.

SUPERNATURALS EXAMINED.

DISSERTATION III. REMARKS on PROPHECIES,

Occasioned by

Mr. *Jackson's* LETTER to *DEISTS*.

The INTRODUCTION.

MR. *Jackson* having finished what he has to say in defence of miracles, attempts to prove *miracles* by *prophecies*; but as neither afford any proof of themselves, *i. e.* as one prophecy cannot prove another, nor one miracle another, so they can be no proof for one another; miracles do not prove prophecies, nor prophecies miracles; nor shall I follow his laborious path of enquiry into the truth of fulfilling certain prophecies, according to his sense of them, which, whether true or false, as it has no *infallible criterion*, I have no need to quote what he says on this subject, which would make it perplexed and laborious, since it may be discharged in a few words.

But first indulge me a little on the *lawfulness* of the enquiry, tho' it be peeping into the *Holy of Holies*, examining the great *arcanum* of *enthusiasm*, and dissecting the very *soul of priestcraft*: 'tis therefore

a tender point ; yet, designing brevity, I must not long apologize. In *common* affairs, 'tis no crime to doubt and enquire into the certainty of our dependencies, that we may not be deceived ; men are blamed that do it not : Is it less necessary in *uncommon* affairs, which are said to be most material, and where the deception is greater, and harder to explore ?

If things are *sacred* because they are *secret*, expose them, and the witchcraft is at an end, the spell is broke, and the charm has no force : it is but sacred varnish that appears, they are but pompous sepulchres, in which is nothing but rottenness. The *better* any thing is, the *more* it will bear enquiry. The fraud and fraudulent are the fruits and friends of darkness, and the religion that will not bear examination, is the kingdom of it. *Truth cometh to the light, that it may be manifest.* If men should know *why* and *what* they believe, they should display both the *bottom* and the *building*. Plain truth cannot be seen in the obscurity of mysteries. Like wisdom, it delights to appear in public, it loves freedom, openness, and plain dealing. What are called *the mysteries of the spirit*, are known to none, for they that think they have it, have no mark to know it by, but their own fond imaginations ; and its *supernatural proofs* being lost, there can be no proof in *nature* given of it ; therefore that *mysterious spirit* is what every one's faith or fancy makes it, who thinks himself possessed of it. This *mansion of mystery* is the pride of ignorance, the delusion of madmen and fools, where enthusiasm is born, and future events brought forth ; where bigots are trained ; where the voice of reason is stopt, and enquiry is confounded.

The better to methodize my examination, I shall consider,

First,

First, *Of the difficulties attending the credit of prophecies, and their mysterious predictions.*

Secondly, *Of the prophets predictions, practices, and illuminations.*

Thirdly, *The conclusion.*

S E C T. I.

Of the difficulties attending the credit of prophecies, and their mysterious predictions.

IF the sense of prophecies, and the fulfilling them, were *clear*, it would redound much to their credit; but when both are *uncertain*, it must greatly lessen our regard for them, and dependence thereon. We have no means whereby we can be satisfied that some things called prophecies were not written *after* the facts which they are said to prophecy of, as the conquest of *Babylon* by *Cyrus*, mentioned by *Mr. Jackson*, and *Dr. Sykes*; nor is there any method of satisfaction concerning the sense of obscure prophecies, that those in *Daniel* and the *Revelations* predict what *Mr. Jackson* insinuates, or that he, or any man, hath the right understanding thereof, who have attempted to accommodate *facts* to *prophecies*. A vain attempt! in which interpreters have never agreed. He owns the great difficulty of it; and indeed, the great labour he has taken, shews it, if he had not owned it. Does it consist with the *goodness* or *wisdom* of God to deliver himself in such mysterious terms, that the *wisest* and *most learned* men, with all their labour, can never be certain when they come at the meaning, and must own that they cannot agree, because their understandings are confounded in the *darkness* of it; and where there is not sufficient light to convince reasonable men, their un-

understandings are unenlightened. In *obscure prophecies* men may everlastingly puzzle themselves and others, without any certainty of ever being in the right. This is the case of all those prophecies which Mr. *Jackson* has given himself so much labour about, fetched from *Daniel* and the *revelations*. If prophecies are not *commonly* understood, or not understood by *common readers*, they were not designed for *common good*. If those of the *faculty* only understand them, they are then only learned prescriptions to keep up the craft, and dignity of the faculty. If we know not certainly what a prophecy signifies, of what signification is it? *Common sense* is sufficient for *common honesty*, which is plain and open, and delights to shew itself clear and fair.

By what means can we be sure of the certain times when the particular prophecies were written? and that we have their uncorrupted writings? for it is well known that corruptions have crept into the text, and that it was the work of *Exra* and others, after the *Jews* captivity, to find out and correct them, as well as they could. If the *word of God* has been corrupted, there can be little dependance on the *word of man*, or on his wisdom or honesty to make it pure: for there are certain degrees of *prejudice, partiality, interest and ignorance*, that man cannot surmount. The facts predicted should have been known to be fulfilled by those that knew the prophets and their prophecies; unless there can be demonstrative proof, that the traditional prophecy could not possibly be corrupted. *Oral tradition* cannot be trusted to in the second or third generation, scarce from a second or third person: the natural infirmities of men, generally corrupt it without intention. It is rare that *two* or *three* persons

sons tell so much as the *sense* of the particulars of a story exactly one after another.

A prophecy, when delivered, should be such as no human reason could foresee, nor could possibly be any random guess : then the *original* or *true copy* of it should be well witnessed, and preserved by men that had no interest in deceiving the world ; if possible, in such manner that there could be *no possibility* of corrupting or altering it. It should also be so clear and intelligible, as to admit of *no misunderstanding* it. The circumstances that come after to pass, should so agree with the plain prophecy, that it may be as well known to be the fulfilling thereof, as a man may know his own face in a glass ; or, *deception* may creep in ; the very *possibility* of which therefore should be absolutely guarded against. The better the chain holds together, the stronger it is, extraordinary cases must have extraordinary proofs : and after all, when the thing predicted is past, the *credit* of it's prediction naturally *lessens*, as *time increases* ; because it is well known, that the world is full of impositions : and in the things of God, there ought not to be the least *shadow* of it.

Tho' it is endeavoured to be proved, that some of the prophecies were literally fulfilled ; yet if *all* were not, if *some* prove false, it is a proof the prophets were not under the influence of an infallible spirit, or not infallibly guided by it : and be the case either way, we cannot trust to them in *all* cases ; and if not in *all* we cannot in *any*, unless we can distinguish those cases. If the prophecies contain *some* good and true things in them, can those recommend them that are not so ?

It was observed, that there is the greatest difficulties in applying prophecies, which are not clear and explicit to their intended purpose ; or in know-
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ing to what intent or purpose they were given : for instance ; what prophecies some apply to the redemption of the people of God by *Jesus Christ*, others have thought are only applicable to the redemption of the Jews from the power of the king of *Assyria*, and had respect to the times they were written in. And tho' some of the prophecies are said to be in *part* only accomplished ; in either case the *parts* are a great way asunder.

If the prophets did not prophesy *false* things, they were sometimes misunderstood, and in the greatest essentials. The Jews expected their saviour to be a *temporal king*, so did the primitive christians, before and after the crucifixion of Jesus ; for the *millenarian doctrine* of his coming again to reign on the earth, is spoken of in several places of the new testament, which was to have been * *immediately after* the destruction of *Jerusalem* ; and tho' *the day and hour* was not fixed, it was to be before *that generation passed away*, the disciples were bid to expect it, watch for it, and be ready, † not for the *Holy Ghost*, his substitute ; but for *Jesus* himself, and the manner of his coming was described ; therefore those were called the last days and times ‖. And tho' we are told the *gospel was first to be preached to all nations*, we are also told that so it had then been in the apostles time §. And Christ's temporal reign on earth, was the opinion of the first fathers of the Church, (*viz.*) *Cerinthus*, in the first century, *Papias*, Bishop of *Hierapolis*, had it from the christians by oral tradition. It was also embraced by *Justin Martyr*,

* Matt. xxiv. 29, 34, 42. Mark xiii. 24, 33, &c. Luke xxi. 31, 32, 36. John xxi. 22. Acts i. 11. † Acts iii. 20. 1 Theff. iv. 13, &c. Heb. x. 37. 1 Pet. iv. 7. 2 Peter iii. ‖ 1 John ii. 18. James v. 7, 8. Jude v. 18. § Acts ii. 5. Colof. i. 6. 23. Rom. x. 18.—xvi. 26.

Irenæus, Tertullian, Hippolitus, Lactantius, Theophilus of Antioch, Methodus, Victorinus, and the most illustrious of the ancient fathers were advocates for the *millenium*. It was impossible to persuade the Jews or Jew christians to the contrary. They expected *Christ* according to the prophets to sit on the throne or kingdom of *David*, which was a temporal kingdom, and from *Jerusalem* he was to administer judgment to all nations *. The *wise men* that came to seek Jesus understood it so †; so did the *angel Gabriel*: yet we are now told they were all mistaken, and that his kingdom is *spiritual*; for tho' it was expected to be *worldly*, we are now sure *his kingdom is not of this world*, unless the established christian churches are a part of the world, having worldly power and grandeur, where his *deputies* generally rule as if they never expected king Jesus would come and call them to account, except in this happy age and country: and they may always be trusted to rule in a tolerable manner, when and where the *spiritual* power is subject to the *temporal*; and when and where the savage fierceness of bigotry for the *gospel*, is muzzled by the *law*.

Believers of prophecies being puzzled to explain them, when the *letter* of the prophecy was not parallel to the *letter* of the story they applied it, have understood, what was wanting to be made out, in an *allegorical, figurative* or *mystical* manner; so they have made a *mysterious* application to the *letter* of the prophecy, or some one *mystical* prophecy to many very different cases; or the *mystery* of one, to the *mystery* of the other; and by the *spiritual wire-drawing* of one or all these methods, they always may make out what they please. If by any of these means the *expositor* by chance or hard labour draws a tolerable good parallel, the *prophet* gets

* Mat. ii. 2.

† Luke i. 32, 33.

sure *praise* ; but if he fails, which is oftener the case, the *expositor* gets sure *disgrace*. So difficult has the *exposition* generally been, not only to common understandings but to learned men, that happy is he who has gone into the battle, and come off without a scar in his intellects, or being crippled in his understanding ; and some have been affected with a kind of *prophetic delirium* all their life-time after.

Wherefore should the *word of God*, be harder to understand than the *word of man* ? Why should that be *mysterious*, which is most necessary to be *plain* ? Why should not God's word be understood in it's natural sense ? How is *revelation unrevealed* consistent with divine wisdom or goodness, or the marks or evidence of either ? Does God delight to *puzzle* and *distract* human minds ; and purposely, as by a wile, to *deceive* men's understandings ? Is this consistent with the character of *goodness* and *truth* ? To what purpose are *unknowable riddles*, or *inexplicable predictions* ? What knowledge does this convey ? or what warning do they give us of things to come, if the meaning of the expressions are not known ? And what occasion is there for such prophecies ? *If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle ? so except words are uttered easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken ?* If no *prophecy of scripture* is of any *private interpretation*, it can have no mystical meaning. They that say *one* thing, and mean *another*, are not to be depended on, nor regarded. Is it any mark of wisdom in a *teacher* to utter himself in words, which the *scholar* with all his endeavours cannot understand : and if he by labour or chance hopes he has got the right sense, yet can never be sure of it ? That which is *good* and *wise* need not be ashamed nor afraid to appear. The

wisdom that is *bidden*, has not the face of wisdom ; her residence is founded on *knowledge* ; but *mystery* or *secrecy* prevents our coming at it. How is it consistent with the *wisdom* of God to deliver *mysteries* to the world, for men to explain as they can or will, leaving them in the dark to be eternally tossed about by their own giddy conceits, and his word to be to them *an endless fund of deception*, and *maze of confusion*, as well as *an everlasting bone of contention* ? Where is the difference between what is *unintelligible* and *nonsense* ? When mysteries prevail, credulity is infatuation. Any writing may be deemed prophetic, if a *mystical* interpretation be allowed. Whatever the spirit teaches, the letter says, *the time will come when men will turn their ears from the truth, and be turned into fables*. To put a spiritual or *mystical* interpretation to a prophecy, is to make a *fable* of it. Are not assertions and prevarications ever present where truth is absent ?—It seems as strange, that the *Jews* should not know the meaning of their own prophets, and we should ; as that a foreigner in tongue and religion, should understand the articles of our church, and our churchmen not understand them at all ; and yet the strangers sense of these articles should be *forced*, *foreign*, and *allegorical*. I (as a carnal man) am apt to think the knack of understanding the prophecies and scriptures, *spiritually*, is that of putting what sense men please upon them, to preserve their reputation : so if they can be fulfilled or understood in *any* sense, the prophets and writers keep *their* characters at the expence of God's, who by this means is represented *prevaricating* with mankind, by saying one thing, and meaning a different ; or giving out his oracles in such *dark enigma's*, that neither speakers nor hearers know what is meant, nor have any certain

rule to direct them what is their proper meaning. To all rational minds it is apparent, that they who go beyond things *natural* and *moral*, go beyond their senses. This *spiritual sense* which is above the capacity of the *natural* man, is *the all confounding sense of nature*. The *reasonable* relish of things spoils an *enthusiastical* appetite.

If we consider the *nature* of such prophecy, as requires a *spiritual* or *mystical* interpretation, we shall find, that were the prophets honest men, they did not understand, what they themselves meant; for they that are honest, will not speak so as to *mislead* and *deceive* their hearers. If they were not honest, they spoke one thing, and meant another, whereby they that believed in them were deceived, and punished for being deceived; that is, for their *faith* and *sincerity*. So the Jews were *deceived* by their own prophets? None could be more than they. They thought that *believing* their *prophets*, was *faith* in *God*; and this *faith* deceived them, and they are cast off for being deceived! Unhappy people! to be so made by their *faith*, by which they hoped to be saved, as well as we! We plainly read that the prophets promised these people, in the name of God, to send them a *prince* who should deliver them out of the power of all their enemies, and make them *everlastingly happy*. No prophecy is more plain. The Jews believed these prophets were directed by God thus to speak; and they are deceived by thus believing in God: they could understand these prophecies no otherwise than according to the *obvious* and *natural* sense of the words delivered. If they had put a *different* sense upon them, it would have been easily proved they had been to blame; but because they understood and believed as they thought in God by his prophets, in the *most apparent sense*, he, as we may say,

say, has forsaken them! This is a miserable reflection! If they are *wrong* in so believing, their prophets were *wrong* in so deceiving them. If we ascribe it to God, it is fathering the *deception* and the *design* on him. Words that cannot be understood, are spoken to no purpose; they contain no revelation or prophecy: or if there is any design or purpose by such utterance, it is a very *deceitful* one.

S E C T. II.

Of the PROPHEETS Predictions, Practices and Illuminations.

WHAT *confidence* or *trust* ought to be reposed in the prophecies, will the *more plainly* appear, as the enquiry is the *more soberly*, or *diligently* made. By the understanding and conduct of the prophets, the foundation of mens faith in them may be known.

The writer of the *Pentateuch* tells us * that God bade *Jacob* go down into *Egypt*, and promised that he would certainly *bring him up again*; but he never returned again alive.

Elisha sent *Hazael* to *Benbadad*, with a *lye* in his mouth. *Say unto him*, (said the prophet †) *thou mayst certainly recover*, but he died; and to make the prophet more knowing than honest, he is said to foreknow his death, and that *Hazael* would take that opportunity to make himself king: and it is suspicious, that he as well had, as followed, the prophet's advice, for his own advantage in deceiving *Benbadad*.

Huldab promised king *Josiab* in the word of the Lord ‖, that he should *die in peace*; yet he died

* Gen. xlvi. 3, 4. compared with Gen. xlix. 23. † 2 Kings x. 10. ‖ 2 Kings xxii. 20.

in war *. Perhaps his faith in the prophets made him fool-hardy, which shews us the folly of confiding in prophecies.

When *Hezekiah* was sick, *Isaiab* told him †, that he should surely die, and not live; but *Hezekiah* telling the Lord how good he had been, he so wrought upon the Lord, that he promised him, by *Isaiab*, fifteen years longer life; therefore it was not *Hezekiah*, but the Lord that repented; and how can future events be foretold, when it may chance the Lord himself may change his mind.

Ezekiel prophesied ||, that the Lord would bring a sword upon Egypt by *Nebuchadnezzar*, and cut off both man and beast, and that the land should be desolate and waste, from the tower of Siene to the border of Ethiopia, so as to be utterly uninhabited by man and beast forty years. But there is no proof that this was ever done, since *Nebuchadnezzar* never conquered Egypt, as we are informed by any history.

When *Jeremiab* came to *Tabpanes* in Egypt, where the king's palace was, *Jeremiab* ||| was commanded to take great stones, and hide them in the clay in the brick-kiln, and prophecy, that *Nebuchadnezzar* should set his throne upon those stones, and spread his royal pavilion over them, and smite the land of Egypt, which no history acquaints us ever came to pass. Tho' great pains have been taken by partial historians, to attempt the historical fulfilling of prophecies, by corrupting what remains of Egyptian and Grecian history, to be made agree with the Hebrew prophets and historians, and destroying the rest, yet it never can be proved, that *Nebuchadnezzar* conquered Egypt within its own rivers, according to

* 2 Kings xxiii. 29.

† *Isaiab* xxxviii. 1. and 2 Kings, xx. 1.

|| *Ezekiel* xxix. 19, 20.

||| *Jeremiab* xliiii. 8, &c.

the prophecies of *Isaiab*, *Jeremiab*, and *Ezekiel*; therefore there is reason to believe the prophets were as much out in their other particulars concerning the destruction threatened to all the nations round about them; as well as in that of their own future prosperity, except some bold and lucky guesses which sometimes saved their credit. These deluded people seem now only reserved as a mark to mankind, to beware of such delusions.

Not only destruction against *Egypt*, by *Nebuchadnezzar*, is also prophesied by *Isaiab*, but against her rivers, (xix. 5, 6, 7, 8) *Their waters shall fail from the sea, and the river shall be wasted and dried up, &c.* If the prophet meant what he said, when did this happen? If he did not, what did he mean? If we cannot tell his meaning, what does the prophecy signify?

The xlvth chapter of *Jeremiab* was written in *Egypt* against *Pharaoh Hophra*, and the xlviith chapter passes for a prophecy against *Pharaoh Necho*, the grandfather of *Hophra*, concerning an action done near twenty years before the xlvth chapter was written; so that either some prophecies were written after the facts prophesied of, or the chapters are misplaced, and by consequence, the prophecies have been modelled and mangled.

Mr. *Jackson* and Dr. *Sykes* say, that *Isaiab* prophesied the downfall of *Babylon* by *Cyrus*, in a very particular manner, many years before *Cyrus* took it. But this being more than can in this age be known, if we cannot be sure the words of the text are the uncorrupted words of *Isaiab*, how can this be a conclusive evidence of the truth of revelation, and of the antiquity of the prophecies, sufficient to remove a just suspicion of error, either accidental, or worse?

It requires a peculiar faith from a *Christian*, to believe that (great evangelical prophet, as he is called)

called) *Isaiab*, so long before the empire of the *Medes*, prophesied of *Cyrus* by name, but by name knew not *Jesus*, nor foretold any thing of the religion that came by him; and to see that his prophecies of *Cyrus* were plain and literal, and those concerning *Jesus*, forced, and far-fetched from deep allegories and figurative speech. Besides, if all those particulars concerning *Babylon*, mentioned by these gentlemen, were truly foretold so long before, and so exactly came to pass; where is the free-will of man? since the result of one free human action might have broke every link of the chain to pieces, or frustrated every particular of the prophecies.

The xxxvith, xxxviith, and xxxixth chapters of *Isaiab*, are almost word for word the same as the 2 *Kings* xviiiith, xixth, and xxth. Was the *prophet* the same as the *historian*? If so, to foretel and fulfil was easy; if not, there must have been some borrowing or blundering in the case; if borrowing, it might be to accommodate *facts* to *prophecies*, or *prophecies* to *facts*; if blundering, there's no knowing how these writings have been managed; consequently, there's the less reason to depend on their being *correct* or *genuine*. 'Tis certain, the *historian*, by his spirit, was a *prophet*, or one of that party, and guilty of errors and partiality, as any impartial man may see, which makes him a *bad historian* and *prophet*. There can be no greater proof against the value and validity of any writings, than that their intrinsic purity and consistent harmony is wanting; such stand self-condemned, and need no evidence against their own infallibility and truth, but their own contents.

It is natural to believe, that those whom *deity* inspires should have juster notions of him that inspires them, than those that are uninspired, or lay no claim to such pretensions; and that the teachers of the

worship of the *true* God, should have better and brighter notions of him than priests of *false* Gods. It is asserted by our divines, that the *beathen* philosophers could never, by their human abilities, attain to such refined sentiments of *Deity*, as those that were taught by him; and indeed, if they could, of what *superior excellence* is inspiration? But in this we may find ourselves deceived. Inspiration scorns the comparison, and very justly, for 'twill suffer very much by it, 'twill eclipse its pretended superior glory. For if we take a survey of the sentiments of the prophets, we shall find, that if they were *good* men, (which I will not now call in question, since good men may be mistaken) yet nothing was more common for them, than to set their God on the stool of repentance. One of the inspired writers tells us, (*Gen. vi. 6.*) that *it repented the Lord he had made man, and it grieved him to the heart*; O poor Lord! therefore he destroyed all mankind by a flood, yet planted a new race from the rebellious root; as if it could be expected that the *same tree* would not always bring forth the *same manner of fruit*, by which means the world was nothing mended. God might, consistently with his repenting, have been represented as trying to mend his hand, by making other sort of creatures; and if they had not answered his expectations, he might have destroyed them again, and again tried to mend the matter, by a creation of other sort of animals. But if God repented his making *man*; why did he not repent the making *serpents, lions, tygers, wolves, vultures*, and other voracious and carnivorous creatures, whose living and happiness depends upon destroying the lives and happiness of others.

Again, we are told by the same inspiration, *Exod. xxxi. 17.* that after God had made the world, *he rested, and was refreshed.* He could have done no more,

more, if he had made it all in one day, provided his strength could have held out ; for this represents him *tired*, and consequently *weakened* with the fatigue. Did *inspiration* dictate this? what could a man say worse that was un-inspired? What idea does this convey of *Omnipotence*, that it should require a day to rest, and want refreshment?

The Lord is said to make the *Israelites* groan for their idolatry, and then their groaning brought him to repentance ; and that tho' he brought them out of *Egypt* by his *great power*, to make them a peculiar nation ; by his *great power* he would have destroyed them in his *great wrath*, if *Moses* had not pacified him, reasoned the case with him, told him the consequences of so rash an action, and persuaded him better, (*Exod.* xxxii. 9, to 14.) According to *Moses's* representation of things, the Lord would have lost his reputation among the *Egyptians*, and forswore himself, if he had acted according to the angry mood he was then in. Let those readers that think these things little better than *blasphemy* know, that the *blasphemy* is the *writer of the Penteteuch*, and not *mine*. I only set the writer in a clear light. These things shew what the prophet's notions of God were.

We are entertained with more refined notions of Deity by a *heathen priest*, (*Numbers* xxiii. 19.) *God is not a man, that he should lye ; nor the son of man, that he should repent : Hath he said, and shall he not do it ? Or, hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good ?* And tho' something like this is expressed by *Samuel* xv. 29. *The strength of Israel will not lye nor repent ; for he is not a man, that he should repent ;* it appears to mean no more, than that God would do what he *then* promised, and would not repent of what he *then* intended to do, but that he repented of what he *had* done ; for we are, by the same pro-

phet, at the same time, told, *ver. 11 and 35. It repented the Lord that he had made Saul King.* This is not to be wondered at, if we consider, that the Lord and the prophet were one and the same, and that the prophet gave the people a king with great reluctance; for it abridged his power, therefore *Samuel* was resolved to plague both king and people, being stung with envy, after *Saul's* and *Jonathan's* success against the *Philistines*: And to shew the power he was yet possessed of, and not willing to part with, he sends *Saul* on a bloody message, to destroy a neighbouring people, against whom they had not so much as any pretence of quarrel; therefore, what they had done four hundred years before, was alledged for a reason, *1 Sam. xv. ver. 2. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, (said Samuel) I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt: Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.* A bloody commission! What had *Amalek* done to the *Israelites*, when they came out of *Egypt*? We are told, *Exod. xvii.* when the *Israelites* came upon their borders, they came out to drive them away, and fought with them, and there was a battle 'till the going down of the sun; and tho' the *Israelites* had the better of it, by the enchantment of *Moses* holding up his hand, they thought it best to get off in the dark; and not having had sufficient revenge, (which looks as if they had the worst of it, for double revenge is desperate malice) the Lord is said to say to *Moses*, *Write this for a memorial in a book;* hence the remembrance of it was continued; no wonder then the Lord said, *I remember what Amalek did to Israel.* Well, what was to be written? *I will utterly*

put out the remembrance of *Amalek* from under heaven. No doubt but that Lord, or that Spirit, would have done it *then*, if it could; but being unable at that time, *swore*, ver. 16. he would have war with *Amalek* from generation to generation. Therefore the record stands in *Deut.* xxv. 17, 18, 19. Remember what *Amalek* did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of *Egypt*; how he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint, and weary, and he feared not God. Therefore it shall be, when the Lord thy God hath given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of *Amalek* from under heaven, thou shalt not forget it. Why? what should *Amalek* have done? What, but met *Israel* with bread and water in the way, when they came from *Egypt*, *Deut.* xxiii. 4. Instead of doing so, when the *Israelites* came on their borders, *Amalek* attacked them, drove them off, and fell upon their rear; therefore, to comfort *Israel* after their defeat, *Moses* tells them, they should destroy them as soon as they had power. *Samuel* makes a handle of this, to foment war, that the king and people might be abhorred by their neighbours, and plagued for clipping his power, and that of the *priesthood*, in desiring a kingly government: therefore the faction of the priests was on the side of *Samuel* against *Saul*; and *Samuel*, to sow discord among the people, to vex the king, and keep up the spirit of the *ecclesiastic faction*, and to give it such a head as might bring in many of the people to their party, who were for a kingly government, he determines to encourage *rebellion*, and set up a *pretender*, which does not appear to have been contrived by the prophet from a love to *David*,

but

but from an *enmity to Saul*; therefore this *high priest* goes and *sanctifies treason* under the colour of *religion*, and excuses himself by laying his *lyes* on God. after he had most cruelly hewed alive *Agag*, king of the *Amalakites*, *Saul's* prisoner, and, in a most bloody and barbarous manner, chopt him in pieces; and as it is said to be done *before the Lord in Gilgal*, I suppose it to be upon an altar there; this is an expression to *sanctify inhumanity*.

Can any man read the story, and be so stupid as to fancy he sees the *Lord's hand* in it, and not rather the *Devil's cloven foot* of priestcraft? 1 Sam. xvi. 1, 2, 3, 4. *And the Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, (hypocrisy!) seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel; (why then did he suffer him to reign any longer?) fill thine horn with oil, (holy anointing oil!) and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlemite, for I have provided me a king among his sons. And Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me (and deservedly.) And the Lord said, Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord, &c.* What an excellent cover for *treason, rebellion, and villainy*, is the *hypocrisy of religion!* and this of the *Lord's* contrivance too! *Priests* always bring *him* or the *church* (which is all one with them) into the plot. If it had not been thought, at that time, the *Lord* could have profaned his own service by commandment, the writer could not have been so foolish as to confess so much of the *wickedness* of the *priest*, and *folly* of the *people!* to such a *pitch of power* was the one ascended, as to *persuade* any thing! and to such a *depth of stupidity* were the people fallen, as to *believe* any thing! But this artful contrivance of *Samuel's*, and his declaration, that *it repented the Lord he had made Saul king over Israel*, was to justify his *treason and rebellion* against his *lawful sovereign*,

reign, chosen by God, or the prophet lyed, anointed king by himself, confirmed by the consent of the people, and established by his own valour and virtue.

The priests and prophets having been of *Samuel's* faction, and *Samuel* having made *David* their head, the prophet being dead, they gave to *Saul*, enquiring of them about the event of the war, no answer at all; which affected him too much, because he believed too much; and having been plagued by *Samuel* and *David*, and their faction, the greater part of the time he had been king, he grew melancholly, which is called, in the history of him, *an evil spirit from the Lord*; (excellent doctrine!) this melancholly made him credulous, low-spirited, and timorous; he seeks an answer from a cunning old woman called a *witch*; the spiteful answer she gave him (because he had spoiled her trade of fortune-telling, by banishing those pretenders) rendered him so dejected and melancholly, that looking upon himself as forsaken of God, and destined to death, he lost all courage, and hastened his own end; without which, probably, the *witch* might have proved a *lyar*, and his own *dumb oracles* have been despised, as they deserved; but king *Saul* having always a faction to contend against, of those that, in the eyes of the people, were sanctified, (of which party were the historians of his life) and the king dying unfortunately, it was said, *the Lord gave the people a king in his anger, and took him away in his displeasure*. Here is a sample of the righteousness of *priests* and *prophets*, who, whenever they wanted power, were the *incendiaries of faction and rebellion in every state*, or the *tools of tyranny, and promoters of slavery*.

David made such interest with the priests and prophets, by doing all that was in his power to oblige the *former*, and entering himself into the club of the *latter*,

latter, that *he* and *they* published a grant, sealed by the oath of God, (if his bare word had been sufficient, to swear had been needless) that the throne of the kingdom of *Israel* should be fixed in the posterity of *David* to all generations, to cut off *Saul's* issue. The prophet *David* says, *Psalms* lxxxix. that God had sworn to him by his holiness, that he would not lye unto *David*. One would think God need not swear that he would not lye; but the prophets often accused God of lying, which made this thing necessary; yet in that psalm *David* charges God with acting contrary to his promise and oath. It may be said, those things discover *David*, at that time, to be in a fit of despair; but if the prophet had sentiments of God's unchangeableness, he would rather, at such time, have questioned whether that promise really came from God. However, he thought it more political to charge God with lying, than make that a question. Accordingly, the better to establish this pretended grant, *David* found out a way to sanctify the murder of the remaining family of *Saul*, tho' they lived very submissively under him. *David*, indeed, spared *Mephibosheth*, a son of *Jonathan*, because he had shewn him favour before, to please those people that had a respect for their late king, pretending a regard to his oath made to the late prince his friend, which being before confessed or known, rendered it difficult to get over. But tho' *David* did not put this cripple to death, and tho' *Ziba* his servant's plot against him was too barefaced not to be detected, yet *David* withdrew his favours from him, and made him too poor to rebel; his friends too having no share in the government, and his relations dead. Had *David* dared to trust to the Lord's pretended oath, while any of *Saul's* posterity was alive, he would never have made sure work, to hang them all out of the way, and treat

Michael,

Michael, Saul's daughter, like a concubine, whom he had forced away from her loving husband, to favour his right of succession.

It appears by this *holy* history, that the Lord seldom or ever made a person king for his goodness, or foreknew how he would turn out. He first of all chose *Saul*, one would think, for his tallness, and he soon repented of that; then *David* seemed to be chose for his fresh colour and courage; however, the Lord had, by good luck, now gotten *a man after his own heart*, and was so fond of him, as to promise him upon oath, he would fix the crown upon his seed for ever; and yet only *a sixth part* of the promise remained to his *grandson*, and ever since the captivity, *all* the promise has been forgot.

Solomon arrived to such a degree of power, that he kept the priests and prophets in subjection, and therefore no rebellion happened in his reign, tho' it is plain the disposition was not wanting; for the prophet *Abijah*, in the name of God, excited *Jeroboam* thereto, who was one of the malecontents of *Solomon's* court, but *Jeroboam* was politician enough to perceive, that there was no prospect of success in *Solomon's* time; therefore he secured himself in *Egypt* till his death, and after that, laid hold of the opportunity that offered, to raise himself to the kingdom; which when he had gained, he chose rather the *Israelites* should worship *other gods*, than have *another king*; whereby it is plain he looked on all prophecy as a farce, tho' he sided with that faction, 'till he obtained his ends by them. This was he, who tho' said to be chosen of *the God of Israel* by the prophet, regarded *that God* less than he did *a calf*: and the spirit of the prophet had as little foresight of futurity as a calf, in chusing him king; for this was the occasion of the division of the kingdom, of weakening the people by intestine wars,

and of their being, long after, carried into captivity, if the prophets may be believed, 1 *Kings* xiv. 16. Did *Jehu* behave any better, who was said to be chosen by the Lord? and if the Lord himself was in the dark, as to futurity, how should his prophet see? and from whence could come the light of prophecy? or how does there appear to be any light or truth in it? and if these things were not of the Lord, what then is prophecy? So that, whether these things are of God, or not, it appears there is no light nor truth in prophecy. What spirit inspired the prophets, may be known by the actions relating to their prophecies, as *a tree is known by its fruits*.

A prophet, by the order of *Elisha*, anointed *Jehu*, in the name of the Lord, king over *Israel*; the conspiracy begun by the prophets, was finished by the soldiers; and when *Jehu* had pleased the prophets that contrived to make him king, by murdering not only all the family of *Abab*, but *Abaziah* king of *Judah*, and forty-two of his domestics, and all *Baal's* priests, he established the worship of *Jeroboam*, and made *calves* of them all. Hence it's plain, the prophets knew no more of futurity than other men; since by their pretended inspiration, they never mended the matter.

What should we think of a prophet, who, to sanctify treason and rebellion, affirmed, that God had appointed a person to be *king of England*, for the good of the *church of England*, who, as soon as he was invested with the power, should establish *Papery*, or *Mahometanism*? Can we think that God would make that man his peculiar choice, that chose not him? What man would chuse or reject, without knowing the consequence, and not rather take his chance as things fall out, than by making a blind or foolish chance, to have his judgment arraigned? Would any wise king on earth make that man his vice-

vice-roy, who alienated the affections of his subjects to their sovereign, or suffer him to remain in his office after he had forfeited that, and his head, by his rebellious conduct, if it were in the king's power to remove such viceroy? Certainly, a good and wise king would not suffer his subjects to be the prey of a tyrant, if he could hinder it.

If what we read of the prophets be true, *James v.* 17. they did sometimes, by their miraculous power, a great deal of mischief: By a prayer of *Elijah's*, there was no rain for three years and six months, so that there was a most grievous famine, *1 Kings xvii.* The same man, when he had tried to convince the prophets of *Baal* that the God of *Israel* was God, without desiring their conversion, he slew eight hundred and fifty of them, *1 Kings xviii.* 18, 19, 20, 40. This prophet also destroyed twice fifty men by fire, that only executed the king's orders, which they were obliged to do. By virtue of the prophet *Elisha's* curse, forty-two little children were torn to pieces by two she-bears, for only calling him *bald-pate*. 'Tis said, indeed, that his dead bones raised to life a man, as they were burying him; and that his master *Elijah* restored the *Shunamite's* son out of his fit by sneezing. It is possible to suppose a person to be dead that is not, and that the *Jews* sometimes buried persons before they were dead, as they bury them the same day they are supposed to die; and 'tis possible for time to bring a person out of a fit, that to all appearance seems dead. But if these were dead, and restored to life; yet, like other bad quacks, where they cured *one*, they killed an *hundred*. Therefore it appears to me, that the prophets were as *fallible* and as *faulty* as other men; and since they were *every way as bad* as other men by *nature*, there is but little reason to believe they were, in any respect, *supernaturally better*.

Jeremiab (iv. 10.) charges God with deceiving both him and the people, saying, *Ab! Lord God, surely, thou hast greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, ye shall have peace, whereas the sword reached unto the soul.* At another time he cries out to God, (xv. 18.) *Wilt thou be altogether to me as a liar, and as waters that fail?* that glide away, and leave the channel dry. I suppose he had prophesied something that came not to pass; therefore to save his own credit, he impeached his maker; says he, xx. 7. *O Lord thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived; thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed; as much as to say, thou art more powerful than just; and therefore hast exercised thy power in deceiving me.* It may be said, perhaps, the prophet was out of temper, but then he was inspired with an ill tempered spirit. *Ezekiel* (xiv. 9.) represents God saying, *if a prophet be deceived, I the Lord have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him;* so that the Lord deceives a prophet, and deceives him on purpose to destroy him! One would think this is destroying him deceitfully. What mean sentiments does not pretended inspiration convey to man of God Almighty! In short the prophets tell us that God repented so often (*Jer.* xv. 6.) that at last *he was weary of repenting.*

St. *Paul* or some other supposed inspired writer tells us, that *God found fault with the first covenant,* (when he had tried it) and therefore made a new one, and *changed both the law and the priesthood,* (*Heb.* vii. 12, 18.—viii. 8.) and well he might, if they were *weak and unprofitable,* as the prophet says, (*Ezekiel* xx. 25.) *He gave them statutes that were not good:* a bad gift! It seems as if God so often changed his mind, that a man could not depend on God's word by the prophets, or his oath.

Sometimes

Sometimes the prophets to save their credit said that God *had put a lying spirit in their mouths*, 1 Kings xxii. 23, 24. that is, he made them prophesy lyes, which he knew would not, or intended should never come to pass, as in the case of *Chenaanah* and *Micaiah*: both were equally positive and confident, that what each man said was true, tho' differently inspired; for when *Micaiah's* prophecy contradicted *Chenaanah's*, the latter struck the former on the cheek, and said, *which way went the spirit of the Lord, from me to speak unto thee?* therefore they both laid claim to the same spirit. Nor did *Micaiah* lay the fault on a *false* God, but on his *own* God, that he had commissioned a lying spirit to deceive him and the rest. Sometimes the prophets are said to lye in the name of God, and thereby not only deceive the people, but one another; as in the case of the prophets at *Bethel*, 1 Kings xiii. and *lying* was so common a practice, that they seem to have made a trade of it. All was sanctified with the name of God. And since the *true* God's prophets prophesied false things, it could not be known who were *true* prophets, until the event proved the prediction, which seems to intimate that they prophesied at random, and some things came to pass by accident.

Now and then the inspiration of their *cups* passed for the inspiration of *God*, and so they were inspired with a *wrong* spirit, when they prophesied *wrong*. *Isaiab* (xxviii. 7.) says, *The priests and the prophets have erred thro' strong drink, they are swallowed up with wine, they are out of the way, thro' strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment.*

The prophets to save their credit, often fixed *no* time to the events predicted, and then it was easy to say, the Lord will perform it in his own time: or
if

if they fixed a time, it was put off; and when the prophecy came not to pass, the time for its accomplishment was *prolonged*. This was done so often, that it became a proverb among the people, (*Ezek. xiii. 22, 23, 24, 25.*) *The days are prolonged and every vision faileth.*

As a bold *assertion* often passes for a *proof*, it is not to be doubted, but a bold and lucky *guess* has often passed for a *prophecy*. And it is certain that more are *deceived* by one *lucky prediction* of any sort, than *undeceived* by fifty that are *false*. When prophesying was in fashion, the prophets made a penny of it *, and some of them got a good living by it. The *common prophets* were sometimes hackney prostitutes, like *common whores*; they prophesied any way for gain, and were hired by rewards to prophesy as great men would have them.

It is certain the prophets *died away* after the captivity, till they were no more to be found, tho' they *swarmed* before. The probable reason is this. They had by *false* and *uncertain prophecies* lost all their *reputation*, and so the *fashion* of being inspired, when it was no more creditable nor profitable, sunk; and when neither *credit* nor *profit* blew up the fire of *enthusiasm*, it went out. Some among the *Jews* at length looked upon them not much better than mad men; (*Jer. xxix. 26.*) *every man that is mad maketh himself a prophet*, said they. It may be, many of them were like other enthusiasts, they that had no intention to *deceive others*, were *themselves deceived*; and because they *meant well*, and endeavoured to make men *holy* and *religious*, they thought themselves possessed of the *holy spirit*: And indeed I see no other marks of the Holy Ghost among them or us.

* 1 Sam. ix. 7, 8. 2 Kings viii. 8, 9. Nehemiah vi. 12, 13. Micah iii. 11.

The Conclusion, or Application.

THE *Jewish* prophets appear to have been the instigators and promoters of many factions and rebellions in *Judea*, and to have caused more calamities than they cured, and for that reason it is likely many of them suffered death. I presume they did not expect such wages for their work when they took up their calling. Those that think themselves *God's ambassadors*, are generally very *proud*, and imperious, which sometimes brings them to the *tree* or the *block*. Whether does it argue more the wickedness of the people that put the prophets to death, or the weakness of the power they served in protecting its servants no better; which tho' said to be more than human, yet, when put to the test, fell under it? Where then is the *proof* of it? Does it not rather prove, that the very thing, *viz. a supernatural power*, which they made the most pretensions to, they were least possessed of? It seems unaccountable, that if a supernal power *guided* them, it should not *protect* them: or that a good master should take no more care of his peculiar servants! Does an artificer, when he has done a piece of work, burn his tools?

But if predicting prophets are any benefit to a nation, why have we none? we have *enthusiasts* enough. Is the age not wicked enough? that is well. Is it too wicked? they are the more wanted. The *twice-born Whitefield*, and his followers, that have large effusions of the spirit, in conceit at least, know nothing of *futurity*, nor even the *truth* of things *past*, which themselves believe. They fancy they have something within them which makes a *mighty stir*, but they make a *mighty stir* about nothing. Has this prophetic spirit so ill defended his servants formerly,

merly, that no body dares to lift into his service now? Now they may prophesy safe enough, if they can do any good, or say any truth that will be serviceable to fore-know. I'll venture to affirm, no prophet of God would suffer death by the government in KING GEORGE'S days, these glorious days of learning, light, and liberty. Should *envy* say, that in this I abuse my *sovereign*, it is only *envy* can say so. The truth is, this is a *knowing age*; knowledge is destructive of superstition, which therefore priests call an *infidel age*; and prophets cannot stand the shrift of these days, fearing unbelieving eyes should see through them. Now they may come with freedom, they come not at all; for *freedom* begets *enquiry*, and produces *knowledge*. Once there were laws against crimes that no person ever did, or could commit; and many suffered death in *Old and New England*, for doing what could not be done: but now the law for the punishment of *witches, wizards, and conjurers*, is annulled, and the *devil* is defied to do his worst, he can do nothing at all! There is no fortune-telling regarded, but by the most silly deluded people, who want a wise education, and being young, are unexperienced. No *prophecies* are uttered, no *wonders* are wrought in our days. What extraordinary artist, mathematician, lawyer, or physician, makes any vain pretensions to a prophetic spirit, or idly spends his golden time, to set forth or interpret prophecies? The *wise* men of the world are not carried away with the *gales* of the *spirit*: it may blow where it lists for them; for they are not tossed about *with every wind of doctrine*, or blast of prophecy. Does it ever appear, that the spirit which makes *fools* its favourites, ever makes them *wise*? I think, that those among us who have pretended, by extraordinary inspiration, to be adopted into the *Lord's privy-council*, are generally
men

men of more extraordinary *passions* than *endowments*; and when it happens otherwise, their parts are very ill applied; but, thank God, since the *French prophets*, there have been among us no fools great enough to profess foretelling future events.

Our common notion is, that prophesying depends not upon the *faculties* of the prophets, but on *divine inspiration* only, which moves them to utter things according to that impulse: but the Rabbinical notions of prophets are, that it was *scientific*; for there were schools, where persons devoted themselves to the study and attainment of prophecy. We read of the schools of the prophets, and we all know a school is a place for instruction and learning. The *sons of the prophets* were the *striplings* in prophecy, the *juniors*, the *scholars*; and prophesying signifies not only foretelling future events, (that is the hardest part) but singing, preaching, and speaking something by a pretended or imaginary divine impulse or inspiration, whether it respects time past, present, or to come. But whatever spirit the prophets are conceived to be inspired by, let it be observed, that the spirit of the prophets were subject to the prophets, unless when they heard things unutterable, and knew not whether they were in the body or no; but then they could never utter those things.

The truth is, that *extraordinary inspiration* is only some *extraordinary natural gift*; and therefore, a man may as well be an inspired *mechanic*, as an inspired *divine*, and inspired writings are known by their nature, as men are; as we read, or should read, 2 *Tim.* iii. 16. *All scripture that is given by inspiration, is profitable for doctrine, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.* What is, and what is not true, is known by *reason*; what is, and what is not good and proper to be done, is known by the

fitness and nature of things: and the degrees of good or evil in actions is thus known; that which contributes to the good or evil of the *greater number*, and the giving or neglecting seasonable aid in the *greater need*, is the *greater good or evil*. Necessities enhance the value of assistance; and as to the knowledge of futurity, or mysteries, it is happiest not to desire any thing that is out of our power to attain, as all prophetic knowledge is.

I shall conclude this subject with that incomparable passage from *Rowe's Lucan's Pharsalia*, which describes *Cato* with his army, passing by the temple of *Jupiter Ammon*, in *Lybia*. Thus,

*Before the temple's entrance, at the gate,
 Attending crouds of eastern pilgrims wait:
 These from the horned God expect relief;
 But all give way before the Latian chief.
 His host (as crouds are superstitious still)
 Curious of fate, of future good and ill,
 And fond to prove prophetic Ammon's skill,
 Intreat their leader to the God would go,
 And from his oracle Rome's fortune know:
 But Labienus chief the thought approv'd,
 And thus the common suit to Cato mov'd.*

*Chance, and the fortune of the way, he said,
 Have brought Jove's sacred counsel to our aid:
 This greatest of the gods, this mighty chief,
 In each distress shall be a sure relief;
 Shall point the distant dangers from afar,
 And teach the future fortune of the war.
 To thee, O Cato, pious, wise, and just,
 Their dark decrees the pious gods shall trust;
 To thee their fore-determined will shall tell:
 Their will has been thy law, and thou hast kept it well.
 Fate bids thee now the noble thought improve;
 Fate brings thee here to meet and talk with Jove.*

Inquire

*Inquire betimes what various chance shall come
 To impious Cæsar, or thy native Rome ;
 Try to avert, at least, thy country's doom. }
 Ask if these arms our freedom shall restore ?
 Or else, if laws and right shall be no more ?
 Be thy great breast with sacred knowledge fraught,
 To lead us in the wand'ring maze of thought :
 Thou that to virtue ever wer't inclin'd,
 Learn what it is, how certainly defin'd, }
 And leave some perfect rule to guide mankind. }*

*Full of the God that dwelt within his breast,
 The hero thus his secret mind express'd,
 And inborn truths reveal'd ; truths which might well
 Become ev'n oracles themselves to tell.*

*Where would thy fond, thy vain enquiry go ?
 What mystic fate, what secret wouldst thou know ?
 Is it a doubt if death should be my doom,
 Rather than live till kings and bondage come ; }
 Rather than see a tyrant crown'd at Rome ? }
 Or wouldst thou know if, what we value here,
 Life, be a trifle, hardly worth our care ?
 What by old age and length of days we gain,
 More than to lengthen out the sense of pain ?
 Or if this world, with all its forces join'd,
 The universal malice of mankind, }
 Can shake or hurt the brave and honest mind ? }
 If stable virtue can her ground maintain,
 While fortune feebly frets and frowns in vain ?
 If truth and justice with uprightness dwell,
 And honesty consists in meaning well ?
 If right be independent of success ;
 And conquest cannot make it more or less ?
 Are these, my friend, the secrets thou would'st know,
 Those doubts for which to oracles we go ?
 'Tis known, 'tis plain, 'tis all already told,
 And horned Ammon can no more unfold.*

From God derived, to God by nature join'd,
 We act the dictates of his mighty mind:
 And tho' the priests are mute, and temples still,
 God never wants a voice to speak his will.
 When first we from the teeming womb were
 brought,
 With-inborn precepts then our souls were fraught,
 And then the maker his new creatures taught.
 Then, when he form'd, and gave us to be men,
 He gave us all our useful knowledge then.
 Canst thou believe, the vast eternal mind
 Was e'er to Syrts and Lybian sands confined?
 That he would chuse this waste, this barren
 ground,
 To teach the thin inhabitants around,
 And leave his truth in wilds and desarts drown'd?
 Is there a place that God would chuse to love
 Beyond this earth, the seas, yon heav'n above,
 And virtuous minds, the noblest throne for Jove?
 Why seek we farther then? Behold around,
 How all thou seest does with the God abound;
 Jove is alike in all, and always to be found.
 Let those weak minds, who live in doubt and fear,
 To juggling priests for oracles repair;
 One certain hour of death to each decreed,
 My fix'd, my certain soul from death has freed.
 The coward and the brave are doom'd to fall;
 And when Jove told this truth, he told us all.
 So spoke the hero, and to keep his word,
 Nor Ammon, nor his oracle explor'd;
 But left the croud at freedom to believe,
 And take such answers as the priest should give.

SUPERNATURALS

EXAMINED.

DISSERTATION IV.

On the defence of the peculiar institutions and doctrines of Christianity, in answer to a late pamphlet, entitled, *Deism fairly stated, and fully vindicated from the gross imputations and groundless calumnies of modern believers.* In a LETTER to the Author of the latter Tract.

S I R,

I Have read *that treatise* which, of the many others written against your excellent performance, *alone* deserves regard: my love to truth, and to you its advocate, excites me to deliver my sentiments thereon; for that reason, I think neither the *antagonists*, nor the *subjects*, are unworthy special notice. I shall endeavour to confine myself within the bounds of *truth* and *decency*; and, in order to be brief, shall take notice only of the more material parts of your opponent's arguments. After observing to you, that the controversialists should be distinguished by either the names that themselves espouse, of CHRISTIANS and DEISTS, or of the terms CREDULOUS and INCREDULOUS; characters that are in the directest opposition, and, I conceive, may, without offence, be properly applied; *believers* and *infidels* being

terms

terms improper ; for, except in *supernaturals*, both are, in general, believers or infidels alike. The *degrees* between these *positive parties* may be accounted *three*, *viz.* the DOUBTER, the QUERIST, and the EXAMINER. In the latter class I put myself. These are the *terms* or *appellations* I intend to make use of thro' this work, and therefore thought proper to premise this in the first place.

To your propositions, particularly the fifth, *viz.* that NATURAL DUTIES ARE ONLY PERCEIVED BY US TO BE DUTIES, your antagonist answers, that *faith in God, and obedience to his commands, are natural duties.* By a duty I understand an act of the will, somewhat enjoined, as a precept, which we appear able to do, or leave undone, or do the contrary. 'Tis wrong to propose faith to the *assent of the will*, which ought to be a *light to the judgment*. If it is a natural duty to believe a proposition as soon as it is proposed, it makes examination usefess. What a man does not see a reason for, he cannot believe ; unless that may be called belief, which is taken upon trust *without reason*, and even *contrary* to reason. If this be a *duty*, then faith may be called a *duty* ; but faith, which is founded on evidence or reason, unavoidably obeys, and a reasonable faith cannot obey where evidence or reason is not ; therefore *a true and reasonable faith is no duty at all.* The duty lies in the *enquiry*, not in the *consequence* of it ; for examination is the work of the will, but the success of it is not : therefore *faith* and *duty* are two things. It is a man's duty to use what means appear proper to him to inform his judgment, but the success of the means is not within the compass of duty ; *and if faith be no duty, there is no righteousness in it.* Tho' this may seem strange to some, yet if it be well considered, it will clearly appear, that to believe a proposition without a reasonable proof, is not
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in the power of a reasonable creature, nor is it in his power to reject what has such proof, as soon as he discerns it; he believes, or disbelieves, without being retarded by the consent of the will, for when *sufficient* conviction appears, it irresistibly constrains the will: therefore *faith in God is no more a duty, than the ability is to discern his being, or the properties of it.* As it is not a blind man's duty to see, so it is not a man's duty to believe a God, who cannot see the evidences of it: and if faith in God be not a duty, faith in things of a much lower degree, that have no evidence in nature, can be no natural duty.

Therefore obedience to the commands of God (or what are called so) is only due from us to such precepts as we are convinced are his commands: for if we must obey commands said to be of God, without sufficient conviction, or reasonable evidence that they are so, our obedience is blind, and instead of being good, may be prejudicial and mischievous to mankind. Therefore 'tis evident, *that upon the pretended ground of obedience to God's commands, we are not obliged to receive the several institutions of a divine revelation, if it don't appear to be divine, nor the institutions to be of God.* In such case it cannot be *right* to receive it by those who cannot perceive the *rectitude* of it, for that is a false ground. *And not only* (says this author) *in matters of religion, but even in the common intercourses of life, the relation that subsists between the parties concerned in them, often derives and confers an obligation on particular injunctions that are not in themselves natural duties; but yet are clearly perceived and acknowledged to become duties, merely because they are commanded.* It had been better if said, meerly because the place, station, and circumstances the servant is in, shew them to be duties. Obedience of inferiors to the commands of their superiors, in
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all things lawful and just, appear to be duties, not because of the *authority* of the commander, but of the *fitness of the things* commanded. The true obligation of a just command, arises from the authority of that justice which makes it the reasonable motive of obedience. This gentleman, in an *exception*, confesses as much, when he says, “ *excepting only when it is something impious, or immoral, something prohibited by a superior authority.*” This is still more evident in things respecting the service of God, for we do not obey God as a *person*, nor have we *vocal* mandates from him ; for, as such, we know neither the one nor the other, but as *the reasonable requirements of a divine nature* ; not for the benefit of God the commander, but for our own in obeying ; hence we have a rule to judge by. *All arbitrary laws pretended to be from God, that do not by nature tend to man’s good, are impositions, and not the commands of God.* Positive institutions, that do not appear to be naturally fit to promote human happiness, do not appear to be of God ; therefore your rule holds good, INJUNCTIONS THAT ARE NOT IN THEMSELVES NATURAL DUTIES, CANNOT BE CLEARLY PERCEIVED AND ACKNOWLEDGED TO BECOME DUTIES MEERLY BECAUSE THEY ARE COMMANDED. All that we know of God is, that he is a *spirit*, that is, a *divine nature*, not a *person* ; he therefore that loves and obeys truth, purity of heart, love to mankind ; that has a benevolent mind ; that regulates his conduct by righteousness ; loves and obeys God. Thus what is love and obedience to God, is easily known. *Wisdom* and *goodness* is the perfection of nature, and of God’s nature, so far as it concerns our service ; therefore, all *doctrines* and *precepts* that are incompatible with *wisdom* and *goodness*, are not of God : and if they do not appear to be wise and good, they do not appear to be of him ; and should therefore

therefore (even tho' they may be wise and good) be rejected till they do so appear: for *wisdom* and *goodness* cannot require us to believe and do what does not appear to us to be wise and good; nor to judge *wiser* than we can, or act by *better* motives than we have to act by: that would be to require us to do things impossible to be done; for we must judge of things by their *appearance*, unless our better knowledge direct us otherwise, and then we always judge according to *knowledge*. 'Tis right to us that we should judge and act in the *best* manner we can, and therefore, when we can know no better than by *appearance*, that appearance, tho' *wrong*, is the *best* rule of our judgment; and we can no more alter this rule, and the result of it, than we can alter our frame and constitution. Therefore, if divine laws appear to us to be *wrong*, and this appearance be according to the best of our knowledge and capacities, 'tis *wrong* in us to obey them; because 'tis directly acting against conscience, against the best light and evidence that we have. 'Tis not *our* fault that we do not see truth, if we seek it, but that of the circumstances we are in. Not seeing things in a *true* light, is often the occasion of *wrong* judgment and action; yet if we follow the truth without *seeing* it to be so, 'tis not following it for the truth's sake, and so doing destroys all virtue in the obedience: it is walking in the dark, not knowing whether we are right or wrong, without any certain rule to direct us. God cannot appear *just* to man, if his authority enable him to give such positive laws as have not the appearance of *justice* and *fitness*; therefore, to impose such laws on man as the commands of God, is to represent God an *arbitrary* and *unjust* being.

There is a necessity to prove these *positive duties* insisted on to be God's *positive commands*; upon this

rests the whole controversy. All positive commands called duties, not naturally and morally fit, or not appearing to arise from the plain reason, and evident nature and fitness of things, are impositions; and imposing them on men as the law of God, confounds mens understandings of God's law; tis *transgressing* the commandments of God, instead of *obeying* them, and *teaching for doctrines* and duties the *traditions* and institutions of men.

All reasonable duties which are fit and proper, arising from the nature of things and circumstances, are natural, tho' they may be called positive; and all positive duties that are not of this sort, are unnatural and unreasonable. *We contend for nothing more, than that a just regard should be had to what are the commands of God,* and not to take for them the commands of men: for (as you have said) "what-ever are not originally in their own nature constituent parts of religion, can never have a divine appointment and authority to become such;" because the original nature and reason of things is always the same, God not being changeable and capricious: there is, therefore, good reason to question such positive commands as are said to be given by the universal God, which are not best fitted for the universal nature of mankind. That *the PECULIAR institutions of the gospel have a natural tendency to promote purity of heart and rectitude of manners,* requires a PECULIAR proof; if that be done, every sober *Deist* will approve of them: plain proof of it is all that is wanted.

(P. 14.) After your antagonist has cited you, intimating that "God only requires of men a conduct proportionate to the abilities he has given them;" he adds, that yet, *for all this, he may convey certain instructions to our reasoning powers and faculties in the way of revelation; and the more li-*

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mitted and confined our faculties are, in their present state, so much the more occasion may there be for such special assistance, and more extensive and perfect knowledge of our duty imparted by it. If our Creator require of us a conduct but proportionate to our abilities, those of the most limited and confined have no occasion for *special assistance* or knowledge of their duty more than others, since 'tis not fit in the nature of things, that all men should be made equal; and since, by this rule, there will be an equal distribution of justice to all, whether their abilities are great or little. Besides, attempting to cure the imperfections of *nature* by the plaister of *revelation*, is beneath the practice of the all-wise *physician*; for whatever deficiencies are in nature, they are God's own work: and besides this, the daubing with the holy unction of revelation, never yet made his understanding *straight*, whom God by nature made *crooked*; or ever conferred those abilities which nature denied; but, on the contrary, it has warped many from the *rectitude of reason*, and, like the light of enthusiasm, made men as unwise as it found them, if not much more so. It is to all men that depend upon its light, as above that of natural reason, an inextricable maze, and a wilderness of endless embarrassment.

Seeing that natural and positive duties arise from one foundation, viz. *the relation and fitness of things*, and appear alike conspicuous, as soon as they do appear, I see not the least seeming contradiction (p. 15.) in your saying, "Natural duties only are capable of being perceived by us to be duties; and that the reason on which a duty is founded, necessarily results from the relation the person to perform it stands in to the person to whom it is to be performed." The duties naturally arising from those different relations, are all *natural duties*: and none

can properly be said to be *superinduced*, that are properly duties. As God is one, and his will one, so are his laws.

Therefore (p. 16.) the gentleman has not proved what he says he has, *that the practice of natural duties only, is not the WHOLE of true religion, with regard to practice.* How he will be able to prove, *that the belief of natural doctrines are not the WHOLE of it in respect of belief*, I shall examine. That doctrines, as things may have a real foundation in nature, *though that foundation does not appear*, may be true; but 'till *that foundation does appear*, there is no reason in nature that we should believe them.

The gentleman argues, (p. 17.) *That since we are obliged to confess there may be, and are, many things in nature above our reason; to deny the possibility of any degree of information, concerning such matters being imparted to us by divine revelation, will be found, in the issue, to prescribe rules to God, and set bounds to the exercise of his power, which natural, as well as revealed religion, clearly teaches us is infinite.* 'Tis not setting any other bounds to God's power, than such as the gentleman has done, p. 11. *All possible power and authority belong to God.* To say, God does not teach us things above our reason, is only saying, 'he does not give more light to man's nature than it can receive, and it is not possible he should.—Whatever is above man's understanding, is of no concernment to man's happiness: such things, if they are divine, concern only the Divinity, or such beings whose capacities they suit.

Says the Gentleman, *Since we are sensible many things have an actual existence in nature, tho' we know not HOW, or in what manner*, he concludes, *there can be no absurdity in believing, that the same method of conveying information to us, may be followed in revelation as in nature, &c.* But this is a false parallel:

parallel: we are not sensible that any revelation, superior to nature, had any existence at all, as the works of nature have; this ought to be proved before that be allowed) therefore like consequences will not follow, because the antecedents are unlike. The building cannot be the same, when the foundation and materials are different, and *the possibility of their being on a level, is not yet sufficiently established by any observations* the gentleman has made. The HOW things have existence which we do not know, we do not believe; nor are we so much concerned HOW this revelation sprouted, tho' we have weighty objections against that, as of WHAT NATURE it is. Certainly, in things prescribed us to take, 'tis lawful to enquire whether they be wholesome, or poison.

(P. 18, 19.) To say, that what God commands must not only *unquestionably be true*, but also APPEAR to be true, is most honourable of God; and is so far from *ascribing to him something in words, but in reality nothing at all*, that it is ascribing nothing but reality to him. 'Tis most fit, that what God reveals to natural beings, be in a natural way, or it must be *unnatural* to them; and the gentleman himself says, *an unnatural revelation 'tis impious to expect*. Whatever is supernatural is not according to nature, therefore unnatural: for there is no medium.

The gentleman hopes to shew, *that it is a very proper ground of our assent, and sufficient in itself alone, whenever it happens, that we see NO OTHER reason for the truth of a proposition, but that GOD HAS REVEALED IT*. Let him shew but this reason, that God has revealed what he calls revelation, it will be sufficient in itself alone. Let him but do this, this single point will determine the controversy; to prove this by reason is all we require, and will be more convincing than miracles: therefore

we do not call for any thing unreasonable or impossible, unless it be impossible to prove this by reason. This is the subject contested. The *Christians* affirm their book contains a revelation of God's will; you *Deists* question the truth of that affirmation, and require them to prove it: This you think is a reasonable request, if they have no mind to deceive you; especially as you require but a *reasonable* conviction, tho' they may give you a *miraculous* one, if they can; but if they can do neither, you judge it unreasonable and unjust to demand your assent, without convincing you that you are wrong, and they are right. You declare yourselves to be *lovers of TRUTH*; that let her banners be displayed, and you will be volunteers, and fight under those colours: that you cannot believe without conviction, nor be convinced without reason; but that as soon as the TRUTH appears to you, you cannot withhold your assent one moment; that you will immediately cast down your arms, and yourselves, and venerate that *goddes* wherever she appears. This you profess, and this is a fair declaration: the *wiser Christians* do the same.

To proceed then; I think it proper both sides should be perfectly well satisfied in every point wherein there may be *deception*, and till then, *doubting and enquiring is your duty*: and what is put upon men for *credible and sufficient testimony*, ought to be such as is *credible to other than believers*, and such as carries its own *sufficiency* with it. We should take care of imputing those things to God, which have been the inventions of *men*. God's word must demonstrate God's *wisdom*; which will be as clear and convincing to man's reason, by its own intrinsic plainness and purity, as the splendor of the sun is to their bodily eyes.

In pag. 20, 21. we have this simile. *When an eastern prince was acquainted by an European of good quality and credit, that in these parts of the earth, the water would, at certain times, become solid and unnavigable, without any visible cause to produce so surprizing an alteration in it; was it reasonable for the prince to disbelieve an account which was well attested, merely because it did not appear to him to have its foundation in reason and nature?* The giver of this simile argues from hence, that since we are such unexperienced and incompetent judges in *natural* things, no wonder we are not able to determine of things *supernatural*; and therefore, that 'tis contrary to truth and common sense to disbelieve and reject these *supernaturals*. But if *natural* things puzzle us, why should God confound us with *supernaturals*? Let us *examine and compare* the simile to the *application and subject*. The *eastern prince* could not believe the *European's* report, and what then? Was it his duty to believe what he could not? The *quality and credit* of the reporter was all the *evidence* he had of the *truth* of the report, and this, as great as it was, was *insufficient* to convince him. Where did the fault lay? The thing reported is true, but not believed by the *prince*; Why? Was it a *prejudice* received against the *European*? that could not be, if he knew his *person and character*; nor could it be against being *informed*; every body is willing to come at *knowledge* in an easy manner: Could he believe without *conviction*? not unless his *faith* run before his *reason*. Could he refrain believing, if convinced? impossible! Where then was the fault? it must be either in *the nature of the evidence*, or in the *prince*, for wanting a *rational conviction*. Now, one of these is supposed to be your case; but the latter depends upon the former. You *don't* believe the things commanded, Why? because

cause you *cannot* : Why? because you want to be *rationally* convinced of those things: Why? because the evidence affords not *sufficient proof*. After all then, the fault is not in you, but in the *evidence*; make that good, and the work is done; but you say they cannot, therefore you cannot believe; then, say they, *you must be damned*, Why? because you cannot believe things to you *incredible*, nor do what to you is *impossible*! Is this just, say you? Does this look as if it came from God the father of truth? If this *damnation doctrine* has nothing *good* in it, could it proceed from any *good being*? *Damnation* on such terms no man need fear: but of the *evil spirit* that *delivers* it, and of the *stupid nature* that *believes* it, let every one beware. But why is this damning clause? why, but certainly to frighten poor souls out of their senses; that when their senses are drove away, faith may be drove in. A little more of this illustration.

An eastern prince is acquainted by an European of good quality and credit. Are we acquainted by persons of *good quality and credit*? They that acquaint us now with the story, may be so; but they know no more the truth of it, than we do: therefore I mean the *first* story-tellers, who and what were they? they were, by the confession of these persons, of *no quality*, and of but *little credit*, even in their own country: and we can have no other; therefore *the cases are not similar*. The eastern prince might hear that *water congeals to ice*, by a thousand men more, if he sought to know the truth, and all of them *living* witnesses; or, if so disposed, he might, by a voyage to a *colder climate*, see the truth of the story: but our stories, what man ever saw! Can our assurance of the truth of what is imposed upon us, be compared with the assurance this *prince* may have? there is, certainly, no comparison.

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The eastern prince is informed, what? why, that water freezes; three quarters of the world know this to be true, if he don't. But is there one man in the world who knows the truth of what we are required to believe on the pains of damnation? Strange difference, which admits of no comparison! hard meat! and bad measure! And how does it become solid? says the prince; Without any visible cause, answers the European. Whoever, indeed, saw cold? this part of the simile best agrees. 'Tis either an ignorant or deceitful answer. 'Tis certainly not intended to give conviction or satisfaction. He could not say, without any sensible cause; for frost is produced by an extreme cold air. What though he could not sufficiently account for it, he should have accounted for it as well as he could; therefore the cause of unbelief is owing to the European, not the prince. In my judgment, the latter is justifiable in not believing, and the former is to be condemned for a fool or a knave, in requiring an assent to what he could not, or would not deliver with sufficient evidence in a reasonable and proper manner. But he that thinks this prince deserves to be condemned for not believing the relation of this European, would think it very unreasonable for one to require his assent to things in nature as surprizing to him, which were as wretchedly made out; and would imagine, that he is not obliged to believe till he is better informed, but thinks it reasonable to disbelieve an account that to him seems unnatural: for what seems to be true or false, has the same effect on us as if it was really so, unless we know it to be otherwise. And we can no more prevent this manner of judging, than we can the manner of our own existence, unless we can believe a person better than we can our senses; but then we must have reason why we do so, and as this reason is grounded, it

shews the measure of our understanding at that time. Suppose this *prince* could have *no other* proof of this fact than this *European's report*, which being so badly told, he could not believe it, tho' true; it argues the *prince* was no *fool*, only not willing to be imposed on; for *fools* always believe fast enough, so that *folly and belief generally go together*. Suppose he could not believe the story told him, it must be because he thought it reasonable to *disbelieve*; however, *believing* it, might appear reasonable to another: for we can no more be guided by another man's reason, 'till we make it our own, than we can see what another does, unless our strength of sight be equal, and we see it thro' the same medium. Suppose again, he could not believe, tho' the belief might have been of real service to him, nor could see his interest in believing, it must be owing to some *defect* in the *circumstances*; for every one is willing to believe those things that are *true*, and *advantageous* to him, if he can, and can *see* them so to be; and if he cannot, it is cruel and barbarous to the utmost degree, to *burn him alive for not being able to believe*. This wicked part, which makes it a most shocking tragedy, is left out of the *simile*.

Suppose a man that lives between the tropics, will not, or rather cannot believe, that water is congealed to stone near the polar circles: What then? What is it to him, whether it be true or false? 'tis matter of mere speculation to him, and no more: Is this the case of *the belief of the gospel*? it is not so represented. There are many works of nature we are unacquainted with, which, if known, might surprize us; but are we therefore to credit any romantic surprizing story that is told us, which has no foundation in nature or reason; because he that reports it, affirms it to be of the utmost importance, when we cannot perceive any truth in the story? Of the greater

greater *consequence* any relation is, it should be attended with the greater *certainty*: with the greater blindness it appears, it has the more evident demonstration of folly or knavery. Suppose it true, tho' a *dark truth*, every man cannot see things alike, and at the same distance, why should all men be condemned for want of sight, or have their eyes put out, who do not come up to a certain standard? If such a law was made, every one must see the *injustice* of it; and if said to be made by a *good law-giver*, every one must know it to be a bold and barbarous *imposition* ascribed to him.

(P. 21.) But we go on with comparisons, tho' they are far from hitting the mark, or illustrating the point. *A man that is born blind, neither has, nor can form any idea of light and colours; and yet, says this author, the blindness of his understanding will be worse than that of his eyes, if he will not believe there is or can be any such thing in nature, as light and colours, because he can form no ideas what they are, nor how they are perceived and known.* The blindness of his understanding is worse than that of a blind man's eyes, who does not see that the *want of belief* is not a fault of the will; for a man can no more prevent believing what appears to him to be true, than he can prevent seeing what is before his open eyes in day-light. Besides, 'tis contrary to common sense to think we *can believe* what we can have no *idea* of. *A blind man cannot believe what light and colours are; What does he believe then about them, when he is said to believe that light and colours are? what but the bare terms, or such properties of which he can form no idea, by which other men can distinguish he knows not what, nor how.* Understanding enlightens our conceptions, but the bare belief of the existence of things we can have no understanding of, can be of no use or benefit to us;

and as it makes us in no degree *wiser*, so it makes us in no respect *better*.

(P. 21.) *If the want of experience and observation renders us incompetent judges of the nature of things, how can we judge of things supernatural? and how can such things be a rule to us? And since under the pretence of supernatural laws, which we can by no means judge of; if we yield to the receiving them, what impositions and impostures may not take place? What care then ought we to take, that we are not imposed on by too easy belief; that we do not assent to things beyond our understanding, as necessary to direct our faith and practice, which is a slavish and blind obedience; for by not waiting to examine and judge what is right, our judgments become infirm, and cannot discriminate things for want of exercise; and in giving up this director, reason, the rule of our obedience, what absurdities may not follow? what folly or infatuation may not take place?*

If a good and reasonable being can require no other obedience than according to the ability and light he gives us, we ought not to follow we know not what in the dark; and consequently, as you say, “what we neither have, nor can form any idea of, after the closest application, we must and OUGHT to reject, as what does not concern us.” ’Tis unreasonable to require us to receive that for *truth*, which does *not appear at all, or not appear to be truth*; and ’tis wicked to pretend there is *righteousness* in doing what is unreasonable. As a blind man has nothing to do with *lights and colours*, which he can determine nothing about; so we have nothing to do with what we cannot know to be truth, tho’ it be truth. As what does not come within the verge of man’s knowledge, is not the subject of it; so principles above human comprehension, are not prin-

principles fit for human faith : and because they naturally lead the mind into a maze of confusion and error, therefore they OUGHT to be rejected ; and with suitable marks of resentment and indignation, when pressed upon men with penalties and zeal.

Whatever God reveals as truth, must necessarily appear to be truth, because revealed. All *doctrines* and *precepts*, therefore, coming from God, which are necessary for man to *believe* and *practise*, must so appear ; they must have the *signatures* and *characteristics* of *divine wisdom* : for *light* and *truth* bring their own demonstration with them. If God command man what he is to *believe* and *do*, without discovering the *reasons* for his obedience, he does not act as a *wise and good being*, nor with man as a *reasonable creature*. *Goodness* and *wisdom* delight to discover themselves what they are ; for as they cannot appear *better*, they will not appear to be what they are not. If *reason* in man be not an evidence of *wisdom* in God, and if what he requires as our *reasonable service*, be not correspondent to *goodness* in him ; we have no evidence that God is *wise* or *good*, and consequently no reason to believe he requires any obedience of us.

The doctrines, which are called the revelation of God, *that do not appear to have their foundation in reason and nature* (both which have God for their foundation) *do not appear to be of God*. If he be a God of *understanding*, he will not require men to serve him without *their understandings* ; but so they must do, if they believe and act without knowing *why* or *wherefore* : therefore if God reveals to man his *duty*, he reveals to him the *apparent reasons* of his duty, which are the *proper motives* to it, or God delights in man's *ignorant and stupid obedience* ; and no wonder then he is so *ignorantly and stupidly obeyed*.

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And then, tho' *revelation* says, *Light is come into the world*, yet it is such as puts out all *human light*, and involves men in *darkness*. As God cannot speak, but it must be *true*; so the truth of his word must *appear* to them to whom he reveals it, or the *truth* must be *doubtful*; and consequently it must be *doubtful*, whether it be *his word* or no. And as that cannot be of the light, which is not discoverable by it; so that cannot be the *revelation of wisdom and goodness*, in which the *apparent marks of wisdom and goodness are not revealed*.

Your antagonist seems to triumph in your giving the rational *Christian's* scheme, without being particular in your answer to it; to shew what cause he has of triumph, I therefore attempt it.

The SCHEME.

They argue, that as the religion of nature, absolutely considered, and in its full extent, is only known to God, if he should be pleased to make a supernatural revelation of such parts of that law to us, which our unassisted reason could never have discovered, such a revelation ought to be gratefully received, and readily acknowledged. For tho' no doctrine that has not its foundation in reason and nature, can be a religious doctrine; yet doctrines that have such a foundation, tho' that does not appear,

The ANSWER.

This argument is founded on a wrong hypothesis; for as the religion of nature arises from the natural relation and circumstances of things, *they* only discover the necessary duties those relations and circumstances require, which sets aside all *supernatural revelation*, and the need of it. Therefore there can be no revelation from God, of doctrines and duties for man's belief and obedience, but such as not only have, but *appear* to have their foundation in reason and nature: for if

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pear, may, if God pleases, be communicated to us, either by himself immediately, or mediately by his agents, without any restriction on, or repugnancy to any of his attributes.

And this, say they, is the case of all supernatural doctrines contained in the scriptures, which collectively compose the Christian faith; these are so many revelations of the law of nature, which unassisted reason could not discover; and tho' they remain incomprehensible, and lie out of the reach of reason, yet when that which is imperfect is done away, and faith is turned into vision, they will then appear to us to be founded in truth and reason.

we are to receive things, not as what they appear to be to us, but as what they are in themselves, then God requires of us a conduct above the abilities he has furnished us with, which is repugnant to all those moral attributes we ascribe to deity.

And as the foundation of such religion does not appear to be in God, in nature, or in reason; therefore 'tis *unnatural* and *irrational*, without any appearance of a foundation at all; therefore, wherever it is contained, or whatever it is called, it is contrary to *truth* and *virtue*; and when that comes to pass, which will not, then things will appear to be true, which are not.

Let the gentleman now behold this *rational Christian scheme*, and see how formidable it is, how *destructive of all your objections*; how easy is this *stubborn subject reduced*! and by what plain arguments is it answered and refuted? Thus it is reducible to your question, "Whether those doctrines that cannot be perceived to have their foundation in the reason and nature of things, are, notwithstanding, certainly thus founded;" and I think it evidently appears from what has been said, they are not: "Whether therefore they are to be so allowed, only
" be-

“because they are contained in the scriptures,” will scarce be made a question by any reasonable querist. Therefore, *the reasonableness and apparent truth of every doctrine respectively, is necessary to prove it right, or whether it be divinely inspired.*

(P. 25.) If *Christians* do not agree about what revelation reveals, 'tis evident they are in the *dark*, and it is no wonder, *if darkness causes doubts*. If the *nature* of this revelation does not *clearly appear*, it does not clearly appear whether it be from God, or is any revelation at all; and if *believers* themselves are not agreed about the sense of it, how should *unbelievers* be convinced by them?

(P. 28.) The question, at length, agreed to is, *Whether all the doctrines in scripture are divinely revealed? not whether they are apparently reasonable?* and tho' we must not take *the uncontrollable liberty of substituting one question in the room of the other*, yet I will venture to say, and undertake to prove too, that if they are not the one, they are not the other: for whatever is not reasonable, is unreasonable; and whatever is unreasonable, cannot be divinely revealed.

(P. 29.) He argues against *supernatural matters* being incapable of examination by natural reason, thus. *What can be more supernatural, more above the comprehension of reason, than the manner of God's existence; yet you will not infer, that because this is a supernatural matter, therefore the existence of such a being is incapable of being apparently reasonable, &c.* but the *manner* of God's existence, and the *existence* of such a being, are two distinct things. Granting the *manner* of God's existence to be a supernatural subject to man, as being above the comprehension of his reason, therefore the *manner* is incapable of examination by us, because incomprehensible; but that *God does exist*, we judge to be not
above

above human reason to apprehend and examine, therefore *not a supernatural matter*; the other which is, we can neither examine nor believe.

This gentleman is not willing to grant, that *natural* and *supernatural* are contradictory terms, therefore gives this definition. *Whatever we call supernatural is as much comprehended within the immense system of nature, and has its foundation there, as those very objects that are the most familiar to us, and esteemed most natural and common.* Then nature comprehends all things, and there is nothing supernatural. So all miracles and prophecies, but such as are within the circle of nature, are disbanded: and I believe, in this one explanation, that *revelation*, which is the matter contested, is explained away; for this definition will not comprehend the *supernatural works of wonder, and wonderful doctrines*, delivered in the scriptures; and is an evasion, only for the sake of a retreat to more secure defence: but *nature* teaches nothing above *sense* and *reason*, and *reason* knows nothing beyond *nature*; but *supernaturals* are set up to confound both.

Now to the former question, which is the point of debate; *Whether the scriptures are divinely revealed?* (P. 38.) Our author says, *The steps that are proper to be taken on this occasion are, to shew that the scriptures were written by persons divinely inspired;—the several writers inserted no doctrines as grounded on divine authority, but such as were really so;—the original scriptures have been faithfully transmitted down to us.*

First then, *the scriptures were written by persons divinely inspired.*

One argument is, *that the old-testament-writers were inspired, if the new were, because ratified by them.* There are many now that believe the scriptures were inspired, and yet don't understand them,

nor can agree about them, these then are not inspired with proper understanding; so by the application of prophecies from the old-testament-writers, by the new, it is plain *they understood them not*, and therefore were not inspired; the proof of which is shewn by Mr. Collin's *scheme of literal prophecy*, and Mr. Parvishes *enquiry into the Jewish and Christian revelation*.

An argument that the new-testament-writers were divinely inspired is, that "*they performed what all the wisdom and improvements of natural reason, and the most inquisitive philosophers were not able to perform: What? they inserted in their writings a compleat system of morality, and all the principles and duties of natural religion.* This is asserted, but how is it proved? *All our prophets, indeed, prophesy so;* but it seems to me, that God has put a *lying spirit in the mouth of all these our prophets.* What philosophers ever wrote upon morals, that have not given as compleat a system? and why are *scraps* of morality, scattered here and there, called a *system*? and why a *compleat system*, when the *essential* part of a *moral system* is wanting, *viz.* rules for the well governing a nation; and when the *morals* want *mending* by explanation, to give some a more *loose*, others a more *restrained* sense? and when there are those that *no art can mend*, and therefore are *explained away*? These things are so easily proved, that they are too well known to need it: however, see some of them below *.

* *Mat.* v. 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 38, 39, 40, 42, 44, 48.
 vi. 14, 15, 19, 25, 26, &c.
 vii. 1, 6, 7, 8.
 viii. 22.
 x. 37, 38.
 xvi. 24.
 xviii. 22.
 xix. 21.
 xxiii. 9, 10.

Another proof given of the inspiration of these writers is, that *they recovered and restored the true light of reason, at a time when the wisest men acknowledged it did no where appear.* I wish the gentleman had informed us who those *wise men* were; sure, they were not those that came out of the *east* to worship the infant JESUS, the new-born God; for they, as far as I can examine, never had existence, but in MATTHEW'S *gospel*. I want to be informed, how the true light of reason disappeared? and how it has appeared since; and how by *their* means? Were not men *the same rational beings* then, as now? Has the world been *wiser* since the inspired age? or were the inspired themselves made *wiser* by their inspiration? Have mankind, by their means, thought or acted *more rationally*? Does the general nature of things change? If not, how came the human nature to suffer such an alteration? Was mankind *ignorant* then, and is he not so now, and has been so ever since? Is he any *better* or *wiser* than before? not a jot. What wonderful restoration have they then made of the *light of reason*? Hath the *Christian* part of the world been *wiser* or *better* than the rest? rather worse. Have they not committed all manner of the most savage and inhuman wickedness *for Christ's sake*? How then have they *enlightened* and *mended* the world? and how does the fruits of their inspiration appear? That all human kind lost the true light of reason, is romantic; and if ever it was the case, one would be tempted, as you say, to think it *unavoidable*, and therefore *innocent*.

A third argument given to prove these writers inspired is, *they delivered rules and instructions for the proper manner of worshipping God; a point which Socrates dissuaded Alcibiades from attempting,—and likewise acknowledged to his pupil, that this matter*

was not discoverable by human reason alone, tho' it was such an important subject, so necessary to be known, that he foresaw the supreme being would send an especial messenger on purpose to instruct men in it. 'Tis possible *Socrates* might say so, for aught I know of the man, but 'tis more likely some *Christian* has made him say what he never said. But why did *Socrates* dissuade *Alcibiades* from delivering rules and instructions for the proper manner of worshipping God? Why, because 'tis what the world are not likely ever to agree about; and what this boasted *revelation* itself is unable to make even *believers* do. The most sincere followers of the *Charta Sacra*, have never agreed about what it teaches; so that notwithstanding this *enlightening revelation*, they are all in the dark, not a soul can see by it to demonstrate its wondrous supernatural light to another. And some think, 'tis highly necessary a *new revelation* should be given to explain the *old*; for tho' we give *hundreds and thousands* a year to have it explained, that the whole world is not able to do it, that it might pass for *heavenly light*, if there was no *human reason* in the world; but that the latter puts the former out, and discovers its palpable darkness. Alas! for the pitiful inhabitants of that part of the world who have miserably felt its effects, as a *fire without light*, who have not been *warmed*, but *burnt* with it; not enlightened by the *wisdom* of its *doctrines*, but confounded and dazzled with the *mysteries* of its *godliness*! Ah! that the fact was false which you have said, that "millions of people have fallen a sacrifice to *Christian* piety." Happy had it been for every *Christian* nation, if this was a *gross imputation of groundless calumny*, as your opponent calls it; but 'tis as *certain* a truth, as 'tis a *melancholly* one. By this may be seen, of what *excellent service* to mankind their rules and instructions

ons for worshipping God have been; and in what *proper manner* they have been given, or brought down to us, understood, and practised all the way. Certainly the tree is known by its fruits. It may be thought *partial* in me, as an *examiner*, to say these things; but they are the fruits of my examination.

Yet the gentleman, exulting, says, as if he had proved his points, when he has but named them, (p. 40.) *Had not the Deity immediately dictated to, and impressed upon the mind of each writer, the matters specified above, (or before) by what natural causes could it have happened, that this collection of writings (the new testament) should be so vastly different from all others, and so greatly exceed them, as to comprehend in it a republication of the true original religion of reason and nature, exactly distinguished and separated from all the corruptions which polytheism, idolatry, and superstition, had introduced and mingled with it; and bring to light primæval truths, that had been hid from ages and generations.* And yet the DEISTS, the only people in the world that adhere to the true original religion of reason and nature, and are separated from all the corruptions here mentioned, cannot find in it these *primæval truths* boasted of, therefore *this boasting is not good*, because it is the mere compliment of his humble devotion paid to his dear paper idol.

Come on, *my friend*, let us follow our leader, to see if he follows truth; his *genteel address* makes even error look like it, as well as the *seeming reason* with which he clothes his arguments, which, without all doubt, appear cogent to the *believer*; for they shew the *great abilities* of the man, in that he maintains a very bad position, with very great art. He has indeed the labouring oar, who maintains error against truth, *hic labor hoc opus est*, whereas reason and nature render the work easy, and the steps that trace them are pleasant. We

We are now to take for granted the *moral characters* of *unknown persons*, and upon this foundation we are to allow that *they inserted no doctrines as grounded on divine authority, but such as were really so; and to suppose otherwise, is an ungenerous unjust suspicion.* This is, I must own, a most complaisant method of gaining a point, and complimenting away a man's understanding. It displays extremely much the *gentleman*, but not the *philosopher*. Or, indeed, it looks like attempting to get that by *begging*, which cannot be got by *labour*. Let the *wisdom* and *truth* of the *doctrines* speak for themselves, let their *nature* and *tendency* shew the *spirit* that inspired them; nothing else can do it: to attempt any other proof, is doing nothing to the purpose.

A further argument, and as fruitless as the former, your opponent advances, is, that *the consistency of all the gospel doctrines is a weighty argument, that the several writers have not confounded their own private conceptions with the doctrines they received by divine inspiration.* Was there any weight in this argument, it might be easily proved against them, that neither the *history* nor *doctrines* are consistent. I own that the *evangelical physicians* with us have a way of *plastering* up old sores, but they cannot *heal* them. *Stories* may be related, and *doctrines* delivered so as to be very consistent, without any truth in either; nay, tho' the one may appear to be *highly probable*, and the other *seemingly reasonable*, yet this is no proof of the *veracity* of either; but if *inconsistencies* plainly appear, 'tis a weighty argument against their being of divine authority.

The last remaining circumstance he asserts is, that *the original scriptures have been faithfully transmitted down to us.* That is more than any man alive can be sure of. How is this possible to be proved, when the original copies, and writers are unknown.

'Tis not certainly known *where, when, by whom,* and *in what language,* they were first written. All the accounts we have of them is by the most *uncertain traditions* of a church, notorious in every age for *lyes and forgery,* and through the hands of sects and factions, that have ever, from the first age of the church condemned each other for *interpolations,* and forging evangelical histories, apostolic acts, epistles, and revelations, which were not separated till much later ages; and all that has been received for *canonical,* has not been so made, till time had worn out the objections against them, and power had destroyed those objections. There is not remaining any one book in the new testament, but some *Christian sect* has condemned. The uppermost sect was always *orthodox,* and have destroyed both *books and men,* that have been against them, when they have had them in their power. It was *authority,* and the *prevailing opinion,* more than *reason or divine inspiration,* were the rules of determining what they since call the *true* from the *spurious.* That the original scriptures have not been faithfully transmitted down to us, I have elsewhere shewn. 'Twas more than a century before the gospels were made public; therefore 'tis a question if they had any apostolic original: and since 'tis confessed by believers themselves, from the earliest ages, that there have been corruptions in the text itself; and even with us, there are perpetually objections to the translations of it, that 'tis otherwise in the original, and that the originals (so called) have various readings. The *Christians* reading in their churches the gospels and epistles that *we* have, is no proof of their being genuine; they also read those that are counted *spurious,* as well as those that time and authority have called genuine. When these things,

things, and a thousand more like these, have been insinuated and answered a thousand times over, *nothing can prove divine inspiration better than its own divine nature, and intrinsic worth.*

This gentleman tells us, (p. 44.) that *Tertullian seems to assert, that several originals were remaining in his time, which was in the third century.* I make no doubt of it, but doubt much if they had one century of existence before his time.

Again. *The sense of the gospel has oftentimes been sadly perverted, but the text has been transmitted pure and untainted to this day;* then it was impure and tainted in the original, as appears by the *inconsistencies and unintelligible matters* therein contained. Indeed, a *Deist* will say, he thought as much, that what alterations it has received, has been made to mend it; but that 'tis as much above human learning to do, as its birth was below its production. But how has the gospel text been transmitted pure and untainted to the people, when some *Papists* and *Protestants* accuse each other of a corrupt translation?

(P. 45.) Our *Christian* advocate insinuates, *that St. Matthew, and the other evangelists, were equally qualified, and equally disposed to give a punctual account of the religion of JESUS CHRIST, as Plato and Xenophon were to give a true representation of the religion of their master Socrates.* Then the evangelists were as *learned and wise as Plato and Xenophon,* or *Plato and Xenophon* were as *unlearned and ignorant as they.* The contrary we have been all along taught; but it seems we are taught any thing that will establish the credit of those that must be established, as it best suits the argument and the times; one thing to-day, and another to-morrow.

He goes on; *that the substance of all Christian doctrines and duties originally contained in the new testament,*

testament, our present copies correspond as exactly with their originals, as those of the Grecian writers above-mentioned do with theirs. What in reason then can be expected better than it is? If the *original* be plain and pure, what need has it of *explanations*? for can *man's learning* mend *God's wisdom*? If it be not, that which is *originally* and *naturally bad*, no *explanations* can make good, without changing its *original nature*; which is destroying the *original* by altering it. If it be divinely pure, or not, the world of *learned gentlemen*, that take such infinite study to explain it, at such an immense charge, may save themselves the pains, and other good people the cost; for if it be, we need them not; and if it be not, let them leave us to the guidance of *dame nature*, and the government of good laws.

Now it seems we are come to a period in this matter, because what follows is a new subject, which concerns only the peculiar doctrines of *Christianity*; one of which has been already considered, *viz.* THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS, which though you say affects but a PART, your *Christian* adversary is of another opinion: his words to you are these; *What part, I pray, what single doctrine of Christianity does the trial of the witnesses affect? Nothing less than the resurrection of Jesus Christ; a doctrine which, by the plainest and most notorious consequence, affects the WHOLE CAUSE; a doctrine with which the truth of all Christianity is so inseparably connected, that they must confessedly stand or fall together; therefore, I think I may be excused from meddling with any other parts at this time, till that is ACTUALLY answered; which I believe will not be, 'till he comes again in glory; and then all our objections will be perfectly answered; our human reason be eternally*
U baffled,

baffled, and hide itself in everlasting confusion. But we are advised *to judge nothing before the time*, or before that time come; but, in the mean time, let us proceed to examine, in order to sift out truth from error, in every thing necessary, that falls in our way. *I am,*

and desire always to remain,

a faithful Friend and Servant

to You and Truth.

P O S T S C R I P T.

I Have met with a *little author*, written in favour of the *Great Observator* on *St. Paul*, who says, *Deists do not examine*; but he expresses himself according to his *little wit*, for it is examination and reason that makes men sincerely *Deists* or *Moral Philosophers*. For my own part, I can safely say, that if I had never *seriously thought*, and *strictly examined*, I had not been a *disbeliever*. Men never render themselves more contemptible, than when they assert gross falsehoods. I think, he that has an honest heart has the root of the matter in him. Let men say what they will, and wrangle about religion as they please, which they most shamefully do, who would have men believe those things to be true that has not the appearance of truth, nor can be so made to appear to an honest heart and a discerning eye, by all the art of man, the art of evermore *new translating* and *new transforming* scripture by different words and explanations; which are only so many shifts and evasions, to avoid the light that discovers their darkness: And since every one hath their different expositions, and
always

always find new ones, when newly pressed with the evident and apparent sense. The same manner of dealing will vindicate as well the *alcoran*, or any book in the world, as the bible: and that scripture, or book, which wants such methods of vindication, shews it wants mending, is defective and erroneous.

I have now said all that I desire to say on these subjects, which will be testimonies to after-times, of the *extensive, glorious, and happy freedom* these times enjoy, to the *eternal honour* of that GOVERNMENT which gives it, and of his present MAJESTY, who is the *protector* of all our civil and religious rights and liberties, never sufficiently to be valued by a grateful heart, and a thankful receiver; for nothing can render a people more passionately *fond of their country*, nor more *dutiful to their prince and governors*, than the happy enjoyment of *reasonable liberty*, of all things the most desirable, and the most valuable to all those that can taste and enjoy the blessings and benefits of it.

F I N I S.

The first part of the paper is devoted to a general
 consideration of the subject. It is shown that the
 results of the experiments are in accordance with
 the theory. The second part is devoted to a
 detailed description of the apparatus used in the
 experiments. The third part is devoted to a
 discussion of the results. It is shown that the
 results are in accordance with the theory. The
 fourth part is devoted to a discussion of the
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 the theory. The sixth part is devoted to a
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 results are in accordance with the theory.

THE END