

CHRISTIAN PANOPLY;

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APOLOGY

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B I B L E;

IN A

SERIES OF LETTERS,

ADDRESSING TO

THOMAS PAINE,

Author of a Book entitled

The AGE of REASON, &c. &c. &c.

By R. WATSON, D. D. F. R. S.

Lord Bishop of London, and Former Professor of Divinity in
the University of Cambridge.

AN ADDRESS

TO SOUVENIR OF RELIGION.

By the same Author.

And a brief view of the Apostolical Evidence of
its Authenticity.

By WILLIAM PRATT, M. A.

Arch-deacon of Carlisle.

LONDON:—1797.

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L E T T E R I.

SIR,

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

I begin with your preface. You therein state—that you had long had an intention of publishing your thoughts upon religion, but that you had originally reserved it to a later period in life.—I hope there is no want of charity in saying, that it would have been fortunate for the Christian world, had your life been terminated before you had fulfilled your intention. In accomplishing your purpose, you will have unsettled the faith of thousands; rooted from the minds of the unhappy virtuous, all their comfortable assurance of a future recompense;

have annihilated in the minds of the flagitious all their fears of future punishment; you will have given the reins to the domination of every passion, and have thereby contributed to the introduction of the public insecurity, and of the private unhappiness, usually and almost necessarily accompanying a state of corrupted morals.

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

A fever, which you and those about you expected would prove mortal, made you remember, with renewed satisfaction, that you had written the former part of your *Age of Reason*—and you know therefore, you say, by experience, the conscientious trial of your own principles I admit this declaration to be a proof of the sincerity of your persuasion, but I cannot admit it to be any proof of the truth of your principles. What is conscience? Is it, as has been thought, an internal monitor implanted in us by the Supreme Being, and dictating to us, on all occasions, what is right, or wrong? Or is it merely our own judgment of the moral rectitude or turpitude of our own actions? I take the word (with Mr. Locke) in the latter, as in the only intelligible sense. Now who sees not that our judgments of virtue and vice, right and wrong, are not always formed from an enlightened and dispassionate use of our reason, in the investigation of truth? They are more generally formed from the nature of the religion we profess; from the quality of the civil government under which we live; from the

general manners of the age, or the particular manners of the persons with whom we associate; from the education we have had in our youth; from the books we have read at a more advanced period; and from other accidental causes. Who sees not that, on this account, conscience may be conformable or repugnant to the law of nature?—may be certain, or doubtful?—and that it can be no criterion of moral rectitude, even when it is certain, because the certainty of an opinion is no proof of its being a right opinion? A man may be certainly persuaded of an error in reasoning, or an untruth in matters of fact. It is a maxim of every law, human and divine, that a man ought never to act in opposition to his conscience, but it will not from thence follow, that he will, in obeying the dictates of his conscience, on all occasions act right. An inquisitor, who burns Jews and heretics; a Robespierre, who massacres innocent and harmless women; a robber, who thinks that all things ought to be in common, and that a state of property is an unjust infringement of natural liberty:—these, and a thousand perpetrators of different crimes, may all follow the dictates of conscience; and may, at the real or supposed approach of death, remember “with renewed satisfaction” the worst of their transactions, and experience, without dismay, “a conscientious trial of their principles.” But this their conscientious composure, can be no proof to others of the rectitude of their principles, and ought to be no pledge to themselves of their innocence, in adhering to them.

I have thought fit to make this remark, with a view of suggesting to you a consideration of great importance—whether you have examined calmly, and according to the best of your ability, the arguments by which the truth of revealed religion may, in the judgment of learned and impartial men, be established?—You will allow, that thousands of

learned and impartial men (I speak not of priests, who, however, are, I trust, as learned and impartial as yourself, but of laymen of the most splendid talents)—you will allow, that thousands of these, in all ages, have embraced revealed religion as true. Whether these men have all been in an error, enveloped in the darkness of ignorance, shackled by the chains of superstition, whilst you and a few others have enjoyed light, and liberty, is a question I submit to the decision of your readers.

If you have made the best examination you can, and yet reject revealed religion as an imposture, I pray that God may pardon what I esteem your error. And whether you have made this examination or not, does not become me or any man to determine. That gospel, which you despise, has taught me this moderation; it has said to me—“Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth”—I think that you are in an error; but whether that error be to you a vincible or an invincible error, I presume not to determine. I know indeed where it is said—that the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness,—and that if the gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.” The consequence of your unbelief must be left to the just and merciful judgment of Him, who alone knoweth the mechanism and the liberty of our understandings; the origin of our opinions; the strength of our prejudices; the excellencies and the defects of our reasoning faculties.

I shall, designedly, write this and the following letters in a popular manner; hoping that thereby they may stand a chance of being perused by that class of readers, for whom your work seems to be particularly calculated, and who are the most likely to be injured by it. The really learned are in no danger of being infected by the poison of infidelity; they will excuse me, therefore for having entered

as little as possible, into deep disquisitions concerning the authenticity of the Bible. The subject has been so learnedly, and so frequently, handled by other writers, that it does not want (I had almost said, it does not admit) any further proof. And it is the more necessary to adopt this mode of answering your book, because you disclaim all learned appeals to other books, and undertake to prove, from the Bible itself, that it is unworthy of credit. I hope to shew, from the Bible itself, the direct contrary. But in case any of your readers should think that you had not put forth all your strength, by not referring for proof of your opinion to ancient authors: lest they should suspect that all ancient authors are in your favour; I will venture to affirm, that had you made a learned appeal to all the ancient books in the world, sacred or profane, Christian, Jewish, or Pagan, instead of lessening, they would have established, the credit and authority of the Bible as the word of God.

Quitting your preface, let us proceed to the work itself in which there is much repetition, and a defect of proper arrangement. I will follow your track, however, as nearly as I can. The first question you propose for consideration is—“Whether there is sufficient authority for believing the Bible to be the word of God, or whether there is not?”—You determine this question in the negative, upon what you are pleased to call moral evidence. You hold it impossible that the Bible can be the word of God, because it is therein said, that the Israelites destroyed the Canaanites by the express command of God: and to believe the Bible to be true, we must, you affirm, unbelieve all our belief of the moral justice of God; for wherein, you ask, could crying or smiling infants offend?—I am astonished that so acute a reasoner should attempt to disparage the Bible, by bringing forward this exploded and frequently refuted objection of Morgan, Tindal, and

Bolingbroke. You profess yourself to be a deist, and to believe that there is a God, who created the universe, and established the laws of nature, by which it is sustained in existence. You profess that from the contemplation of the works of God, you derive a knowledge of his attributes; and you reject the Bible, because it ascribes to God things inconsistent (as you suppose) with the attributes which you have discovered to belong to him: in particular, you think it repugnant to his moral justice, that he should doom to destruction the crying or smiling infants of the Canaanites.—Why do you not maintain it to be repugnant to his moral justice, that he should suffer crying or smiling infants to be swallowed up by an earthquake, drowned by an inundation, consumed by fire, starved by a famine, or destroyed by a pestilence? The word of God is in perfect harmony with his work; crying or smiling infants are subjected to death in both. We believe that the earth, at the express command of God, opened her mouth, and swallowed up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, with their wives, their sons and their little ones. This you esteem so repugnant to God's moral justice, that you spurn, as spurious, the book in which the circumstance is related. When Catania, Lima, and Lisbon, were severally destroyed by earthquakes, men with their wives, their sons, and their little ones, were swallowed up alive:—why do you not spurn, as spurious, the book of nature in which this fact is certainly written, and from the perusal of which you infer the moral justice of God? You will, probably, reply, that the evils which the Canaanites suffered from the express command of God, were different from those which are brought on mankind, by the operation of the laws of nature.—Different! in what?—Not in the magnitude of the evil—not in the subjects of sufferance—not in the author of it—for my philosophy, at least, instructs me to believe that God not only primarily

formed, but that he hath through all ages executed, the laws of nature; and that he will through all eternity administer them, for the general happiness of his creatures, whether we can, on every occasion, discern that end or not.

I am far from being guilty of the impiety of questioning the existence of the moral justice of God, as proved either by natural or revealed religion; what I contend for is shortly this—that you have no right, in fairness of reasoning, to urge any apparent deviation from moral justice as an argument against revealed religion, because you do not urge an equally apparent deviation from it, as an argument against natural religion: you reject the former, and admit the latter, without adverting that, as to your objection, they must stand or fall together.

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

ants were so abominable, that the very land was sick of them, and forced to vomit them forth, as the stomach disgorges a deadly poison.

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

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

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

leaven the whole lump," that they might assure all other nations of the existence of one supreme God, the creator and preserver of the world, the only proper object of adoration. With what reason can we expect, that what was done to one nation, not out of any partiality to them, but for the general good, should be done to all? that the mode of instruction, which was suited to the infancy of the world, should be extended to the maturity of it's manhood, or to the imbecility of it's old age? I own to you, that when I consider how nearly man in a savage state, approaches to the brute creation, as to intellectual excellence, and when I contemplate his miserable attainments, as to the knowledge of God, in a civilized state, when he has had no divine instruction on the subject, or when that instruction has been forgotten (for all men have known something of God from tradition), I cannot but admire the wisdom and goodness of the Supreme Being, in having let himself down to our apprehensions; in having given to mankind, in the earliest ages, sensible and extraordinary proofs of his existence and attributes; in having made the Jewish and Christian dispensations mediums to convey to all men, through all ages, that knowledge concerning himself, which he had vouchsafed to give immediately to the first. I own it is strange, very strange, that he should have made an immediate manifestation of himself in the first ages of the world; but what is there that is not strange? It is strange that you and I are here—that there is water, and earth, and air, and fire—that there is a sun, and moon, and stars—that there is generation, corruption, reproduction. I can account ultimately for none of these things, without recurring to him who made every thing. I also am his workmanship, and look up to him with hope of preservation through all eternity; I adore him for his word as well as for his work: his work I cannot comprehend, but his word has assured me of all that

I am concerned to know—that he hath prepared everlasting happiness for those who love and obey him. This you will call preachment.—I will have done with it; but the subject is so vast, and the plan of providence, in my opinion, so obviously wise and good, that I can never think of it without having my mind filled with piety, admiration, and gratitude.

In addition to the moral evidence (as you are pleased to think it) against the Bible, you threaten, in the progress of your work, to produce such other evidence as even a priest cannot deny. A philosopher in search of truth, forfeits with me all claim to candor and impartiality, when he introduces railing for reasoning, vulgar and illeberal sarcasm in the room of argument. I will not imitate the example you set me; but examine what you shall produce, with as much coolness and respect, as if you had given the priests no provocation; as if you were a man of the most unblemished character, subject to no prejudices, actuated by no bad designs, not liable to have abuse retorted upon you with success.

L E T T E R II.

BEFORE you commence your grand attack upon the Bible, you wish to establish a difference between the evidence necessary to prove the authenticity of the Bible, and that of any other ancient book. I am not surprised at your anxiety on this head: for all writers on the subject have agreed in thinking that St. Austin reasoned well, when, in vindicating the genuineness of the Bible, he asked—"What proofs have we that the works of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Varro, and other profane authors, were written by those whose names they bear; unless it

be that this has been an opinion generally received at all times, and by all those who have lived since these authors?" This writer was convinced, that the evidence which established the genuineness of any profane book, would establish that of a sacred book; and I profess myself to be of the same opinion, notwithstanding what you have advanced to the contrary.

In this part your ideas seem to me to be confused; I do not say that you, designedly, jumble together mathematical science and historical evidence; the knowledge acquired by demonstration, and the probability derived from testimony. You know but of one ancient book, that authoritatively challenges universal consent and belief, and that is Euclid's Elements. If I were disposed to make frivolous objections, I should say that even Euclid's Elements had not met with universal consent; that there had been men, both in ancient and modern times, who had questioned the intuitive evidence of some of his axioms, and denied the justness of some of his demonstrations: but, admitting the truth, I do not see the pertinency of your observation. You are attempting to subvert the authenticity of the Bible, and you tell us that Euclid's Elements are certainly true. What then?—Does it follow that the Bible is certainly false? The most illiterate scrivener in the kingdom does not want to be informed, that the examples in his Wingate's Arithmetic, are proved by a different kind of reasoning from that by which he persuades himself to believe, that there was such a person as Henry VIII. or that there is such a city as Paris.

It may be of use, to remove this confusion in your argument, to state, distinctly, the difference between the genuineness, and the authenticity, of a book. A genuine book, is that which was written by the person whose name it bears, as the author of it. An authentic book, is that which re-

lates matters of fact, as they really happened. A book may be genuine without being authentic; and a book may be authentic, without being genuine. The books written by Richardson, and Fielding, are genuine books, though the histories of Clarissa and Tom Jones are fables. The History of the Island of Formosa is a genuine book; it was written by Psalmanazar; but it is not an authentic book (though it was long esteemed as such, and translated into different languages,) for the author, in the latter part of his life, took shame to himself for having imposed on the world, and confessed that it was a mere romance. Anson's Voyage may be considered as an authentic book, it, probably, containing a true narration of the principle events recorded in it; but it is not a genuine book, having not been written by Walters, to whom it is ascribed, but by Robins.

This distinction between the genuineness and authenticity of a book, will assist us in detecting the fallacy of an argument, which you state with great confidence in the part of your work now under consideration, and which you frequently allude to, in other parts, as conclusive evidence against the truth of the Bible. Your argument stands thus—if it be found that the books ascribed to Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, were not written by Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, every part of the authority and authenticity of these books is gone at once. I presume to think otherwise. The genuineness of these books (in the judgment of those who say that they were written by these authors) will certainly be gone; but their authenticity may remain; they may still contain a true account of real transactions, though the names of the writers of them should be found to be different from what they are generally esteemed to be.

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

An history may be true, though it should not only be ascribed to a wrong author, but though the author of it should not be known; anonymous testimony does not destroy the reality of facts, whether natural or miraculous. Had Lord Clarendon published his History of the Rebellion, without prefixing his name to it; or had the History of Titus Livius come down to us, under the name of Valerius Flaccus, or Valerius Maximus; the facts mentioned in these histories would have been equally certain.

As to your assertion, that the miracles recorded in Tacitus, and in other profane historians, are quite as well authenticated as those of the Bible—it, being a mere assertion, destitute of proof, may be properly answered by a contrary assertion. I take the liberty then to say, that the evidence for the miracles recorded in the Bible is, both in kind and degree, so greatly superior to that for the prodigies mentioned by Livy, or the miracles related by Tacitus, as to justify us in giving credit to the one as the work of God, and in withholding it from the other as the effect of superstition and imposture. This method of derogating from the credibility of Christianity, by opposing to the miracles of our Saviour, the tricks of ancient impostors, seems to have originated with Hiefoles in the fourth cen-

tury; and it has been adopted by unbelievers from that time to this; with this difference, indeed, that the heathens of the third and fourth century admitted that Jesus wrought miracles; but least that admission should have compelled them to abandon their gods and become Christians, they said, that their *Apolonius*, their *Apuleius*, their *Aristeas*, did as great; whilst modern deists deny the fact of Jesus having ever wrought a miracle. And they have some reason for this proceeding; they are sensible that the gospel miracles are so different, in all their circumstances, from those related in pagan story, that, if they admit them to have been performed, they must admit Christianity to be true; hence they have fabricated a kind of deistical axiom—that no human testimony can establish the credibility of a miracle.—This, though it has been an hundred times refuted, is still insisted upon, as if its truth had never been questioned, and could not be disproved.

You “proceed to examine the authenticity of the Bible; and you begin, you say, with what are called the five Books of Moses, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Your intention, you profess, is to shew that these books are spurious, and that Moses is not the author of them; and still further, that they were not written in the time of Moses, nor till several hundred years afterwards; that they are no other than an attempted history of the life of Moses, and of the times in which he is said to have lived, and also of the times prior thereto, written by some very ignorant and stupid pretender to authorship, several hundred years after the death of Moses.”—In this passage the utmost force of your attack on the authority of the five books of Moses is clearly stated. You are not the first who has started this difficulty; it is a difficulty, indeed, of modern date; having not been

heard of; either in the synagogue, or out of it, till the twelfth century. About that time *Aben Ezra*, a Jew of great erudition, noticed some passages (the same that you have brought forward) in the five first books of the Bible, which he thought had not been written by Moses, but inserted by some person after the death of Moses. But he was far from maintaining, as you do, that these books were written by some ignorant and stupid pretender to authorship, many hundred years after the death of Moses. *Hobbes* contends that the books of Moses are so called, not from their having been written by Moses, but from their containing an account of Moses. *Spinoza* supported the same opinion; and *Le Clerc*, a very able theological critic of the last and present century, once entertained the same notion. You see that this fancy has had some patrons before you; the merit or the demerit, the sagacity or the temerity of having asserted, that Moses is not the author of the Pentateuch, is not exclusively your's. *Le Clerc*, indeed, you must not boast of. When his judgment was matured by age, he was ashamed of what he had written on the subject in his younger years; he made a public recantation of his error, by annexing to his commentary on Genesis, a Latin dissertation concerning Moses, the author of the Pentateuch, and his design in composing it. If in your future life you should chance to change your opinion on the subject, it will be an honour to your character to emulate the integrity, and to imitate the example of *Le Clerc*. The Bible is not the only book which has undergone the fate of being reprobated as spurious, after it had been received as genuine and authentic for many ages. It has been maintained that the history of *Herodotus* was written in the time of *Constantine*; and that the Classics are forgeries of the thirteenth or fourteenth century. These extravagant reveries amused the world at the time of their publication, and have

long since sunk into oblivion. You esteem all prophets to be such lying rascals, that I dare not venture to predict the fate of your book.

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

of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people."—In Deuteronomy it says—"And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished (this surely imports the finishing a laborious work.) that Moses commanded the Levites which bare the Ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, Take this book of the Law, and put it in the side of the Ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee." This is said in Deuteronomy, which is a kind of repetition or abridgement of the four preceding books; and it is well known that the Jews gave the name of the Law to the first five books of the Old Testament. What possible doubt can there be that Moses wrote the books in question? I could accumulate many other passages from the scriptures to this purpose; but if what I have advanced will not convince you that there is affirmative evidence, and of the strongest kind, for Moses's being the author of these books, nothing that I can advance will convince you.

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

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

But Moses, you urge, cannot be the author of the book of Numbers, because he says of himself—"that Moses was a very meek man, above all the men that were on the face of the earth." If he said this of himself, he was, you say, "a vain and arrogant conceit (such is your phrase!) and unworthy of credit—and if he did not say it, the books are without authority." This your dilemma is perfectly harmless; it has not an horn to hurt the weakest logician. If Moses did not write this little verse, if it was inserted by *Samuel*, or any of his countrymen, who knew his character and revered his memory, will it follow that he did not write

joined as a positive law at Sinai. Others esteem it's institution to have been no older than the age of Moses; and argue, that what is said of the sanctification of the sabbath in the book of Genesis, is said by way of anticipation. There may be truth in both these accounts. To me it is probable, that the memory of the creation was handed down from Adam to all his posterity; and that the seventh day was, for a long time, held sacred by all nations, in commemoration of that event; but that the peculiar rigour of it's observance was enjoined by Moses to the Israelites alone. As to their being two reasons given for it's being kept holy,—one, that on that day God rested from the work of creation—the other, on that day God had given them rest from the servitude of Egypt—I see no contradiction in the accounts. If a man, in writing the history of England, should inform his readers, that the parliament had ordered the fifth of November to be kept holy, because on that day God had delivered the nation from a bloody intended massacre by gunpowder; and if, in another part of his history, he should assign the deliverance of our church and nation from popery and arbitrary power, by the arrival of King William, as a reason for it's being kept holy; would any one contend, that he was not justified in both these ways of expression, or that we ought from thence to conclude, that he was not the author of them both?

You think—that law in Deuteronomy inhuman and brutal, which authorises parents, the father and the mother, to bring their own children to have them stoned to death for what it is pleased to call stubbornness.—You are aware, I suppose, that paternal power, amongst the *Romans*, the *Gauls*, the *Persians*, and other nations, was of the most arbitrary kind; that it extended to the taking away the life of the child. I do not know whether the Israelites in the time of Moses exercised this pater-

nal power; it was not a custom adopted by all nations; but it was by many; and in the infancy of society, before individual families had coalesced into communities, it was probably very general. Now Moses, by this law, which you esteem brutal and inhuman, hindered such an extravagant power from being either introduced or exercised amongst the Israelites. This law is so far from countenancing the arbitrary power of a father over the life of his child, that it takes from him the power of accusing the child before a magistrate—the father and the mother of the child must agree in bringing the child to judgment—and it is not by their united will that the child was to be condemned to death; the elders of the city were to judge whether the accusation was true; and the accusation was to be not merely, as you insinuate, that the child was stubborn, but that he was “stubborn and rebellious, a glutton and a drunkard.” Considered in this light, you must allow the law to have been an humane restriction of a power improper to be lodged with any parent.

That you may abuse the priests, you abandon your subject—“Priests, you say, preach up Deuteronomy, for Deuteronomy preaches up tithes.”—I do not know that priests preach up Deuteronomy, more than they preach up other books of scripture; but I do know that tithes are not preached up in Deuteronomy, more than in Leviticus, in Numbers, in Chronicles, in Malachi, in the law, the history, and the prophets of the Jewish nation.—You go on: “It is from this book, chap. xxv. ver. 4, they have taken the phrase, and applied it to tithing, ‘Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn;’ and that this might not escape observation, they have noted it in the table of contents at the head of the chapter, though it is only a single verse or less than two lines. O priests! priests! ye are willing to be compared to an ox for the sake of tithes!”—I cannot call this—reasoning—and I

will not pollute my page by giving it a proper appellation. Had the table of contents, instead of simply saying—the ox is not to be muzzled—said—tithes enjoined, or priests to be maintained—there would have been a little ground for your censure. Whoever noted this phrase at the head of the chapter, had better reason for doing it than you have attributed to them. They did it because St. Paul had quoted it, when he was proving to the Corinthians that they who preached the gospel had a right to live by the gospel; it was Paul, and not the Priests, who first applied this phrase to tithing. St. Paul, indeed, did not avail himself of the right he contended for; he was not, therefore, interested in what he said. The reason on which he grounds the right, is not merely this quotation, which you ridicule; nor the appointment of the law of Moses, which you think fabulous; nor the injunction of Jesus, which you despise; no, it is a reason founded in the nature of things, and which no philosopher, no unbeliever, no man of common sense can deny to be a solid reason; it amounts to this—that “the labourer is worthy of his hire.” Nothing is so much a man’s own, as his labour and ingenuity; and it is entirely consonant to the law of nature, that by the innocent use of these he should provide for his subsistence. Husbandmen, artists, soldiers, physicians, lawyers, all let out their labour and talents for a stipulated reward; why may not a priest do the same? Some accounts of you have been published in England; but, conceiving them to have proceeded from a design to injure your character, I never read them. I know nothing of your parentage, your education, or condition of life. You may have been elevated, by your birth, above the necessity of acquiring the means of sustaining life by the labour of either hand or head; if this be the case, you ought not to despise those who have come into the world in less favourable circumstances. If your

origin has been less fortunate, you must have supported yourself, either by manual labour, or the exercise of your genius. Why should you think that conduct disreputable in priests, which you probably consider as laudable in yourself? I know not whether you have not as great a dislike of king, as of priests: but that you may be induced to think more favourably of men of my profession, I will just mention to you that the payment of tithes is no new institution, but that they were paid in the most ancient times, not to priests only, but to kings. I could give you an hundred instances of this: two may be sufficient. *Abraham* paid tithes to the king of Salem, four hundred years before the law of Moses was given. The king of Salem was priest also of the most high God. Priests, you see, existed in the world, and were held in high estimation, for kings were priests, long before the impostures, as you esteem them, of the Jewish and Christian dispensations were heard of. But as this instance is taken from a book which you call “a book of contradictions and lies”—the Bible;—I will give you another, from a book, to the authority of which, as it is written by a profane author, you probably will not object. *Diogenes Laertius*, in his life of *Solon*, cites a letter of *Pisistratus* to that lawgiver, in which he says—“I *Pisistratus*, the tyrant, am contented with the stipends which were paid to those who reigned before me; the people of Athens set apart a *tenth* of the fruits of their land, not for my private use, but to be expended in the public sacrifices, and for the general good.”

LETTER III.

HAVING done with what you call the grammatical evidence that Moses was not the author of the books attributed to him, you come to your historical and chronological evidence, and you begin with Genesis. Your first argument is taken from the single word—Dan—being found in Genesis, when it appears from the book of Judges, that the town of Laish was not called Dan, till above three hundred and thirty years after the death of Moses; therefore the writer of Genesis, you conclude, must have lived after the town of Laish had the name of Dan given it. Lest this objection should not be obvious enough to a common capacity, you illustrate it in the following manner: “Hayre-de-Grace was called Hayre-Marat in 1793; should then any dateless writing be found, in after times, with the name of Hayre-Marat, it would be certain evidence that such a writing could not have been written till after the year 1793.” This is a wrong conclusion. Suppose some late republican should at this day publish a new edition of any old history of France, and instead of Hayre-de-Grace should write Hayre-Marat; and that two or three thousand years hence, a man, like yourself, should, on that account, reject the whole history as spurious; would he be justified in so doing? Would it not be reasonable to tell him—that the name of Hayre-Marat had been inserted, not by the original author of the history, but by a subsequent editor of it; and to refer him, for a proof of the genuineness of the book, to the testimony of the whole French nation? This supposition so obviously applies to your difficulty, that I cannot but recommend it to your impartial attention. But if this solution does not please you

I desire it may be proved, that the *Dan*, mentioned in Genesis, was the same town as the *Dan*, mentioned in Judges; I desire, further, to have it proved, that the *Dan*, mentioned in Genesis, was the name of a town, and not of a river. It is merely said—Abraham pursued them, the enemies of Lot, to *Dan*. Now a river was full as likely as a town to stop a pursuit. *Lot*, we know, was settled in the plain of *Jordan*; and *Jordan*, we know, was composed of the united streams of two rivers, called *Jor* and *Dan*.

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

“Take away from Genesis,” you say, the belief that Moses was the author, on which only the strange belief that it is the Word of God has stood,

and there remains nothing of Genesis but an anonymous book of stories, fables, traditional or invented absurdities, or of downright lies."—What! is it a story then, that the world had a beginning; and that the author of it was God? If you deem this a story; I am not disputing with a deistical philosopher, but with an atheistic madman. Is it a story that our first parents fell from a paradisiacal state—that this earth was destroyed by a deluge—that Noah and his family were preserved in the ark, and that the world has been re-peopled by his descendants? Look into a book so common that almost every body has it, and so excellent that no person ought to be without it—Grotius on the truth of the Christian religion—and you will there meet with abundant testimony to the truth of all the principal facts recorded in Genesis. The testimony is not that of Jews, Christians, and priests; it is the testimony of the philosophers, historians, and poets of antiquity. The oldest book in the world is Genesis; and it is remarkable that those books which come nearest to it in age, are those which make, either the most distinct mention, or the most evident allusion to the facts related in Genesis concerning the formation of the world from a chaotic mass, the primeval innocence and subsequent fall of man, the longevity of mankind in the first ages of the world, the depravity of the antedeluvians, and the destruction of the world.—Read the tenth chapter of Genesis—It may appear to you to contain nothing but an uninteresting narration of the descendants of *Shem*, *Ham*, and *Japheth*; a mere fable, an invented absurdity, a downright lie. No, sir, it is one of the most valuable, and the most venerable records of antiquity. It explains what all profane historians were ignorant of—the origin of nations. Had it told us, as other books do, that one nation had sprung out of the earth they inhabited; another from a cricket or a grasshopper; another from an

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

From the abuse of the Bible, you proceed to that of Moses, and again bring forward the subject of his wars in the land of Canaan. There are many men who look upon all war (would to God that all men

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

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

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

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

You produce two or three other objections respecting the genuineness of the first five books of the Bible. I cannot stop to notice them: every commentator answers them in a manner suited to the apprehension of even a mere English reader. You calculate, to the thousandth part of an inch, the length of the iron bed of Og the king of Bashan; but you did not prove that the bed was too big for the body, or that a Patagonian would have been lost in it. You make no allowance for the size of a royal bed; nor ever suspect that king Og might have been possessed with the same kind of vanity, which occupied the mind of king Alexander, when he ordered his soldiers to enlarge the size of their beds, that they might give the Indians, in succeeding ages, a great idea of the prodigious stature of a Macedonian. In many parts of your work you speak much in commendation of science. I join with you in every commendation you can give it: but you speak of it in such a manner

as gives room to believe, that you are a great proficient in it; if this be the case, I would recommend a problem to your attention, the solution of which you will readily allow to be far above the powers of a man conversant only, as you represent priests and bishops to be, in *hic, hæc, hoc*. The problem is this—To determine the height to which a human body, preserving its similarity of figure, may be augmented, before it will perish by its own weight. When you have solved this problem, we shall know whether the bed of the king of Bashan was too big for any giant; whether the existence of a man twelve or fifteen feet high is in the nature of things impossible. My philology teaches me to doubt of many things; but it does not teach me to reject every testimony which is opposite to my experience: had I been born in Shetland, I could, on proper testimony, have believed in the existence of the Lincolnshire ox, or of the largest dray-horse in London; though the oxen and horses in Shetland had not been bigger than mastiffs.

L E T T E R I V.

HAVING finished your objections to the genuineness of the books of Moses, you proceed to your remarks on the book of Joshua; and from its internal evidence, you endeavour to prove that this book was not written by Joshua. What then? what is your conclusion? "That it is anonymous and without authority." "Stop a little, your conclusion is not connected with your premises; your friend Euclid would have been ashamed of it." "Anonymous, and therefore without authority!" I have noticed this solecism before, but as you frequently bring it forward, and, indeed, your book stands much in need of it, I will submit to your consider-

ation another observation on the subject. The book called *Fleta* is anonymous, but it is not on that account without authority. Doomsday book is anonymous, and was written above seven hundred years ago, yet our courts of law do not hold it to be without authority, as to the facts related in it. Yes, you will say, but this book has been preserved with singular care amongst the records of the nation. And who told you that the Jews had no records, or that they did not preserve them with singular care? Josephus says the contrary; and, in the bible itself, an appeal is made to many books which have perished, such as the book of Jathar, the book of Nathan, of Abijah, of Iddo, of Jehu, of natural history, by Solomon, of the acts of Manasseh, and others which might be mentioned. If any one, having access to the journals of the lords and commons, to the books of the treasury, war-office, privy council, and other public documents, should at this day write an history of the reigns of George the first and second, and should publish it without his name, would any man, three or four hundreds or thousands of years hence, question the authority of that book, when he knew that the whole British nation had received it as an authentic book from the time of its first publication to the age in which he lived? This supposition is in point. The books of the Old Testament were composed from the records of the Jewish nation, and they have been received as true by that nation, from the time in which they were written, to the present day. Dodley's Annual Register is an anonymous book, we only know the name of its editor; the New Annual Register is an anonymous book; the Reviews are anonymous books; but do we, or will our posterity esteem these books of no authority? On the contrary, they are admitted at present, and will be received in after ages, as authoritative records of the civil, military, and literary history of England and of Eu-

rope. So little foundation is there for our being startled by your assertion, "It is anonymous, and without authority."

If I am right in this reasoning (and I protest to you that I do not see any error in it) all the arguments you adduce in proof that the book of Joshua was not written by Joshua, nor that of Samuel by Samuel, are nothing to the purpose for which you have brought them forward: These books may be books of authority, though all you advance against the genuineness of them should be granted. No article of faith is injured by allowing that there is no such positive proof when, or by whom, these and some other books of holy scripture were written, as to exclude all possibility of doubt and cavil. There is no necessity, indeed, to allow this. The chronological and historical difficulties which others before you have produced, have been answered, and as to the greatest part of them, so well answered, that I will not waste the reader's time by entering into a particular examination of them.

You make yourself merry with what you call the tale of the sun standing still upon Mount Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon; and you say that "the story detects itself, because there is not a nation in the world that knows any thing about it." How can you expect that there should, when there is not a nation in the world whose annals reach this era by many hundred years? It happens however, that you are probably mistaken as to the fact; a confused tradition concerning this miracle, and a similar one in the time of Ahaz, when the sun went back ten degrees, has been preserved amongst one of the most ancient nations, as we are informed by one of the most ancient historians. Herodotus, in his *Euterpe*, speaking of the Egyptian priests, says "They told me that the sun had four times deviated from his course, having twice risen where he uniformly goes down, and twice gone down where he

uniformly rises. This, however, had produced no alteration in the climate of Egypt; the fruits of the earth and the phenomena of the Nile, had always been the same. (Beloe's translation.) The last part of this observation confirms the conjecture, that this account of the Egyptian priests had a reference to the two miracles respecting the sun, mentioned in scripture; for they were not of that kind which could introduce any change in climates or seasons. You would have been contented to admit the account of this miracle as a fine piece of poetical imagery; you may have seen some Jewish doctors and some Christian commentators, who consider it as such, but improperly, in my opinion. I think it idle at least, if not impious, to undertake to explain how the miracle was performed; but one who is not able to explain the mode of doing a thing, argues ill if he thence infers that the thing was not done. We are perfectly ignorant how the sun was formed, how the planets were projected at the creation, how they are still retained in their orbits by the power of gravity; but we admit, notwithstanding, that the sun was formed, that the planets were then projected, and that they are still retained in their orbits. The machine of the universe is in the hand of God; he can stop the motion of any part, or of the whole of it, with less trouble and less danger of injuring it, than you can stop your watch. In testimony of the reality of the miracle the author of the book says—"Is not this written in the book of Jasher?" No author in his senses would have appealed, in proof of his veracity, to a book which did not exist, or in attestation of a fact which, though it did exist, was not recorded in it; we may safely therefore conclude, that at the time the book of Joshua was written, there was such a book as the book of Jasher, and that the miracle of the sun's standing still, was recorded in that book. But this observation, you will say, does

not prove the fact of the sun's having stood still. I have not produced it as a proof of that fact; but it proves that the author of the book of Joshua believed the fact; that the people of Israel admitted the authority of the book of Jasher. An appeal to a fabulous book would have been as senseless an insult upon their understanding, as it would have been to ours, had Rapin appealed to the Arabian Nights Entertainment, as a proof of the battle of Hastings.

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

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

recorded a very material transaction, does not make it probable that he recorded other material transactions; that he wrote the chief part of the book of Joshua; and that such things as happened after his death, have been inserted in it by others, in order to render the history more complete.

The book of Joshua, chap. vi. ver. 26, is quoted in the first book of Kings, chap. xvi. 34. "In his (Ahab's) days did Hiel the Bethelite build Jerico; he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his first born, and set up the gates thereof, in his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun." Here is a proof that the book of Joshua is older than the first book of Kings; but that is not all which may reasonably be inferred, I do not say proved, from this quotation. It may be inferred from the phrase—according to the word of the Lord which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun—that Joshua wrote down the word which the Lord had spoken. In Baruch (which though an Apocryphal book, is authority for this purpose) there is a similar phrase—as thou spakest by thy servant Moses in the day when thou didst command him to write thy law. I think it unnecessary to make any observation on what you say relative to the book of Judges; but I cannot pass unnoticed your censure of the book of Ruth, which you call "an idle bungling story, foolishly told, nobody knows by whom, about a strolling country girl, creeping sily to bed to her cousin Boaz; pretty stuff, indeed, you exclaim, to be called the word of God!" It seems to me that you do not perfectly comprehend what is meant by the expression—the Word of God, or the divine authority of the scriptures:—I will explain it to you in the words of Dr. Law, late Bishop of Carlisle, and in those of St. Austin. My first quotation is from Bishop Law's Theory of Religion, a book not undeserving your notice. "The true sense then of

the *divine authority* of the books of the Old Testament, and which perhaps is enough to denominate them in general *divinely inspired*, seems to be this—that as in those times God has all along, beside the inspection, or superintendency of his general providence, interfered upon particular occasions, by giving express commissions to some persons (thence called *prophets*) to declare his will in various manners, and degrees of evidence, as best suited the occasion, time, and nature of the subject; and in all other cases, left them wholly to themselves: in like manner, he has interposed his more immediate assistance (and notified it to them, as they did to the world) in the *recording* of these revelations; so far as that was necessary, amidst the common (but from hence termed *sacred*) history of those times; and mixed with various other occurrences; in which the historian's own natural qualifications were sufficient to enable him to relate things; with all the accuracy they required."—The passage from St. Austin is this—"I am of opinion, that those men to whom the Holy Ghost revealed what ought to be received as authoritative in religion, might write some things as men with historical diligence, and other things as prophets by divine inspiration; and that these things are so distinct, that the former may be attributed to themselves as contributing to the increase of knowledge, and the latter to God speaking by them things appertaining to the authority of religion." Whether this opinion be right or wrong, I do not here enquire; It is the opinion of many learned men and good Christians: and, if you will adopt it as your opinion, you will see cause, perhaps, to become a Christian yourself; and you will see cause to consider chronological, geographical, or genealogical errors—apparent mistakes or real contradictions as to historical facts—needless repetitions and trifling interpolations—indeed you will see cause to consider all the principal objections of your book

to be absolutely without foundation. Receive but the Bible as composed by upright and well informed, though, in some points, fallible men (for I exclude all fallibility when they profess to deliver the Word of God), and you must receive it as a book revealing to you, in many parts the express will of God; and in other parts, relating to you the ordinary history of the times. Give but the authors of the Bible that credit which you give to other historians; believe them to deliver the word of God, when they tell you that they do so; believe, when they relate other things, as of themselves, and not of the Lord, that they wrote to the best of their knowledge and capacity, and you will be in your belief something very different from a deist: You may not be allowed to aspire to the character of an orthodox believer, but you will not be an unbeliever in the divine authority of the Bible; though you should admit human mistakes and human opinions to exist in some parts of it. This I take to be the first step towards the removal of the doubts of many sceptical men; and when they are advanced thus far, the grace of God assisting a teachable disposition, and a pious intention, may carry them on to perfection.

As to Ruth, you do an injury to her character. She was not a strolling country girl. She had been married ten years, and being left a widow, without children, she accompanied her mother-in-law, returning into her native country, out of which, with her husband and her two sons, she had been driven by a famine. The disturbances in France have driven many men, with their families, to America. If ten years hence, a woman, having lost her husband and her children, should return to France with a daughter in law, would you be justified in calling the daughter-in-law a strolling country girl? "But she crept slyly to bed to her cousin Boaz." I do not find it in the history—as a person imploring

protection, she laid herself down at the foot of an aged kinsman's bed, and she rose up with as much innocence as she had laid herself down. She was afterwards married to Boaz, and reputed by all her neighbours a virtuous woman; and they were more likely to know her character than you are. Whoever reads the book of Ruth, bearing in mind the simplicity of ancient manners, will find it an interesting story of a poor young woman, following in a strange land the advice, and affectionately attaching herself to the fortunes of the mother of her deceased husband.

The two books of Samuel come next under your review. You proceed to shew that these books were not written by Samuel, that they are anonymous, and thence you conclude, without authority. I need not here repeat what I have said upon the fallacy of your conclusion; and as to your proving that the books were not written by Samuel, you might have spared yourself some trouble if you had recollected, it is generally admitted that Samuel did not write any part of the second book which bears his name, and only a part of the first. It would, indeed, have been an enquiry not undeserving your notice, in many parts of your work, to have examined what was the opinion of learned men respecting the authors of the several books of the Bible; you would have found that you were in many places fighting a phantom of your own raising, and proving what was generally admitted. Very little certainty, I think, can at this time be obtained on this subject; but that you may have knowledge of what has been conjectured by men of judgment, I will quote to you a passage from Dr. Hartley's *Observations on Man*. The author himself does not vouch for the truth of his observation, for he begins it with a supposition. "I suppose then, that the Pentateuch consists of the writings of Moses, put together by Samuel, with a very few additions;

that the books of Joshua and Judges were, in like manner collected by him; and the book of Ruth, with the first part of the first book of Samuel, written by him; that the latter part of the first book of Samuel, and the second book, were written by the prophets who succeeded Samuel, suppose Nathan and Gad; that the books of Kings and Chronicles, are extracts from the records of the succeeding prophets concerning their own times, and from the public genealogical tables made by Ezra; that the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are collections of like records, some written by Ezra and Nehemiah, and some by their predecessors; that the book of Esther was written by some eminent Jew, in or near the times of the transaction there recorded, perhaps Mordecai; the book of Job by a Jew, of an uncertain time; the psalms by David, and other pious persons; the books of Proverbs and Canticles by Solomon; the book of Ecclesiastes by Solomon, or perhaps by a Jew of later times, speaking in his person, but not with an intention to make him pass for the author; the prophecies by the prophets whose names they bear; and the books of the New Testament by the persons to whom they are usually ascribed."

I have produced this passage to you, not merely to shew you that, in a great part of your work, you are attacking what no person is interested in defending; but to convince you that a wise and good man, and a firm believer in revealed religion, for such was Dr. Hartley, and no priest, did not reject the anonymous books of the Old Testament as books without authority. I shall not trouble either you or myself with any more observations on that head; you may ascribe the two books of Kings, and the two books of Chronicles, to what authors you please; I am satisfied with knowing that the annals of the Jewish nation were written in the time of Samuel, and probably in all succeeding times, by men

of ability, who lived in or near the times of which they write. Of the truth of this observation we have abundant proof, not only from the testimony of Josephus, and of the writers of the Talmuds, but from the Old Testament itself. I will content myself with citing a few places—"Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer." 1 Chron. xxix, 29. "Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, first and last, are they not written in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Abijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer?" 2 Chron. ix, 29. "Now the acts of Rehoboam, first and last, are they not written in the book of Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the seer, concerning genealogies?" 2 Chron. xii, 15. "Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, first and last, behold they are written in the book of Jehu the son of Hanani." 2 Chron. xx, 34. Is it possible for writers to give a stronger evidence of their veracity, than by referring their readers to the books from which they had extracted the materials of their history?

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

and earth. This was the purpose for which they were chosen, and this purpose has been accomplished. For above three and twenty hundred years the Jews have uniformly witnessed to all the nations of the earth the unity of God, and his abomination of idolatry. But as you look upon "the appellation of the Jews being God's *chosen* people as a *lie* which the priests and leaders of the Jews had invented to cover the baseness of their own characters, and which Christian priests, sometimes as corrupt, and often as cruel, have professed to believe," I will plainly state to you the reasons which induce me to believe that it is no *lie*, and I hope they will be such reasons as you will not attribute either to cruelty or corruption.

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

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

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

Several things, you observe, are mentioned in the book of the Kings, such as the drying up of Jeroboam's hand, the ascent of Elijah into heaven, the destruction of the children who mocked Elisha, and the resurrection of a dead man: These circumstances being mentioned in the book of Kings, and not mentioned in that of Chronicles, is a proof to you that they are lies. I esteem it a very erroneous mode of reasoning, which, from the silence of one author concerning a particular circumstance, infers the want of veracity in another who mentions it, and this observation is still more cogent, when applied to a book which is only a supplement to, or an abridgement of other books; and under this description the book of Chronicles has been considered by all writers. But though you will not believe the miracle of the drying up of Jeroboam's hand, what can you say to the prophecy which was then delivered concerning the future destruction of the idolatrous altar of Jeroboam?

The prophecy is thus written, 1 Kings, xiii. 2. "Behold a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name, and upon thee (the altar) shall he offer the priests of the high places." Here is a clear prophecy; the name, family, and office of a particular person, are described in the year 975 (according to the Bible chronology) before Christ. About 350 years after the delivery of the prophecy, you will find, by consulting the second book of Kings (chap. xxiii. 15, 16.) this prophecy fulfilled in all its parts.

You make a calculation that Genesis was not written till 800 years after Moses, and that it is of the same age, and you may probably think of the same authority, as Esop's Fables. You give, what you call the evidence of this, the air of a demonstration—"It has but two stages—first, the account of the kings of Edom, mentioned in Genesis, is taken from Chronicles, and therefore the book of Genesis was written after the book of Chronicles:—secondly the book of Chronicles was not begun to be written till after Zedekiah, in whose time Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem, 588 years before Christ, and more than 860 after Moses."—Having answered this objection before, I might be excused taking any more notice of it; but as you build much, in this place, upon the strength of your argument, I will shew you it's weakness, when it is properly stated.—A few verses in the book of Genesis could not be written by Moses: therefore no part of Genesis could be written by Moses—a child would deny your *therefore*—Again, a few verses in the book of Genesis could not be written by Moses, because they speak of kings of Israel, there having been no kings of Israel in the time of Moses; and therefore they could not be written by Samuel or by Solomon, or any other person who lived after there were kings in Israel, except by the author of the book of Chronicles—

this is also an illegitimate inference from your position. Again, a few verses in the book of Genesis are, word for word the same as a few verses in the book of Chronicles; therefore the author of the book of Genesis must have taken them from Chronicles; another lame conclusion! Why might not the author of the book of Chronicles have taken them from Genesis, as he has taken many other genealogies, supposing them to have been inserted in Genesis by Samuel? But where, you may ask, could Samuel, or any other person, have found the account of the kings of Edom? Probably in the public records of the nation, which were certainly as open for inspection to Samuel and the other prophets, as they were to the author of Chronicles. I hold it needless to employ more time on the subject.

L E T T E R V.

AT length you come to two books, Ezra and Nehemiah, which you will allow to be genuine books, giving an account of the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity, about 536 years before Christ; but then you say, "Those accounts are nothing to us, nor to any other persons unless it be to the Jews, as a part of the history of their nation; and there is just as much of the Word of God in those books, as there is in any of the histories of France, or in Rapin's History of England." Here let us stop a moment, and try if from your own concessions it be not possible to confute your argument. Ezra and Nehemiah, you grant, are genuine books—"but they are nothing to us!" The very first verse of Ezra says—the prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled;—is this nothing to us, to

know that Jeremiah was a true prophet? Do but grant that the Supreme Being communicated to any of the sons of men a knowledge of future events, so that their predictions were plainly verified, and you will find little difficulty in admitting the truth of revealed religion. Is it nothing to us to know that, five hundred and thirty-six years before Christ, the books of Chronicles, Kings, Judges, Joshua, Deuteronomy, Numbers, Leviticus, Exodus, Genesis, every book the authority of which you have attacked, are all referred to by Ezra and Nehemiah, as authentic books, containing the history of the Israelitish nation from Abraham to the very time?—Is it nothing to us to know that the history of the Jews is true?—It is every thing to us; for if that history be not true, Christianity must be false. The Jews are the root, we are branches “grafted in amongst them;” to whom pertain “the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.”

The history of the Old Testament has, without doubt, some difficulties in it; but a minute philosopher, who busies himself in searching them out, whilst he neglects to contemplate the harmony of all its parts, the wisdom and goodness of God displayed throughout the whole, appears to me to be like a purblind man, who in surveying a picture, objects to the simplicity of the design, and the beauty of the execution, from the asperities he has discovered in the canvas and the colouring. The history of the Old Testament, notwithstanding the real difficulties which occur in it, notwithstanding the scoffs and cavils of unbelievers, appears to me to have such internal evidences of its truth, to be so corroborated by the most ancient profane histories, so confirmed by the present circumstances of the world,

that if I were not a Christian, I would become a Jew. You think this history to be a collection of lies, contradictions, blasphemies—I look upon it to be the oldest, the truest, the most comprehensive, and the most important history in the world. I consider it as giving more satisfactory proofs of the being and attributes of God, of the origin and end of human kind, than ever was attained by the deepest researches of the most enlightened philosophers. The exercise of our reason in the investigation of truths respecting the nature of God, and the future expectations of human kind, is highly useful; but I hope I shall be pardoned by the metaphysicians in saying that the chief utility of such disquisitions consists in this—that they bring us acquainted with the weakness of our intellectual faculties. I do not presume to measure other men by my standard; you may have clearer notions than I am able to form of the infinity of space; of the eternity of duration; of necessary existence; of the connection between necessary existence and intelligence; between intelligence and benevolence—you may see nothing in the universe but organized matter; or, rejecting a material, you may see nothing but an ideal world. With a mind weary of conjecture, fatigued by doubt, sick of disputation, eager for knowledge, anxious for certainty, and unable to attain it by the best use by my reason in matters of the utmost importance, I have long ago turned my thoughts to an impartial examination of the proofs on which revealed religion is grounded, and I am convinced of its truth. This examination is a subject within the reach of human capacity; you have come to one conclusion respecting it, I have come to another; both of us cannot be right; may God forgive him that is in an error!

You ridicule, in a note, the story of an angel appearing to Joshua. Your mirth you will perceive to be misplaced, when you consider the de-

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

You allow the book of Ezra to be a genuine book: but that the author of it may not escape without a blow, you say, that in matters of record it is not to be depended on, and as a proof of your assertion, you tell us that the total amount of the numbers who returned from Babylon does not correspond with the particulars; and that every child may have an argument for it's infidelity, you display the particulars and shew your own skill in Arithmetic, by summing them up. And can you suppose that Ezra, a man of great learning, knew so little of science, so little of the lowest branch of science, that he could not give his readers the sum total of sixty particular sums? You know, undoubtedly, that the Hebrew letters denoted also numbers; and that there was such a great similarity between some of these letters, that it was extremely easy for a transcriber of a manuscript to mistake a beth for a caph (or 2 for 20) a gimel for a nun (or 3 for 50) a daleth for a resh (or 4 for 200.) Now what have we to do with numerical contradictions in the Bible, but to attribute them, wherever they occur, to this obvious source of error—the inattention of the

transcriber in writing one letter for another that was like it?

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

The character represented in Job, under the name of Satan is; you say, “the first and the only time this name is mentioned in the Bible.” Now I find this name, as denoting an enemy, frequently occurring in the Old Testament; thus 2 Sam. xix. 22, “What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah, that ye should this day be adversaries unto me?” In the original, it is Satans unto me. Again, 1 Kings v. 4. “The Lord my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent.” In the original, neither Satan nor evil; I need not mention other places; these are sufficient to shew that the word Satan, denoting an adversary, does occur in various places of the Old Testament; and it is extremely probable to me, that the root Satan was introduced in the Hebrew and other eastern languages, to denote an adversary, from its having been the proper name of the great enemy of mankind. I know it is an opinion of Voltaire, that the word Satan is not older than the Babylonian captivity; this is a mistake, for it is met with, in the hundred and ninth psalm, which all allow to have been written by David, long before the captivity. Now we are upon this subject, permit me to recommend to your consideration the universality of the doctrine concerning an evil being, who in the beginning of time had opposed himself, who still continues to oppose himself to the supreme source of all good.—Amongst all nations, in all ages, this opinion pre-

veiled, that human affairs were subject to the will of the gods, and regulated by their interposition. Hence has been derived whatever we have read of the wandering stars of the Chaldeans, two of them beneficent, and two malignant—hence the Egyptian *Typho* and *Osiris*—the Persian *Arimanius* and *Oromasdes*—the Grecian *celestial* and *infernal Jove*—the *Brama* and the *Zupay* of the Indians, Peruvians, Mexicans—the good and evil principle, by whatever names they may be called, of all other barbarous nations—and hence the structure of the whole book of Job, in whatever light, of history or drama, it be considered. Now does it not appear reasonable to suppose, that an opinion so ancient and so universal, has arisen from tradition concerning the fall of our first parents; disfigured, indeed, and obscured, as all traditions must be, by many fabulous additions?

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

It appears, you observe, “to have been the custom of the heathens, to personify both virtue and vice, by statues and images, as is done now-a-days both by statuary and by painting; but it does not follow from this that they worshipped them any more than we do.” Not worshipped them! What think you of the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar set up? Was it not worshipped by the princes, the rulers, the judges, the people, the nations, and the languages of the Babylonian empire? Not worshipped them! What think you of the de-

“cree of the Roman senate for fetching the statue of the mother of the gods from Pessinum? Was it only that they might admire it as a piece of workmanship? Not worshipped them! “What man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians was a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?” Not worshipped them! The worship was universal. “Every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places, which the Samaritans had made—the men of Babylon made Saccothbenoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashima, and the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burned their children in fire to Adrammelech and Anamelech, the gods of Sepharvaim.” (2 Kings, chap. xvii.) The heathens are much indebted to you for this curious apology for their idolatry; for a mode of worship the most cruel, senseless, impure, and abominable, that can possibly disgrace the faculties of the human mind. Had this your conceit occurred in ancient times, it might have saved *Micah’s teraphims*, the *golden calves of Jeroboam*, and of *Aaron*, and quite superceded the necessity of the second commandment!!! Heathen morality has had its advocates before you; the facetious gentleman who pulled off his hat to the statue of Jupiter, that he might have a friend when heathen idolatry should again be in repute, seems to have had some foundation for his improper humour, some knowledge that certain men esteeming themselves great philosophers, had entered into a conspiracy to abolish Christianity, some foresight of the consequences which will certainly attend their success.

It is an error, you say, to call the Psalms—the Psalms of David. This error was observed by St. Jerome, many hundred years before you were born; his words are—“We know that they are

in an error who attribute *all* the psalms to David." You, I suppose, will not deny that David wrote some of them. Songs are of various sorts; we have hunting songs, drinking songs, fighting songs, love songs, foolish, wanton, wicked songs: If you will have the "Psalms of David to be nothing but a collection from the different song writers," you must allow that the writers of them were inspired by no ordinary spirit; that it is a collection incapable of being degraded by the name you give it; that it greatly excels every other collection in matter and in manner. Compare the book of Psalms with the odes of Horace or Anacreon, with the hymns of Calimachus, the golden verses of Pythagoras, the choruses of the Greek tragedians (no contemptible compositions any of these) and you will quickly see how greatly it surpasses them all, in piety of sentiment, in sublimity of expression, in purity of morality, and in rational theology.

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

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

Isaiah has a greater share of your abuse than any other writer in the Old Testament, and the reason of it is obvious—the prophecies of Isaiah have received such a full and circumstantial completion, that, unless you can persuade yourself to consider the whole book (a few historical sketches excepted) "as one continued bombastical rant, full of extravagant metaphor, without application, and destitute of meaning," you must of necessity allow its divine authority. You compare the burden of Babylon, the burden of Moab, the burden of Damascus, and the other denunciations of the prophet against cities and kingdoms, to the story "of the knight of

the burning mountain, the story of Cinderilla, &c.¹ I may have read these stories, but I remember nothing of the subjects of them; I have read also Isaiah's burden of Babylon, and I have compared it with the past and present state of Babylon, and the comparison has made such an impression on my mind, that it will never be effaced from my memory. I shall never cease to believe that the Eternal alone, by whom things future are more distinctly known than past or present things are to man, that the eternal God alone could have dictated to the prophet Isaiah the subject of the burden of Babylon.

The latter part of the forty-fourth and the beginning of the forty-fifth chapter of Isaiah are, in your opinion, so far from being written by Isaiah; that they could only have been written by some person who lived at least an hundred and fifty years after Isaiah was dead:—these chapters, you go on, “are a compliment to Cyrus, who permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity above an hundred and fifty years after the death of Isaiah:”—and is it for this, Sir, that you accuse the church of audacity and the priests of ignorance, in imposing, as you call it, this book upon the world as the writings of Isaiah? What shall be said of you who, either designedly or ignorantly, represent one of the most clear and important prophecies in the Bible, as an historical compliment, written above an hundred and fifty years after the death of the prophet?—We contend, Sir, that this is a prophecy and not an history; that God called *Cyrus* by his name; declaring that he should conquer Babylon, and described the means by which he should do it, above an hundred years before *Cyrus* was born, and when there was no probability of such an event. *Porphyry* could not resist the evidence of *Daniel's* prophecies, but by saying, that they are forged after the events predicted had taken place; *Voltaire* could not resist the evidence of the prediction of

concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, but by saying, that the account was written after Jerusalem had been destroyed; and you, at length (though for ought I know, you may have had predecessors in this presumption), unable to resist the evidence of *Isaiah's* prophecies, contend that they are bombastical rant, without application, though the application is circumstantial; and destitute of meaning, though the meaning is so obvious that it cannot be mistaken; and that one of the most remarkable of them, is not a prophecy but an historical compliment written after the event. We will not, Sir, give up *Daniel* and *St. Matthew*, to the independent assertions of *Porphyry* and *Voltaire*, nor will we give up *Isaiah* to your assertion. Proof, proof is what we require, and not assertion; we will not relinquish our religion, in obedience to your abusive assertion respecting the prophets of God. That the wonderful absurdity of this hypothesis may be more obvious to you, I beg you to consider that *Cyrus* was a Persian, had been brought up in the religion of his country, and was probably addicted to the magian superstition of two independent Beings, equal in power but different in principle, one the author of light and of all good, the other the author of darkness and all evil. Now is it probable that a captive Jew, meaning to compliment the greatest prince in the world, should be so stupid as to tell the prince his religion was a lie? “I am the Lord, and there is none else, I form the light, and create darkness, I make peace and create evil, I the Lord do all these things.”

But if you will persevere in believing that the prophecy concerning *Cyrus* was written after the event, peruse the burden of Babylon; was that also written after the event? Were the Medes then arrayed up against Babylon? Was Babylon, the glory of the kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees, then overthrown, and become as Sodom and Gomorrah?

Was it *then* uninhabited? Was it *then* neither fit for the Arabian's tent nor the shepherd's fold? Did the wild beasts of the desert *then* lie there? Did the wild beasts of the islands *then* cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces? Were Nebuchadnezzar and Balshazzar, the son and the grandson, *then* cut off? Was Babylon *then* become a possession of the bittern, and pools of water? Was it *then* swept with the besom of destruction, so swept that the world knows not now where to find it.

I am unwilling to attribute bad designs, deliberate wickedness, to you or to any man; I cannot avoid believing, that you think you have truth on your side, and that you are doing service to mankind in endeavouring to root out what you esteem superstition. What I blame you for is this—that you have attempted to lessen the authority of the Bible by ridicule, more than by reason; that you have brought forward every petty objection which your ingenuity could discover, or your industry pick up, from the writings of others; and without taking notice of the answers which have been repeatedly given to these objections, you urge and enforce them as if they were new. There is certainly some novelty, at least in your manner, for you go beyond all others in boldness of assertion, and in profaneness of argumentation; Bolingbroke and Voltaire must yield the palm of scurrility to Thomas Paine.

Permit me to state to you, what would, in my opinion, have been a better mode of proceeding; better suited to the character of an honest man, sincere in his endeavours to search out truth. Such a man, in reading the Bible, would, in the first place, examine whether the Bible attributed to the Supreme Being any attributes repugnant to holiness, truth, justice, goodness; whether it represented him as subject to human infirmities; whether it ex-

cluded him from the government of the world, or assigned the origin of it to chance, and an eternal conflict of atoms. Finding nothing of this kind in the Bible (for the destruction of Canaanites by his express command, I have shewn not to be repugnant to his moral justice) he would, in the second place, consider that the Bible, being as to many of its parts, a very old book, and written by various authors, and at different and distant periods, there might probably occur some difficulties and apparent contradictions in the historical part of it; he would endeavour to remove these difficulties, to reconcile these apparent contradictions, by the rules of such sound criticism as he would use in examining the contents of any other book; and if he found that most of them were of a trifling nature, arising from short additions inserted into the text as explanatory and supplemental, or from mistakes and omissions of transcribers, he would infer that all the rest were capable of being accounted for, though he was not able to do it; and he would be the more willing to make this concession, from observing, that there ran through the whole book an harmony and connection utterly inconsistent with every idea of forgery and deceit. He would then, in the third place, observe, that the miraculous and historical parts of this book were so intermixed that they could not be separated; and that they must either both be true, or both false; and from finding that the historical part was as well or better authenticated than that of any other history, he would admit the miraculous part; and to confirm himself in this belief, he would advert to the prophecies, well knowing that the prediction of things to come, was as certain a proof of the divine interposition, as the performance of a miracle could be. If he should find, as he certainly would, that many ancient prophecies had been fulfilled in all their circum-

stances, and that some were fulfilling at this very day, he would not suffer a few seeming or real difficulties to overbalance the weight of this accumulated evidence for the truth of the Bible. Such, I presume to think, would be a proper conduct in all those who are desirous of forming a rational and impartial judgment on the subject of revealed religion. To return—

As to your observation, that the book of Isaiah is (at least in translation) that kind of composition and false taste, which is properly called prose run mad—I have only to remark, that your taste for Hebrew poetry, even judging of it from translation, would be more correct if you would suffer yourself to be inforced on the subject by bishop Lowth, who tells you in his *Prelection*—“that a poem translated literally from the Hebrew into any other language, whilst the same forms of the sentences remain, will still retain, even as far as relates to versification, much of its native dignity, and a faint appearance of versification.” (Gregory’s *Transf.*) If this is what you mean by prose run mad, your observation may be admitted.

You explain at some length your notion of the misapplication made by St. Matthew, of the prophecy of Isaiah—“Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son.” That passage had been handled largely and minutely by almost every commentator, and it is too important to be handled superficially by any one: I am not, on the present occasion, concerned to explain it. It is quoted by you to prove, and it is the only instance you produce, that Isaiah was “a lying prophet and an impostor.” Now I maintain, that this very instance proves, that he was a true prophet, and no impostor. The history of the prophecy, as delivered in the seventh chapter, is this—Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, made war upon Ahaz, king of Judah; not merely, or perhaps, not at all, for the sake of

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

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

L E T T E R VI.

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

Jeremiah, on account of his having boldly predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, had been thrust into a miry dungeon by the princes of Judah, who

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

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

In the 34th chapter is a prophecy of Jeremiah to Zedekiah, in these words, ver. 2.—"Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and will burn it with fire; and thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but thou shalt surely be taken, and delivered into his hand; and thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth, and thou shalt go to Babylon. *Yet hear the word of the Lord, O Zedekiah, king of Judah; thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not die by the sword, but thou shalt die in peace; and with the burnings of thy fathers, the former kings that were before thee, so shall they burn odours for thee, and will lament thee, saying, Ah, Lord, for I have pronounced the word, saith the Lord.*"

"Now, instead of Zedekiah beholding the eyes of the king of Babylon, and speaking with him mouth to mouth, and dying in peace, and with the

burnings of odours, as at the funeral of his fathers (as Jeremiah had declared the Lord himself had pronounced), the reverse, according to the 52d chapter was the case; it is there stated, verse 10, "That the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes; then he put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death." What can we say of these prophets, but that they are impostors and liars?" I can say this, that the prophecy you have produced, was fulfilled in all parts: and what then shall be said of those who call Jeremiah a liar and an impostor? Here then we are fairly at issue—you affirm that the prophecy was not fulfilled, and I affirm that it was fulfilled in all its parts. "I will give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire:" so says the prophet; what says the history?" "They (the forces of the king of Babylon) burnt the house of God, and brake down the walls of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire." (2 Chron. xxxvi. 19.) "Thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but shalt surely be taken and delivered into his hand:" so says the prophet; what says the history?—The men of war fled by night, and the king went the way towards the plain, and the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him; so they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon, to Riblah." (2 Kings, xxv. 5.) The prophet goes on, "Thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth." No pleasant circumstance this to Zedekiah, who had provoked the king of Babylon by revolting from him! The history says, "The king of Babylon gave judgment upon Zedekiah, or, as it is more literally rendered from the Hebrew, *spoke judgments with him at Riblah.*"

The prophet concludes this part with, "And thou shalt go to Babylon;" the history says, "The king of Babylon bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death." Jer. lii. 11.—"Thou shalt not die by the sword." He did not die by the sword, he did not fall in battle.—"But thou shalt die in peace." He did die in peace, he neither expired on the rack or on the scaffold; was neither strangled, nor poisoned; no unusual fate of captive kings! he died peacefully in his bed, though that bed was in a prison.—"And with the burnings of thy fathers shall they burn odours for thee." I cannot prove from the history that this part of the prophecy was accomplished, nor can you prove that it was not. The probability is, that it was accomplished; and I have two reasons on which I ground this probability.—Daniel, Shadrach, Mefchach, and Abednego, to say nothing of other Jews, were men of great authority in the court of the king of Babylon, before and after the commencement of the imprisonment of Zedekiah; and Daniel continued in power till the subversion of the kingdom of Babylon by Cyrus.—Now it seems to me to be very probable, that Daniel, and the other great men of the Jews, would both have inclination to request, and influence enough with the king of Babylon to obtain permission to bury their deceased prince Zedekiah, after the manner of his fathers.—But if there had been no Jews at Babylon of consequence enough to make such a request, still it is probable that the king of Babylon would have ordered the Jews to bury and lament their departed prince, after the manner of their country. Monarchs, like other men are conscious of the instability of human condition; and when the pomp of war has ceased, when the influence of conquest is abated, and the fury of resentment subsided, they seldom fail to revere royalty

even in its ruins, and grant without reluctance proper obsequies to the remains of captive kings.

You profess to have been particular in treating of the books ascribed to Isaiah and Jeremiah.—Particular! in what? You have particularised two or three passages, which you have endeavored to represent as objectionable, and which I hope have been shewn, to the reader's satisfaction, to be not justly liable to your censure; and you have passed over all the other parts of these books without notice. Had you been particular in your examination, you would have found cause to admire the probity and the intrepidity of the characters of the authors of them; you would have met with many instances of sublime composition; and, what is of more consequence, with many instances of prophetic veracity:—particularities of these kinds you have wholly overlooked. I cannot account for this; I have no right, no inclination, to call you a dishonest man; am I justified in considering you as a man not altogether destitute of ingenuity, but so entirely under the dominion of prejudice in every thing respecting the Bible, that, like a corrupted judge, previously determined to give sentence on one side, you are negligent in the examination of truth?

You proceed to the rest of the prophets, and you take them collectively, carefully however selecting for your observations such particularities as are best calculated to render, if possible, the prophets odious or ridiculous in the eyes of your readers. You confound prophets with poets and musicians: I would distinguish them thus; many prophets were poets and musicians, but all poets and musicians were not prophets. Prophecies were often delivered in poetic language and measure; but flights and metaphors of the Jewish poets have not, as you affirm, been foolishly erected into what are now cal-

led prophecies—they are now called, and have always been called, prophecies,—because they were real predictions, some of which have received, some are now receiving, and all will receive, their full accomplishment.

That there were false prophets, witches, necromancers, conjurors, and fortune-tellers, among the Jews, no person will attempt to deny; no nation, barbarous or civilized, has been without them: but when you would degrade the prophets of the Old Testament to a level with these conjuring, dreaming, strolling gentry—when you would represent them as spending their lives in fortune-telling, casting nativities, predicting riches, fortunate or unfortunate marriages, conjuring for lost goods, &c. I must be allowed to say, that you wholly mistake their office, and misrepresent their character; their office was to convey to the children of Israel the commands, the promises, the threatenings of Almighty God; and their character was that of men sustaining, with fortitude, persecution in the discharge of their duty. There were false prophets in abundance amongst the Jews; and if you oppose these to the true prophets, and call them both party prophets, you have the liberty of doing so, but you will not thereby confound the distinction between truth and falsehood. False prophets are spoken of with detestation in many parts of scripture, particularly by Jeremiah, who accuses them of prophesying lies in the name of the Lord, saying, “I have dreamed, I have dreamed—Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues, and say, He saith; that prophecy false dreams, and cause my people to err by their lies and by their lightness.” Jeremiah cautions his countrymen against giving credit to their prophets, to their diviners, to their dreamers, to their enchanters, to their forcerers, “which speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon.” You can

not think more contemptibly of these gentry, than they were thought of by the true prophets at the time they lived; but, as Jeremiah says on this subject, “What is the chaff to the wheat?” what are the false prophets to the true ones? Every thing good is liable to abuse; but who argues against the use of a thing from the abuse of it? against physicians, because there are pretenders to physic? Was Isaiah a fortune-teller, predicting riches, when he said to king Hezekiah, “Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left saith the Lord. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.” Fortune-tellers generally predict good luck to their simple customers, that they may make something by their trade; but Isaiah predicts to a monarch desolation of his country, and ruin of his family. This prophecy was spoken in the year before Christ 713; and above an hundred years afterwards, it was accomplished; when Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem, and carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king’s house (2 King’s xxiv. 13); and when he commanded the master of his eunuchs (Dan. i. 3.) that he should take certain of the children of Israel, and of the king’s seed, and of the princes, and educate them for three years, till they were able to stand before the king.

Jehoram king of Israel, Jehoshaphet king of Judah, and the king of Edom, going with their armies to make war on the king of Moab, came into a place where there was no water either for their men or cattle. In this distress they waited upon Elisha (an high honour for one of your conjurors) by the advice of Jehoshaphat, who knew that the word of the Lord was with him. The prophet,

on seeing Jehoram, an idolatrous prince, who had revolted from the worship of the true God, come to consult him, said to him—"Get thee to the prophets of thy father and the prophets of thy mother." This you think shews Elisha to have been a party prophet, full of venom and vulgarity—it shews him to have been a man of great courage, who respected the dignity of his own character, the sacredness of his office as a prophet of God, whose duty it was to reprove the wickedness of kings, as of other men. He ordered them to make the valley where they were, full of ditches: This you say, every countryman could have told, that the way to get water, was to dig for it." But this is not a true representation of the case; the ditches were not dug that water might be gotten by digging for it, but that they might hold the water when it should miraculously come "without wind or rain," from another country; and it did come "from the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water." As to Elisha's cursing the little children who had mocked at him, and their destruction in consequence of his imprecation, the whole story must be taken together. The provocation he received, is by some considered as an insult offered to him, not as a man but a prophet, and that the persons who offered it, were not what we understand by little children, but grown-up youths, the term child being applied, in the Hebrew language, to grown-up persons. Be this as it may, the cursing was the act of the prophet; had it been a sin, it would not have been followed by a miraculous destruction of the offenders; for this was the act of God, who best knows who deserve punishment. What effect such a signal judgment had on the idolatrous inhabitants of the land, is no where said; but it is probable it was not without a good effect.

Ezekiel and Daniel lived during the Babylonian captivity; you allow their writings to be genuine.

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

Daniel? You have not produced from it one exceptionable passage. I hope you will read that book with attention, with intelligence, and with an unbiassed mind follow the advice of our Saviour when he quoted this very prophecy—"Let him that readeth understand,"—and I shall not despair of your conversion from Deism to Christianity.

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

You quote a passage from Ezekiel; in the 29th chapter, ver. 11, speaking of Egypt, it is said—"No foot of man shall pass through it, nor foot of beast shall pass through it, neither shall it be inhabited forty years." This you say, "never came to pass, and consequently it is false, as all the books I have already viewed are." Now that this did come to pass, we have, as Bishop Newton observes, "the testimonies of Megasthenes and Berofus, two heathen historians, who lived about 300 years before Christ; one of whom affirms expressly, that Nebuchadnezzar conquered the greater part of Africa; and the other affirms it in effect, in saying, that when Nebuchadnezzar heard of the death of his father, having settled his affairs in Egypt, and com-

mitted the *captives* whom he took in Egypt, to the care of some of his friends, to bring them after him, he hastened directly to Babylon." And if we had been possessed of no testimony in support of the prophecy, it would have been an hasty conclusion, that the prophecy never came to pass; the history of Egypt, at so remote a period, being no where accurately and circumstantially related. I admit that no period can be pointed out from the age of Ezekiel to the present, in which there was no foot of man or beast to be seen for forty years in all Egypt; but some think that only a part of Egypt is here spoken of; and surely you do not expect a literal accomplishment of an hyperbolic expression, denoting great desolation; importing that the trade of Egypt, which was carried on then, as at present, by caravans, by the foot of man and beast, should be annihilated.

Had you taken the trouble to have looked a little further into the book from which you have made your quotation, you would have there seen a prophecy delivered above two thousand years ago, and which has been fulfilling from that time to this—"Egypt shall be the basest of the kingdoms, neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations—there shall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt"—This you may call a dream, a vision, a he: I esteem it a wonderful prophecy; for "as is the prophecy, so has been the event. Egypt was conquered by the Babylonians; and after the Babylonians by the Persians; and after the Persians it became subject to the Macadonians; and after the Macadonians to the Romans; and after the Romans to the Saracens; and then to the Mamelucs; and is now a province of the Turkish empire."

Suffer me to produce to you from this author not an enigmatical letter to Daniel respecting the recovery of Jerusalem from the hands of the king of Babylon, but an enigmatical prophecy concerning

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

As to your wonderful discovery that the prophecy of Jonah is a book of some gentile, “and that it has been written as a fable, to expose the nonsense, and to satirize the vicious and malignant character of a Bible prophet, or a predicting priest,” I shall put it, covered with *hellebore* for the service of its author, on the same shelf with your hypothesis concerning the conspiracy of Daniel and Ezekiel, and shall not say another word about it.

You conclude your objections to the Old Testament in a triumphant stile; an angry opponent would say, in a style of extreme arrogance, and sottish self sufficiency.—“I have gone,” you say, “through the Bible (mistaking here, as in other places, the Old Testament for the Bible) as a man would go through a wood, with an axe on his shoulders, and fell trees; here they lie; and the priests, if they can, may replant them. They may perhaps stick them in the ground, but they will never grow”—And is it possible that you should think so highly of your performance, as to believe,

that you have thereby demolished the authority of a book which Newton himself esteemed the most authentic of all histories; which by its celestial light, illumines the darkest ages of antiquity; which is the touchstone whereby we are enabled to distinguish between true and fabulous theology, between the God of Israel, holy just and good, and the impure rabble of heathen Baalim; which has been thought, by competent judges, to have afforded matter for the laws of Solon, and a foundation for the philosophy of Plato; which has been illustrated by the labour of learning, in all ages and countries; and been admired and venerated for its piety, its sublimity, its veracity, by all who are able to read and understand it? No sir; you have gone indeed through the wood, with the best intention in the world to cut it down; but you have merely busied yourself in exposing to vulgar contempt a few insignificant shrubs, which good men had wisely concealed from public view; you have entangled yourself in thickets of thorns and briars; you have lost your way on the mountains of Lebanon; the goodly cedar trees whereof, lamenting the madness, and pitying the blindness of your rage against them, have scorned the blunt edge and the base temper of your axe and laughed unhurt at the feebleness of your stroke.

In plain language, you have gone through the Old Testament, hunting after difficulties, and you have found some real ones; these you have endeavored to magnify into insurmountable objections to the authority of the whole book. When it is considered that the Old Testament is composed of several books, written by different authors, and at different periods, from Moses to Malachi, comprising an abstracted history of a particular nation for above a thousand years, I think the real difficulties which occur in it are much fewer, and of much less importance, than could reasonably have been expected.

Apparent difficulties you have represented as real ones, without hinting at the manner in which they have been explained. You have ridiculed things held most sacred, and calumniated characters esteemed most venerable, you have excited the scoffs of the profane; increased the scepticism of the doubtful; shaken the faith of the unlearned; suggested cavils to the "disputers of this world;" and perplexed the minds of honest men who wish to worship the God of their fathers in sincerity and truth. This and more you have done in going through the Old Testament; but you have not so much as glanced at the great design of the whole, at the harmony and mutual dependence of the several parts. You have said nothing of the wisdom of God in selecting a particular people from the rest of mankind, not for their own sakes, but that they might witness to the whole world, in successive ages, his existence and attributes; that they might be an instrument of subverting idolatry; of declaring the name of the God of Israel throughout the whole earth. It was through this nation that the Egyptians saw the wonders of God; that the Canaanites (whom wickedness had made a reproach to human nature) felt his judgments; that the Babylonians issued their decrees—"That none should dare to speak amiss of the God of Israel—that all should fear and tremble before him;"—and it is through them that you and I, and all the world, are not at this day worshippers of idols. You have said nothing of the goodness of God in promising, that through the seed of Abraham, all the nations of the earth were to be blessed; that the desire of all nations, the blessing of Abraham to the Gentiles, should come. You have passed by all the prophecies respecting the coming of the Messiah: though they absolutely fixed the time of his coming, and of his being cut off; described his office, character, condition, sufferings, and death, in so circumstantial

a manner, that we cannot but be astonished at the accuracy of their completion in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. You have neglected noticing the testimony of the whole Jewish nation to the truth both of the natural and miraculous facts recorded in the Old Testament. That we may better judge of the weight of this testimony, let us suppose that God should now manifest himself to us, as we contend he did to the Israelites in Egypt, in the desert, and in the land of Canaan; and that he should continue these manifestations of himself to our posterity for a thousand years or more, punishing or rewarding them according as they disobeyed or obeyed his commands; what would you expect should be the issue? You would expect that our posterity would, in the remotest period of time, adhere to their God, and maintain against all opponents the truth of the books in which the dispensations of God to us and to our successors had been recorded. They would not yield to the objections of men, who, not having experienced the same divine government, should for want of such experience, refuse assent to their testimony. No; they would be to the then surrounding nations, what the Jews are to us, witnesses of the existence and of the moral government of God.

L E T T E R VII.

THE New Testament, they tell us, is founded upon the prophecies of the Old; if so, it must follow the fate of its foundation."— Thus you open your attack upon the New Testament; and I agree with you, that the New Testament must follow the fate of the Old; and that fate is to remain unimpaired by such efforts as you have made against it. The New Testament, however, is not

founded solely on the prophecies of the Old. If an heathen from *Athens* or *Rome*, who had never heard of the prophecies of the Old Testament, had been an eye-witness of the miracles of Jesus, he would have made the same conclusion that the Jew Nicodemus did—"Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."—Our Saviour tells the Jews—"Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me:"—And he bids them search the scriptures, for they testified of him:—But notwithstanding this appeal to the prophecies of the Old Testament, Jesus said to the Jews, "Though ye believe not in me, believe the works—believe me for the very works sake"—"If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin." These are sufficient proofs that the truth of Christ's mission was not even to the Jews, much less to the Gentiles, founded solely on the truth of the prophecies of the Old Testament. So that if you could prove some of these prophecies to have been misapplied, and not completed in the person of Jesus, the truth of the christian religion would not thereby be overturned.—That Jesus of Nazareth was the person, in whom all the prophecies, direct and typical, in the Old Testament, respecting the Messiah, were fulfilled, is a proposition founded on those prophecies, and to be proved by comparing them with the history of his life. That Jesus was *a* prophet sent from God, is one proposition—that Jesus was *the* prophet, the Messiah, is another; and though he certainly was both *a* prophet and *the* prophet, yet the foundations of the proof of these propositions are separate and distinct.

The mere existence "of such a woman as Mary, and of such a man as Joseph, and Jesus;" is you say, a matter of indifference, about which there is no ground either to believe or disbelieve.—Belief is

different from knowledge, with which you here seem to confound it. We know that, the whole is greater than its part, and we know that all the angles in the same segment of a circle are equal to each other—we have intuition and demonstration as grounds of this knowledge; but is there no ground for belief of past or future existence? Is there no ground for believing that the sun will exist to-morrow, and that your father existed before you? You condescend, however, to think it probable, that there were such persons as Mary, Joseph, and Jesus; and without troubling yourself about their existence or non-existence, assuming, as it were, for the sake of argument, but without positively granting their existence, you proceed to inform us, "that it is the fable of Jesus Christ, as told in the New Testament, and the wild and visionary doctrine raised thereon," against which you contend. You will not repute it a fable, that there was such a man as Jesus Christ; that he lived in Judea near eighteen hundred years ago; that he went about doing good, and preaching, not only in the villages of Galilee; but in the city of Jerusalem; that he had several followers, who constantly attended him; that he was put to death by Pontious Pilate; that his disciples were numerous a few years after his death, not only in Judea, but in Rome the capital of the world, and in every province of the Roman empire; that a particular day has been observed in a religious manner by all his followers, in commemoration of a real or supposed resurrection; and that the constant celebration of baptism, and of the Lord's supper, may be traced back from the present time to him, as the author of those institutions. These things constitute, I suppose no part of your fable; and if these things be facts, they will, when maturely considered, draw after them so many other things related in the New Testament concerning Jesus, that there will be left for your fable but very scanty materials, which will

require great fertility of invention, before you will dress them up into any form which will not disgust even a superficial observer.

The miraculous conception you esteem a fable, and in your mind is an obscene fable.—Impure indeed must that man's imagination be, who can discover any obscenity in the angel's declaration to Mary—The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.—I wonder you do not find obscenity in Genesis, where it is said, "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters," and brought order out of confusion, a world out of a chaos, by his fostering influence. As to the Christian faith being built upon the heathen mythology, there is no ground whatever for the assertion; there would have been some for saying that much of the heathen mythology, was built upon the events recorded in the Old Testament.

You come now to a demonstration; or which amounts to the same thing, to a proposition which cannot, you say be controverted:—first, "That the *agreement* of all the parts of a story does not prove that story to be true, because the parts may agree and the whole may be false;—secondly, That the *disagreement* of the parts of a story proves that the *whole cannot be true*. The agreement does not prove truth, but the disagreement proves falsehood positively." Great use, I perceive, is to be made of this proposition. You will pardon my unskilfulness in dialectics, if I presume to controvert the truth of this abstract proposition, as applied to any purpose in life. The agreement of the parts of a story implies that the story has been told, by at least two persons (the life of Doctor Johnston, for instance, by Sir John Hawkins and Mr. Boswell). Now I think it scarcely possible for even two persons, and the difficulty is increased if there are more than two,

to write the history of the life of any one of their acquaintance, without there being a considerable difference between them, with respect to the number and order of the incidents of his life. Some things will be omitted by one, and mentioned by the other; some things will be briefly touched by one, and the same things will be circumstantially detailed by the other, the same things which are mentioned in the same way by them both, may not be mentioned as having happened exactly at the same point of time, with other possible and probable differences. But these real or apparent difficulties, in minute circumstances, will not invalidate their testimony as to the material transactions of his life, much less will they render the whole of it a fable. If several independent witnesses, of fair character, should agree in all the parts of a story (in testifying, for instance, that a murder or a robbery was committed at a particular time, in a particular place, and by a certain individual), every court of justice in the world would admit the fact, notwithstanding the abstract possibility, of the whole being false:—again, if several honest men should agree in saying, that they saw the King of France beheaded, though they should disagree as to the figure of the guillotine or the size of his executioner, as to the king's hands being bound or loose, as to his being composed or agitated in ascending the scaffold, yet every court of justice in the world would think, that such difference, respecting the circumstances of the fact, did not invalidate the evidence respecting the fact itself. When you speak of the whole of a story, you cannot mean every particular circumstance connected with the story, but not essential to it; you must mean the pith and marrow of the story; for it would be impossible to establish the truth of any fact (of admirals Byng or Keppel, for example, having neglected or not neglected their duty), if a disagreement in the evidence of witnesses, in minute points,

should be considered as annihilating the weight of their evidence in points of importance. In a word the relation of a fact differs essentially from the demonstration of a theorem. If one step is left out, one link in the chain of ideas constituting a demonstration is omitted, the conclusion will be destroyed; but a fact may be established, notwithstanding the disagreement of the witnesses in certain trifling particulars of their evidence respecting it.

You apply your incontrovertible proposition to the genealogies of Christ given by Matthew and Luke—there is a disagreement between them; therefore, you say, “If Matthew spake truth, Luke speaks falsehood; and if Luke speak truth, Matthew speaks falsehood; and thence there is no authority for believing either; and if they cannot be believed even in the very first thing they say and set out to prove, they are not entitled to be believed in any thing they say afterwards.” I cannot admit either your premises or your conclusion—not your conclusion; because two authors, who differ in tracing back the pedigree of an individual for above a thousand years, cannot, on that account be esteemed incompetent to bear testimony to the transactions of his life, unless an intention to falsify could be proved against them. If two Welsh historians should at this time write the life of any remarkable man of their country, who had been dead twenty or thirty years, and should through different branches of their genealogical tree, carry up the pedigree to *Cadwallon*, would they on account of that difference be discredited in every thing they said? Might it not be believed that they gave the pedigree as they had found it recorded in different instruments, but without the least intention to write a falsehood—I cannot admit your premises; because Matthew speaks truth, and Luke speaks truth, though they do not speak the same truth; Matthew giving the genealogy of Joseph the reputed father of Jesus,

and Luke giving the genealogy of Mary, the real mother of Jesus. If you will not admit this, other explanations of the difficulty might be given; but I hold it sufficient to say, that the authors had no design to deceive the reader; that they took their accounts from the public registers, which were faithfully kept, and that had they been fabricators of these genealogies, they would have been exposed at the time to instant detection; and the certainty of that detection would have prevented them from making the attempt to impose a false genealogy on the Jewish nation.

But that you may effectually overthrow the credit of these genealogies, you make the following calculation:—“From the birth of David to the birth of Christ is upwards of 1080 years; and as there were but 27 full generations, to find the average age of each person mentioned in St. Matthew’s list at the time his first son was born, it is only necessary to divide 1080 by 27; which gives 40 years for each person. As the life time of man was then but of the same extent it is now, it is an absurdity to suppose that 27 generations should all be old bachelors, before they married. So far from this genealogy being a solemn truth, it is not even a reasonable lie.” This argument assumes the appearance of arithmetical accuracy, and the conclusion is in a style which even its truth would not excuse:—yet the argument is good for nothing, and the conclusion is not true. You have read the Bible with some attention; and you are extremely liberal in imputing to it lies and absurdities; read it over again, especially the books of the Chronicles, and you will there find, that, in the genealogical list of St. Matthew, three generations are omitted between Joram and Ozias; Joram was the father of Azariah, Azariah of Joash, Joash of Amaziah, and Amaziah of Ozias. I inquire not, in this place, whence this omission proceeded; whe-

ther it is to be attributed to an error in the genealogical tables from whence Matthew took his account; or to a corruption of the text of the evangelist; still it is an omission. Now if you will add these three generations to the 27 you mention, and divide 1080 by 30, you will find the average age when these Jews had each of them their first son born, was 36. They married sooner than they ought to have done, according to Aristotle; who fixes thirty-seven as the most proper age, when a man should marry. Nor was it necessary that they should have been old bachelors, though each of them had not a son to succeed him till he was thirty-six; they might have been married at twenty, without having a son till they were forty. You assume in your argument that the first born son succeeded the father in the list—this is not true. Solomon succeeded David; yet David had at least six sons, who were grown to manhood before Solomon was born; and Rehoboam had at least three sons before he had Abia (Abijah) who succeeded him. It is needless to cite more instances to this purpose; but from these, and other circumstances which might be insisted upon, I can see no ground for believing, that the genealogy of Jesus Christ mentioned by St. Matthew, is not a solemn truth.

You insist much upon some things being mentioned by one evangelist, which are not mentioned by all or any of the others; and you take this to be a reason why we should consider the gospels, not as the works of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, but as the productions of some *unconnected* individuals, each of whom made his own legend. I do not admit the truth of this supposition; but I may be allowed to use it as an argument against yourself—it removes every possible suspicion of fraud and imposture, and confirms the gospel history in the strongest manner. Four *unconnected* individuals have each written memoirs of the life of Jesus; from

whatever source they derived their materials, it is evident that they agree in a great many particulars of the last importance; such as the purity of his manners; the sanctity of his doctrines; the multitude and publicity of his miracles; the persecuting spirit of his enemies; the manner of his death; and the certainty of his resurrection; and whilst they agree in these great points, their disagreement in points of little consequence, is rather a confirmation of the truth, than an indication of the falsehood, of their several accounts. Had they agreed in nothing, their testimony ought to have been rejected as a legendary tale; had they agreed in every thing, it might have been suspected, that instead of unconnected individuals, they were a set of impostors. The manner, in which the evangelists have recorded the particulars of the life of Jesus, is wholly conformable to what we experience in other biographers, and claims our highest assent to its truth, notwithstanding the force of your incontrovertible proposition.

As an instance of contradiction between the Evangelists, you tell us that Matthew says, the angel announcing the immaculate conception, appeared unto Joseph; but Luke says he appeared unto Mary. The angel, Sir, appeared to them both; to Mary, when he informed her that she should, by the power of God, conceive a son; to Joseph some months afterwards, when Mary's pregnancy was visible; in the interim she had paid a visit of three months to her cousin Elizabeth. It might have been expected, that from the accuracy with which you have read your bible, you could not have confounded these obviously distinct appearances; but men, even of candour, are liable to mistakes. Who, you ask, would now believe a girl who should say she was gotten with child by a ghost? Who, but yourself would ever have asked a question so abominably indecent and profane? I cannot argue with

you on this subject. You will never persuade the world that the Holy Spirit of God has any resemblance to the stage ghosts in Hamlet or Macbeth, from which you seem to have derived your idea of it.

The story of the massacre of the young children, by the order of Herod, is mentioned only by Matthew, and therefore you think it is a lie. We must give up all history if we refuse to admit facts recorded by only one historian. Matthew addressed his gospel to the Jews, and put them in mind of a circumstance of which they must have had a melancholy remembrance; but Gentile converts were less interested in that event. The Evangelists were not writing the life of Herod, but of Jesus; it is no wonder then that they omitted, above half a century after the death of Herod, an instance of his cruelty, which was not essentially connected with their subject. The massacre, however, was probably known even at Rome; and it was certainly correspondent to the character of Herod. John, you say, at the time of the massacre, "was under two years of age, and yet he escaped; so that the story circumstantially belies itself." John was six months older than Jesus; and you cannot prove that he was not beyond the age to which the order of Herod extended; it probably reached no farther than to those who had completed their first year, without including those who had entered upon their second; but without insisting upon this, still, I contend that you cannot prove John to have been under two years of age at the time of the massacre; and I could give many probable reasons to the contrary. Nor is it certain that John was, at that time, in that part of the country to which the edict of Herod extended. But there would be no end of answering, at length, all your little objections.

No two of the evangelists, you observe, agree in reciting *exactly in the same words*, the written in-

scription which was put over Christ when he was crucified.—I admit that there is an unessential verbal difference; and are you certain that there was not a verbal difference in the inscriptions themselves?—One was written in Hebrew, another in Greek, another in Latin; and, though they had all the same meaning, yet it is probable, that if two men had translated the Hebrew and the Latin into Greek, there would have been a verbal difference between their translations. You have rendered yourself famous by writing a book called—*The Rights of Man*:—had you been guillotined by Robespierre, with this title, written in French, English, and German, and affixed to the guillotine—Thomas Paine, of America, author of the *Rights of Man*—and had four persons, some of whom had seen the execution, and the rest had heard of it from eye-witnesses, written short accounts of your life twenty years or more after your death, and one had said the inscription was—*This is Thomas Paine, the author of The Rights of Man*—another, *The author of The Rights of Man*—a third, *This is the author of The Rights of Man*—and a fourth, *Thomas Paine, of America, the author of The Rights of Man*—would any man of common sense have doubted, on account of this disagreement, the veracity of the authors in writing your life?—"The only one," you tell us, "of the men called apostles, who appear to have been near the spot where Jesus was crucified, was Peter."—This your assertion is not true—we do not know that Peter was present at the crucifixion; but we do know that John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was present; for Jesus spoke to him from the cross.—You go on, "But why should we believe Peter, convicted by their own account of perjury, in swearing that he knew not Jesus?" I will tell you why—because Peter sincerely repented of the wickedness into which he had been betrayed, through fear

for his life, and suffered martyrdom in attestation of the truth of the Christian religion.

But the Evangelists, disagree, you say, not only as to the superscription on the cross, but as to the time of the crucifixion, "Mark saying it was at the third hour (nine in the morning) and John at the sixth hour (twelve, as you suppose, at noon.*)" Various solutions have been given of this difficulty, none of which satisfied Doctor Middleton, much less can it be expected that any of them should satisfy you; but there is a solution not noticed by him, in which many judicious men have acquiesced; that John writing his gospel in Asia, used the Roman method of computing time, which was the same as our own; so that by the sixth hour, when Jesus was *condemned*, we are to understand six o'clock in the morning; the intermediate time from six to nine, when he was crucified, being employed in preparing for the crucifixion. But if this difficulty should be still esteemed insuperable, it does not follow that it will always remain so; and if it should, the main point, the crucifixion of Jesus, will not be affected thereby.

I cannot, in this place, omit remarking some circumstances attending the crucifixion, which are so natural that we might have wondered if they had not occurred. Of all the disciples of Jesus, John was beloved by him with a peculiar degree of affection; and, as kindness produces kindness, there can be little doubt that the regard was reciprocal. Now whom should we expect to be the attendants of Jesus in his last suffering? Whom but John, the friend of his heart! Whom but his mother, whose soul was now pierced through by the sword of sorrow, which Simeon had foretold? Whom but those who had been attached to him through life, who, having been healed by him of their infirmities, were impelled by gratitude to minister to him of their substance—to be attentive to all his wants? There were

the persons whom we should have expected to attend his execution; and these were there. To whom would an expiring son, of the best affections, recommend a poor, and probably a widowed mother, but to his warmest friend? And this did Jesus. Unmindful of the extremity of his own torture, and anxious to alleviate the burden of her sorrows, and to protect her old age from future want and misery, he said to his beloved disciple—"Behold thy mother! and from that hour that disciple took her to his own home." I own to you that such instances as these, of the conformity of events to our probable expectation, are to me genuine marks of the simplicity and truth of the gospels; and far outweigh a thousand little objections arising from our ignorance of manners, times, and circumstances, or from our incapacity to comprehend the means used by the Supreme Being in the moral government of his creatures.

St. Matthew mentions several miracles which attended our Saviour's crucifixion—the darkness which overspread the land—the rending of the veil of the temple—an earthquake which rent the rocks—and the resurrection of many saints, and their going into the holy city. "Such, you say, is the account which this dashing writer of the book of Matthew gives, but in which he is not supported by the writers of the other books." This is not accurately expressed; Matthew is supported by Mark and Luke, with respect to two of the miracles—the darkness—and the rending of the veil: And their omission of the others does not prove that they were either ignorant of them, or disbelieved them. I think it idle to pretend to say positively what influenced them to mention only two miracles; they probably thought them sufficient to convince any person, as they convinced the centurion, that Jesus was a righteous man—the Son of God." And these two miracles were better calculated to produce

general conviction, amongst the persons for whose benefit Mark and Luke wrote their gospels, than either the earthquake or the resurrection of the saints. The earthquake was, probably, confined to a particular spot, and might, by an objector, have been called a natural phenomenon; and those to whom the saints appeared might, at the time of writing the gospels of Mark and Luke, have been dead; but the darkness must have been generally known and remembered; and the veil of the temple might still be preserved at the time these authors wrote. As to John not mentioning any of these miracles, it is well known that his gospel was written as a supplement to the other gospels; he has therefore omitted many things which the other three Evangelists had related, and he has added several things which they had not mentioned; in particular, he has added a circumstance of great importance; he tells us that he saw one of the soldiers pierce the side of Jesus with a spear, and that blood and water flowed through the wound; and lest any one should doubt of the fact, from its not being mentioned by the other Evangelists, he asserts it with peculiar earnestness—"And he that saw it, bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." John saw blood and water flowing from the wound; the blood is easily accounted for; but whence came the water? The anatomists tell us that it came from the *pericardium*, so consistent is evangelical testimony with the most curious researches into natural science! You amuse yourself with the account of what the scripture calls *many* saints, and you call an *army* of saints, and are angry with Matthew for not having told you a great many things about them. It is very possible that Matthew might have known the fact of their resurrection, without knowing every thing about them; but if he had gratified your curiosity in every particular, I am of opinion that you would not have

believed a word of what he had told you. I have no curiosity on the subject; it is enough for me to know that "Christ was the first fruits of them that slept," and "that all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth," as those holy men did, who heard the voice of the Son of God at his resurrection, and passed from death to life. If I durst indulge myself in being wise above what is written, I must be able to answer many of your enquiries relative to these saints; but I dare not touch the ark of the Lord, I dare not support the authority of the scripture by the boldness of conjecture. Whatever difficulty there may be in accounting for the silence of the other evangelists, and of St. Paul also, on this subject, yet there is a greater difficulty in supposing that Matthew did not give a true narration of what had happened at the crucifixion. If there had been no supernatural darkness, no earthquake, no rending of the veil of the temple, no graves opened, no resurrection of holy men, no appearance of them unto many—if none of these things had been true, or rather if any of them had been false, what motive could Matthew, writing to the Jews, have had for trumping up such wonderful stories? He wrote, as every man does, with an intention to be believed; and yet every Jew he met would have stared him in the face, and told him that he was a liar and an impostor. What author, who twenty years hence should address to the French nation an history of Louis XVI. would venture to affirm, that when he was beheaded there was darkness for three hours over all France? that there was an earthquake? that rocks were split? graves opened? and dead men brought to life, who appeared to many persons in Paris? It is quite impossible to suppose, that any one would dare to publish such obvious lies; and I think it equally impossible to suppose that Matthew would have dared to publish his

account of what happened at the death of Jesus, had not the account been generally known to be true.

L E T T E R VIII.

THE "tale of the resurrection," you say, "follows that of the crucifixion." You have accustomed me so much to this kind of language, that when I find you speaking of a tale, I have no doubt of meeting with a truth. From the apparent disagreement in the accounts which the evangelists have given of some circumstances respecting the resurrection, you remark—"If the writers of these books had gone into any court of justice to prove an *alibi* (for it is the nature of an *alibi* that is here attempted to be proved, namely, the absence of a dead body by supernatural means) and have given their evidence in the same contradictory manner as it is here given; they would have been in danger of having their ears cropt for perjury, and would have justly deserved it,"—"hard words, or hanging," it seems, if you had been their judge.—Now I maintain, that it is the brevity with which the account of the resurrection is given by all the evangelists, which has occasioned the seeming confusion; and that this confusion would have been cleared up at once, if the witnesses of the resurrection had been examined before any judicature. As we cannot have this *viva voce* examination of all the witnesses, let us call up and question the evangelists as witnesses to a supernatural *alibi*. Did you find the sepulchre of Jesus empty? One of us actually saw it empty, and the rest heard, from eye-witnesses, that it was empty. Did you, or any of the followers of Jesus, take away the dead body from the sepulchre? All answer, No. Did the sol-

diers, or the Jews, take away the body? No. How are you certain of that? Because we saw the body when it was dead, and saw it afterwards when it was alive. How do you know that what you saw was the body of Jesus? We had been long and intimately acquainted with Jesus, and knew his person perfectly. Were you not affrighted, and mistook a spirit for a body? No; the body had flesh and bones; we are sure that it was the very body which hung upon the cross, for we saw the wound in his side, and the print of the nails in the hands and feet. And all this you are ready to swear? We are; and we are ready to die also, sooner than we will deny any part of it. This is the testimony which all the evangelists would give, in whatever court of justice they were examined; and this, I apprehend, would sufficiently establish the *alibi* of the dead body from the sepulchre, by supernatural means.

But as the resurrection of Jesus is a point which you attack with all your force, I will examine minutely the principal of your objections; I do not think them deserving of this notice, but they shall have it. The book of Matthew, you say, "states that when Christ was put in the sepulchre, the Jews applied to Pilate for a watch or a guard to be placed over the sepulchre, to prevent the body being stolen by the disciples." I admit this account, but it is not the whole of the account; you have omitted the reason for the request which the chief priests made to Pilate. "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, after three days I will rise again." It is material to remark this; for at the very time that Jesus predicted his resurrection, he predicted also his crucifixion, and all that he should suffer from the malice of those very men who now applied to Pilate for a guard. "He shewed to his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief

priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." (Matt. xvi. 21.) These men knew full well that the first part of this prediction had been accurately fulfilled through their malignity; and instead of repenting of what they had done, they were so infatuated as to suppose, that by a guard of soldiers they could prevent the completion of the second. The other books, you observe, say nothing about this application, nor about the sealing of the stone, nor the guard, nor the watch, and according to these accounts there were none. This, Sir, I deny. The other books do not say that there were none of these things; how often must I repeat, that omissions are not contradictions, nor silence concerning a fact, a denial of it?

You go on—"The book of Matthew continues its account that at the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn, towards the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, to see the sepulchre. Mark says it was sun-rising, and John says it was dark. Luke says it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women, that came to the sepulchre. And John says that Mary Magdalene came alone. So well do they all agree about their first evidence! They all appear, however, to have known most about Mary Magdalene; she was a woman of a large acquaintance, and it was not an ill conjecture that she might be upon the stroll." This is a long paragraph; I will answer it distinctly: First, there is no disagreement of evidence with respect to the time when the women went to the sepulchre; all the evangelists agree as to the day on which they went; and, as to the time of the day, it was early in the morning; what court of justice in the world would set aside this evidence, as insufficient to substantiate the fact of the women having gone to the sepulchre, because the witnesses differed as to the degree of twilight which lighted them on their

way? Secondly, there is no disagreement of evidence with respect to the persons who went to the sepulchre. John states that Mary Magdalene went to the sepulchre; but he does not state, as you make him state, that Mary Magdalene went alone; she might for any thing you have proved, or can prove to the contrary, have been accompanied by all the women mentioned by Luke—is it an unusual thing to distinguish by name a principal person going on a visit, or an embassy, without mentioning his subordinate attendants? Thirdly, in opposition to your insinuation, that Mary Magdalene was a common woman, I wish it to be considered, whether there is any scriptural authority for that imputation; and whether there be or not, I must contend, that a repentant and reformed woman, ought not to be esteemed an improper witness of a fact. The conjecture which you adopt concerning her, is nothing less than an illiberal indecent, unfounded calumny, not excusable in the mouth of a libertine, and intolerable in yours.

The book of Matthew you observe, goes on to say—"And, behold, there was an earthquake, for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it:—but the other books say nothing about an earthquake,"—What then? does their silence prove that there was none?—nor about the angel rolling back the stone and sitting upon it;—what then? does their silence prove that the stone was not rolled back by an angel, and that he did not sit upon it?—and according to their accounts there was no angel sitting there." This conclusion I must deny; their accounts do not say there was no angel sitting there, at the time that Matthew says he sat upon the stone. They do not deny the fact, they simply omit the mention of it; and they all take notice that the women, when they arrived at the sepulchre, found the stone rolled away: hence it is

evident that the stone was rolled away *before* the women arrived at the sepulchre; and the other evangelists, giving an account of what happened to the women *when* they reached the sepulchre, have merely omitted giving an account of a transaction previous to their arrival. Where is the contradiction? What space of time intervened between the rolling away the stone, and the arrival of the women at the sepulchre, is nowhere mentioned; but it certainly was long enough for the angel to have changed his position; from sitting on the outside he might have entered into the sepulchre; and another angel might have made his appearance, or, from the first, there might have been two, one on the outside rolling away the stone, and the other within. Luke, you tell us, "says there were two, and they were both standing; and John says there were two, and both sitting."—It is impossible, I grant, even for an angel to be sitting and standing at the same instant of time; but Luke and John do not speak of the same instant, nor to the same appearance—Luke speaks of the appearance to all the women; and John of the appearance to Mary Magdalene alone, who tarried weeping at the sepulchre after Peter and John had left it. But I forbear making any more minute remarks on still minuter objections, all of which are grounded on this mistake—that the angels were seen at one particular time, in one particular place, and by the same individuals.

As to your inference, from Matthew's using the expression *unto this day*, "that the book must have been manufactured after a lapse of some generations at least," it cannot be admitted against the positive testimony of all antiquity. That the story about stealing away the body was a bungling story, I readily admit; but the chief priests are answerable for it; it is not worthy either your notice, or mine, except as it is a strong instance to you, to me, and

to every body, how far prejudices may mislead the understanding.

You come to that part of the evidence in those books that respects, you say, "the pretended appearances of Christ after the pretended resurrection; the writer of the book of Matthew relates, that the angel that was sitting on the stone at the mouth of the sepulchre, said to the two Marys (chap. xxviii. 7.), "Behold, Christ is gone before you into Galilee, there shall you see him." The gospel Sir, was preached to poor and illiterate men; and it is the duty of priests to preach it to them in all its purity; to guard them against the error of mistaken, or the designs of wicked men. You, then, who can read your Bible, turn to this passage, and you will find, that the angel did not say, "Behold, Christ is gone before you into Gallilee;"—but, "Behold, *he goeth* before you into Gallilee." I know not what Bible you made use of in this quotation, none that I have seen render the original word by—he is gone:—it might be properly rendered, he will go; and it is literally rendered, he is going. This phrase does not imply an immediate setting out for Galilee: when a man has fixed upon a long journey to London or Bath, it is common enough to say, he is going to London or Bath, though the time of his going may be at some distance. Even your dashing Matthew could not be guilty of such a blunder as to make the angel say *he is gone*; for he tells us immediately afterwards, that, as the women were departing from the sepulchre to tell his disciples what the angels had said to them, Jesus himself met them. Now how Jesus could be *gone* into Galilee, and yet meet the women at Jerusalem, I leave you to explain, for the blunder is not chargeable upon Matthew. I excuse your introducing the expression—"then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee," for the quotation is rightly made; but had you turned to the Greek Testament, you would not

have found in this place any word answering to *them*: the passage is better translated—and the eleven. Christ had said to his disciples (Matthew xxvi. 32.), “After I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee:”—and the angel put the women in mind of the very expression and prediction—*he is risen, as he said; and behold, he goeth before you into Galilee.* Matthew, intent upon the appearance in Galilee, of which there were, probably, at the time he wrote, many living witnesses in Judea, omits the mention of many appearances taken notice of by John, and by this omission, seems to connect the day of the resurrection of Jesus, with that of the departure of the disciples for Galilee. You seem to think this a great difficulty, and incapable of solution;—for you say—“It is not possible, unless we admit these disciples the right of wilful lying, that the writers of these books could be any of the eleven persons called disciples; for if, according to Matthew, the eleven went into Galilee to meet Jesus in a mountain, by his own appointment, on the same day that he is said to have risen, Luke and John must have been two of that eleven; yet the writer of Luke says expressly; and John implies as much, that the meeting was that same day in a house at Jerusalem; and on the other hand, if, according to Luke and John, the *eleven* were assembled in a house at Jerusalem, Matthew must have been one of that eleven; yet Matthew says, the meeting was in a mountain in Galilee, and consequently the evidence given in those books destroy each other.” When I was a young man in the university, I was pretty much accustomed to drawing of consequences; but my *Alma Mater* did not suffer me to draw consequences after your manner; she taught me—that a false position must end in an absurd conclusion. I have shewn your position—that the eleven went into Galilee on the day of the resurrection—to be false, and hence your conse-

quence—that the evidence given in these two books destroys each other—is not to be admitted. You ought, moreover, to have considered, that the feast of unleavened bread, which immediately followed the day on which the passover was eaten, lasted seven days; and that strict observers of the law did not think themselves at liberty to leave Jerusalem, till that feast was ended; and this is a collateral proof that the disciples did not go to Galilee on the day of the resurrection.

You certainly have read the New Testament; but not, I think, with great attention; or you would have known who the apostles were. In this place you reckon *Luke* as one of the eleven, and in other places you speak of him as an eye-witness of the things he relates; you ought to have known that *Luke* was no apostle; and he tells you himself, in the preface to his gospel, that he wrote from the testimony of others. If this mistake proceeds from your ignorance, you are not a fit person to write comments on the Bible; if from design (which I am unwilling to suspect), you are still less fit; in either case it may suggest to your readers the propriety of suspecting the truth and accuracy of your assertions, however daring and intemperate. “Of the numerous priests or parsons of the present day, bishops and all, the sum total of whose learning,” according to you, “is a bab, and hic, hæc, hoc, there is not one amongst them,” you say, “who can write poetry like Homer, or science like Euclid.” If I should admit this (though there are many of them, I doubt not; who understand these authors better than you do), yet I cannot admit that there is one amongst them, Bishops and all, so ignorant as to rank *Luke* the evangelist among the apostles of Christ. I will not press this point; any man may fall into a mistake, and the consciousness of this fallibility should create in all men a little modesty, a

little diffidence, a little caution, before they presume to call the most illustrious characters of antiquity liars, fools and knaves.

You want to know why Jesus did not shew himself to all the people after his resurrection. This is one of Spinoza's objections; and it may sound well enough in the mouth of a Jew, wishing to excuse the infidelity of his countrymen: but it is not judiciously adopted by deists of other nations. God gives us the means of health, but he does not force us to the use of them; he gives us the powers of the mind, but he does not compel us to the cultivation of them: he gave the Jews opportunities of seeing the miracles of Jesus, but he did not oblige them to believe them. They who persevered in their incredulity after the resurrection of Lazarus, would have persevered also after the resurrection of Jesus. Lazarus had been buried four days, Jesus but three; the body of Lazarus had begun to undergo corruption, the body of Jesus saw no corruption; why should you expect, that they would have believed in Jesus on his own resurrection, when they had not believed in him on the resurrection of Lazarus? When the pharisees were told of the resurrection of Lazarus, they, together with the chief priests, gathered a council, and said—"What do we; for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him:—then from that day forth they took council together to put him to death." The great men at Jerusalem, you see, admitted that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead; yet the belief of that miracle did not generate conviction that Jesus was the Christ; it only exasperated their malice, and accelerated their purpose of destroying him. Had Jesus shewn himself after his resurrection, the chief priests would probably have gathered another council, have opened it with, "What do we?" and ended it with a determination to put him to death. As to us, the evidence of the

resurrection of Jesus, which we have in the New Testament, is far more convincing, than if it had been related that he shewed himself to every man in Jerusalem; for then we should have had a suspicion, that the whole story had been fabricated by the Jews.

You think Paul an improper witness of the resurrection; I think him one of the fittest that could have been chosen; and for this reason—his testimony is the testimony of a former enemy. He had, in his own miraculous conversion, sufficient ground for changing his opinion as to a matter of fact; for believing that to have been a fact, which he had formerly, through extreme prejudice, considered as a fable. For the truth of the resurrection of Jesus he appeals to above two hundred and fifty living witnesses; and before whom does he make this appeal?—Before his enemies, who were able and willing to blast his character, if he had advanced an untruth.—You know, undoubtedly, that Paul had resided at Corinth near two years; that, during a part of that time, he had testified to the Jews, that Jesus was the Christ; that, finding the bulk of that nation obstinate in their unbelief, he had turned to the gentiles, and had converted many to the faith in Christ; that he left Corinth, and went to preach the gospel in other parts; that, about three years after he had quitted Corinth, he wrote a letter to the converts which he had made in that place, and who after his departure had been split into different factions, and had adopted different teachers in opposition to Paul. From this account we may be certain, that Paul's letter, and every circumstance in it, would be minutely examined. The city of Corinth was full of Jews; these men were, in general, Paul's bitter enemies; yet, in the face of them all, he asserts, "that Jesus Christ was buried; that he rose again the third day; that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve; that he was after,

wards seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part were then alive." An appeal to above two hundred and fifty living witnesses, is a pretty strong proof of a fact; but it becomes irresistible, when that appeal is submitted to the judgment of enemies. St. Paul, you must allow, was a man of ability; but he would have been an idiot, had he put it in the power of his enemies, to prove, from his own letter, that he was a lying rascal. They neither proved, nor attempted to prove, any such thing; and, therefore, we may safely conclude, that this testimony of Paul to the resurrection of Jesus was true: and it is a testimony, in my opinion, of the greatest weight.

You come, you say, to the last scene, the ascension; upon which, in your opinion, "the reality of the future mission of the disciples was to rest for proof." I do not agree with you in this. The reality of the future mission of the apostles might have been proved, though Jesus Christ had not visibly ascended into heaven. Miracles are the proper proofs of a divine mission; and when Jesus gave the apostles a commission to preach the gospel, he commanded them to stay at Jerusalem till they "were endued with power from on high." Matthew has omitted the mention of the ascension; and John, you say, has not said a syllable about it. I think otherwise. John has not given an express account of the ascension, but has certainly said something about it; for he informs us, that Jesus said to Mary—"Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my father; but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my father and your father, and to my God and your God." This is surely saying something about the ascension; and if the fact of the ascension be not related by John, or Matthew, it may reasonably be supposed that the omission was made on account of the notoriety of the fact. That the fact was generally known, may

be justly collected from the reference which Peter makes to it in the hearing of all the Jews, a very few days after it had happened—"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses."—Therefore being *by the right hand of God* exalted. Paul bears testimony also to the ascension, when he says, that Jesus was *received up into glory*. As to the difference you contend for, between the account of the ascension, as given by Mark and Luke, it does not exist; except in this, that Mark omits the particulars of Jesus going with his apostles to Bethany, and blessing them there, which are mentioned by Luke. But, omissions, I must often put you in mind, are not contradictions.

You have now, you say, "gone through the examination of the four books ascribed to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; and when it is considered that the whole space of time, from the crucifixion to what is called the ascension, is but a few days, apparently not more than three or four, and that all the circumstances are reported to have happened near the same spot, Jerusalem, it is, I believe, impossible to find, in any story upon record, so many and such glaring absurdities, contradictions, and falsehoods, as are in those books." What am I to say to this? Am I to say that, in writing this paragraph, you have forfeited your character as an honest man? Or, admitting your honesty, am I so far that you are grossly ignorant of the subject? Let the reader judge. John says, that Jesus appeared to his disciples at Jerusalem, on the day of his resurrection, and that Thomas was not then with them. The same John says, that after *eight days* he appeared to them again, when Thomas was with them. Now, Sir, how *apparently three or four days* can be consistent with *really eight days*, I leave you to make out. But this is not the whole of John's testimony, either with respect to *place* or *time*—for he says, After these things (after the two appear-

ances to the disciples at Jerusalem, on the first (and on the eighth day after the resurrection) Jesus shewed himself again to his disciples at the sea of Tiberius. The sea of Tiberius, I presume you know, was in Galilee; and Galilee, you may know, was sixty or seventy miles from Jerusalem; it must have taken the disciples some time, after the eighth day, to travel from Jerusalem into Galilee. What, in your own insulting language to the priests, will you have you to answer, as to the *same spot, Jerusalem*, as to your *apparently three or four days*? But this is not all. Luke, in the beginning of the Acts, refers to his gospel, and says—"Christ shewed himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs, being seen of the apostles forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God; Instead of *four*, you perceive there were *forty* days between the crucifixion and the ascension. I need not, I trust, after this, trouble myself about the falsehoods and contradictions which you impute to the evangelists; your readers cannot but be upon their guard, as to the credit due to your assertions, however bold and improper. You will suffer me to remark, that the evangelists were plain men, who, convinced of the truth of their narration, and conscious of their own integrity, have related what they knew, with admirable simplicity. They seem to have said to the Jews of their time, and to say to the Jews and unbelievers of all times—We have told you the truth; and if you will not believe us, we have nothing more to say. Had they been impostors, they would have written with more caution and art, have obviated every cavil, and avoided every appearance of contradiction. This they have not done; and this I consider as a proof of their honesty and veracity.

John the Baptist had given his testimony to the truth of our Saviour's mission, in the most unequivocal terms; he afterwards sent two of his disciples

to Jesus, to ask him whether he was really the expected Messiah or not. Matthew relates *both* these circumstances; had the writer of the book of Matthew been an impostor, would he have invalidated John's testimony, by bringing forward his real or pretended doubt? Impossible! Matthew, having proved the resurrection of Jesus, tells us, that the eleven disciples went into Galilee into a mountain, where Jesus had appointed them, and "when they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted." Would an impostor, in the very last place where he mentions the resurrection, and in the conclusion of his book, have suggested such a cavil to unbelievers, as to say—some doubted? Impossible! The evangelist has left us to collect the reason why some doubted. The disciples saw Jesus at a distance, on the mountain; and some of them fell down and worshipped him; whilst others doubted whether the person they saw was really Jesus; their doubt, however, could not have lasted long, for in the very next verse we are told, that Jesus came and took unto them.

Great and laudable pains have been taken by many learned men, to harmonize the several accounts given us by the evangelists of the resurrection. It does not seem to me to be a matter of any great consequence to Christianity, whether the accounts can, in every minute particular, be harmonized or not; since there is no such discordance in them, as to render the fact of the resurrection doubtful to any impartial mind. If any man, in a court of justice, should give positive evidence of a fact, and three others should afterwards be examined, and all of them should confirm the evidence of the first as to the fact, but should apparently differ from him, and from each other, by being more or less particular in their accounts, of the circumstances attending the fact; ought we to doubt of the fact, because we could not harmonize the evidence respecting the cir-

circumstances relating to it? The omission of any one circumstance (such as that of Mary Magdalene having gone twice to the sepulchre; or that of the angel having, after he had rolled away the stone from the sepulchre, entered into the sepulchre) may render an harmony impossible, without having recourse to supposition to supply the defect. You deists laugh at all such attempts, and call them priestcraft. I think it better then, in arguing with you, to admit that there may be (not granting, however, that there is) an irreconcilable difference between the evangelists in some of their accounts respecting the life of Jesus, or his resurrection. Be it so, what then? Does this difference, admitting it to be real, destroy the credibility of the gospel history in any of its essential points? Certainly, in my opinion, not. As I look upon this to be a general answer to most of your deistical objections, I profess my sincerity, in saying, that I consider it as a true and sufficient answer; and I leave it to your consideration.

I have, purposely, in the whole of this discussion, been silent as to the inspiration of the evangelists; well knowing that you would have rejected, with scorn, any thing I could have said on that point; but, in disputing with a deist, I do most solemnly contend, that the Christian religion is true, and worthy of all acceptance, whether the evangelists were inspired or not.

Unbelievers, in general, wish to conceal their sentiments; they have a decent respect for public opinion; are cautious of affronting the religion of their country; fearful of undermining the foundations of civil society.—Some few have been more daring, but less judicious; and have, without disguise, professed their unbelief. But you are the first who ever swore that he was an infidel, concluding your deistical creed with—So help me God! I pray that God may help you; that he may, through the influ-

ence of his holy spirit, bring you to a right mind, convert you to the religion of his son, whom, out of his abundant love to mankind, he sent into the world, that all who believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

You swear that you think the Christian religion is not true. I give full credit to your oath; it is an oath in confirmation—of what?—of an opinion. It proves the sincerity of your declaration of your opinion; but the opinion, notwithstanding the oath, may be either true or false. Permit me to produce to you an oath, not confirming an opinion, but a fact; it is the oath of St. Paul, when he swears to the Galatians, that in what he told them of his miraculous conversion, he did not tell a lie: “Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not.” Do but give that credit to Paul which I give to you; do but consider the difference between an opinion and a fact, and I shall not despair of your becoming a Christian.

Deism, you say, consists in a belief of one God, and an imitation of his moral character, or the practice of what is called virtue; and in this (as far as religion is concerned) you rest all your hopes.—There is nothing in Deism but what is in Christianity, but there is much in Christianity which is not in Deism. The Christian has no doubt concerning a future state; every Deist, from Plato to Thomas Paine, is on this subject, overwhelmed with doubts insuperable by human reason. The Christian has no misgivings as to the pardon of penitent sinners, through the intercession of a mediator; the Deist is harrassed with apprehension, lest the moral justice of God should demand, with inexorable rigour, punishment for transgression. The Christian has no doubt concerning the lawfulness and the efficacy of prayer; the Deist is disturbed on this point by abstract considerations concerning the

goodness of God, which wants not to be intreated; concerning his foresight, which has no need of our information; concerning his immutability, which cannot be changed through our supplication. The Christian admits the providence of God and the liberty of human actions; the Deist is involved in great difficulties, when he undertakes the proof of either. The Christian has assurance that the spirit of God will help his infirmities; the Deist does not deny the possibility that God may have access to the human mind, but he has no ground to believe the fact of his either enlightening the understanding, influencing the will, or purifying the heart.

L E T T E R IX.

“**T**HOSE,” you say, “who are not much acquainted with ecclesiastical history, may suppose that the book called the New Testament, has existed ever since the time of Jesus Christ, but the fact is historically otherwise; there was no such book as the New Testament till more than three hundred years after the time that Christ is said to have lived.” This paragraph is calculated to mislead common readers; it is necessary to unfold its meaning. The book called the New Testament, consists of twenty-seven different parts; concerning seven of these, viz. the Epistle to the Hebrews, that of James, the second of Peter, the second of John, the third of John, that of Jude, and the Revelation, there were at first some doubts; and the question, whether they should be received into the canon, might be decided, as all questions concerning opinions must be, by vote. with respect to the other twenty parts, those who are most acquainted with ecclesiastical history will tell you, as

Da Pin does after Eusebius, that they were owned as canonical, at all times, and by all Christians. Whether the council of Laodicea was held before or after that of Nice, is not a settled point; all the books of the New Testament, except the Revelation, are enumerated as canonical in the constitutions of that council; but it is a great mistake to suppose, that the greatest part of the books of the New Testament were not in *general use* amongst Christians long before the council of Laodicea was held. This is not merely my opinion on the subject; it is the opinion of one much better acquainted with ecclesiastical history than I am, and probably than you are—*Mosheim*. “The opinions,” says this author, “or rather the conjectures of the learned, concerning the time when the books of the New Testament were collected into one volume, as also about the authors of that collection, are extremely different. This important question is attended with great and almost insuperable difficulties to us in these latter times. It is however sufficient for us to know that, before the middle of the second century, the greatest part of the books of the New Testament, were read in every Christian society throughout the world, and received as a divine rule of faith and manners. Hence it appears, that these sacred writings were carefully separated from several human compositions upon the same subject, either by some of the apostles themselves, who lived so long, or by their disciples and successors, who were spread abroad through all nations. We are well assured that the *four gospels* were collected during the life of St. John, and that the three first received the approbation of this divine apostle. And why may we not suppose, that the other books of the New Testament were gathered together at the same time? What renders this highly probable is, that the most urgent necessity required its being done. For, not long after Christ’s ascension into heaven, several histo-

ries of his life and doctrines, full of pious frauds, and fabulous wonders, were composed by persons, whose intentions, perhaps, were not bad, but whose writings discovered the greatest superstition and ignorance. Nor was this all; productions appeared, which were imposed on the world by fraudulent men, as the writings of the holy apostles. These apocryphal and spurious writings must have produced a sad confusion, and rendered both the history and the doctrine of Christ uncertain, had not the rulers of the church used all possible care and diligence in separating the books that were truly apostolical and divine, from all that spurious trash, and conveying them down to posterity in one volume."

Did you ever read the apology for the Christians, which Justin Martyr presented to the emperor Antoninus Pius, to the senate and people of Rome? I should sooner expect a falsity in a petition, which any body of persecuted men, imploring justice, should present to the king and parliament of Great-Britain, than this apology. Yet in this apology, which was presented not fifty years after the death of St. John, not only parts of *all the four gospels are quoted*, but it is expressly said, that on the day called Sunday, a portion of them was read in the public assemblies of the Christians. I forbear pursuing this matter farther; else it might easily be shewn, that probably the gospels, and certainly some of St. Paul's epistles, were known to *Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp*, contemporaries with the apostles. These men could not quote or refer to books which did not exist; and therefore though you could make it out that the book called the New Testament did not formerly exist under that title, till 350 years after Christ; yet I hold it to be a certain fact, that all the books of which it is composed, were written, and most of them received by all Christians, within a few years after his death,

You raise a difficulty relative to the time which intervened between the death and resurrection of Jesus, who had said, that the son of man shall be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Are you ignorant then that the Jews used the phrase three days and three nights, to denote what we understand by three days? It is said in Genesis, chap. vii. 12. "The rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights;" and this is equivalent to the expression (ver. 17.) "And the flood was forty days upon the earth." Instead then of saying three days and three nights, let us simply say, three days—and you will not object to Christ's being three days—Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, in the heart of the earth. I do not say that he was in the grave the whole of either Friday or Sunday; but an hundred instances might be produced, from writers of all nations, in which a part of a day is spoken of as the whole. Thus much for the defence of the historical part of the New Testament.

You have introduced an account of *Faustus*, as denying the genuineness of the books of the New Testament. Will you permit that great scholar in sacred literature, *Michaelis*, to tell you something about this *Faustus*? "He was ignorant, as were most of the African writers, of the Greek language, and acquainted with the New Testament merely through the channel of the Latin translation; he was not only devoid of a sufficient fund of learning, but illiterate in the highest degree. An argument which he brings against the genuineness of the gospel, affords sufficient ground for this assertion; for he contends, that the gospel of St. Matthew could not have been written by St. Matthew himself, because he is always mentioned in the third person." You know who has argued like *Faustus*, but I did not think myself authorised, on that account, to call you illiterate in the highest degree; but *Michaelis* makes a still more severe conclusion

concerning Faustus; and he extends his observation to every man who argued like him—"A man capable of such an argument, must have been ignorant, not only of the Greek writers, the knowledge of which could not have been expected from Faustus, but even of the commentaries of Cæsar. And were it thought improbable that so heavy a charge could be laid with justice on the side of his knowledge, it would fall with double weight on the side of his honesty, and induce us to suppose that, preferring the art of sophistry to the plainness of truth, he maintained opinions which he believed to be false." (Marsh's Transl.) Never more, I think, shall we hear of Moses not being the author of the Pentateuch, on account of its being written in the third person.

Not being able to produce any argument to render questionable either the genuineness or the authenticity of St. Paul's Epistles, you tell us, that "it is a matter of no great importance by whom they were written, since the writer, whoever he was, attempts to prove his doctrine by argument: he does not pretend to have been witness to any of the scenes told of the resurrection and ascension, and he declares that he had not believed them." That Paul had so far resisted the evidence which the apostles had given of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, as to be a persecutor of the disciples of Christ, is certain; but I do not remember the place where he declares that he had not believed them. The high priest and the senate of the children of Israel did not deny the reality of the miracles, which had been wrought by Peter and the apostles; they did not contradict their testimony concerning the resurrection and ascension; but whether they believed it or not, they were fired with indignation, and took counsel to put the apostles to death: and this was also the temper of Paul: whether he believed or did not believe the story of the resurrecti-

on, he was exceedingly mad against the saints. The writer of Paul's Epistles does not attempt to prove his doctrine by argument; he in many places tells us, that his doctrine was not taught him by man, or any invention of his own, which required the ingenuity of argument to prove it:—"I certify you, brethren, that the gospel, which was preached of me, is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Paul does not pretend to have been a witness of the *story* of the resurrection, but he does much more; he asserts, that he was himself a witness of the resurrection. After enumerating many appearances of Jesus to his disciples, Paul says of himself, "Last of all, he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." Whether you will admit Paul to have been a *true* witness or not, you cannot deny that he pretends to have been a witness of the resurrection.

The story of his being struck to the ground, as he was journeying to Damascus, has nothing in it, you say, miraculous or extraordinary: you represent him as struck by lightning. It is somewhat extraordinary for a man who is struck by lightning to have, at the very time, full possession of his understanding; to hear a voice issuing from the lightning, speaking to him in the Hebrew tongue, calling him by his name, and entering into conversation with him. His companions, you say, appear not to have suffered in the same manner: the greater the wonder. If it was a common storm of thunder and lightning which struck Paul and all his companions to the ground, it is somewhat extraordinary that he alone should be hurt; and that notwithstanding his being struck blind by lightning, he should in other respects be so little hurt, as to be immediately able to walk into the city of Damascus. So difficult is it to oppose truth by an hypothesis!—In the character of Paul you discover a great deal of violence and fan-

tacism; and such men, you observe, are never good moral evidences of any doctrine they preach. Read, Sir, Lord *Lyttleton's* observations on the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul; and I think you will be convinced of the contrary. That elegant writer thus expresses his opinion on this subject—" Besides all all the proofs of the Christian religion, which may be drawn from the prophecies of the Old Testament, from the necessary connection it has with the whole system of the Jewish religion, from the miracles of Christ, and from the evidence given of his resurrection by all the other apostles, I think the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul alone, duly considered, is, of itself, a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation." I hope this opinion will have some weight with you; it is not the opinion of a lying Bible-prophet, of a stupid evangelist, or of an a b ab priest,—but of a learned layman, whose illustrious rank received splendour from his talents.

You are displeas'd with St. Paul "for setting out to prove the resurrection of the *same* body." You know, I presume, that the resurrection of the same body is not, by all, admitted to be a scriptural doctrine. "In the New Testament (wherein, I think, are contained all the articles of the Christian faith) I find our Saviour and the apostles to preach *the resurrection of the dead*, and the *resurrection from the dead*, in many places; but I do not remember any place where the resurrection of the same body is so much as mentioned." This observation of Mr. Locke I so far adopt, as to deny that you can produce any place in the writings of St. Paul, wherein he sets out to prove the resurrection of the same body. I do not question the possibility of the resurrection of the same body, and I am not ignorant of the manner in which some learned men have explained it (somewhat after the way of your vegetative speck in the kernel of a peach) but as you

are discrediting St. Paul's doctrine, you ought to shew that what you attempt to discredit, *is* the doctrine of the apostle. As a matter of choice, you had rather have a better body—you will have a better body—"your natural body will be raised a spiritual body," your corruptible will put on incorruption. You are so much out of humour with your present body, that you inform us, every animal in the creation excels us in something. Now I had always thought, that the single circumstance of our having hands, and their having none, gave us an infinite superiority, not only over insects, flies, snails, and spiders (which you represent as excelling us in loco-motive powers) but over all the animals of the creation; and enabled us, in the language of Cicero, describing the manifold utility of our hands, to make, as it were a new nature of things. As to what you say about the consciousness of existence being the only conceivable idea of a future life—it proves nothing, either for or against the resurrection of a body, or of the same body; it does not inform us whether to any, or to what substance, material or immaterial, this consciousness is annexed. I leave it, however, to others, who do not admit personal identity to consist in consciousness, to dispute with you on this point, and willingly subscribe to the opinion of Mr. Locke, "that nothing but consciousness can unite remote existences into the same person."

From a caterpillar's passing into a torpid state, resembling death, and afterwards appearing a splendid butterfly, and from the (supposed) consciousness of existence which the animal had in these different states, you ask, Why must I believe that the resurrection of the same body is necessary to continue in me the consciousness of existence hereafter? I do not dislike analogical reasoning, when applied to proper objects, and kept within due

bounds: But where is it said in scripture, that the resurrection of the same body is necessary to continue in you the consciousness of existence?—Those who admit a conscious state of the soul between death and the resurrection, will contend, that the soul is the substance in which consciousness is continued without interruption; those who deny the intermediate state of the soul as a state of consciousness, will contend, that consciousness is not destroyed by death, but suspended by it, as it is suspended during a sound sleep, and that it may as easily be restored after death, as after sleep, during which the faculties of the soul are not extinct but dormant. Those who think that the soul is nothing distinct from the compages of the body, not a substance, but a mere quality, will maintain that the consciousness appertaining to every individual person is not lost when the body is destroyed; that it is known to God; and may, at the general resurrection, be annexed to any system of matter he may think fit, or to that particular compages to which it belonged in this life.

In reading your book I have been frequently shocked at the virulence of your zeal—at the indecorum of your abuse, in applying vulgar and offensive epithets to men who have been held, and who will long, I trust, continue to be holden in high estimation. I know that the scar of calumny is seldom wholly effaced, it remains long after the wound is healed; and your abuse of holy men and holy things, will be remembered when your arguments against them are refuted and forgotten.—Moses you term an arrogant coxcomb, a chief assassin; Aaron, Joshua, Samuel, David, monsters, and impostors; the Jewish kings a parcel of rascals; Jeremiah and the rest of the prophets, liars; and Paul a fool, for having written one of the sublimest compositions, and on the most important subject that ever occupied the mind of man—the les-

son in our burial service:—this lesson you call a doubtful jargon, as destitute of meaning as the tolling of the bell at the funeral. Men of low condition! pressed down, as you often are, by calamities generally incident to human nature, and groaning under the burdens of misery peculiar to your condition, what thought you when you heard this lesson read at the funeral of your child, your parent, or your friend? Was it a mere jargon to you, as destitute of meaning as the tolling of a bell?—No.—You understood from it, that you would not all sleep, but that you would all be changed in a moment at the last trump; you understood from it, that this corruptible must put on incorruption; that this mortal must put on immortality, and that death would be swallowed up in victory; you understood from it, that if (notwithstanding profane attempts to subvert your faith) ye continue stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, your labour will not be in vain.

You seem fond of displaying your skill in science and philosophy; you speak more than once of Euclid; and, in censuring St. Paul, you intimate to us, that when the apostle says—one star differeth from another star in glory, he ought to have said in distance. All men *see* that one star differeth from another star in glory or brightness; but few men *know* that their difference in brightness arises from their difference in distance; and I beg leave to say, that even you, philosopher as you are, do not *know* it. You make an assumption which you cannot prove—that the stars are *equal* in magnitude, and placed at *different* distances from the earth—but you cannot prove that they are not *different* in magnitude, and placed at *equal* distances, though none of them may be so near to the earth, as to have any sensible annual *parallax*. I beg pardon of my readers for touching upon this subject; but it really moves one's indignation, to see a smattering

In philosophy urged as an argument against the veracity of an apostle. "Little learning is a dangerous thing."

Paul, you say, affects to be a naturalist; and to prove (you might more properly have said illustrate) his system of resurrection from the principles of vegetation—"Thou fool," says he, "that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die:"—to which one might reply, in his own language, and say—"Thou fool, Paul, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die *not*." It may be seen, I think, from this passage, who affects to be a naturalist, to be acquainted with the microscopical discoveries of modern times; which were probably neither known to Paul, nor to the Corinthians; and which, had they been known to them both, would have been of little use in the illustration of the subject of the resurrection. Paul said—that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die:—every husbandman in Corinth, though unable perhaps to define the term death, would understand the apostle's phrase in a popular sense, and agree with him that a grain of wheat must become *rotten* in the ground before it could sprout; and that, as God raised from a rotten grain of wheat, the roots, the stem, the leaves, the ear of a new plant, he might also cause a new body to spring up from the rotten carcase in the grave. Doctor Clarke observes, "In like manner as in every grain of corn there is contained a minute, insensible, seminal principle, which is itself the entire future blade and ear; and in due season, when all the rest of the grain is corrupted, evolves and unfolds itself visibly to the eye; so our present mortal and corruptible body may be but the *exuvia*, as it were, of some hidden, and at present insensible principle (possibly the present seat of the soul) which at the resurrection shall discover itself in its proper form." I do not agree with this *great man* (for such I esteem him) in this philosophical

conjecture; but the quotation may serve to shew you, that the germ does not evolve and unfold itself visibly to the eye till all the rest of the grain is *corrupted*; that is, in the language and meaning of St. Paul, till it *dies*. Though the authority of Jesus may have as little weight with you as that of Paul, yet it may not be improper to quote to you our Saviour's expression, when he foretold the numerous disciples which his death would produce—"Except a corn of wheat fall unto the ground and die, it abideth alone: But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." You perceive from this, that the Jews thought the death of the grain was necessary to its re-production: Hence every one may see what little reason you had to object to the apostle's popular illustration of the possibility of a resurrection. Had he known as much as any naturalist in Europe does, of the progress of an animal from one state to another, as from a worm to a butterfly (which you think applies to the case) I am of opinion he would not have used that illustration in preference to what he has used, which is obvious and satisfactory.

Whether the fourteen epistles ascribed to Paul were written by him or not, is, in your judgment, a matter of indifference.—So far from being a matter of indifference, I consider the genuineness of St. Paul's epistles to be a matter of the greatest importance; for if the epistles, ascribed to Paul, were written by him (and there is unquestionable proof that they were), it will be difficult for you, or for any man, upon fair principles of sound reasoning, to deny that the Christian religion is true. The argument is a short one, and obvious to every capacity. It stands thus:—St. Paul wrote several letters to those whom, in different countries, he had converted to the Christian faith; in these letters he affirms two things;—first, that he had wrought miracles in their presence;—secondly, that many of themselves had received the gift of tongues, and

other miraculous gifts of the holy ghost.—The persons to whom these letters were addressed must, on reading them, have certainly known, whether Paul affirmed what was true, or told a plain lie; they must have known, whether they had seen him work miracles; they must have been conscious, whether they themselves did or did not possess any miraculous gifts. Now can you, or can any man, believe, for a moment, that Paul (a man certainly of great abilities) would have written public letters, full of lies, and which could not fail to be discovered to be lies, as soon as his letters were read?—Paul could not be guilty of falsehood in these two points, or in either of them; and if either of them be true, the Christian religion is true. Reference to these two points are frequent in St. Paul's epistles: I will mention only a few. In his Epistle to the Galatians, he says (chap. iii. 2, 5), "This only would I learn of you, received ye the spirit (gifts of the spirit) by the works of the law?—He ministrereth to you the spirit, and worketh miracles among you.—To the Thessalonians he says (1 Thess. ch. i. 5), "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost."—To the Corinthians he thus expresses himself (1 Cor. ii. 4): "My preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in the demonstration of the spirit and of power;" and he adds the reason for his working miracles—"That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." With what alacrity would the faction at Corinth, which opposed the apostle, have laid hold of this and many similar declarations in the letter, had they been able to have detected any falsehood in them? There is no need to multiply words on so clear a point—the genuineness of Paul's epistles, proves their authenticity, independently of every other proof; for it is absurd in the extreme to suppose him, under circumstances of obvious detection, capable of advancing what was

not true; and if Paul's epistles be both genuine and authentic, the Christian religion is true.—Think of this argument.

You close your observations in the following manner:—"Should the Bible (meaning, as I have before remarked, the Old Testament) and Testament hereafter fall, it is not I that have been the occasion." You look, I think, upon your production with a parent's partial eye, when you speak of it in such a style of self-complacency. The Bible, Sir, has withstood the learning of *Perphyry*, and the power of *Julian*, to say nothing of the Manichean *Fauftus*—it has resisted the genius of *Bollingbroke*, and the wit of *Voltaire*, to say nothing of a numerous herd of inferior assailants; and it will not fall by your force. You have barbed anew the blunted arrows of former adversaries; you have feathered them with blasphemy and ridicule; dipped them into your deadliest poison; aimed them with your utmost skill; shot them against the shield of faith with your utmost vigour; but, like the feeble javelin of aged *Priam*, they will scarcely reach the mark, will fall to the ground without a stroke.

LETTER X.

THE remaining part of your work can hardly be made the subject of animadversion. It principally consists of unsupported assertions, abusive appellations, illiberal sarcasms, *strifes of words*, *profane babblings*, and *oppositions of science falsley so called*. I am hurt at being, in mere justice to the subject, under the necessity of using such harsh language; and am sincerely sorry that, from what cause I know not, your mind has received a wrong bias in every point respecting revealed religion.

You are capable of better things; for there is a philosophical sublimity in some of your ideas, when you speak of the Supreme Being, as the Creator of the universe. That you may not accuse me of disrespect, in passing over any part of your work without bestowing proper attention upon it, I will wait upon you through what you call your—conclusion.

You refer your reader to the former part of the Age of Reason in which you have spoken of what you esteem three frauds—mystery, miracle, and prophecy. I have not at hand the book to which you refer, and know not what you have said on these subjects; they are subjects of great importance, and we, probably, should differ essentially in our opinions concerning them; but I confess I am not sorry to be excused from examining what you have said on these points. The specimen of your reasoning, which is now before me, has taken from me every inclination to trouble either my reader or myself, with any observations on your former book.

You admit the possibility of God's revealing his "will to man; yet the thing so revealed," "is revelation to the person only to whom it is made; his account of it to another is not revelation."—This is true; his account is simple testimony. You add, there is no "possible criterion to judge of the truth of what he says."—This I positively deny: and contend, that a real miracle, performed in attestation of a revealed truth, is a certain criterion by which we may judge of the truth of that attestation. I am perfectly aware of the objections which may be made to this position; I have examined them with care; I acknowledge them to be of weight; but I do not speak unadvisedly, or as wishing to dictate to other men, when I say, that I am persuaded the position is true. So thought Moses, when, in the matter of Korah, he said to the Israelites—"If these men die the common death of all men, then the

Lord hath not sent me." So thought Elijah, when he said—"Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day, that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant;" and the people before whom he spake, were of the same opinion; for when the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt-sacrifice, they said—"The Lord he is the God." So thought our Saviour, when he said—"The works that I do in my father's name, they bear witness of me;"—and, "if I do not the works of my father, believe me not."

What reason have we to believe Jesus speaking in the gospel, and to disbelieve Mahomet speaking in the Koran? Both of them lay claim to a divine commission; and yet we receive the words of the one as a revelation from God, and we reject the words of the other as an imposture of man. The reason is evident; Jesus established his pretensions, not by alledging any secret communication with the Deity, but by working numerous and indubitable miracles in the presence of thousands, and which the most bitter and watchful of his enemies could not disallow; but Mahomet wrought no miracles at all—Nor is a miracle the only criterion by which we may judge of the truth of a revelation. If a series of prophets should, through a course of many centuries, predict the appearance of a certain person, whom God would, at a particular time, send into the world for a particular end; and at length a person should appear, in whom all the predictions were minutely accomplished; such a completion of prophecy would be a criterion of the truth of that revelation, which that person should deliver to mankind. Or if a person should now say (as many false prophets have said, and are daily saying) that he had a commission to declare the will of God; and, as a proof of his veracity, should predict—that after his death, he would rise from the dead on the

third day—the completion of such a prophecy would, I presume, be a sufficient criterion of the truth of what this man might have said concerning the will of God. Now I tell you (says Jesus to his disciples, concerning Judas, who was to betray him) before it come, that when it is come to pass ye may believe that I am he. In various parts of the gospels our Saviour, with the utmost propriety, claims to be received as the messenger of God, not only from the miracles which he wrought, but from the prophecies which were fulfilled in his person, and from the predictions which he himself delivered. Hence, instead of their being no criterion by which we may judge of the truth of the Christian revelation, there are clearly three. It is an easy matter to use an indecorous flippancy of language in speaking of the Christian religion, and with a supercilious negligence, to class Christ and his disciples among the impostors who have figured in the world; but it is not, I think, an easy matter for any man of good sense and sound erudition, to make an impartial examination into any one of the three grounds of Christianity which I have here mentioned, and to reject it.

What is it, you ask, the Bible teaches?—The prophet Micah shall answer you: It teaches us—“to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God;”—justice, mercy, and piety, instead of what you contend for—rapine, cruelty, and murder. What is it, you demand, the Testament teaches us? You answer your question—to believe that the Almighty committed debauchery with a woman. Absurd and impious assertion! No, Sir, no; this profane doctrine, this miserable stuff, this blasphemous perversion of scripture, is your doctrine, not that of the New Testament. I will tell you the lesson which it teaches to infidels as well as to believers; it is a lesson which philosophy never taught, which wit cannot ridicule, nor sophistry

disprove; the lesson is this—“The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live:—all that are in their graves shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”

The moral precepts of the gospel are so well fitted to promote the happiness of mankind in this world, and to prepare human nature for the future enjoyment of that blessedness, of which in our present state, we can form no conception, that I had no expectation they would have met with your disapprobation. You say, however—“As to the scraps of morality that are irregularly and thinly scattered in these books, they make no part of the pretended thing, revealed religion.” “Whatever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.” Is this a scrap of morality? Is it not rather the concentrated essence of all ethics, the vigorous root from which every branch of moral duty towards each other may be derived? Duties you know, are distinguished by moralists, into duties of perfect and imperfect obligation: Does the Bible teach you nothing, when it instructs you that this distinction is done away? When it bids you “put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any.” These, and precepts such as these, you will in vain look for in the codes of *Frederick* or *Justinian*; you cannot find them in our statute books; they were not taught, nor are they taught, in the schools of heathen philosophy; or, if some one or two of them should chance to be glanced at by *Plato*, a *Seneca*, or a *Cicero*, they are not bound upon the consciences of mankind by any sanction. It is in the gospel, and in the gospel alone, that we learn their importance; acts of benevolence and brotherly love, may be to an unbe-

liever voluntary acts, to a Christian they are indispensable duties. Is a new commandment no part of revealed religion? "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another:" The law of Christian benevolence is enjoined us by Christ himself, in the most solemn manner, as the distinguishing badge of our being his disciples.

Two precepts you particularise as inconsistent with the dignity and the nature of man—that of not resenting injuries, and that of loving enemies.—Who but yourself ever interpreted literally the proverbial phrase—"If a man smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also?"—Did Jesus himself turn the other cheek when the officer of the high priest smote him? It is evident, that a patient acquiescence under slight personal injuries is here enjoined; and that a proneness to revenge, which instigates men to savage acts of brutality, for every trifling offence, is forbidden. As to loving enemies, it is explained, in another place, to mean, the doing them all the good in our power; "if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink;" and what think you is more likely to preserve peace, and promote kind affections among men, than the returning good for evil? Christianity does not order us to love in proportion to the injury—"it does not offer a premium for a crime."—it orders us to let our benevolence extend alike to all, that we may emulate the benignity of God himself, who maketh "his sun to rise on the evil and the good."

In the law of Moles, retaliation for deliberate injuries had been ordained—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.—*Aristotle*, in his treatise of morals, says, that some thought retaliation of personal wrongs an equitable proceeding; *Rhadamanthus* is said to have given it his sanction; the decemviral laws allow it; the common law of England did not forbid it; and it is said to be still the law of some countries, even in Christendom: but the mild spi-

rit of Christianity absolutely prohibits, not only the retaliation of injuries, but the indulgence of every resentful propensity.

"It has been," you affirm, "the scheme of the Christian church to hold man in ignorance of the Creator, as it is of government to hold him in ignorance of his rights."—I appeal to the plain sense of any honest man to judge whether this representation be true in either particular. When he attends the service of the church, does he discover any design in the minister to keep him in ignorance of his Creator? Are not the public prayers in which he joins, the lessons which are read to him, the sermons which are preached to him, all calculated to press upon his mind a strong conviction of the mercy, justice, holiness, power, and wisdom of the one adorable God, blessed for ever! By these means which the Christian church has provided for our instruction, I will venture to say, that the most unlearned congregation of Christians in Great-Britain have more just and sublime conceptions of the Creator, a more perfect knowledge of their duty towards him, and a stronger inducement to the practice of virtue, holiness, and temperance, than all the philosophers of all the heathen countries in the world ever had, or now have. If, indeed, your scheme should take place, and men should no longer believe their Bible, then would they soon become as ignorant of the Creator, as all the world was when God called Abraham from his kindred; and as all the world, which has had no communication with either Jews or Christians, now is. Then would they soon bow down to stocks and stones, kiss their hand (as they did in the time of Job, and as the poor African does now,) to the moon walking in brightness, and deny the God that is above; then would they worship Jupiter, Bacchus, and Venus, and emulate, in the transcendent

ant flagitiousness of their lives, the impure morals of their gods.

What design has government to keep men in ignorance of their rights? None whatever.—All wise statesmen are persuaded, that the more men know of their rights, the better subjects they will become. Subjects, not from necessity but choice, are the firmest friends of every government. The people of Great Britain are well acquainted with their natural and social rights; they understand them better than the people of any other country do; they know that they have a right to be free, not only from the capricious tyranny of any one man's will but from the more afflicting despotism of republican factions, and it is this very knowledge which attaches them to the constitution of their country. I have no fear that the people should know too much of their rights; my fear is that they should not know them in all their relations, and to their full extent. The government does not desire that men should remain in ignorance of their rights; but it both desires, and requires, that they should not disturb the public peace, under vain pretences; that they should make themselves acquainted, not merely with the rights, but with the duties also of men in civil society. I am far from ridiculing (as some have done) the rights of man; I have long ago understood, that the poor as well as the rich, and the rich as well as the poor, have, by nature some rights, which no human government can justly take from them, without their tacit or express consent; and some also, which they themselves have no power to surrender to any government. One of the principal rights of man, in a state either of nature or society, is a right of property in the fruits of his industry, ingenuity, or good fortune. Does government hold any man in ignorance of this right; So much the contrary, that the chief care of government is to declare, ascertain, modify, and

defend this right; nay, it gives right where nature gives none; it protects the goods of an intestate; and it allows a man, at his death, to dispose of that property, which the law of nature would cause to revert into the common stock. Sincerely as I am attached to the liberties of mankind, I cannot but profess myself an utter enemy to that spurious philosophy, that democratic insanity, which would equalize all property, and level all distinctions in civil society. Personal distinctions, arising from superior probity, learning, eloquence, skill, courage, and from every other excellency of talents, are the very blood and nerves of the body politic; they animate the whole, and invigorate every part—without them, its bones would become reeds, and its marrow water; it would presently sink into a fetid, senseless mass of corruption.

Power may be used for private ends, and in opposition to the public good; rank may be improperly conferred, and insolently sustained; riches may be wickedly acquired, and viciously applied; but as this is neither necessarily, nor generally the case, I cannot agree with those who, in asserting the natural equality of men, spurn the instituted distinctions attending power, rank and riches. But I mean not to enter into any discussion on this subject, farther than to say, that your crimination of government, appears to me to be wholly unfounded; and to express my hope, that no one individual will be so far misled by disquisitions on the rights of man, as to think that he has any right to do wrong, as to forget that other men have rights as well as he.

You are animated with proper sentiments of piety, when you speak of the structure of the universe. No one, indeed, who considers it with attention can fail of having his mind filled with the supreme veneration for its Author. Who can contemplate, without astonishment, the motion of a comet, run-

ning far beyond the orb of Saturn, endeavoring to escape into the pathless regions of unbounded space, yet feeling, at its utmost distance, the attractive influence of the sun, hearing, as it were, the voice of God arresting its progress, and compelling it, after a lapse of ages, to reiterate its ancient course?—Who can comprehend the distance of the stars from the earth, and from each other?—It is so great, that it mocks our conception; our very imagination is terrified, confounded, and lost, when we are told, that a ray of light, which moves at the rate of above ten million of miles in a minute, will not, though emitted at this instant from the brightest star, reach the earth in less than six years.—We think this earth a great globe; and we see the sad wickedness, which individuals are often guilty of, in scraping together a little of its dirt: we view with still greater astonishment and horror, the mighty ruin which has, in all ages, been brought upon human kind, by the low ambition of contending powers, to acquire a temporary possession of a little portion of its surface. But how does the whole of this globe sink, as it were, to nothing, when we consider that a million of earths will scarcely equal the bulk of the sun; that all the stars are suns; and that millions of suns constitute, probably, but a minute portion of that material world, which God hath distributed through the immensity of space?—Systems, however, of insensible matter, though arranged in exquisite order, prove only the wisdom and the power of the great Architect of nature.—As percipient beings, we look for something more—for his goodness—and we cannot open our eyes without seeing it.

Every portion of the earth, sea, and air, is full of sensitive beings, capable in their respective orders, of enjoying the good things which God has prepared for their comfort. All the orders of beings are enabled to propagate their kind; and thus pro-

vision is made for a successive continuation of happiness. Individuals yield to the law of dissolution inseparable from the material structure of their bodies; but no gap is thereby left in existence; their place is occupied by other individuals, capable of participating in the goodness of the Almighty.—Contemplations such as these, fill the mind with humility, benevolence, and piety. But why should we stop here? Why not contemplate the goodness of God in the redemption, as well as in the creation of the world? By the death of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ; he hath redeemed the whole human race from the eternal death which the transgression of Adam had entailed on all his posterity. You believe nothing about the transgression of Adam. The history of Eve and the serpent excites your contempt; you will not admit that it is either a real history, or an allegorical representation of death entering into the world through sin, thro' disobedience to the command of God. Be it so.—You find, however, that death doth reign over all mankind, by whatever means it was introduced; this is not a matter of belief, but of lamentable knowledge. The New Testament tells us, that through the merciful dispensation of God, Christ hath overcome death, and restored man to that immortality which Adam had lost—this also you refuse to believe. Why? Because you cannot account for the propriety of this redemption: Miserable reason! stupid objection! what is there that you can account for? Not for the germination of a blade of grass, not for the fall of a leaf of the forest—and will you refuse to eat of the fruits of the earth, because God has not given you wisdom equal to his own? Will you refuse to lay hold on immortality, because he has not given you, because he, probably, could not give to such a being as man, a full manifestation of the end for which he designs him, nor

of the means requisite for the attainment of that end? What father of a family can make level to the apprehension of his infant children, all the views of happiness which his paternal goodness is preparing for them? How can he explain to them the utility of reproof, correction, instruction, example, of all the various means by which he forms their minds to piety, temperance, and probity? We are children in the hand of God; we are in the very infancy of our existence; just separated from the womb of eternal duration; it may not be possible for the Father of the universe to explain to us (infants in apprehension) the goodness and the wisdom of his dealings with the sons of men. What qualities of mind will be necessary for our well-doing through all eternity, we know not; what discipline in this infancy of existence may be necessary for generating these qualities, we know not; whether God could or could not, consistently with the general good, have forgiven the transgression of Adam, without any atonement, we know not; whether the malignity of sin be not so great, so opposite to the general good, that it cannot be forgiven whilst it exists, that is, whilst the mind retains a propensity to it, we know not; so that if there should be much greater difficulty in comprehending the mode of God's moral government of mankind than there really is, there would be no reason for doubting of its rectitude. If the whole human race be considered as but one small member of a large community of free and intelligent beings of different orders, and if this whole community be subject to discipline and laws productive of the greatest possible good to the whole system, then may we still more reasonably suspect our capacity to comprehend the wisdom and goodness of God's proceedings in the moral government of the universe.

You are lavish in your praise of deism; it is so much better than atheism, that I mean not to say

any thing to its discredit; it is not however, without its difficulties. What think you of an uncaused cause of every thing? of a Being who has no relation to time, not being older to day than he was yesterday, nor younger to day than he will be tomorrow? who has no relation to space, not being a part here, and a part there, or a whole any where? what think you of an omniscient Being, who cannot know the future actions of a man? Or, if his omniscience enables him to know them, what think you of the contingency of human actions? And if human actions are not contingent, what think you of the morality of actions, of the distinction between vice and virtue, crime and innocence, sin and duty? What think you of the infinite goodness of a Being, who existed through eternity, without any emanation of his goodness manifested in the creation of sensitive beings? Or if you contend that there has been an eternal creation, what think you of an effect coeval with its cause, of matter not posterior to its maker? What think you of the existence of evil, moral and natural, in the work of an infinite Being powerful, wise and good? What think you of the gift of freedom of will, when the abuse of freedom becomes the cause of general misery? I could propose to your consideration a great many other questions of a similar tendency, the contemplation of which has driven not a few from deism to atheism, just as the difficulties in revealed religion have driven yourself, and some others, from christianity to deism.

For my own part, I can see no reason why either revealed or natural religion should be abandoned, on account of the difficulties which attend either of them. I look up to the incomprehensible Maker of heaven and earth with unspeakable admiration and self-annihilation, and am a deist.—I contemplate, with the utmost gratitude and humility of mind, his unfathomable wisdom and goodness in the re-

demption of the world from eternal death, through the intervention of his Son Jesus Christ, and am a christian.—As a deist, I have little expectation; as a christian, I have no doubt of a future state. I speak for myself, and may be in an error, as to the ground of the first part of this opinion. You, and other men, may conclude differently. From the inert nature of matter—from the faculties of the human mind—from the apparent imperfection of God's moral government of the world—from many modes of analogical reasoning, and from other sources, some of the philosophers of antiquity did collect, and modern philosophers may, perhaps, collect a strong probability of a future existence; and not only of a future existence, but (which is quite a distinct question) of a future state of retribution, proportioned to our moral conduct in this world. Far be it from me to loosen any of the obligations to virtue; but I must confess, that I cannot, from the same sources of argumentation, derive any positive assurance on the subject. Think then with what thankfulness of heart I receive the word of God, which tells me, that though “in Adam (by the condition of our nature) all die;” yet “in Christ) by the covenant of grace) shall all be made alive.” I lay hold on “eternal life as the gift of God through Jesus Christ;” I consider it not as any appendage to the nature I derive from Adam, but as the free gift of the Almighty, through his Son, whom he hath constituted Lord of all, the Saviour, the Advocate, and the judge of human kind.

“Deism” you affirm, “teaches us, without the possibility of being mistaken, all that is necessary or proper to be known.” There are three things, which all reasonable men admit are necessary and proper to be known—the being of God—the providence of God—a future state of retribution.—Whether these three truths are so taught us by deism, that there is no possibility of being mistaken concerning any of

them, let the history of philosophy, and of idolatry, and superstition, in all ages and countries, determine. A volume might be filled with an account of the mistakes into which the greatest reasoners have fallen, and of the uncertainty in which they lived, with respect to every one of those points. I will advert briefly, only to the last of them. Notwithstanding the illustrious labours of *Gassendi*, *Cudworth*, *Clarke*, *Baxter*, and of above two hundred other modern writers on the subject, the natural mortality or immortality of the human soul is as little understood by us, as it was by the philosophers of Greece or Rome. The opposite opinions of *Plato* and of *Epicurus* on this subject, have their several supporters amongst the learned of the present age, in Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy, in every enlightened part of the world; and they who have been most seriously occupied in the study of the question concerning a future state, as deducible from the nature of the human soul, are least disposed to give from reason a positive decision of it either way. The importance of revelation is by nothing more apparent, than by the discordant sentiments of learned and good men (for I speak not of the ignorant and immoral) on this point. They shew the insufficiency of human reason, in a course of above two thousand years, to unfold the mysteries of human nature, and to furnish, from the contemplation of it, any assurance of the quality of our future condition. If you should ever become persuaded of this insufficiency (and you can scarce fail of becoming so, if you examine the matter deeply), you will, if you act rationally, be disposed to investigate, with seriousness and impartiality, the truth of Christianity. You will say of the gospel, as the *Northumbrian* heathens said to *Paulinus*, by whom they were converted to the Christian religion—“The more we reflect on the nature of our soul, the less we know of it. While it animates our body, we may know

some of its properties; but when once separated, we know not whither it goes, or from whence it came. Since, then, the *gospel* pretends to give us clearer notions of these matters, we ought to hear it, and laying aside all passion and prejudice, follow that which shall appear most conformable to right reason."

What a blessing is it to beings, with such limited capacities as ours confessedly are, to have God himself for our instructor in every thing which it much concerns us to know! We are principally concerned in knowing—not the origin of arts, or the recondite depths of science—not the histories of mighty empires desolating the globe by their contentions—not the subtilties of logic, the mysteries of metaphysics, the sublimities of poetry, or the niceties of criticism.—These, and subjects such as these, properly occupy the learned leisure of a few; but the bulk of human kind have ever been, and must ever remain, ignorant of them all; they must, of necessity, remain in the same state with that which a German emperor voluntarily put himself into, when he made a resolution, bordering on barbarism, that he would never read a printed book. We are all, of every rank and condition, equally concerned in knowing—what will become of us after death?—and, if we are to live again, we are interested in knowing—whether it be possible for us to do any thing whilst we live here, which may render that future life an happy one. Now, "that thing called Christianity," as you scoffingly speak—that last best gift of Almighty God, as I esteem it, the *gospel* of Jesus Christ, has given us the most clear and satisfactory information on both these points. It tells us, what deism never could have told us, that we shall certainly be raised from the dead—that whatever be the nature of the soul, we shall certainly live for ever—and that, whilst we live here, it is possible for us to do much towards the rendering that everlasting life

à happy one.—These are tremendous truths to bad men; they cannot be received and reflected on with indifference by the best; and they suggest to all such a cogent motive to virtuous action, as deism could not furnish even to *Brutus* himself.

Some men have been warped to infidelity by viciousness of life; and some have hypocritically professed Christianity from prospects of temporal advantage; but, being a stranger to your character, I neither impute the former to you, nor can admit the latter as operating on myself. The generality of unbelievers are such, from want of information on the subject of religion; having been engaged from their youth in struggling for worldly distinction, or perplexed with the incessant intricacies of business, or bewildered in the pursuits of pleasure, they have neither ability, inclination, nor leisure, to enter into critical disquisitions concerning the truth of Christianity. Men of this description are soon startled by objections which they are not competent to answer; and the loose morality of the age (so opposite to Christian perfection!) co-operating with their want of scriptural knowledge, they presently get rid of their nursery faith, and are seldom sedulous in the acquisition of another, founded, not on authority, but sober investigation. Presuming, however, that many deists are as sincere in their belief as I am in mine, and knowing that some are more able, and all as much interested as myself, to make a rational enquiry into the truth of revealed religion, I feel no propensity to judge uncharitably of any of them. They do not think as I do, on a subject surpassing all others in importance; but they are not, on that account, to be spoken of by me with asperity of language, to be thought of by me as persons alienated from the mercies of God. The *gospel* has been offered to their acceptance; and, from whatever cause they reject it, I cannot but esteem their situation to be

dangerous. Under the influence of that persuasion I have been induced to write this book. I do not expect to derive from it either fame or profit; these are not improper incentives to honourable activity; but there is a time of life when they cease to direct the judgment of thinking men. What I have written, will not, I fear, make any impression on you; but I indulge an hope, that it may not be without its effect on some of your readers. Infidelity is a rank weed, it threatens to overspread the land; its root is principally fixed amongst the great and opulent; but you are endeavoring to extend the malignity of its poison through all the classes of the community. There is a class of men for whom I have the greatest respect, and whom I am anxious to preserve from the contamination of your irreligion—the merchants, manufacturers, and tradesmen of the kingdom. I consider the influence of the example of this class as essential to the welfare of the community. I know that they are in general given to reading, and desirous of information on all subjects. If this little book should chance to fall into their hands after they have read your's, and they should think that any of your objections to the authority of the Bible have not been fully answered; I entreat them to attribute the omission to the brevity which I have studied; to my desire of avoiding learned disquisitions; to my inadvertancy; to my inability; to any thing rather than an impossibility of completely obviating every difficulty you have brought forward. I address the same request to such of the youth of both sexes, as may have unhappily imbibed, from your writings, the poison of infidelity; beseeching them to believe, that all their religious doubts may be removed, though it may not have been in my power to answer, to their satisfaction, all your objections. I pray God that the rising generation of this land may be preserved from that “evil heart of unbelief,” which has brought ruin

on a neighboring nation; that neither a neglected education, nor domestic irreligion, nor evil communication, nor the fashion of a licentious world, may ever induce them to forget that religion alone ought to be their rule of life.

In the conclusion of my *Apology for Christianity* I informed Mr. Gibbon of my extreme aversion to public controversy. I am now twenty years older than I was then, and I perceive that this my aversion has increased with my age. I have, through life, abandoned my little literary productions to their fate: such of them as have been attacked, have never received any defence from me; nor will this receive any, if it should meet with your public notice, or with that of any other man.

Sincerely wishing that you may become a partaker of that faith in revealed religion, which is the foundation of my happiness in this world, and of all my hopes in another, I bid you farewell.

R. LANDAFF.

Calgarth Park, Jan. 20, 1796.

END OF WATSON'S APOLOGY.

Character of Dr. WATSON.

By Edward Gibbon.

“ When Dr. Watson gave to the public his apology for Christianity, in a series of letters, he addressed them to the author of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, with a just confidence, that he had considered this important subject in a manner not unworthy of his antagonist, or of himself. Dr. Watson’s mode of thinking, bears a liberal and philosophical cast: his thoughts are expressed with spirit, and their spirit is always tempered by politeness and moderation. Such is the man whom I should be happy to call my friend, and whom I should not blush to call my antagonist. But the same motives which might tempt me to accept, or even to solicit, a private and amicable conference, dissuaded me from entering into a public controversy with a writer of so respectable a character.” ||

|| Gibbon’s Vindication of some passages against several opponents.

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ADDRESS

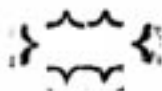
TO

Scoffers at Religion,

BY

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

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



GENTLEMEN,

ADVERTISEMENT.

THIS address is taken from Bishop Watson's Apology for Christianity, addressed to Edward Gibbon, Esq. The Bishop takes his leave of Mr. Gibbon in the following words.

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

SUPPOSE the mighty work accomplished, the cross trampled upon, Christianity every where proscribed, and the religion of nature more become the religion of Europe; what advantage will you have derived to your country, or to yourselves, from the exchange? I know your answer—you will have freed the world from the hypocrisy of priests, and the tyranny of superstition. No; you forget that Lycurgus, and Numa, and Odin, and Mango-Copac, and all the great legislators of ancient and modern story, have been of opinion that the affairs of civil society could not well be conducted without *some* religion; you must of necessity introduce a priesthood, with, probably, as much hypocrisy; a religion, with, assuredly, more superstition, than that which you now reprobate with such indecent and ill-grounded contempt. But I will tell you from what you will have freed the world; you will have freed it from its abhorrence of vice, and from every powerful incentive to virtue; you will, with the religion, have brought back the depraved morality of Paganism; you will have robbed mankind of their firm assurance of another life; and thereby you will have despoiled them of their patience, of their humility, of their charity, of their chastity, of all those mild and silent virtues, which (however despicable they may appear in your eyes) are the only ones which meliorate and sublime our nature; which Paganism never knew, which spring from Christianity alone, which do or might constitute our comfort in this life, and without the possession of which, another life, if after all there should happen to be one, must (unless a mira-

ele be exerted in the alteration of our disposition) be more vicious and more miserable than this is.

Perhaps you will contend, that the universal right of reason, that the truth and fitness of things, are of themselves sufficient to exalt the nature, and regulate the manners of mankind. Shall we never have done with this groundless commendation of natural law? Look into the first chapter of Paul's epistle to the Romans, and you will see the extent of its influence over the Gentiles of those days; or if you dislike Paul's authority, and the manners of antiquity, look into the more admired accounts of modern voyagers; and examine its influence over the Pagans of our own times, over the sensual inhabitants of Otaite, over the Cannibals of New Zealand, or the remorseless savages of America. But these men are Barbarians. Your law of nature, notwithstanding, extends even to them:—But they have misused their reason; they have then the more need of, and would be the more thankful for that revelation which you, with an ignorant and fastidious self-sufficiency, deem useless. But they might of themselves, if they thought fit, become wise and virtuous. I answer with Cicero, *ut nihil interest, utrum nemo valeat, an nemo valere possit; sic non intelligo quid intersit, utrum nemo sit sapiens, an nemo esse possit.*

These, however, you will think are extraordinary instances; and that we ought not from these, to take our measure of the excellency of the law of nature, but rather from the civilized states of China and Japan, or from the nations which flourished in learning and in arts, before Christianity was heard of in the world. You mean to say, that by the law of nature, which you are desirous of substituting in the room of the gospel, you do not understand those rules of conduct, which an individual, abstracted from the community, and deprived of the institution of mankind, could exco-

gitate for himself; but such a system of precepts, as the most enlightened men of the most enlightened ages have recommended to our observance. Where do you find this system? We cannot meet with it in the works of Stobæus, or the Scythian Anacharsis, nor in those of Plato or Cicero, nor in those of the emperor Antoninus, or the slave Epictetus; for we are persuaded that the most animated considerations of the *prepon* and the *honestum*, of the beauty of virtue, and the fitness of things, are not able to furnish even a Brutus himself, with permanent principles of action; much less are they able to purify the polluted recesses of a vitiated heart, to curb the irregularity of appetite, or restrain the impetuosity of passion in common men. If you order us to examine the works of Grotius or Puffendorff, of Burlamaqui or Hutchinson, for what you understand by the law of nature; we apprehend that you are in a great error, in taking your notions of natural law, as discoverable by natural reason, from the elegant systems of it, which have been drawn up by Christian philosophers; since they have all laid their foundations, either tacitly or expressly, upon a principle derived from revelation, a thorough knowledge of the being and attributes of God; and even those amongst yourselves, who rejecting Christianity still continue Theists, are indebted to revelation (whether you are either aware of, or disposed to acknowledge the debt or not) for those sublime speculations concerning the Deity, which you have fondly attributed to the excellency of your own unassisted reason. If you would know the real genius of natural law, and how far it can proceed in the investigation or enforcement of moral duties, you must consult the manners and the writings of those who have never heard of either the Jewish or the Christian dispensation, or of those other manifestations of himself, which God vouchsafed to Adam and to the patri-

archs, before and after the flood. It would be difficult perhaps any where, to find a people entirely destitute of traditionary notices concerning a Deity, and of traditionary fears or expectations of another life; and the morals of mankind may have, perhaps, been no where quite so abandoned as they would have been, had they been left wholly to themselves in these points: However, it is a truth which cannot be denied, how much soever it may be lamented, that though the generality of mankind have always had some faint conceptions of God and his providence, yet they have been always greatly inefficient in the production of good morality, and highly derogatory to his nature, amongst all the people of the earth, except the Jews and Christians; and some may perhaps be desirous of excepting the Mahometans, who derive all that is good in their Koran from Christianity.

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

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

I am sensible you will be ready to say, what is all this to the purpose? though the bulk of mankind may never be able to investigate the laws of natural religion, nor disposed to reverence their sanctions when investigated by others, nor solicitous about any other standard of moral rectitude, than civil legislation; yet the inconveniences which may attend the extirpation of Christianity, can be no proof of its truth:—I have not produced them as a proof of its truth; but they are a strong and conclusive proof, if not of its truth, at least of its utility; and the consideration of its utility, may be a motive to yourselves for examining whether it may not chance to be true; and it ought to be a reason with every good citizen, and with every man of sound judgment, to keep his opinions to himself, if from any particular circumstances in his studies or in his education, he should have the misfortune to think that it is not true. If you can discover to the rising generation a better religion than the Christian, one that will more effectually animate their hopes, and subdue their passions, make them better men or better members of society, we importune you to publish it for their advantage; but till you can do that, we beg of you not to give the reins to their passions, by instilling into their unsuspecting minds your pernicious prejudices: Even now, men scruple not, by their lawless lust, to ruin the repose of private families; and to fix a stain of infamy upon the noblest: Even now, they hesitate not, in lifting up a mur-

derous arm against the life of their friend, or against their own, as often as the fever of intemperance stimulates their resentment, or the satiety of an useless life excites their despondency: Even now, whilst we are persuaded of a resurrection from the dead, and of *a judgment to come*, we find it difficult enough to resist the sollicitations of sense, and to escape unspotted from the licentious manners of the world: But what will become of our virtue, what of the consequent peace and happiness of society, if you persuade us that there are no such things? In two words—you may ruin yourselves by your attempt, and you will certainly ruin your country by your success.

But the consideration of the inutility of your design, is not the only one which should induce you to abandon it; the argument *a tuto* ought to be warily managed, or it may tend to the silencing our opposition to any system of superstition which has had the good fortune to be sanctioned by public authority; it is, indeed, liable to no objection in the present case; we do not, however, wholly rely upon its cogency. It is not contended, that Christianity is to be received, merely because it is useful; but because it is true. This you deny, and think your objections well grounded; we conceive them originating in your vanity, your immorality, or your misapprehension. There are many worthless doctrines, many superstitious observances, which the fraud or folly of mankind have every where annexed to Christianity (especially in the church of Rome) as essential parts of it: If you take these sorry appendages to Christianity, for Christianity itself, as preached by Christ and by the apostles; if you confound the Roman with the Christian religion, you quite misapprehend its nature; and are in a state similar to that of men, mentioned by Plutarch, in his treatise of superstition; who flying from superstition, leapt over religion, and sunk into down-

right Atheism.† Christianity is not a religion very palatable to a voluptuous age; it will not conform its precepts to the standard of fashion; it will not lessen the deformity of vice by lenient appellations; but calls keeping, whoredom; intrigue, adultery; and duelling, murder; it will not pander the lust; it will not licence the intemperance of mankind; it is a troublesome monitor to a man of pleasure; and your way of life may have made you quarrel with your religion. As to your vanity, as a cause of your infidelity, suffer me to produce the sentiments of M. Bayle upon that head; if the description does not suit your character, you will not be offended at it; and if you are offended with its freedom, it will do you good. “This inclines me to believe that libertines, like Des Barreaux, are not greatly persuaded of the truth of what they say. They have made no deep examination; they have learned some few objections, which they are perpetually making a noise with; they speak from a principle of ostentation, and give themselves the lie in the time of danger. Vanity has a greater share in their disputes than conscience; they imagine that the singularity and boldness of the opinions which they maintain, will give them the reputation of men of parts: By degrees, they get a habit of holding impious discourses; and if their vanity be accompanied by a

† *Le Papisme, says Helvetius, in a posthumous work, n' est nux yeux d'un homme sensé qu' une pure idolatrie—nous sommes étonnés de l'absurdité de la religion païenne. Celle de la religion Papiste étonnera bien d'avantage un jour la postérité. We trust that day is not at a great distance, and deism will then be buried in the ruins of the Church of Rome; for the taking the superstition, the avarice, the ambition, the intolerance of Antichristianism, for Christianity has been the great error upon which infidelity has built its system, both at home and abroad.*

voluptuous life, their progress in that road is the swifter."†

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

But what if there should be some incomprehensible doctrines in the Christian religion; some circumstances, which in their causes or their consequences, surpass the reach of human reason; are they to be rejected upon that account? You are, or would be thought, men of reading, and knowledge, and enlarged understandings; weigh the matter fairly; and consider whether revealed religion be not, in this respect, just upon the same foot-

† Bayle, *Hist. Diſt. Art. Des Barreaux*.

‡ See a *View of the Internal Evidence, &c.* by Soame Jenyns.

ing with every other object of your contemplation. Even in mathematics, the science of demonstration itself, though you get over its first principles, and learn to digest the idea of a point without parts, a line without breadth, and a surface without thickness; yet you will find yourselves at a loss to comprehend the perpetual approximation of lines which can never meet; the doctrine of incommensurables, and of an infinity of infinities, each infinitely greater, or infinitely less, not only than any finite quantity, but than each other. In physics, you cannot comprehend the primary cause of any thing; not of the light by which you see; nor of the elasticity of the air, by which you hear; nor of the fire, by which you are warmed. In physiology, you cannot tell what first gave motion to the heart; nor what continues it, nor why its motion is less voluntary than that of the lungs; nor why you are able to move your arm to the right or left, by a simple volition. You cannot explain the cause of animal heat, nor comprehend the principle by which your body was at first formed, nor by which it is sustained, nor by which it will be reduced to earth. In natural religion, you cannot comprehend the eternity or omnipresence of the Deity; nor easily understand how his prescience can be consistent with your freedom, or his immutability with his government of moral agents; nor why he did not make all his creatures equally perfect; nor why he did not create them sooner: In short, you cannot look into any branch of knowledge, but you will meet with subjects above your comprehension. The fall and the redemption of human kind, are not more incomprehensible than the creation and the conservation of the universe; the infinite author of the works of providence, and of nature, is equally inscrutable, equally past our finding out in them both. And it is somewhat remarkable, that the deepest enquirers into nature, have ever thought with most

reverence, and spoken with most diffidence concerning those things, which in revealed religion may seem hard to be understood; they have ever avoided that self-sufficiency of knowledge which springs from ignorance, produces indifference, and ends in infidelity. Admirable to this purpose, is the reflection of the greatest mathematician of the present age, when he is combating an opinion of Newton's, by an hypothesis of his own, still less defensible than that which he opposes:—Tous les jours que je vois de ces esprits-forts, qui critique les verites de notre religion, et s'en moquent meme avec la plus impertinente suffisance, je pense, chetifs mortels! combien et combien des choses sur lesquelles vous raisonnez si legerement, sont elles plus sublimes, et plus eleves, que celles sur lesquelles le grand Newton s'egare si grossierement.†

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

† Euler. § De Leg. Lib. x.

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

There is, however, a short method of examining this argument, which may, perhaps, make as great an impression on your minds, as any other. Three men of distinguished abilities rose up at different times, and attacked Christianity with every objection which their malice could suggest, or their learning could devise; but neither Celsus in the second century, nor Porphyry in the third, nor the emperor Julian himself, in the fourth century, ever questioned the reality of the miracles related in the gospels. Do but you grant us what these men (who were more likely to know the truth of the matter than you can be) granted to their adversaries, and we will very readily let you make the most of the magic, to which, as the last wretched shift, they were forced to attribute them. We can find you men, in our days, who from the mixture of two colourless liquors, will produce you a third as red as blood, or of any other colour you desire *et dicto citius*, by a drop resembling water, will restore the transparency; they will make two fluids coalesce into a solid body; and from the mixture of liquors colder than ice, will instantly raise you a horrid explosion and a tremendous flame: These, and twenty other tricks, they will perform, without having been sent with our Saviour to Egypt, to learn magic; nay, with a bottle or two

of oil, they will compose the undulations of a lake; and by a little art, they will restore the functions of life to a man who has been an hour or two under water, or a day or two buried in the snow. But in vain will these men, or the greatest magician that Egypt ever saw, say to a boisterous sea, *peace, be still*; in vain will they say to a carcase rotting in the grave, *come forth*; the winds and the sea will not obey them, and the putrid carcase will not hear them. You need not suffer yourselves to be deprived of the weight of this argument, from its having been observed, that the fathers have acknowledged the supernatural part of Paganism, since the fathers were in no condition to detect a cheat, which was supported both by the disposition of the people, and the power of the civil magistrate;† and they were from that inability, forced to attribute to infernal agency, what was too cunningly contrived to be detected, and contrived for too impious a purpose, to be credited as the work of God.

With respect to prophecy, you may, perhaps, have accustomed yourselves to consider it as originating in Asiatic enthusiasm, in Chaldean mystery; or in the subtle stratagem of interested priests; and have given yourselves no more trouble concerning the predictions of sacred, than concerning the oracles of Pagan history. Or if you have ever cast a glance upon this subject, the dissensions of learned men concerning the proper interpretation of the revelation, and other difficult prophecies, may have made you rashly conclude, that all prophecies were equally unintelligible; and more indebted for their accomplishment, to a fortunate concurrence of events and the pliant ingenuity of the expositor, than to the inspired foresight of the prophet. In all that the prophets of the Old Testament have delivered, concerning the destruction of particular cities, and

† See Lord Lyttleton's *Obs. on St. Paul*, p. 59.

the desolation of particular kingdoms, you may see nothing but shrewd conjectures, which any one acquainted with the history of the rise and fall of empires, might certainly have made: And as you would not hold him for a prophet, who should now affirm, that London or Paris would afford to future ages a spectacle just as melancholy as that which we now contemplate with a sigh, in the ruins of Agrigentum or Palmyra; so you cannot persuade yourselves to believe that the denunciations of the prophets against the haughty cities of Tyre or Babylon, for instance, proceeded from the inspiration of the Deity. There is no doubt, that by some such general kind of reasoning, many are influenced to pay no attention to an argument which, if properly considered, carries with it the strongest conviction.

Spinoza said, that he would have broken his atheistic system to pieces, and embraced without repugnance, the ordinary faith of Christians, if he could have persuaded himself of the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead; and I question not, that there are many disbelievers, who would relinquish their deistic tenets and receive the gospel, if they could persuade themselves that God had ever so far interfered in the moral government of the world, as to illumine the mind of any one man with the knowledge of future events. A miracle strikes the senses of the persons who see it; a prophecy addresses itself to the understandings of those who behold its completion; and it requires in many cases some learning, in all some attention, to judge of the correspondence of events with the predictions concerning them: No one can be convinced, that what Jeremiah and the other prophets foretold of the fate of Babylon, that it should be besieged by the Medes; that it should be taken when her mighty men were drunken, when her springs were dried up; and that it should become a pool of water, and

should remain desolate forever; no one, I say, can be convinced, that all these, and other parts of the prophetic denunciation, have been minutely fulfilled, without spending some time in reading the accounts which profane historians have delivered down to us concerning its being taken by Cyrus; and which modern travellers have given us of its present situation.

Porphyry was so persuaded of the coincidence between the prophecies of Daniel and the events, that he was forced to affirm, the prophecies were written after the things prophesied of, had happened; another Porphyry has, in our days, been so astonished at the correspondence between the prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, as related by St. Matthew, and the history of that event, as recorded by Josephus; that rather than embrace Christianity, he has ventured (contrary to the faith of all ecclesiastical history, the opinion of the learned of all ages, and all the rules of good criticism) to assert that St. Matthew wrote his gospel after Jerusalem had been taken and destroyed by the Romans. You may from these instances perceive the strength of the argument from prophecy; it has not been able indeed to vanquish the prejudices of either the ancient or the modern Porphyry; but it has been able to compel them both to be guilty of obvious falsehoods, which have nothing but impudent assertions to support them.

Some over zealous interpreters of scripture, have found prophecies in simple narrations, extended real predictions beyond the times and circumstances to which they naturally were applied, and perplexed their readers with a thousand quaint allusions and allegorical conceits; this proceeding has made men of sense pay less regard to prophecy in general.— There are some predictions, however, such as those concerning the present state of the Jewish people, and the corruption of Christianity, which are now

fulfilling in the world; and which, if you will take the trouble to examine them, you will find of such an extraordinary nature, that you will not perhaps hesitate to refer them to God as their author; and if you once become persuaded of the truth of any one miracle, or of the completion of any one prophecy, you will resolve all your difficulties (concerning the manner of God's interposition in the moral government of our species, and the nature of the doctrines contained in revelation) into your own inability fully to comprehend the whole scheme of divine providence.

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

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

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

According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, there was only an interval of three months, you say, between the baptism and crucifixion of Jesus; from which time, taking away the forty days of the temptation, there will only remain about six weeks for the whole period of his public ministry; which lasted, however, according to St. John, at the least above three years. Your objection, fairly stated, stands thus—Matthew, Mark, Luke, in writing the history of Jesus Christ, mention the several events

of his life, as following one another in continued succession, without taking notice of the times in which they happened; but is it a just conclusion from their silence, to infer that there really were no intervals of time between the transactions which they seem to have connected? Many instances might be produced from the most admired biographers of antiquity, in which events are related, as immediately consequent to each other, which did not happen but at very distant periods. We have an obvious example of this manner of writing in St. Matthew, who connects the preaching of John the Baptist, with the return of Joseph from Egypt, though we are certain that the latter event preceded the former by a great many years.

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

John, in mentioning the discourse which Jesus had with his mother and his beloved disciple, at the time of his crucifixion, says, that she, with Mary Magdalene, stood near the cross; Matthew, on the other hand, says, that Mary Magdalene and the other women were there, beholding afar off: This you think a manifest contradiction; and scoldingly enquire, whether the women and the beloved disciple, which were near the cross, could be the same with those who stood far from the cross?—It is difficult not to transgress the bounds of moderation and good manners, in answering such sophistry: What! have you to learn, that though the Evangelists speak of the crucifixion as of one event, it was not accomplished in one instant, but lasted sever-

ral hours? And why the women who were at a distance from the cross, might not, during its continuance, draw near the cross; or from being near the cross, might not move from the cross, is more than you can explain to either us or yourselves. And we take from you your only refuge, by denying expressly, that the different Evangelists, in their mention of the women, speak of the same point of time.

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

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

the name of a town, but of a district of Mount Olivet adjoining the town.

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

Before I put an end to this address, I cannot help taking notice of an argument, by which some philosophers have of late endeavored to overturn the whole system of revelation: And it is the more necessary to give an answer to their objection, as it is become a common subject of philosophical conversation, especially amongst those who have visited the continent. The objection tends to invalidate, as is supposed, the authority of Moses; by shewing, that the earth is much older, than it can be proved to be from his account of the creation, and the scripture chronology. We contend, that six thousand years have not yet elapsed since the creation; and these philosophers contend, that they have indubitable proof of the earth's being at the least fourteen thousand years old; and they complain, that Moses hangs as a dead weight upon them, and blunts all their zeal for enquiry.†

The Canonico Recupero, who it seems is engaged in writing the history of Mount Etna, has discovered a stratum of lava, which flowed from that mountain, according to his opinion, in the time of the second Punic war, or about two thousand years ago; this stratum is not yet covered with soil, sufficient for the production of either corn or vines; it requires then, says the Canon, two thousand years

† *Brydone's Travels.*

at least, to convert a stratum of lava into a fertile field. In sinking a pit near *Jaci*, in the neighborhood of *Etna*, they have discovered evident marks of seven distinct lavas, one under the other; the surfaces of which are parallel, and most of them covered with a rich bed of thick earth; now the eruption which formed the lowest of these lavas (if I may be allowed to reason, says the Canon, from analogy) flowed from the mountain at least fourteen thousand years ago.—It might be briefly answered to this objection, by denying, that there is any thing in the history of *Moses* repugnant to this opinion concerning the great antiquity of the earth; for though the rise and progress of arts and sciences, and the small multiplication of the human species, render it almost to a demonstration probable, that man has not existed longer upon the surface of this earth, than according to the *Mosaic* account; yet, that the earth itself was then created out of nothing, when man was placed upon it, is not, according to the sentiments of some philosophers, to be proved from the original text of sacred scripture; we might, I say, reply with these philosophers, to this formidable objection of the Canon, by granting it in its full extent; we are under no necessity, however, of adopting their opinion, in order to shew the weakness of the Canon's reasoning. For, in the first place, the Canon has not satisfactorily established his main fact, that the lava in question is the identical lava, which *Diodorus Siculus* mentions to have flowed from *Etna*, in the second *Carthaginian* war; and in the second place, if may be observed, that the time necessary for converting lavas into fertile fields, must be very different, according to the different consistences of the lavas, and their different situations, with respect to elevation or depression; to their being exposed to winds, rains, and to other circumstances; just as the time in which the heaps of iron slag, (which resembles la-

va) are covered with verdure, is different at different furnaces, according to the nature of the slag, and situation of the furnace; and something of this kind is deducible from the account of the Canon himself; since the crevices of this famous stratum are really full of rich, good soil, and have pretty large trees growing in them.

But if all this should be thought not sufficient to remove the objection, I will produce the Canon an analogy in opposition to his analogy, and which is grounded on more certain facts. *Etna* and *Vesuvius* resemble each other in the causes which produce their eruptions, in the nature of their lavas, and in the time necessary to mellow them into soil fit for vegetation; or if there be any slight difference in this respect, it is probably not greater than what subsists between the different lavas of the same mountain. This being admitted, which no philosopher will deny, the Canon's analogy will prove just nothing at all, if we can produce an instance of seven different lavas (with interjacent strata of vegetable earth) which have flowed from *Mount Vesuvius*, within the space, not of fourteen thousand, but of somewhat less than seventeen hundred years; for then, according to our analogy, a stratum of lava may be covered with vegetable soil in about two hundred and fifty years, instead of requiring two thousand for the purpose. The eruption of *Vesuvius*, which destroyed *Herculaneum* and *Pompeii*, is rendered still more famous by the death of *Pliny*, recorded by his nephew, in his letter to *Tacitus*; this event happened in the year 79; it is not yet then quite seventeen hundred years since *Herculaneum* was swallowed up: But we are informed by unquestionable authority, that “the matter which covers the ancient town of *Herculaneum*, is not the produce of one eruption only; for there are evident marks that the matter

of six eruptions has taken its course over that which lies immediately above the town, and was the cause of its destruction. These strata are either of lava or burnt matter, *with veins of good soil betwixt them.*† I will not add another word upon this subject; except that the bishop of the diocese was not much out in his advice to *Canonica Recupero*—to take care not to make his mountain older than Moses; though it would have been full as well to have shut his mouth with a reason, as to have stopped it with the dread of an ecclesiastical censure.

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

Your objections to revelation may be numerous; you may find fault with the account which Moses has given of the creation and the fall; you may not be able to get water enough for an universal deluge; nor room enough in the ark of Noah, for all the different kinds of aerial and terrestrial animals; you may be dissatisfied with the command for sacrificing of Isaac, for plundering the Egyptians, and for extirpating the Canaanites; you may find fault with the Jewish œconomy, for its ceremonies, its sacrifices, and its multiplicity of priests; you may object to the imprecations in the Psalms, and think the immoralities of David a fit subject for dramatic ridicule;‡ you may look upon the partial

† See Sir William Hamilton's *Remarks upon the Nature of the Soil of Naples and its Neighbourhood, in the Philos. Transf. vol. lxi. p. 7.*

‡ See *Saül et David Hyperdrame.*

Whatever censure the author of this composition may deserve for his intention, the work itself de-

promulgation of Christianity, as an insuperable objection to its truth; and waywardly reject the goodness of God toward yourselves, because you do not comprehend how you have deserved it more than others; you may know nothing of the entrance of sin and death into the world, by any man's transgression; nor be able to comprehend the doctrine of the cross, and of redemption by Jesus Christ; in short, if your minds are so disposed, you may find food for your scepticism in every page of the Bible, as well as in every appearance of nature; and it is not in the power of any person but yourselves to clear up your doubts; you must read and you must think for yourselves; and you must do both with temper, with candour, and with care. Infidelity is a rank weed; it is nurtured by our vices, and cannot be plucked up as easily as it may be planted. Your difficulties with respect to revelation, may have first arisen from your own reflection on the religious indifference of those, whom from your earliest infancy you have been accustomed to revere and imitate; domestic irreligion may have made you willing hearers of libertine conversation; and the uniform prejudices of the world may have finished the business at a very early age; and left you to wander through life without a principle to direct your conduct, and to die without hope. We are far from wishing you to trust the word of the clergy for the truth of your religion; we beg of you to examine it to the bottom, to try it, to prove it, and not to hold it fast unless you find it good. Till you are disposed to undertake this talk, it becomes you to consider with great seriousness and attention, whether it can be for your interest to esteem a few witty sarcasms, or metaphysical subtleties, or ignorant misrepresentations, or unwarranted

serves none; its ridicule is too gross to mislead even the ignorant.

assertions, as unanswerable arguments against revelation; and a very slight reflection will convince you, that it will certainly be for your reputation, to employ the flippancy of your rhetoric, and the poignancy of your ridicule, upon any subject, rather than upon the subject of Religion.

I take my leave with recommending to your notice, the advice which Mr. Locke gave to a young man, who was desirous of becoming acquainted with the doctrines of the Christian religion. "Study the holy scripture, especially the New Testament: Therein are contained the words of eternal life. It has God for its author; Salvation for its end; and Truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter."†

I am, &c.

† *Locke's Posth. Works.*

FINIS.

THE
AUTHENTICITY

OF THE

BOOKS

OF THE

NEW TESTAMENT.

By WILLIAM PALEY, M. A.

Archdeacon of Carlisle.

SECTION I.

The following extract is taken from Mr. Paley's view of the Evidences of Christianity.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

WHEN Christian advocates merely tell us, that we have the same reason for believing the Gospels to be written by the Evangelists, whose name they bear; as we have for believing the Commentaries to be Cæsar's, the Eneid Virgil's, or the Orations Cicero's; they content themselves with an imperfect representation. They state nothing more than what is true, but they do not state the truth correctly. In the number, variety, and early date of our testimonies, we far exceed all other ancient books. For one which the most celebrated work of the most celebrated Greek or Roman writer can alledge, we produce many.

In a work, however, like the present, there is a difficulty in finding a place for evidence of this kind. To pursue the detail of proofs throughout, would be to transcribe a great part of Doctor Lardner's eleven octavo volumes; to leave the argument without proofs, is to leave it without effect; for the persuasion produced by this species of evidence, depend upon a view and induction of the particulars which compose it.

The historical books of the New Testament, meaning thereby the four gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles, are quoted, or alluded to, by a series of Christian writers, beginning with those who were contemporary with the Apostles, or who immediately followed them, and proceeding in close and regular succession from their time to the present.

THE medium of proof stated in this proposition is, of all others, the most unquestionable, the least liable to any practices of fraud, and is not diminished by the lapse of ages. Bishop Burnet, in the history of his own times, inserts various extracts from lord Clarendon's history. One such insertion is a proof that lord Clarendon's history was extant at the time when Bishop Burnet wrote, that it had been read by Bishop Burnet, that it was received by Bishop Burnet as a work of Lord Clarendon's, and also regarded by him as an authentic account of the transactions which it relates; and it will be a proof of these points a thousand years hence, or as long as the books exist. Juvenal having quoted, as Cicero's, that memorable line,

“ O fortunatam natam me consule Romanam.”

the quotation would be strong evidence, were there any doubt that the oration in which that line is found, actually came from Cicero's pen. These instances, however simple, may serve to point out to a reader who is little accustomed to such researches the nature and value of the argument.

The testimonies which we have to bring forward under this proposition, are the following:

I. There is extant an epistle ascribed to Barnabas,† the companion of Paul. It is quoted as the epistle of Barnabas, by Clement of Alexandria, A. D. 194: by Origen, A. D. 230. It is mentioned by Eusebius, A. D. 315, and by Jerome, A. D. 392, as an ancient work in their time, bearing the name of Barnabas, and as well known and read among the Christians, though not accounted a part of scripture. It purports to have been written soon after the destruction of Jerusalem, during the calamities which followed that disaster; and it bears the character of the age to which it professes to belong.

In this epistle appears the following remarkable passage:—"Let us therefore beware, lest it come upon us, *as it is written*, there are many called, few chosen." From the expression, "as it is written," we infer with certainty, that at the time when the author of this epistle lived, there was a book extant, well known to Christians, and of authority among them, containing these words—"many are called, few chosen." Such a book is our present gospel of St. Matthew, in which this text is twice found, and is found in no other book now known. There is a farther observation to be made on the terms of the quotation. The writer of the epistle was a Jew. The phrase "it is written," was the very form in which the Jews quoted their scriptures. It is not probable, therefore, that he would have used this phrase, and without qualification, of any books but what had acquired a kind of scriptural authority. If the passage remarked in this ancient writing had been found in one of St.

† *Lardner's Cred. ed. 1755, vol. I. p. 23, et seq.* The reader will observe from the references, that the materials of these sections are almost entirely extracted from Dr. Lardner's work—my office consisted in arrangement and selection.

Paul's epistles, it would have been esteemed by every one a high testimony to St. Matthew's gospel. It ought, therefore, to be remembered, that the writing in which it is found was probably but very few years posterior to those of St. Paul.

Beside this passage, there are also in the epistle before us several others, in which the sentiment is the same with what we meet with in St. Matthew's gospel, and two or three in which we recognize the same words. In particular, the author of the epistle repeats the precept, "give to every one that asketh thee," and saith that Christ chose as his apostles, who were to preach the gospel, men who were great sinners, that he might shew that he came "not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

II. We are in possession of an epistle written by Clement, Bishop of Rome,† whom ancient writers, without any doubt or scruple, assert to have been the Clement whom St. Paul mentions, Phil. iv. 3. "With Clement also, and other my fellow-labourers, whose names are in the book of life." This epistle is spoken of by the ancients as an epistle acknowledged by all; and, as Ireneus well represents its value, "written by Clement, who had seen the blessed apostles and conversed with them, who had the preaching of the apostles still sounding in his ears, and their traditions before his eyes. It is addressed to the Church of Corinth; and what alone may seem almost decisive of its authenticity, Dionysius, Bishop of Corinth, about the year 170, *i. e.* about eighty or ninety years after the epistle was written, bears witness, "that it had been wont to be read in that church from ancient times."

This epistle affords, amongst others, the following valuable passages—"Especially remembering

† *Lardner's Cred. vol. I. p. 62. et seq.*

the words of the Lord Jesus which he spake, teaching gentleness and long suffering; for thus he said; † Be ye merciful that ye may obtain mercy; forgive, that it may be forgiven unto you; as you do, so shall it be done unto you; as you give, so shall it be given unto you; as ye judge, so shall ye be judged; as ye show kindness, so shall kindness be shown unto you; with what measure ye mete, with the same it shall be measured to you. By this command, and by these rules, let us establish ourselves, that we may always walk obediently to his holy words."

Again "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, for he said, Woe to that man by whom offences come; it were better for him that he had not been born, than that he should offend one of my elect; it were better for him that the mill stone should be tied about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the sea, than that he should offend one of my little ones." †

In both these passages we perceive the high respect paid to the words of Christ, as recorded by the

† "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." *Mat. v. 7.* "Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven; give, and it shall be given unto you."—*Luke vi. 37, 38.* "Judge not, that ye be not judged; for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." *Mat. vii. 2.*

† *Mat. xviii. 6.* "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a mill stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were cast into the sea." The latter part of the passage in Clement, agrees more exactly with *Luke xvii. 2.* "It were better for him that a mill stone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones."

evangelists: "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus—by this command and by these rules let us establish ourselves, that we may always walk obediently to his holy words." We perceive also in Clement a total unconscioness of doubt, whether these were the real words of Christ, which are read as such in the gospels. This observation indeed belongs to the whole series of testimony, and especially to the most ancient part of it. Whenever any thing now read in the gospels, is met with in an early Christian writing, it is always observed to stand there as acknowledged truth, *i. e.* to be introduced without hesitation, doubt, or apology. It is to be observed also, that as this epistle was written in the name of the church of Rome, and addressed to the church of Corinth, it ought to be taken as exhibiting the judgment not only of Clement, who drew up the letter, but of these churches themselves, at least as to the authority of the books referred to.

It may be said, that as Clement hath not used words of quotation, it is not certain that he refers to any book whatever. The words of Christ, which he has put down, he might himself have heard from the apostles, or might have received through the ordinary medium of oral tradition. This hath been said—but that no such inference can be drawn from the absence of the words of quotation, is proved by the three following considerations:—First, that Clement in the very same manner, namely, without any mark of reference, uses a passage now found in the epistle to the Romans; † which passage, from the peculiarity of the words which compose it, and from their order, it is manifest that he must have taken from the book.

The same remark may be repeated of some very singular sentiments in the epistle to the Hebrews.

† *Rom. i. 29.*

Secondly, that there are many sentences of St. Paul's epistle to the Corinthians, standing in Clement's epistle without any sign of quotation, which yet certainly are quotations; because it appears that Clement had St. Paul's Epistle before him, inasmuch as in one place he mentions it in terms too express to leave us in any doubt—"Take into your hands the epistle of the blessed apostle Paul." Thirdly, that this method of adopting words of scripture, without reference or acknowledgment, was, as will appear in the sequel, a method in general use amongst the most ancient Christian writers. These analogies not only repel the objection, but cast the presumption on the other side; and afford a considerable degree of positive proof, that the words in question have been borrowed from the places of scripture in which we now find them.

But take it, if you will, the other way, that Clement had heard these words from the apostles, or first teachers of Christianity; with respect to the precise point of our argument, viz. that the scriptures contain what the apostles taught, this supposition may serve almost as well.

III. Near the conclusion of the epistle to the Romans, St. Paul, amongst others, sends the following salutation—"Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobus, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them."

Of Hermas, who appears in this catalogue of Roman Christians as contemporary with St. Paul, a book bearing the name, and (it is most probable) rightly, is still remaining. It is called the Shepherd or Pastor of Hermas. Its antiquity is incontestible, from the quotations of it in Irenæus, A. D. 178, Clement of Alexandria, A. D. 194, Tertullian, A. D. 200, Origen A. D. 230. The notes of time extant in the epistle itself, agree with its title, and with the testimonies concerning it, for it purports

to have been written during the life-time of Clement.

In this piece are tacit allusions to St. Matthew's, St. Luke's, and St. John's gospels, that is to say, there are applications of thoughts and expressions found in these gospels, without citing the place or writer from which they were taken. In this form appear in Hermas, the confessing and denying of Christ; the parable of the seed sown; the comparison of Christ's disciples to little children; the saying, "He that putteth away his wife, and marieth another, committeth adultery." The singular expression, "having received all power from his father," in probable allusion to Matt. xxviii. 18. and Christ being the "gate," or only way of coming "to God," in plain allusion to John xiv. 6.—x. 7, 9. There is also a probable allusion to Acts v. 32.

This piece is the representation of a vision, and has by many been accounted a weak and fanciful performance. I therefore observe, that the character of the writing has little to do with the purpose for which we adduce it. It is the age in which it was composed, that gives the value to its testimony.

IV. Ignatius as it is testified by ancient Christian writers, became bishop of Antioch about thirty-seven years after Christ's ascension; and therefore, from his time, and place, and station, it is probable that he had known and conversed with many of the apostles. Epistles of Ignatius are referred to by Polycarp, his contemporary. Passages found in the epistles now extant under his name, are quoted by Irenæus, A. D. 178, by Origen, A. D. 230; and the occasion of writing the epistle is given at large by Eusebius and Jerome. What are called the smaller epistles of Ignatius, are generally deemed to be those which were read by Irenæus, Origen, and Eusebius.†

† Lardner's Cred. vol. I. p. 147.

In these epistles are various undoubted allusions to the gospels of St. Matthew and St. John; yet so far of the same form with those in the preceding articles, that, like them, they are not accompanied with marks of quotation.

Of these allusions, the following are clear specimens:

Matt. † { "Christ was baptized of John, that all
righteousness might be fulfilled by him."
"Be ye wise as serpents in all things,
and harmless as a dove."
"Yet the spirit is not deceived, being
from God; for it knows whence it comes
and whither it goes."
John. † { "He (Christ) is the door of the Fa-
ther, by which enter in Abraham and
Isaac and Jacob, and the apostles, and the
Church."

As to the manner of quotation, this is observable:—Ignatius, in one place, speaks of St. Paul in terms of high respect, and quotes his Epistle to the Ephesians by name; yet in several other places he borrows words and sentiments from the same epistle without mentioning it; which shews that this was his general manner of using and applying writings then extant, and then of high authority.

V. Polycarp|| had been taught by the apostles;

† iii. 15. "For thus it becomes us to fulfill all righteousness."

xi. 16. "Be therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

† iii. 8. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the spirit."

x. 9. "I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved."

|| *Ib.* vol. I. p. 192.

had conversed with many who had seen Christ; was also by the apostles appointed bishop of Smyrna. This testimony concerning Polycarp, is given by Ireneus, who in his youth had seen him. "I can tell the place, saith Ireneus, in which the blessed Polycarp sat and taught, and his going out and coming in, and the manner of his life, and the form of his person, and the discourses he made to the people, and how he related his conversation with John and others who had seen the lord, and how he related their sayings, and what he had heard concerning the lord, both concerning his miracles and his doctrine, as he had received them from the eye witnesses of the word of life; all which Polycarp related agreeable to the scriptures."

Of Polycarp, whose proximity to the age and country and persons of the apostles, is thus attested, we have one undoubted epistle remaining. And this, though a short letter, contains nearly forty clear allusions to books of the New Testament; which is strong evidence of the respect which Christians of that age bore for these books.

Amongst these, although the writings of St. Paul are more frequently used by Polycarp than other parts of scripture, there are copious allusions to the gospel of St. Matthew, some to passages found in the gospels both of Matthew and Luke, and some which more nearly resemble the words in Luke.

I select the following, as fixing the authority of the Lord's Prayer, and the use of it amongst the primitive Christian's, "if therefore, we pray the Lord that he will forgive us, we ought also to forgive."

"With supplication beseeching the all-seeing God not to lead us into temptation."

And the following, for the sake of repeating an observation already made, that words of our Lord found in our gospels, were at this early day quoted as spoken by him; and not only so, but quoted with

so little question or consciousness of doubt about their being really his words, as not even to mention, much less to canvass the authority from which they were taken.

“But remember what the Lord said, teaching, judge not, that ye be not judged; forgive, and ye shall be forgiven; be ye merciful, that ye may obtain mercy; with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”

Supposing Polycarp to have had these words from the books in which we now find them, it is manifest that these books were considered by him, and, as he thought, considered by his readers, as authentic accounts of Christ's discourses; and that that point was incontestible.

The following is a decisive, though what we call a tacit reference to St. Peter's speech in the Acts of the Apostles:—“whom God hath raised, having loosed the pains of death.”

VI. Papias, † a hearer of John, and companion of Polycarp, as Ireneus attests, and of that age, as all agree, in a passage quoted by Eusebius, from a work now lost, expressly ascribes the respective gospels to Matthew and Mark; and in a manner which proves that these gospels must have publicly borne the names of these authors at that time, and probably long before; for Papias does not say, that one gospel was written by Matthew, and another by Mark, but assuming this as perfectly well known, he tells us from what materials Mark collected his account, viz. from Peter's preaching, and in what language Matthew wrote, viz. in Hebrew. Whether Papias was well informed in this statement or not, to the point for which I produce his testimony, namely, that these books bore these names at this time, his testimony is complete.

VII. The writers hitherto alledged, had all lived

† *Ib.* vol. 1. p. 229.

and conversed with some of the apostles. The works of theirs which remain, are in general very short pieces, yet rendered extremely valuable by their antiquity; and none, short as they are, but what contain some important testimony to our historical scriptures. †

Not long after these, that is, not much more than twenty years after the last, follows Justin Martyr. † His remaining works are much larger than any that have yet been noticed. Although the nature of his two principal writings, one of which was addressed to heathens, and the other was a conference with a Jew, did not lead him to such frequent appeals to Christian books, as would have appeared in a discourse intended for Christian readers; we nevertheless reckon up in them between twenty and thirty quotations of the gospels and acts of the apostles, certain, distinct, and copious; if each verse be counted separately, a much greater number; if each expression, a very great one. †

† *That the quotations are more thinly srown in these, than in the writings of the next, and of succeeding ages, is, in a good measure, accounted for by the observation, that the scriptures of the New Testament had not yet, nor by their recency hardly could have become a general part of Christian education: read, as the Old Testament was, by Jews and Christians from their childhood, and thereby intimately mixing, as that had long done, with all their religious ideas; and with their language upon religious subjects. In process of time, and as soon perhaps as could be expected, this came to be the case. And then we perceive the effect, in a proportionably greater frequency, as well as copiousness of allusion. ||*

† *Ib.* Vol. 1. p. 258.

|| *Mich.* introd. c. ii. sect. vi.

† “He cites our present canon, and particularly

We meet with quotations of three of the gospels within the compass of half a page; "and in other words he says, depart from me into outer darkness, which the Father hath prepared for Satan and his angels," (which is from Matthew xxv. 41.) "And again he said in other words, I give unto you power to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and venomous beasts, and upon all the power of the enemy." (This from Luke x. 19.) "And, before he was crucified, he said, the son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the Scribes and Pharisees, and be crucified, and rise again the third day". (This from Mark viii. 31.)

In another place Justin quotes a passage in the history of Christ's birth, as delivered by Matthew and John, and fortifies his quotation by this remarkable testimony; "as they have taught, who have writ the history of all things concerning our Saviour Jesus Christ; and we believe them."

Quotations also are found from the gospel of St. John.

What, moreover, seems extremely material to be observed, is, that in all Justin's works, from which might be extracted almost a complete life of Christ, there are but two instances, in which he refers to any thing as said or done by Christ, which is not related concerning him in our present gospels: which shews that these gospels, and these, we may say, alone, were the authorities from which the christians of that day drew the information upon which they depended. One of these instances is of a saying of Christ, not met with in any book now

our four gospels continually, I dare say, above two hundred times." Jones's New and Full Methods Append. Vol. I. p. 539, ed. 1726.

extant. § The other of a circumstance in Christ's baptism, namely, a fiery or luminous appearance upon the water, which, according to Epiphanius, is noticed in the gospel of the Hebrews; and which might be true; but which whether true or false, is mentioned by Justin, with a plain mark of diminution, when compared with what he quotes as resting upon scripture authority. The reader will advert to this distinction; "and then, when Jesus came to the river Jordan, where John was baptizing, as Jesus descended into the water, a fire also was kindled in Jordan; and when he came up out of the water, *the Apostles of this our Christ have writ*, that the Holy Ghost lighted upon him as a dove."

All the references in Justin are made without mentioning the author; which proves that these books were perfectly notorious, and that there were

§ "*Wherefore also our Lord Jesus Christ has said, in whatever I shall find you, in the same I will also judge you!*"

Possibly Justin designed not to quote any text, but to represent the sense of many of our Lord's sayings. Fabricius has observed, that this saying has been quoted by many writers, and that Justin is the only one who ascribes it to our Lord, and that perhaps by a slip of his memory.

Words resembling these are read repeatedly in Ezekiel; "I will judge them according to their ways!" (vii. 3. xxxiii. 20.) It is remarkable that Justin had but just before expressly quoted Ezekiel. Mr. Jones upon this circumstance sounded a conjecture; that Justin writ only "the Lord hath said," intending to quote the words of God, or rather the sense of those words, in Ezekiel, and that some transcriber imagining these to be the words of Christ inserted in his copy the addition "Jesus Christ." Vol. I. p. 539.

no other accounts of Christ then extant, or at least, no others so received and credited, as to make it necessary to distinguish these from the rest.

But although Justin mentions not the author's names, he calls the books, "Memoirs composed by the apostles," "memoirs composed by the apostles, and their companions;" which descriptions, the latter especially, exactly suit with the titles which the gospels and Acts of the Apostles now bear.

VIII. The *clippage* came about thirty years after Justin: his testimony is remarkable only for this particular; that he relates of himself, that, travelling from Palestine to Rome, he visited upon his journey many bishops; and that "in every success, and in every city, the same doctrine is taught, which the law, and the prophets, and the Lord preached." This is an important attestation, from good authority, and of high antiquity. It is generally understood that by the word "Lord," Hegesippus intended some writing or writings, containing the teaching of Christ, in which sense alone, the term combines with the other terms "law and prophet," which denote writings, and together with them admits of the verb "preached," in the present tense. Then, that these writings were some or all of the books of the New Testament, is rendered probable from hence, that in the fragments of his works, which are preserved in Eusebius, and in a writer of the 9th century, enough, though it be little, is left to show, that Hegesippus expell'd divers things in the style of the gospels, and of the Acts of the Apostles; that he referred to the history in the second chapter of Matthew, and recited a text of that gospel as spoken by our Lord.

IX. At this time, viz. about the year 170, the churches of Lyons and Vienna, in France, sent a

relation of the sufferings of their martyrs to the churches of Asia and Phrygia.† The epistle is preserved entire by Eusebius. And what carries in some measure, the testimony of these churches to a higher age is, that they had now for their bishop Pothinus, who was ninety years old, and whose early life consequently must have immediately joined in with the times of the apostles. In this epistle are exact references to the gospels of Luke and John, and to the Acts of the Apostles. The form of reference the same as in all the preceding articles. That from St. John is in these words: "Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by the Lord, that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doeth God service."‡

X. The evidence now opens upon us full and clear. Ireneus§ succeeded Pothinus as bishop of Lyons. In his youth he had been a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of John. In the time in which he lived, he was instant not much more than a century from the publication of the gospels; in his instruction, only by one step separated from the persons of the Apostles. He asserts of himself and his contemporaries, that they were able to reckon up, in all the principal churches, the succession of bishops from the first¶ I remark these particulars concerning Ireneus with more formality than usual, because the testimony which this writer affords to the historical books of the New Testament, to their authority, and to the titles which they bear, is express, positive, and exclusive. One principal passage, in which this testimony is contained, opens with a precise assertion of the point which we have laid down as the foundation of

† *Ib.* vol. I. p. 332.

‡ *John* xvi. p. 2.

§ *Ib.* vol. I. p. 344.

¶ *Adv. Haeres.* l. 3. c. 3.

our argument, viz. that the story which the gospel exhibit is the story which the apostles told. "We have not received (saith Irenæus) the knowledge of the way of our salvation by any others than those by whom the gospel has been brought to us. Which gospel they first preached, and afterwards, by the will of God, committed to writing, that it might be for time to come the foundation and pillar of our faith — For after that our Lord arose from the dead, and they (the apostles) were endowed from above with the power of the Holy Ghost coming down upon them, they received a perfect knowledge of all things. They then went forth to all the ends of the earth, declaring to men the blessings of heavenly peace, having all of them, and every one alike, the gospel of God. Matthew then, among the Jews, writ a gospel in their own language, while Peter and Paul were preaching the gospel at Rome, and founding a church there. And after their exit, Mark also, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, delivered to us in writing the things that had been preached by Peter. And Luke, the companion of Paul, put down in a book the gospel preached by him (Paul). Afterwards John, the disciple of the Lord, who also leaned upon his breast, he likewise published a gospel while he dwelt at Ephesus in Asia." If any modern divine should write a book upon the genuineness of the gospels, he could not assert it more expressly, or state their original more distinctly, than Irenæus hath done within little more than an hundred years after they were published.

The correspondency, in the days of Irenæus, of the oral and written tradition, and the deduction of the oral tradition through various channels, from the age of the apostles, which was then lately passed, and by consequence, the probability that the books truly delivered what the apostles taught, is inferred also with strict regularity from another

passage of his works. "The tradition of the apostles (this father saith) hath spread itself over the whole universe; and all they who search after the sources of truth, will find this tradition to be held sacred in every church. We might enumerate all those who have been appointed bishops to these churches by the apostles, and all their successors, up to our days. It is by this uninterupted succession that we have received the tradition which actually exists in the church, as also the doctrines of truth, as it was preached by the apostles."† The reader will observe upon this, that the same Irenæus who is now stating the strength and uniformity of the tradition, we have before seen, recognizing in the fullest manner, the authority of the written records; from which we are entitled to conclude, that they were then conformable to each other.

I have said, that the testimony of Irenæus in favour of our gospels, is exclusive of all others. I allude to a remarkable passage in his works, in which, for some reasons sufficiently fanciful, he endeavours to shew, that there could be neither more nor fewer gospels than *four*. With his argument we have no concern. The position itself proves that four and only four gospels were at that time publicly read and acknowledged. That these were our gospels, and in the state in which we now have them, is shown from many other places of this writer beside that which we have already alleged. He mentions how Matthew begins his gospel, how Mark begins and ends his, and their supposed reasons for so doing. He enumerates at length the several passages of Christ's history in Luke, which are not found in any of the other evangelists. He states the particular design with which St. John composed his gospel, and accounts for the doctrinal declarations which precede the narrative.

To the book of the Acts of the Apostles, its author and credit, the testimony of Irenæus is no less explicit. Referring to the account of St. Paul's conversion and vocation, in the ninth chapter of that book, "Nor can they (says he, meaning the parties with whom he argues) show that he is not to be credited, who has related to us the truth with the greatest exactness." In another place, he has accurately collected the several texts in which the writer of the history is represented as accompanying St. Paul, which leads him to deliver a summary of almost the whole of the last twelve chapters of the book.

In an author thus abounding with references and allusions to the scriptures, there is not one to any apocryphal Christian writing whatever. This is a broad line of distinction between our sacred books, and the pretensions of all others.

The force of the testimony of the period which we have considered, is greatly strengthened by the observation, that it is the testimony, and the concurring testimony, of writers who lived in countries remote from one another. Clement flourished at Rome, Ignatius at Antioch, Polycarp at Smyrna, Justin Martyr in Syria, and Irenæus in France.

XI. Omitting Athenagoras and Theophilus, who lived about this time;† in the remaining works of the former of whom are clear references to Mark and Luke; and in the works of the latter, who was bishop of Antioch, the sixth in succession from the apostles, evident allusions to Matthew and John, and probable allusions to Luke (which, considering the nature of the compositions, that they were addressed to heathen readers, is as much as could be expected) observing also, that the works of two learned Christian writers of the same age, Miltiades and Pantaneus,‡ are now lost; of which Mil-

tiades Eusebius records that his writings "were monuments of zeal for the divine oracles;" and which Pantaneus, as Jerome testifies, was a man of prudence and learning, both in the divine scriptures and secular literature, and had left many commentaries upon the holy scriptures then extant: passing by these without further remark, we come to one of the most voluminous of ancient Christian writers, Clement of Alexandria*. Clement followed Irenæus at the distance of only sixteen years, and therefore may be said to maintain the series of testimony in an uninterrupted continuation.

In certain of Clement's works, now lost, but of which various parts are recited by Eusebius, there is given a distinct account of the order in which the four gospels were written. The gospels, which contain the genealogies, were (he says) written first, Mark's next, at the instance of Peter's followers, and John's the last; and this account (he tells us) that he had received from Presbyters of more ancient times. This testimony proves the following points; that these gospels were the histories of Christ then publicly received, and relied upon; that the dates, occasions, and circumstances of their publication, were at that time subjects of attention and enquiry amongst Christians. In the works of Clement which remain, the four gospels are repeatedly quoted by the names of their authors, and the acts of the apostles is expressly ascribed to Luke. In one place, after mentioning a particular circumstance, he adds these remarkable words: "We have not this passage in the four gospels delivered to us, but in that according to the Egyptians;" which puts a marked distinction between the four gospels and all other histories, or pretended histories of Christ. In another part of his works, the per-

* *Ib.* vol. II. p. 469.

† *Ib.* vol. I. p. 400. *Ib.* 422.

‡ *Ib.* vol. I. p. 418, 450.

fect confidence, with which he received the gospels, is signified by him in these words: "That this is true appears from hence, that it is written in the gospel according to St. Luke;" and again, "I need not use many words, but only to allege the evangelic voice of the Lord." His quotations are numerous. The sayings of Christ, of which he alleges many, are all taken from our gospels, the single exception to this observation appearing to be a loose † quotation of a passage in St. Matthew's gospel.

XII. In the age in which they lived, ‡ Tertullian joins on with Clement. The number of the gospels then received, the names of the evangelists, and their proper description, are exhibited by this writer in one short sentence;—"Among the *apostles*, John and Matthew teach us the faith; among *apostolical men*, Luke and Mark refresh it." The next passage to be taken from Tertullian, affords as complete an attestation of the authenticity of our books, as can be well imagined. After enumerating the churches which had been founded by Paul, at Corinth, in Galatia, at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Ephesus; the church of Rome established by Peter and Paul; and other churches derived from John; he proceeds thus: I say then, that with them, but not with them only which are apostolical, but with all who have fellowship with them in the

† "Ask great things, and the small shall be added unto you." Clement rather chose to expound the words of Matthew (vi 33.) than literally to cite them; and this is most undeniably proved by another place in the same Clement, where he both produces the text and these words as an exposition:—"Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness, for these are the great things; but the small things, and things relating to this life, shall be added unto you." Jones's *New and Full Method*, vol. I. p. 552.

‡ *Ib.* vol. II. p. 561.

same faith, is that gospel of Luke received from its first publication, which we so zealously maintain: and presently afterwards adds—"The same apostolical churches will support the other gospels, which we have from them, and according to them, I mean John's & Matthew's, although that likewise, which Mark published, may be said to be Peter's, whose interpreter Mark was." In another place Tertullian affirms, that the three other gospels were in the hands of the churches from the beginning as well as Luke's. This noble testimony fixes the universality with which the gospels were received, and their antiquity; that they were in the hands of all, and had been so from the first. And this evidence appears not more than one hundred and fifty years after the publication of the books. The reader must be given to understand that, when Tertullian speaks of maintaining or defending (tuendi) the gospel of St. Luke, he only means maintaining or defending the integrity of the copies of Luke received by Christian churches, in opposition to certain curtailed copies used by Marcion, against whom he writes.

This author frequently cites the Acts of the apostles under that title, once calls it Luke's commentary, and observes how St. Paul's epistles confirm it.

After this general evidence; it is unnecessary to add particular quotations. These, however, are so numerous and ample, as to have led Dr. Lardner to observe, "that there are more, and larger quotations of the small volume of the New Testament in this one Christian author, than there are of all the works of Cicero in writers of all characters for several ages †."

Tertullian quotes no Christian writings as of equal authority with the scriptures, and no spurious book at all; a broad line of distinction, we may once more observe, between our sacred books and all others.

† *Lardner's Cred.* vol. II. p. 647.

We may again likewise remark the wide extent through which the reputation of the gospels, and of the Acts of the apostles, had spread, and the perfect consent in this point of distant and independent societies. It is now only about two hundred and fifty years since Christ was crucified; and within this period, to say nothing of the apostolical fathers who have been noticed already, we have Justin Martyr at Neapolis, Theophilus at Antioch, Ireneus in France, Clement at Alexandria, Tertullian at Carthage, quoting the same books of historical scriptures, and I may say, quoting these alone.

XIII. An interval of only thirty years, and that occupied by no small number of Christian writers†, whose works only remain in fragments and quotations, and in every one of which is some reference or other to the gospels, (and in one of them (Hippolytus, as preserved in Theodoret) is an abstract of the whole gospel history) brings us to a name of great celebrity in Christian antiquity, Origen‡, of Alexandria, who, in the quantity of his writings, exceed the most laborious of the Greek and Latin authors. Nothing can be more peremptory upon the subject now under consideration, and, from a writer of his learning and information, more satisfactory, than the declaration of Origen, preserved, in an extract from his works, by Eusebius: "That the four gospels alone, are received without dispute, by the whole church of God under heaven;" to which declaration is immediately subjoined a brief history of the respective authors, to whom they were then, as they are now, ascribed. The language holden concerning the gospels throughout the works of Origen which remain, entirely corresponds with

† *Minucius Felix, Appolonius Caius, Asterius Urbanus, Alexander Bishop of Jerusalem, Hippolytus, Ammonius, Julius Africanus.*

‡ *Ib. vol. III. p. 234.*

the testimony here cited. His attestation to the acts of the apostles is no less positive: "And Luke also once more sounds the trumpet relating the acts of the apostles." The universality with which the scriptures were then read, is well signified by this writer, in a passage in which he has occasion to observe against Celsus, "That it is not in any private books, or such as are read by a few only, and those studious persons, but in books read by every body, that it is written, the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by things that are made." It is to no purpose to single out quotations of scripture from such a writer as this. We might as well make a selection of the quotations of scripture in Dr. Clark's sermons. They are so thickly sown in the works of Origen, that Dr. Mill says, "If we had all his works remaining, we should have before us almost the whole text of the Bible †."

Origen, notices, in order to censure, certain apocryphal gospels. He also uses four writings of this sort; that is, throughout his large works he once or twice, at the most, quotes each of the four; but always with some mark, either of direct reprobation, or of caution to his readers, manifestly esteeming them of little or of no authority.

XIV. Gregory, Bishop of Neocaesarea, and Dionysius of Alexandria, were scholars of Origen.— Their testimony, therefore, though full and particular, may be reckoned a repetition only of his. The series, however of evidence, is continued by Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, who flourished within twenty years after Origen. "The church (says this father) is watered, like Paradise, by four rivers, that is, by four gospels." The Acts of the Apostles is also frequently quoted by Cyprian under that name, and under the name of the "divine scrip-

† *Mill. proleg. cap. vi. p. 66.*

ures. In his various writings, are such constant and copious citations of scripture, as to place this part of the testimony beyond controversy. Nor is there, in the works of this eminent African Bishop, one quotation of a spurious or apocryphal Christian writing.

XV. Passing over a croud † of writers following Cyprian, at different distances, but all within forty years of his time, and who all, in the imperfect remains of their works, either cite the historical scriptures of the New Testament, or speak of them in terms of profound respect; I single out Victorin, Bishop of Pettaw in Germany, merely on account of the remoteness of his situation from that of Origen and Cyprian, who were Africans; by which circumstance, his testimony taken in conjunction with theirs, proves that the scripture histories, and the same histories, were known and received from one side of the Christian world to the other. This Bishop ‡ lived about the year 295; and in a commentary upon this text of the Revelation, "the first was like a lion, the second like a calf, and the third like a man, and the fourth like a flying eagle," he makes out that by the four creatures are intended the four gospels, and to shew the propriety of the symbols, he recites the subject with which each evangelist opens his history. The explication is fanciful, but the testimony positive. He also expressly cites the acts of the apostles.

XVI. Arnobius and Lactantius||, about the year 300, composed formal arguments upon the credibi-

† *Novatus, Rome, A. D. 251. Dionysius, Rome, A. D. 259. Commodian, A. D. 270. Anatolius, Laodicea, A. D. 270. Theognostus, A. D. 282. Methodius, Lycia, A. D. 290. Philcas, Egypt, 296.*

‡ *Ib. vol. V. p. 214.*

|| *Ibid. vol. VII. p. 43, 201.*

lity of the Christian religion. As these arguments were addressed to Gentiles, the authors abstain from quoting Christian books *by name*. one of them giving this very reason for his reserve: but when they come to state, for the information of their readers, the outlines of Christ's history, it is apparent that they draw their accounts from our gospels, and from no other sources; for these statements exhibit a summary of almost every thing which is related of Christ's actions and miracles by the four evangelists. Arnobius vindicates, without mentioning their names, the credit of these historians, observing that they were eye-witnesses of the facts which they relate, and that their ignorance of the art of composition was rather a confirmation of their testimony, than an objection to it. Lactantius also argues in defence of the religion, from the consistency, simplicity, disinterestedness, and sufferings of the Christian historians, meaning by that term our evangelists.

XVII. We close the series of testimonies with that of Eusebius†, Bishop of Cesarea, who flourished in the year 315, contemporary with, or posterior only by fifteen years, to the two authors last cited. This voluminous writer, and most diligent collector of the writings of others, beside a variety of large works, composed a history of the affairs of Christianity from its origin to his own time. His testimony to the scriptures, is the testimony of a man much conversant in the works of Christian authors, written during the three first centuries of its era; and who had read many which are now lost. In a passage of his evangelical demonstration, Eusebius remarks, with great nicety, the delicacy of two of the evangelists, in their manner of noticing any circumstance which regarded themselves, and of Mark, as writing under Peter's direction, in the circumstances which regarded him. The illustration of

† *Ibid. vol. VIII. p. 33.*

this remark leads him to bring together long quotations from each of the evangelists; and the whole passage is a proof, that Eusebius, and the Christians of those days, not only read the gospels, but studied them with attention and exactness. In a passage of his ecclesiastical history, he treats, in form and at large, of the occasions of writing the four gospels, and of the order in which they were written. The title of the chapter is "Of the order of the Gospels;" and it begins thus: "Let us observe the writings of this apostle John, which are not contradicted by any; and first of all must be mentioned, as acknowledged by all, the gospel according to him, well known to all the churches under heaven; and that it has been justly placed by the ancients the fourth in order, and after the other three, may be made evident in this manner." Eusebius then proceeds to show that John wrote the last of the four, and that his gospel was intended to supply the omissions of the others, especially in the part of our Lord's ministry, which took place before the imprisonment of John the Baptist. He observes, "that the apostles of Christ were not studious of the ornaments of composition, nor indeed forward to write at all, being wholly occupied with their ministry."

This learned author makes no use at all of Christian writings, forged with the names of Christ's apostles, or their companions.

We close this branch of our evidence here, because, after Eusebius, there is no room for any question upon the subject, the works of Christian writers being as full of texts of scripture, and of references to scripture, as to the discourses of modern divines. Future testimonies to the books of scripture could only prove that they never lost their character and authority.

SECTION II.

When the scriptures are quoted, or alluded to, they are quoted with peculiar respect, as books sui generis, as possessing an authority which belonged to other books, and as conclusive in all questions and controversies amongst Christians.

BESIDE the general strain of reference and quotation, which uniformly and strongly indicates this distinction, the following may be regarded as specific testimonies.

I. Theophilus †, Bishop of Antioch, the sixth in succession from the apostles, and who flourished little more than a century after the books of the New Testament were written, having occasion to quote one of our gospels, writes thus: "These things the holy scriptures teach us, and all who were moved by the holy spirit, among whom John says, in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God." Again; "concerning the righteousness which the law teaches, the like things are to be found in the prophets and the *gospels*, because that all being inspired, spoke by one and the same spirit of God †." No words can testify more strongly than these do, the high and peculiar respect in which these books were holden.

II. A writer against Artemon †, who may be supposed to come about one hundred and fifty-eight years after the publication of the scriptures, in a passage quoted by Eusebius, uses these expressions: "Possibly what they (our adversaries) say, might have been credited, *if first of all* the divine scrip-

† *Lard. Cred. pr. ii. vol. I. p. 429.*

‡ *Lard. Cred. p. 448.*

¶ *Ib. vol. III. p. 40.*

tures did not contradict them; and then the writings of certain brethren, more ancient than the times of Victor." The brethren mentioned by name, are, Justin, Miltiades, Tatian, Clement, Irenæus, Melito, with a general appeal to many more not named. This passage proves, first, that there was at that time a collection called divine scriptures; secondly, that these scriptures were esteemed of higher authority than the writings of the most early and celebrated Christian

III. In a piece ascribed to Hippolytus †, who lived near the same time, the author professes, in giving his correspondent instruction in the things about which he enquires, "to draw out of the *sacred fountain*, and to set before him the sacred scriptures, what may afford satisfaction." He then quotes immediately Paul's epistles to Timothy, and afterwards many books of the New Testament. This preface to the quotations, carries in it a marked distinction between the scriptures and other books.

IV. "Our assertions and discourses," saith Origen †, "are unworthy of credit; we must receive the *scriptures* as witnesses." After treating of the duty of prayer, he proceeds with his argument thus: "what we have said may be proved from the divine scriptures." In his books against Celsus, we find this passage: "That our religion teaches us to seek after wisdom, shall be shown, both out of the ancient Jewish scriptures which we also use, and out of those written since Jesus; which are believed in the churches to be divine." These expressions afford abundant evidence of the peculiar and exclusive authority which the scriptures possessed.

V. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage §, whose age

lies close to that of Origen, earnestly exhorts Christian teachers in all doubtful cases, "to go back to the *fountain*; and if the truth has in any case been shaken, to recur to the gospels and apostolic writings."—"The precepts of the gospel," says he in another place, "are nothing less than authorotative divine lessons, the foundations of our hope, the supports of our faith, the guides of our way, the safe-guards of our course to heaven."

VI. Novatus †, a Roman, contemporary with Cyprian, appeals to the scriptures, as the authority by which all errors were to be repelled, and disputes decided. "That Christ is not only man but God also, is proved by the sacred authority of the divine writings."—"The divine scriptures easily detects and confutes the frauds of heretics."—"It is not by the fault of the heavenly scriptures, which never deceive." Stronger assertions than these could not be used.

VII. At the distance of twenty years from the writer last cited, Anatolius †, a learned Alexandrian, and Bishop of Laodicea, speaking of the rule of keeping Easter, a question at that day agitated with much earnestness, says of those whom he opposed, they can by no means prove their point by the authority of the divine scripture."

VIII. The Arians, who sprung up about fifty years after this, argued strenuously against the use of the words consubstantial and essence, and like phrases; "because they were not in scripture §." And in the same strain, one of the advocates opens a conference with Augustine, after the following manner: "If you say what is reasonable, I must submit. If you allege any thing from the divine scriptures, which are common to both, I must hear

† Lard. Cred. vol. III p. 112.

† Ib. p. 287, 288, 289.

§ Lard. Cred. vol IV. p. 840.

† Lard. Cred. vol. V. p. 102.

† Ib. vol. V. p. 146.

§ Ib. vol. VII. p. 283, 284.

But unscriptural expressions (quæ extra scripturam sunt) deserve no regard."

Athanasius, the great antagonist of Arianism, after having enumerated the books of the Old and New Testament, adds, "These are the fountains of salvation, that he who thirsts may be satisfied with the oracles contained in them. In these alone the doctrine of salvation is proclaimed. Let no man add to them, or take any thing from them†."

IX. Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem‡, who wrote about twenty years after the appearance of Arianism, uses these remarkable words: "concerning the divine and holy mysteries of faith; not the least article ought to be delivered without the divine scriptures." We are assured that Cyril's scriptures were the same as ours, for he has left us a catalogue of the books included under that name.

X. Epiphanius§, twenty years after Cyril, challenges the Arians, and the followers of Origen, to produce any passage of the Old or New Testament, favouring their sentiments."

XI Phebadius, a Gallic Bishop who lived about thirty years after the council of Nice, testifies, that the bishops of that council first consulted the sacred volumes, and then declared their faith||."

XII. Basil, Bishop of Cesarea, in Cappadocia, contemporary with Epiphanius, says, "that hearers instructed in the scriptures, ought to examine what is said by their teachers, and to embrace what is agreeable to the scriptures, and to reject what is otherwise¶."

XIII. Ephraim, the Syrian, a celebrated writer

† *Lard. Cred. vol. XII. p. 182.*

‡ *Ib. vol. VII. p. 276.*

§ *Ib. p. 314.*

|| *Ib. vol. IX. p. 52.*

¶ *Ib. vol. IX. p. 124.*

of the same times, bears this conclusive testimony to the proposition which forms the subject of our present chapter: "The truth written in the sacred volume of the gospel, is a perfect rule. Nothing can be taken from it, nor added to it, without great guilt†."

XV. If we add Jerome to these, it is only for the evidence which it affords of the judgment of preceding ages. Jerome observes, concerning the quotations of of *ancient* Christian writers, that is, of writers who were *ancient* in the year 400, that they made a distinction between books, some they quoted as of authority, and others not; which observation relates to the books of scripture, compared with other writings, apocryphal or heathen‡.

SECTION III.

The scriptures were in very early times collected into a distinct volume.

IGNATIUS, who was Bishop of Antioch within forty years after the ascension, and who had lived and conversed with the apostles, speaks of the gospel and of the apostles, in terms which render it very probable, that he meant by the gospel, the book or volume of the gospels, and by the apostles, the book or volume of their epistles. His words in one place are‡, "fleeing to the gospel as the flesh of Jesus, and to the apostles as the presbytery of the church;" that is, as Le Clerc interprets them,

† *Lard. Cred. vol. IX. p. 202.*

‡ *Ib. vol. X. p. 123, 124.*

§ *Ib. pr. ii. vol. I. p. 180.*

“in order to understand the will of God, he fled to the gospels, which he believed no less than if Christ in the flesh had been speaking to him; and to the writings of the apostles, whom he esteemed as the presbytery of the whole Christian church.” It must be observed that about eighty years after this we have direct proof, in the writings of Clement of Alexandria†, that these two names, “gospel” and “apostles,” were the names by which the writings of the New Testament, and the division of these writings, were usually expressed.

Another passage from Ignatius is the following:—
 “But the gospel has some what in it more excellent, the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, his passion, and resurrection‡.”

And a third, “Ye ought to hearken to the prophets, but especially to the gospel, in which the passion has been manifested to us, and the resurrection perfected.” In this last passage the prophets and the gospel are put in conjunction; and as Ignatius undoubtedly meant by the prophets a collection of writings, it is probable that he meant the same by the gospel, the two terms standing in evident parallelism with each other.

This interpretation of the word “gospel” in the passage above quoted from Ignatius, is confirmed by a piece of nearly equal antiquity, the relation of the martyrdom of Polycarp by the church of Smyrna. “All things, (say they) that went before were done, that the Lord might show us a martyrdom according to the gospel, for he expected to be delivered up as the Lord also did§.” And in another place, we do not commend those who offer themselves, forasmuch as the gospel teaches us no such thing||.” In both these places, what is called the

† *Lard. Cred. vol. II. p. 516.*

‡ *Ib. p. 182.*

|| *Ib. Ep. c. iv.*

§ *Ig. Ep. c. i.*

gospel seems to be the history of Jesus Christ, and of his doctrine.

If this be the true sense of the passages, they are not only evidences of our proposition, but strong, and very ancient, proofs of the high esteem in which the books of the New Testament were holden.

II Eusebius relates, that Quadratus and some others, who were the immediate successors of the apostles, travelling abroad to preach Christ, carried the gospels with them and delivered them to their converts. The words of Eusebius are, “then travelling abroad, they performed the work of evangelists, being ambitious to preach Christ, and deliver the scripture of the divine gospels‡.” Eusebius had before him the writings both of Quadratus himself, and of many others of that age which are now lost. It is reasonable, therefore, to believe, that he had good grounds for his assertion. What is thus recorded of the gospels took place within sixty, or at the most seventy, years after they were published; and it is evident, that they must, before this time, and, it is probable, long before this time, have been in general use, and in high esteem in the churches planted by the apostles; inasmuch as they were now, we find, collected into a volume, and the immediate successors of the apostles, they who preached the religion of Christ to those who had not already heard it, carried the volume with them, and delivered it to their converts.

III. Ireneus, in the year 178‡, puts the evangelic and apostolic writings in connection with the law and the prophets, manifestly intending by the one a code or collection of Christian sacred writings, as the other expressed the code or collection of Jewish sacred writings. And.

IV. Melito, at this time Bishop of Sardis, writing

† *Lard. Cred. p. ii. vol. I. p. 226,*

‡ *Ib. vol. I. p. 383.*

to one Onesimus, tells his correspondent†, that he had procured an accurate account of the books of the Old Testament. The occurrence, in this passage, of the *Old Testament*, has been brought to prove, and it certainly does prove, that there was then a volume or collection of writings called the *New Testament*.

V. In the time of Clement of Alexandria, about fifteen years after the last quoted testimony, it is apparent that the Christian scriptures were divided into two parts, under the general titles of the gospels and apostles; and that both these were regarded as of the highest authority. One, out of many expressions of Clement alluding to this distribution, is the following:—"There is a consent and harmony between the law and the prophets, the apostles and the gospel‡."

VI. The same division, "prophets, gospels, and apostles," appears in Tertullian§, the contemporary of Clement. The collection of the gospels is likewise called by this writer the "Evangelic Instrument||;" the whole volume, the "New Testament;" and the two parts, the "Gospels and Apostles¶."

VII. From many writers also of the third century, and especially from Cyprian, who lived in the middle of it, it is collected, that the Christian scriptures were divided into two codes or volumes, one called the "gospels or scriptures of the Lord," the other, the "Apostles, or epistles of the Apostles‡."

VIII. Eusebius, as we have already seen, takes some pains to show, that the gospel of St. John had been justly placed by the ancients "the fourth in order, and after the other three‡." These are the terms of his proposition; and the very introduction

† *Lard. Cred.* p. 231.

‡ *Ib.* vol. II. p. 516.

§ *Ib.* vol. II. p. 631.

|| *Ib.* vol. II. p. 574.

¶ *Ib.* vol. II. p. 632.

‡ *Ib.* vol. IV. p. 346.

‡ *Lard. Cred.* vol. VIII. p. 90.

of such an argument proves incontestibly, that the four gospels had been collected into a volume to the exclusion of every other; that their order in the volume had been adjusted with much consideration; and that this had been done by those who were called ancients in the time of Eusebius.

In the Dioclesian persecution, in the year 303, the scriptures were sought out and burnt;† many suffered death rather than deliver them up; and those who betrayed them to the persecutors, were accounted as lapsed and apostate. On the other hand, Constantine, after his conversion, gave directions for multiplying copies of the divine oracles, and for magnificently adorning them at the expence of the imperial treasury.‡ What the Christians of that age so richly embellished in their prosperity, and, which is more, so tenaciously preserved under persecution, was the very volume of the *New Testament* which we now read.

SECTION IV.

Our present sacred writings were soon distinguished by appropriate names and titles of respect.

I. **P**OLYCARP—"I trust that ye are well exercised in the holy scriptures—as in these scriptures it is said, be ye angry and sin not, and let not the sun go down upon your wrath."‡ This passage is extremely important; because it proves that, in

† *Lard. Cred.* vol. VII. p. 214, et seq.

‡ *Ib.* p. 432.

|| *Ib.* vol. I. p. 203.

the time of Polycarp, who had lived with the apostles, there were Christian writings, distinguished by the name of "holy scriptures," or sacred writings. Moreover, the text quoted by Polycarp is a text found in the collection at this day. What also the same Polycarp hath elsewhere quoted in the same manner, may be considered as proved to belong to the collection; and this comprehends St. Matthew's, and probably St. Luke's gospel, the Acts of the Apostles, ten epistles of Paul, the first epistle of Peter, and the first of John.† In another place Polycarp has these words; "Whoever perverts the oracles of the Lord to his own lusts, and says there is neither resurrection nor judgment, he is the first born of Satan."‡ It does not appear what else Polycarp could mean by the "oracles of the Lord," but those same "holy scriptures," or sacred writings, of which he had spoken before.

II. Justin Martyr, whose apology was written about thirty years after Polycarp's epistle, expressly cites some of our present histories under the title of GOSPEL, and that, not as a name by him first ascribed to them, but as the name by which they were generally known in his time. His words are these: "For the apostles, in the memoirs composed by them, *which are called gospels*, have thus delivered it, that Jesus commanded them to take bread, and give thanks."§ There exists no doubt, but that by the memoirs above mentioned, Justin meant our present historical scriptures, for throughout his works he quotes these and no others.

III. Dionysius, Bishop of Corinth, who came thirty years after Justin, in a passage preserved in Eusebius, (for his works are lost) speaks of the scriptures of the Lord.¶

† Lard. Cred. p. 223.

‡ Ib. p. 222.

§ Ib. vol. I. p. 271.

¶ Ib. p. 298.

IV. And at the same time, or very nearly so, by Ireneus, bishop of Lyons, in France,* they are called "divine scriptures,"—"divine oracles,"—"scriptures of the Lord,"—"evangelic and apostolic writings.† The quotations of Ireneus prove decidedly that our present gospels, and these alone, together with the acts of the apostles, were the historical books comprehended by him under these appellations.

V. St. Matthew's gospel is quoted by Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch, contemporary with Ireneus, under the title of the "evangelic voice;"‡ and the copious works of Clement of Alexandria, published within fifteen years of the same time, ascribe to the books of the New Testament the various titles of "sacred books,"—"divine scriptures,"—"divinely inspired scriptures,"—"scriptures of the Lord,"—"the true evangelical canon."§

VI. Tertullian, who joins on with Clement, beside adopting most of the names and epithets above noticed, calls the gospels "our digesta," in allusion, as it should seem, to some collection of Roman laws¶ then extant.

VII. By Origen, who came thirty years after Tertullian, the same, and others no less strong titles, are applied to the Christian scriptures; and in addition thereunto, this writer frequently speaks of the "Old and New Testament,"—"the ancient and new scriptures,"—"the ancient and new oracles."§

VIII. In Cyprian, who was not twenty years later, they are "books of the spirit,"—"divine fountains,"—"fountains of the divine fulness."**

* The reader will observe the remoteness of these two writers in country and situation.

† Lard. Cred. p. 343, et seq.

‡ Ib. p. 427. § Ib. vol. II. p. 213.

¶ Ib. vol. II. p. 630. § Ib. vol. III. p. 280.

** Ib. vol. IV. p. 844.

The expressions we have thus quoted, are evidences of high and peculiar respect. They all occur within two centuries from the publication of the books. Some of them commence with the companions of the apostles; and they increase in number and variety, through a series of writers, touching upon one another, and deduced from the first age of the religion.

SECTION V.

Our scriptures were publicly read and expounded in the religious assemblies of the early Christians.

JUSTIN MARTYR, who wrote in the year 140, which was seventy or eighty years after some, and less, probably, after others of the gospels were published, giving, in his first apology, an account to the emperor, of the Christian worship, has this remarkable passage:

“The memoirs of the apostles, or the writings of the prophets, are read according as the time allows, and, when the reader has ended, the president makes a discourse, exhorting to the imitation of so excellent things.”*

A few short observations will shew the value of this testimony.

1. The “memoirs of the apostles,” Justin, in another place, expressly tells us, are what are called “gospels;” and that they were the gospels which we now use, is made certain by Justin’s numerous quotations of *them*, and his silence about any others.

* *Lard. Cred. vol. I. p. 273.*

2. Justin describes the general usage of the Christian church.

3. Justin does not speak of it as recent, or newly instituted, but in the terms in which men speak of established customs.

2. Tertullian, who followed Justin at the distance of about fifty years, in his account of the religious assemblies of the Christians, as they were conducted in his time, says, “We come together to recollect the divine scriptures; we nourish our faith, raise our hope, confirm our trust, by the sacred word.”*

3. Eusebius records of Origen, and cites for his authority the letters of bishops contemporary with Origen, that when he went into Palestine, about the year 216, which was only sixteen years after the date of Tertullian’s testimony, he was desired by the bishops of that country to discourse and expound the scriptures publicly in the church, though he was not yet ordained a presbyter.† This anecdote recognizes the usage, not only of reading; but of expounding the scriptures; and both as subsisting in full force. Origen also himself bears witness to the same practice: “This (says he) we do, when the scriptures are read in the church, and when the discourse for explication is delivered to the people.”‡ And what is a still more ample testimony, many homilies of his upon the scriptures of the New Testament, delivered by him in the assemblies of the church, are still extant.

IV. Cyprian, whose age was not twenty years lower than that of Origen, gives his people an account of having ordained two persons, who were before confessors, to be readers, and what they were to read, appears by the reason which he gives

* *Lard. Cred. vol. II. p. 628.*

† *Ib. vol. III. p. 63.*

‡ *Ib. vol. III. p. 302.*

for his choice:—"Nothing (says Cyprian) can be more fit than that he who has made a glorious confession of the Lord, should read publicly in the church; that he who has shown himself willing to die a martyr, should read the gospel of Christ, by which martyrs are made."^a

V. Intimations of the same custom may be traced in a great number of writers in the beginning and throughout the whole of the fourth century. Of these testimonies I will only use one, as being, of itself, express and full. Augustine, who appeared near the conclusion of the century, displays the benefit of the Christian religion on this very account, the public reading of the scriptures in the churches, "where (says he) is a confluence of all sorts of people of both sexes, and where they hear how they ought to live well in this world, that they may deserve to live happily and eternally in another." And this custom he declares to be universal: "The canonical books of scripture being read every where, the miracles therein recorded are well known to all people."[†]

It does not appear that any other books, than our present scriptures, were thus publicly read, except that the epistle of Clement was read in the church of Corinth, to which it was addressed, and in some others; and that the Shepherd of Hermas was read in many churches. Nor does it subtract much from the value of the argument, that these two writings partly come within it, because we allow them to be the genuine writings of apostolical men. There is not the least evidence that any other gospel than the four which we receive, was ever admitted to this distinction.

^a *Lard Cred. vol. IV. p. 842.*

[†] *Ib. vol. X. p. 276, et. seq.*

SECTION VI.

Commentaries were anciently written upon the scriptures; harmonies formed out of them; different copies carefully collated; and versions made of them into different languages.

NO greater proof can be given of the esteem in which these books were holden by the ancient Christians, or of the sense then entertained of their value and importance, than the industry bestowed upon them. And it ought to be observed, that the value and importance of these books, consisted entirely in their genuineness and truth. There was nothing in them as works of taste, or as compositions, which could have induced any one to have written a note upon them. Moreover it shows that they were even then considered as ancient books. Men do not write comments upon publications of their own times; therefore the testimonies cited under this head, afford an evidence which carries up the evangelic writings much beyond the age of the testimonies themselves, and to that of their reputed authors.

I. Tatian, a follower of Justin Martyr, and who flourished about the year 170, composed a harmony, or collation of the gospels, which he called *Diateffaron* of the four.* The title, as well as the work, is remarkable; because it shows that then, as now, there were four, and only four gospels, in general use with Christians. And this was little more than a hundred years after the publication of some of them.

II. Pantanus of the Alexandrian school, a man of great reputation and learning, who came twenty

* *Lard. Cred. vol. I. p. 307.*

years after Tatian, wrote many commentaries upon the holy scriptures, which as Jerome testifies, were extant in his time.*

III. Clement of Alexandria, wrote short explanations of many books of the Old and New Testament.†

IV. Tertullian appeals from the authority of a later version then in use, to the "authentic Greek."‡

V. An anonymous author, quoted by Eusebius, and who appears to have written about the year 212, appeals to the *ancient copies* of the scriptures, in refutation of some corrupt readings alleged by the followers of Artemon.§

VI. The same Eusebius mentioned by name several writers of the church, who lived at this time, and concerning whom he says, "there still remain divers monuments of the laudable industry of those ancient and ecclesiastical men," (*i. e.* of Christian writers, who were considered as ancient in the year 300) adds, "there are besides, treatises of many others, whose names we have not been able to learn, orthodox and ecclesiastical men, as the interpretations of the divine scriptures, given by each of them, show."¶

VII. The five last testimonies may be referred to the year 200, immediately after which, a period of thirty years gives us,

Julius Africanus, who wrote an epistle upon the apparent difference in the genealogies in Matthew and Luke, which he endeavours to reconcile by the distinction of natural and legal descent, and conducts his hypothesis with great industry through the whole series of generations.‡

* *Lard. Cred. vol. I. p. 455.*

† *Ib. vol. II. p. 462.*

‡ *Ib. vol. III. p. 46.*

§ *Ib. vol. III. p. 170.*

¶ *Ib. p. 638.*

¶ *Ib. vol. II. p. 551.*

Ammonius, a learned Alexandrian, who composed, as Tatian had done, a harmony of *the four gospels*; which, proves, as Tatian's work did, that there were four gospels, and no more, at this time in use in the church. It affords also an instance of the zeal of Christians for those writings, and of their solicitude about them.*

And, above both these, Origen, who wrote commentaries, or homilies, upon most of the books included in the New Testament, and upon no other books but these. In particular, he wrote upon St. John's gospel, very largely upon St. Matthew's, and commentaries, or homilies, upon the acts of the apostles.†

VIII. In addition to these, the third century likewise contains,

Dionysius of Alexandria, a very learned man, who compared, with great accuracy, the accounts in the four gospels of the time of Christ's resurrection, adding a reflection which showed his opinion of their authority:—"Let us not think that the evangelists disagree, or contradict each other, although there be some small difference; but let us honestly and faithfully endeavor to reconcile what we read."‡

Victorin, Bishop of Pectaw in Germany, who wrote comments upon St. Matthew's gospel.¶

Lucian, a Presbyter of Antioch, and Helychius, an Egyptian bishop, who put forth editions of the New Testament.

IX. The fourth century supplies a catalogue¶ of

* *Lard. Cred. p. 122.*

† *Ib. p. 352, 197, 202, 245.*

‡ *Ib. vol. IV. p. 661.*

¶ *Ib. p. 195.*

¶ *Eusebius, A. D. 315*

Juvencus, Spain, 330

fifteen writers, who expended their labours upon the books of the New Testament, and whose works or names are come down to our time; amongst which number, it may be sufficient, for the purpose of shewing the sentiments and the studies of learned Christians of that age, to notice the following:

Eusebius, in the very beginning of the century, wrote expressly upon the discrepancies observable in the gospel, and likewise a treatise in which he pointed out what things are related by four, what by three, what by two, and what by one evangelist.* This author also testifies, what is certainly a material piece of evidence, that the writings of the apostles had obtained such an esteem, as to be translated into every language both of Greeks and Barbarians, and to be diligently studied by all nations.† This testimony was given about the year 300; how long before that date these translations were made, does not appear.

Damascus, Bishop of Rome, corresponded with St. Jerome upon the exposition of difficult texts of scripture; and in a letter still remaining, desires

<i>Theodore, Thrace,</i>	334
<i>Hilary, Poitiers,</i>	354
<i>Fortunatus,</i>	340
<i>Appollinaris of Laodicea,</i>	362
<i>Damascus, Rome,</i>	366
<i>Gregory, Nyssen,</i>	371
<i>Didymus, of Alexandria,</i>	370
<i>Ambrose of Milan,</i>	374
<i>Diodore, of Tarsus,</i>	378
<i>Candidian, of Biescia,</i>	387
<i>Theodore, of Cilicia,</i>	394
<i>Jerome,</i>	392
<i>Chrysostron,</i>	398

* *Lard. Cred. vol. VIII. p. 46.*

† *Ib. p. 201.*

Jerome to give him a clear explanation of the word *Hosanna*, found in the New Testament; "he (Damascus) having met with very different interpretations of it, in the Greek and Latin commentaries of catholic writers which he had read."‡ This last clause shows the number and variety of commentaries then extant.

Gregory of Nyssen, at one time appeals to the most exact copies of St. Mark's gospel; at another time compares together, and proposes to reconcile, the several accounts of the resurrection given by the four evangelists; which limitation proves, that there were no other histories of Christ deemed authentic beside these, or included in the same character with these. This writer observes, acutely enough, that the disposition of the cloaths in the sepulchre, the napkin that was about our Saviour's head not lying with the linen cloaths, but wrapped together in a place by itself, did not bespeak the terror and hurry of thieves, and therefore refutes the story of the body being stolen.†

Ambrose, bishop of Milan, remarked various readings in the Latin copies of the New Testament, and appeals to the original Greek.

And Jerome, towards the conclusion of this century, put forth an edition of the New Testament in Latin, corrected, at least as to the gospels, by Greek copies, "and those (he says) ancient."

Lastly, Chrysostom, it is well known, delivered and published a great many homilies, or sermons, upon the gospels and the acts of the apostles.

It is needless to bring down this article lower; but it is of importance to add, that there is no example of Christian writers of the three first centuries composing comments upon any other books than those which are found in the New Testament.

* *Lard Cred. vol. IX. p. 108.*

† *Ib. p. 163.*

except the single one, of Clement of Alexandria commenting upon a book called the revelation of Peter.

Of the ancient versions of the New Testament, one of the most valuable is the Syriac. Syriac was the language of Palestine when Christianity was there first established. And although the books of scripture were written in Greek, for the purpose of a more extended circulation than within the precincts of Judea, yet it is probable that they would soon be translated into the vulgar language of the country where the religion first prevailed. Accordingly, a Syriac translation is now extant, all along, so far as appears, used by the inhabitants of Syria, bearing many internal marks of high antiquity, supported in its pretensions by the uniform tradition of the East, and confirmed by the discovery of many very ancient manuscripts in the libraries of Europe. It is about 200 years since a Bishop of Antioch sent a copy of this translation into Europe to be printed; and this seems to be the first time that the translation became generally known to these parts of the world. The bishop of Antioch's testament was found to contain all our books, except the second epistle of Peter, the second and third of John, and the revelation; which books, however, have since been discovered in that language in some ancient manuscripts of Europe. But in this collection, no other book, beside what is in ours, appears ever to have had a place. And, which is very worthy of observation, the text, though preserved in a remote country and without communication with ours, differs from ours very little, and in nothing that is important.*

* Jones on the Canon, vol. I. c. xiv.

SECTION VII.

Our scriptures were received by ancient Christians of different sects and persuasions, by many heretics as well as catholics, and were usually appealed to by both sides in the controversies which arose in those days.

THE three most ancient topics of controversy amongst Christians, were the authority of the Jewish institution, the origin of evil, and the nature of Christ. Upon the first of these, we find, in very early times, one class of heretics rejecting the Old Testament entirely, another contending for the obligation of its law, in all its parts, throughout its whole extent, and over every one who sought acceptance with God. Upon the two latter subjects a natural, perhaps, and venial, but a fruitless, eager, and impatient curiosity, prompted by the philosophy, and by the scholastic habits of the age, which carried men much into bold hypotheses and conjectural solutions, raised amongst some who professed Christianity very wild and unfounded opinions. I think there is no reason to believe, that the number of these bore any considerable proportion to the body of the Christian church; and amidst the disputes, which such opinions necessarily occasioned, it is a great satisfaction to perceive, what in a vast plurality of instances we do perceive, all sides recurring to the same scriptures.

I.* Basilides lived near the age of the apostles,

* The materials of the former part of this section, are taken from Dr. Lardner's History of the Heretics of the Two First Centuries, published since his death, with additions, by the Rev. Mr. Hogg, of Exeter, and inserted in the ninth volume of his works, of the edition of 1783.

any other part of the book of Numbers? Or if he did not write any part of the book of Numbers, will it follow that he did not write any of the other books of which he is usually reputed the author? And if he did write this of himself, he was justified by the occasion which extorted from him this commendation. Had this expression been written in a modern style and manner, it would probably have given you no offence. For who would be so fastidious as to find fault with an illustrious man, who, being calumniated by his nearest relations, as guilty of pride and fond of power, should vindicate his character by saying, My temper was naturally as meek and unassuming as that of any man upon earth? There are occasions, in which a modest man, who speaks truly, may speak proudly of himself, without forfeiting his general character; and there is no occasion, which either more requires, or more excuses this conduct, than when he is repelling the foul and envious aspersions of those who both knew his character and had experienced his kindness; and in that predicament stood *Aaron* and *Miriam*, the accusers of Moses. You yourself have probably felt the sting of calumny, and have been anxious to remove the impression. I do not call you a vain and arrogant coxcomb for vindicating your character, when in the latter part of this very work you boast, and I hope truly, "that the man does not exist that can say I have persecuted him, or any man, or any set of men, in the American revolution, or in the French revolution; or that I have in any case returned evil for evil." I know not what kings and priests may say to this; you may not have returned to them evil for evil, because they never, I believe, did you any harm; but you have done them all the harm you could, and that without provocation.

I think it needless to notice your observation upon what you call the dramatic style of Deuteronomy;

it is an ill founded hypothesis. You might as well ask, where the author of *Cæsar's Commentaries* got the speeches of *Cæsar*, as where the author of *Deuteronomy* got the speeches of *Moses*. But your argument—that *Moses* was not the author of *Deuteronomy*, because the reason given in that book for the observation of the sabbath is different from that given in *Exodus*, merits a reply.

You need not be told that the very name of this book imports, in Greek, a repetition of a law; and that the Hebrew doctors have called it by a word of the same meaning. In the fifth verse of the first chapter it is said in our Bibles, "Moses began to declare this law;" but the Hebrew words, more properly translated, import that Moses "began, or determined, to explain the law." This is no shift of mine to get over a difficulty; the words are so rendered in most of the ancient versions, and by *Fagius*, *Vetablus*, and *Le Clerc*; men eminently skilled in the Hebrew language. This repetition and explanation of the law, was a wise and benevolent proceeding in Moses; that those who were either not born, or were mere infants, when it was first (forty years before) delivered in *Horeb*, might have an opportunity of knowing it; especially as *Moses* their leader was soon to be taken from them, and they were about to be settled in the midst of nations given to idolatry and sunk in vice. Now where is the wonder, that some variations, and some additions, should be made to a law; when a legislator thinks fit to republish it many years after it's first promulgation?

With respect to the sabbath, the learned are divided in opinion concerning it's origin; some contending that it was sanctioned from the creation of the world; that it was observed by the patriarchs before the flood; that it was neglected by the *Israelites* during their bondage in *Egypt*; revived on the falling of manna in the wilderness; and cr.

about the year 120, or perhaps sooner.* He rejected the Jewish institution, not as spurious, but as proceeding from a being inferior to the true God; and in other respects advanced a scheme of theology widely different from the general doctrine of the Christian church, and which, as it gained over some disciples, was warmly opposed by Christian writers of the second and third century. In these writings there is positive evidence, that Basilides received the gospel of Matthew; and there is no sufficient proof that he rejected any of the other three; on the contrary, it appears that he wrote a commentary upon the gospel, so copious, as to be divided into twenty-four books.†

II. The Valentinians appeared about the same time ‡. Their heresy consisted in certain notions concerning angelic natures, which can hardly be rendered intelligible to a modern reader. They seem, however, to have acquired as much importance as any of the separatists of that early age. Of this sect, Irenæus, who wrote A. D. 172, expressly records, that they endeavored to fetch arguments for their opinions, from the evangelic and apostolic writings. || Hieracleon, one of the most celebrated of the sect, and who lived probably so early as the year 125, wrote commentaries upon Luke and John. ¶ Some observations also of his upon Matthew are preserved by Origen. § Nor is there any reason to doubt, that he received the whole New-Testament.

* Vol. IX. p. 271.

† Ib. p. 305, 306.

‡ Vol. IX. ed. 1783, p. 350, 351.

|| Vol. I. p. 333.

¶ Vol. IX. ed. 1783, p. 352.

§ Ib. vol. IX. ed. 1781, p. 353.

III. The Carpocratians were also early heretics, little, if at all, later than the two preceding.* Some of their opinions resembled what we at this day mean by Socinianism. With respect to the scriptures, they are specifically charged by Irenæus and by Epiphanius, with endeavouring to pervert a passage in Matthew, which amounts to a positive proof that they received that gospel. † Negatively, they are not accused by their adversaries, of rejecting any part of the New Testament.

IV. The Sethians, A. D. 150; ‡ the Montanists, A. D. 156; § the Marcosians, A. D. 160; ¶ Hermogenes, A. D. 180; § Praxias, A. D. 196; ** Artemon, A. D. 200; †† Theodotus A. D. 200; all included under the denomination of heretics, and all engaged in controversies with catholic Christians, received the scriptures of the New Testament.

V. Tatian, who lived in the year 172, went into many extravagant opinions, was the founder of a sect called Encratites, and was deeply involved in disputes with the Christians of that age; yet Tatian so received the four gospels, as to compose a harmony from them.

VI. From a writer, quoted by Eusebius, of about the year 200, it is apparent that they, who, at that time, contended for the mere humanity of Christ, argued from the scriptures; for they are accused by this writer of making alterations in their copies, in order to favor their opinions. ††

* Lard. Cred. p. 309.

† Ib. p. 318.

‡ Ib. p. 455.

§ Ib. p. 482.

¶ Ib. p. 348.

§ Ib. p. 473.

** Ib. p. 433.

†† Ib. p. 466.

‡‡ Ib. vol. III. p. 46.

VII. Origen's sentiments excited great controversies; the bishops of Rome and Alexandria, and many others, condemning, the bishops of the East espousing them; yet there is not the smallest question, but that both the advocates and adversaries of these opinions acknowledged the same authority of scripture. In his time, which the reader will remember was about one hundred and fifty years after the scriptures were published, many dissensions subsisted amongst Christians, with which they were reproached by Celsus, yet Origen, who has recorded this accusation without contradicting it, nevertheless testifies, 'that the four gospels were received without dispute by the whole church of God under heaven.'

VIII. Paul of Samosata, about thirty years after Origen, so distinguished himself in the controversy concerning the nature of Christ, as to be the subject of two councils, or synods, assembled at Antioch, upon his opinions. Yet he is not charged by his adversaries with rejecting any book of the New-Testament. On the contrary, Epiphanius, who wrote a history of heretics a hundred years afterwards, says, that Paul endeavored to support his doctrine by texts of the scripture. And Vicentius Lirinensis, A. D. 434, speaking of Paul and other heretics of the same age, has these words: 'Here, perhaps, some one may ask, whether heretics also urge the testimony of scripture. They urge it indeed, explicitly and vehemently; for you may see them flying through every book of the sacred law.'

IX. A controversy at the same time existed with the Noetians or Sabellians, who seem to have gone into the opposite extreme from that of Paul of Samosata, and his followers. Yet, according to the express testimony of Epiphanius, Sabellius received

* *Lard. Cred. vol. IV. p. 642.*

† *Ib. vol. XI. p. 158.*

all the scriptures. And with both sects Catholic writers constantly allege the scriptures, and reply to the arguments which their opponents drew from particular texts. This is a proof, that parties, who were the most opposite and irreconcilable to one another, acknowledged the authority of scripture, and with equal deference.

X. And as a general testimony to the same point, may be produced what was said by one of the bishops of the council of Carthage, which was holden a little before this time. "I am of opinion that blasphemous and wicked heretics, who pervert the sacred and adorable words of the scriptures, should be execrated."* Undoubtedly what they perverted they received.

XI. The Milenium, Novatianism, the baptism of heretics, the keeping of Easter, engaged also the attention, and divided the opinions of Christians, at and before that time (and, by the way, it may be observed, that such disputes, though on some accounts to be blamed, showed how much men were in earnest upon the subject) yet every one appealed for the grounds of his opinion to scripture authority. Dionysius of Alexandria, who flourished A. D. 247, describing a conference, or public disputation with the Millenarians of Egypt, confesses of them, though their adversary, "that they embraced whatever could be made out by good arguments from the holy scriptures."† Novatus, A. D. 251, distinguished by some rigid sentiments concerning the reception of those who had lapsed; and the founder of a numerous sect, in his few remaining works, quotes the gospel with the same respect as other Christians did; and concerning his followers, the testimony of Socrates, who wrote

* *Lard. Cred. vol. IX. p. 839.*

† *Ib. vol. IV. p. 666.*

about the year 440, is positive, viz. "that in the disputes between the Catholics and them, each side endeavoured to support itself by the authority of the divine scriptures."*

XII. The Donatists, who sprung up in the year 328, used the same scriptures as we do. "Produce (saith Augustine) some proof from the scriptures, whose authority is common to us both."†

XIII. It is perfectly notorious that, in the Arian controversy, which arose soon after the year 300, both sides appealed to the same scriptures, and with equal professions of deference and regard. The Arians, in their council of Antioch, A. D. 341, pronounce, that "if any one, contrary to the sound doctrine of the scriptures, say that the son is a creature, as one of the creatures, let him be anathema."‡ They and the Athanasians mutually accuse each of using *unscriptural* phrases, which was a mutual acknowledgment of the conclusive authority of scripture.

XIV. The Priscillianists, A. D. 378. || the Pelagians, A. D. 405, ¶ received the same scriptures as we do.

XV. The testimony of Chrysostom, who lived near the year 400, is so positive an affirmation of the proposition which we maintain, that it may form a proper conclusion of the argument. "The general reception of the gospels is a proof that their history is true and consistent; for since the writing of the gospels, many heretics have arisen, holding opinions contrary to what is contained in them, who yet receive the gospels, either entire or in part. §" I am not moved by what may seem a

* *Lard. Cred. vol. V. p. 105.*

† *Ib. vol. VII. p. 243.*

‡ *Ib. vol. VII. p. 277.*

|| *Ib. vol. IX. p. 325.*

¶ *Ib. vol. XI. p. 52.*

§ *Ib. vol. X. p. 316.*

deduction from Chrysostom's testimony, the words "entire or in part;" for, if all the parts which were ever questioned in our gospels, were given up, it would not affect the miraculous origin of the religion in the smallest degree. *c. g.*

Cerinthus is said by Epiphanius to have received the gospel of Matthew, but not entire. What the omissions were, does not appear. The common opinion, that he rejected the two first chapters, seems to have been a mistake.* It is agreed, however, by all who have given any account of Cerinthus, that he taught that the Holy Ghost (whether he meant by that name a person or a power) descended upon Jesus at his baptism; that Jesus from this time performed many miracles, and that he appeared after his death. He must have retained, therefore, the essential parts of the history.

Of all the ancient heretics, the most extraordinary was Marcion.† One of his tenets was the rejection of the Old Testament, as proceeding from an inferior and imperfect deity; and in pursuance of this hypothesis, he erased from the New, and that, as it should seem, without entering into any critical reasons, every passage which recognized the Jewish scriptures. He spared not a text which contradicted his opinion. It is reasonable to believe, that Marcion treated books as he treated texts; yet this rash and wild controversialist published a recension, or chastised edition of St. Luke's gospel, containing the leading facts, and all which is necessary to authenticate the religion. This example affords proof, that there were always some points, and those the main points, which neither wildness nor rashness, neither the fury of opposition nor the intemperance of controversy, would venture to

* *Lard. Cred. vol. IX. ed. 1788, p. 322.*

† *Ib. sect. ii. c. x. Also Michael. vol. I. c. 1. sect. xviii.*

call in question. There is no reason to believe that Marcion, though full of resentment against the catholic Christians, ever charged them with forging their books. "The gospel of St. Matthew, the Epistle to the Hebrews, with those of St. Peter and St. James, as well as the Old Testament in general (he said) were writings not for Christians, but for Jews."* This declaration shows the ground upon which Marcion proceeded in his mutilation of the scriptures, viz. his dislike of the passages or the books. Marcion flourished about the year 130.

Dr. Lardner, in his General Review, sums up this head of evidence in the following words:—"Noetus, Paul of Samosata, Sabellius, Marcellus, Phonus, the Novatians, Donatists, Manicheans, † Priscillianists, beside Artemon, the Audians, the Arians, and divers others, all received most or all the same books of the New Testament which the catholics received; and agreed in a like respect for them, as writ by apostles, or their disciples and companions." ‡

* I have transcribed this sentence from Michaelis (page 38) who has not, however, referred to the authority upon which he attributes these words to Marcion.

† This must be with an exception, however, of Faustus, who lived so late as the year 384.

‡ *Ib.* vol. XII. p. 12. Dr. Lardner's future enquiries supplied him with many other instances.

SECTION VIII.

The four gospels, the acts of the apostles, thirteen epistles of St. Paul, the first epistle of John, and the first of Peter, were received without doubt by those who doubted concerning the other books which are included in our present canon.

I STATE this proposition, because, if made out, it shows that the authenticity of their books was a subject amongst the early Christians of consideration and enquiry; and that, where there was cause of doubt, they did doubt; a circumstance which strengthens very much their testimony to such books as were received by them with full acquiescence.

I. Jerome, in his account of Caius, who was probably a presbyter of Rome, and who flourished near the year 200, records of him, that reckoning up only thirteen epistles of Paul, he says the fourteenth, which is inscribed to the Hebrews, is not his; and then Jerome adds, "With the Romans to this day it is not looked upon as Paul's." This agrees, in the main, with the account given by Eusebius of the same ancient author and his work, except that Eusebius delivers his own remark in more guarded terms, "and indeed to this very time, by some of the Romans, this epistle is not thought to be the apostle's."*

II. Origen, about twenty years after Caius, quoting the epistle to the Hebrews, observes that some might dispute the authority of that epistle, and therefore proceeds to quote to the same point, as *undoubted* books of scripture, the gospel of St. Matthew, the acts of the apostles, and Paul's first epistle

* *Lard. Cred.* vol. III. p. 240.

to the Thessalonians.* And in another place, this author speaks of the epistle to the Hebrews, thus: "The account come down to us is various, some saying that Clement, who was bishop of Rome, wrote this epistle; others, that it was Luke, the same who writ the gospel and the acts." Speaking also in the same paragraph, of Peter, "Peter (says he) has left one epistle acknowledged; let it be granted likewise that he wrote a second, for it is doubted of." And of John, "He has also left one epistle, of a very few lines; grant also a second and a third, for all do not allow these to be genuine." Now let it be noted, that Origen, who thus discriminates, and thus confesses his own doubts, and the doubts which subsisted in his time, expressly witnesses concerning the four gospels, "that they alone are received without dispute by the whole church of God under heaven.†"

III. Dionysius of Alexandria, in the year 247, doubts concerning the book of revelation, whether it was written by St. John, states the grounds of his doubt; represents the diversity of opinion concerning it, in his own time, and before his time.‡ Yet the same Dionysius uses and collates the four gospels, in a manner which shows that he entertained not the smallest suspicion of *their* authority, and in a manner also which shows that they, and they alone, were received as authentic histories of Christ.¶

IV. But this section may be said to have been framed on purpose to introduce to the reader two remarkable passages, extant in Eusebius's Ecclesiastical History. The first passage opens with these words—"Let us observe the writings of the apostle John, which are *uncontradicted*; and, first of all, must be mentioned, as acknowledged of all, the

* *Lard Cred. vol. III. p. 24.*

† *Ib. p. 234.*

‡ *Ib. vol. II. p. 670.*

¶ *Ib. p. 661.*

gospel according to him, well known to all the churches under heaven." The author then proceeds to relate the occasions of writing the gospels, and the reasons for placing St. John's the last, manifestly speaking throughout of all the four as parallel in their authority, and in the certainty of their original.⊖ The second passage is taken from a chapter, the title of which is, "Of the scriptures *universally acknowledged*, and of those that are not such." Eusebius begins his enumeration in the following manner: "In the first place are to be ranked the sacred four gospels, then the book of the acts of the apostles, after that are to be reckoned the epistles of Paul. In the next place, that called the first epistle of John, and the epistle of Peter, are to be esteemed authentic. After this is to be placed, if it be thought fit, the revelation of John, about which we shall observe the different opinions at proper seasons. Of the controverted, but yet well known, or approved by the most, are that called the epistle of James, and that of Jude, and the second of Peter, and the second and third of John, whether they are written by the evangelist, or another of the same name."‡ He then proceeds to reckon up five others, not in our canon, which he calls in one place *spurious*, in another *controverted*, meaning, as appears to me, nearly the same thing by these two words.‡

⊖ *Lard Cred. vol. VIII. p. 90.*

‡ *Ib. p. 98.*

‡ That Eusebius could not intend, by the word rendered "*spurious*," what we at present mean by it, is evident from a clause in this very chapter, where, speaking of the gospels of Peter, and Thomas, and Matthias, and some others, he says, "They are not so much as to be reckoned among the *spurious*, but are to be rejected, as altogether absurd and impious." *Vol. VIII. p. 98.*

It is manifest from this passage, that the four gospels, and the acts of the apostles (the parts of scripture with which our concern principally lies) were acknowledged without dispute, even by those who raised objections or entertained doubts, about some other parts of the same collection. But the passage proves something more than this. The author was extremely conversant in the writings of Christians, which had been published from the commencement of the institution to his own time; and it was from these writings that he drew his knowledge of the character and reception of the books in question.—That Eusebius resorted to this medium of information, and that he had examined with attention this species of proof, is shewn, first, by a passage in the very chapter we are quoting, in which speaking of the books which he calls spurious, “None (he says) of the ecclesiastical writers, in the succession of the apostles, have vouchsafed to make any mention of them in their writings;” and secondly, by another passage of the same work, wherein, speaking of the first epistle of Peter, “This (he says) the presbyters of ancient times have quoted in their writings as undoubtedly genuine;” and then speaking of some other writings bearing the name of Peter, “We know (he says) that they have not been delivered down to us in the number of catholic writings, forasmuch as no ecclesiastical writers of the ancients, or of our times, have made use of testimonies out of them.” “But in the progress of this history, (the author proceeds) we shall make it our business to show, together with the successions from the apostles, what ecclesiastical writers, in every age, have used such writings as these which are contradicted, and what they have said, with regard to the scriptures received in the New Testament, and ac-

* *Lard. Cred. vol. VIII. p. 99.*

*known by all, and with regard to those which are not such.”**

After this it is reasonable to believe that, when Eusebius states the four gospels, and the acts of the apostles, as uncontradicted, uncontested, and acknowledged by all; and when he places them in opposition, not only to those which were spurious in our sense of that term, but to those which were controverted, and even to those which were well known and approved by many, yet doubted of by some; he represents, not only the sense of his own age, but the result of the evidence which the writings of prior ages, from the apostles’ time to his own, had furnished to his enquiries. The opinion of Eusebius and his contemporaries, appears to have been founded upon the testimony of writers whom they *then* called ancient; and we may observe, that such of the works of these writers, as have come down to our times, entirely confirm the judgment, and support the distinction which Eusebius proposes. The books, which he calls, ‘books universally acknowledged,’ are in fact used and quoted, in the remaining works of Christian writers, during the 250 years between the apostles’ time and that of Eusebius, much more frequently than, and in a different manner from, those, the authority of which, he tells us, was disputed.

* *Lard. Cred. vol. VIII. p. 111.*

SECTION IX.

Our historical scriptures were attacked by the early adversaries of Christianity, as containing the accounts upon which the religion was founded.

1. **N**EAR the middle of the second century, Celsus, a heathen philosopher, wrote a professed treatise against Christianity. To this treatise, Origen, who came about fifty years after him, published an answer, in which he frequently recites his adversary's words and arguments. The work of Celsus is lost; but that of Origen remains. Origen appears to have given us the words of Celsus, where he professes to give them, very faithfully; and, amongst other reasons for thinking so, this is one, that the objection, as stated by him from Celsus, is sometimes stronger than his own answer. I think it also probable that Origen, in his answer, has retained a large portion of the work of Celsus: "that it may not be suspected (he says) that we pass by any chapters because we have no answers at hand, I have thought it best, according to my ability, to confute every thing proposed by him, not so much observing the natural order of things, as the order which he has taken himself."*

Celsus wrote about 100 years after the gospels were published; and therefore any notices of these books from him are extremely important for their antiquity. They are, however, rendered more so by the character of the author; for the reception, credit, and notoriety of these books, must have been well established amongst Christians, to have made them subjects of animadversions and opposition by strangers and by enemies. It evinces the

* *Or. Cont. Cels. I. i. sect. 41.*

truth of what Chrysofom, two centuries afterwards, observed, that "the gospels, when written, were not hid in a corner, or buried in obscurity, but they were made known to all the world, before enemies as well as others, even as they are now."

1. Celsus, or the Jew whom he personates uses these words—"I could say many things concerning the affairs of Jesus, and those, too, different from those written by the disciples of Jesus, but I purposely omit them."* Upon this passage it has been rightly observed, that it is not easy to believe, that if Celsus could have contradicted the disciples upon good evidence in any material point, he would have omitted to do so; and that the assertion is, what Origen calls it, a mere oratorical flourish.

It is sufficient, however, to prove that, in the time of Celsus, there were books well known, and allowed to be written by the disciples of Jesus, which books contained a history of him. By the term *disciple*, Celsus does not mean the followers of Jesus in general, for them he calls Christians, or believers, or the like, but those who had been taught by Jesus himself, *i. e.* his apostles and companions.

2. In another passage, Celsus accuses the Christians of altering the gospel.† The accusation refers to some varieties in the readings of particular passages; for Celsus goes on to object, that when they are pressed hard, and one reading has been confuted, they disown that, and fly to another. We cannot perceive from Origen, that Celsus specified any particular instances, and without such specification, the charge is of no value. But the true conclusion to be drawn from it is, that there were in the hands of the Christians, histories which were even then of some standing; for various readings

* *Lardner's Jewish and Heathen Testimony vol. II. p. 274.*

† *Ib. p. 275.*

and corruptions do not take place in recent productions.

The former quotation, the reader will remember, proved that these books were composed by the disciples of Jesus, strictly so called; the present quotation shews, that though objections were taken by the adversaries of the religion to the integrity of these books, there was none to their genuineness.

3. In a third passage, the Jew whom Celsus introduces, shuts up an argument in this manner:—"These things then we have alleged to you out of *your own writings*, not needing any other weapons."* It is manifest that this boast proceeds upon the supposition that the books, over which the writer affects to triumph, possessed an authority by which Christians confessed themselves to be bound.

4. That the books to which Celsus refers, were no other than our present gospels, is made out by his allusions to various passages still found in these gospels. Celsus takes notice of the *genealogies* which fixes two of these gospels; of the precepts, resist not him that injures you; and, if a man strike thee on the one cheek, offer to him the other also; † of the woes denounced by Christ; his predictions; his saying that it is impossible to serve two masters; ‡ of the purple robe, the crown of thorns, and the reed in his hand; of the blood that flowed from the body of Jesus upon the cross, || which circumstance is recorded by John alone; and (what is instarominium for the purpose for which we produce it) of the difference in the accounts given of the resurrection by the evangelists, some mentioning two angels at the sepulchre, others only one. ¶

It is extremely material to remark, that Celsus not only perpetually referred to the accounts of

* *Lard. Test. vol. II. p. 276.*

† *Ib. p. 276.*

|| *Ib. p. 280, 281.*

‡ *Ib. p. 277.*

¶ *Ib. p. 282.*

Christ contained in the four gospels,* but that he referred to no other accounts; that he founded none of his objections to Christianity upon any thing delivered in spurious gospels.

II. What Celsus was in the second century, Porphyry became in the third. His work, which was a large and formal treatise against the Christian religion, is not extant. We must be content, therefore, to gather his objections from Christian writers who have noticed, in order to answer them; and enough remains of this species of information, to prove completely, that Porphyry's animadversions were directed against the contents of our present gospels, and of the acts of the apostles; Porphyry considering that to overthrow them, was to overthrow the religion. Thus he objects to the repetition of a generation in St. Matthew's genealogy; to Matthew's call; to the quotation of a text from Isaiah, which is found in a psalm ascribed to Asaph; to the calling of the lake of Tiberias a sea; to the expression in St. Matthew, "the abomination of desolation;" to the variation in Matthew and Mark upon the text "the voice of one crying in the wilderness," Matthew citing it from Isaiah, and Mark from the prophets; to John's application of the term "word;" to Christ's change of intention about going up to the feast of tabernacles (John vii. 8.) to the judgment denounced by St. Peter upon Ananias and Sapphira, which he calls an imprecation of death. †

The instances here alleged serve, in some measure, to show the nature of Porphyry's objections, and prove that Porphyry had read the gospels with that sort of attention which a writer would employ, who regarded them as the depositaries of that reli-

* *The particulars, of which the above are only a few, are well collected by Mr. Bryant, p. 140.*

† *Jewish and Heathen Test. vol. III. p. 166, et seq.*

gion which he attacked. Besides these specifications, there exists in the writings of ancient Christians general evidence, that the places of scripture, upon which Porphyry had remarked, were very numerous.

In some of the above cited examples, Porphyry, speaking of St. Matthew, calls him your evangelist; he also uses the term evangelists in the plural number. What was said of Celsus is true likewise of Porphyry, that it does not appear that he considered any history of Christ, except these, as having authority with Christians.

III. A third great writer against the Christian religion, was the emperor Julian, whose work was composed about a century after that of Porphyry.

In various long extracts transcribed from this work by Cyril and Jerome, it appears* that Julian noticed by name, Matthew and Luke, in the difference between their genealogies of Christ; that he objected to Matthew's application of the prophecy, "Out of Egypt have I called my son," (ii. 15.) and to that of "a virgin shall conceive," (i. 22.) that he recited sayings of Christ, and various passages of his history, in the very words of the evangelists; in particular, that Jesus healed lame and blind people, and exorcised demoniacs in the villages of Bethsaida and Bethany; that he alleged that none of Christ's disciples ascribed to him the creation of the world, except John; that neither Paul, nor Matthew, nor Luke, nor Mark, had dared to call Jesus God; that John wrote later than the other evangelists, and at a time when a great number of men in the cities of Greece and Italy were converted; that he alludes to the conversion of Cornelius and of Sergius Paulus, to Peter's vision, to the circular letter sent by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem, which are all recorded in the acts of the apostles, and by quoting

* *Jewish and Heathen Test.* vol. IV. p. 77, et seq.

no other, Julian shows that these were the historical books, and the only historical books received by Christians, as of authority, and as the authentic memoirs of Jesus Christ, of his apostles, and of the doctrines taught by them. But Julian's testimony does something more than represent the judgment of the Christian church in his time. It discovers also his own. He himself expressly states the early date of these records. He all along supposes, he nowhere attempts to question, their genuineness.

The argument in favour of the books of the New Testament, drawn from the notice taken of their contents by the early writers against the religion is very considerable. It shows that the accounts which Christians had then, were the accounts which we have now; that our present scriptures were theirs. It shows, moreover, that neither Celsus in the second, Porphyry in the third, nor Julian in the fourth century, suspected the authenticity of these books, or ever insinuated that Christians were mistaken in the authors to whom they ascribed them. Not one of them expressed an opinion upon this subject different from that which was held by Christians. And when we consider how much it would have availed them to have cast a doubt upon this point, if they could; and how ready they showed themselves to be to take every advantage in their power; and that they were all men of learning and enquiry; their concession, or rather their suffrage upon the subject, is extremely valuable.

In the case of Porphyry, it is made still stronger by the consideration that he did in fact support himself by this species of objection, when he saw any room for it, or when his acuteness could supply any pretence for alleging it. The prophecy of Daniel he attacked upon this very ground of spuriousness, insisting that it was written after the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, and maintains his charge of forgery by some far-fetched indeed, but very subtle

criticisms. Concerning the writings of the New Testament, no trace of this suspicion is any where to be found in him.*

SECTION X.

Formal catalogues of authentic scriptures were published, in all which our present sacred histories were included.

THIS species of evidence comes later than the rest, as it was not natural that catalogues of any particular class of books should be put forth, until Christian writings became numerous, or until some writings showed themselves, claiming titles which did not belong to them, and thereby rendering it necessary to separate books of authority from others. But when it does appear, it is extremely satisfactory; the catalogues, though numerous, and made in countries at a wide distance from one another, differing very little, differing in nothing which is material, and all containing the four gospels. To this last article there is no exception.

I. In the writings of Origen which remain, and in some extracts preserved by Eusebius, from works of his which are now lost, there are enumerations of the books of scripture, in which the four gospels and the acts of the apostles are distinctly and honourably specified, and in which no books appear beside what are now received.† The reader by this time,

* *Michaelis's Introduction to the New Testament, vol. I. p. 43. Marsh's Translation.*

† *Vol. III. p. 234. et. seq. Vol. VIII. p. 296.*

will easily recollect that the date of Origen's work is A. D. 230.

II. Athanasius, about a century afterwards, delivered a catalogue of the books of the New Testament in form, containing our scriptures and no others; of which he says, 'In these alone the doctrine of religion is taught; let no man add to them, or take any thing from them.*'

III. About twenty years after Athanasius, Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem, set forth a catalogue of the books of scripture, publicly read at that time in the church of Jerusalem, exactly the same as ours, except that the "Revelation" is omitted.†

IV. And fifteen years after Cyril, the council of Laodicea delivered an authoritative catalogue of canonical scripture, like Cyril's the same as ours, with the omission of the "Revelation."

V. Catalogues now became frequent. Within thirty years from the last date, that is, from the year 363, to near the conclusion of the fourth century, we have catalogues by Epiphanius,‡ by Gregory Nazianzen,|| by Philaster, bishop of Brescia, in Italy,¶ by Amphilochius, bishop of Iconium, all, as they are sometimes called, clean catalogues (that is, they admit no books into the number beside what we now receive) and all, for every purpose of historic evidence, the same as ours.§

VI. Within the same period Jerome, the most learned Christian writer of his age, delivered a catalogue of the books of the New Testament, re-

* *Vol. VIII. p. 224.*

† *Ib. p. 270.*

‡ *Ib. vol. IX. p. 132.*

§ *Epiphanius omits the acts of the apostles. This must have been an accidental mistake, either in him, or in some copyist of his work, for he elsewhere expressly refers to this book, and ascribes it to Luke.*

recognizing every book now received, with the intimation of a doubt concerning the epistle to the Hebrews alone, and taking not the least notice of any book which is not now received.*

VII. Contemporary with Jerome, who lived in Palestine, was St. Augustine, in Africa, who published likewise a catalogue, without joining to the scriptures, as books of authority, any other ecclesiastical writing whatever, and without omitting one which we at this day acknowledge.†

VIII. And with these concurs another contemporary writer, Ruffin, presbyter of Aquileia, whose catalogue, like theirs, is perfect and unmixed, and concludes with these remarkable words: "These are the volumes which the Fathers have included in the canon, and out of which they would have us prove the doctrine of our faith."‡

EXTRACTS FROM

SECTION XI.

These propositions cannot be predicated of any of those books which are commonly called apocryphal books of the New Testament.

I DO not know that the objection taken from apocryphal writings, is at present much relied upon by scholars. But there are many, who, hearing that various gospels existed in ancient times, under the names of the apostles, may have taken up a notion, that the selection of our present gospels from the rest, was rather an arbitrary or accidental choice than founded in any clear and certain case of pre-

* Vol. X. p. 77.

† Ib. p. 213.

‡ Ib. p. 187.

ference. To these it may be very useful to know the truth of the case. I observe, therefore,

That beside our gospels and the acts of the apostles, no Christian history, claiming to be written by an apostle or apostolical man, is quoted within three hundred years after the birth of Christ, by any writer now extant or known; or, if quoted, is not quoted without marks of censure and rejection.

1. That there is no evidence that any spurious or apocryphal books whatever, existed in the first century of the Christian æra; in which century all our historical books are proved to have been extant. "There are no quotations of any such books in the Apostolic Fathers, by whom I mean Barnabas, Clement, of Rome, Hermas, Ignatius, and Polycarp, whose writings reach from about the year of our Lord 70, to the year 108;" (and some of whom have quoted each and every one of our historical scriptures) "I say this (adds Dr. Lardner) because I think it has been proved."*

2. These apocryphal writings were not read in the churches of Christians.

3. Were not admitted into their volume.

4. Do not appear in their catalogues.

5. Were not noticed by their adversaries.

6. were not alleged by different parties, as of authority in their controversies.

7. Were not the subjects amongst them, of commentaries, versions, collations, expositions.

Finally; beside the silence of three centuries, or evidence within that time of their rejection, they were, with a consent nearly universal, reprobated by Christian writers of succeeding ages.

* Lard. Cred. vol. XII. p. 158.

CHAPTER X.

THE reader will now be pleased to recollect, that the two points which form the subject of our present discussion, are, first, that the founder of Christianity, his associates, and immediate followers, passed their lives in labours, dangers, and sufferings; secondly, that they did so in attestation of the miraculous history recorded in our scriptures, and solely in consequence of their belief of the truth of that history.

The argument by which these two propositions have been maintained by us, stands thus:*

No historical fact, I apprehend, is more certain, than that the original propagators of Christianity voluntarily subjected themselves to lives of fatigue, danger and suffering, in the prosecution of their undertaking. The nature of the undertaking; the character of the persons employed in it; the opposition of their tenets to the fixed opinions and expectations of the country in which they first advanced them; their undissembled condemnation of the religion of all other countries; their total want of power, authority, or force, render it in the highest degree probable that this must have been the case. The probability is increased by what we know of the fate of the founder of the institution, who was put to death for his attempt; and by what we also know of the cruel treatment of the converts to the institution within thirty years after its commencement; both which points are attested by heathen writers, and being once admitted, leave it

* The reader will observe, that in the following recapitulation, Mr. Paley has a principal reference to that part of his book which precedes the extract we have taken from this valuable work.

very incredible that the primitive emissaries of the religion, who exercised their ministry, first among the people who had destroyed their matter, and afterwards amongst those who persecuted their converts, should themselves escape with impunity, or pursue their purpose in ease and safety. This probability, thus sustained by foreign testimony, is advanced, I think, to historical certainty, by the evidence of our own books; by the accounts of a writer who was the companion of the persons whose sufferings he relates; by the letters of the persons themselves; by predictions of persecutions ascribed to the founder of the religion, which predictions would not have been inserted in his history, much less have been studiously dwelt upon, if they had not accorded with the event, and which, even if falsely ascribed to him, could only have been so ascribed because the event suggested them; lastly, by incessant exhortations to fortitude and patience, and by an earnestness, repetition, and urgency upon the subject, which were unlikely to have appeared if there had not been, at the time, some extraordinary call for the exercise of these virtues.

It is made out also, I think, with sufficient evidence, that both the teachers and converts of the religion, in consequence of their new profession, took up a new course of life and behaviour.

The next great question is, what they did this for. That it was for a marvellous story of some kind or other, is, to my apprehension, extremely manifest; because, as to the fundamental article, the designation of the person, viz. that this particular person, Jesus of Nazareth, ought to be received as the Messiah, or as a messenger from God, they neither had, nor could have, any thing but miracles to stand upon. That the exertions and sufferings of the apostles were for the story which we have now, is proved by the consideration, that this story is transmitted to us by two of their own number, and

If it be so, the religion must be true. These men could not be deceivers. By only not bearing testimony, they might have avoided all their sufferings, and have lived quietly. Would men in such circumstances, pretend to have seen what they never saw; assert facts which they had no knowledge of; and bring upon themselves, for nothing, enmity and hatred, danger and death?

END OF THE EXTRACT FROM MR. PALEY

T H E
SOPHIST UNMASKED;

I N A

SERIES OF LETTERS,

ADDRESSED TO

T H O M A S P A I N E,

Author of a Book, entitled

T H E

AGE OF REASON.

By PHILOBIBLIUS.

Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee.

BIBLE.

ADVERTISEMENT.

WHEN the CHRISTIAN PANOPLY was put to the press, it was not the intention of the Editor, to give any reply to Mr. Paine's first Age of Reason a place in it. But, being afterwards informed, that a number of the most respectable characters, who have thought proper to encourage the undertaking, wish and expect this to be done, it appeared to him reasonable to gratify them, in an instance, so obviously calculated to render the work more complete.

THE SOPHIST UNMASKED, &c.

LETTER I.

S I R,

WHILE you, and other unbelievers, are so zealously engaged in the cause of infidelity, it would ill become a believer in Christianity, to be remiss in his endeavours to promote the interests of that benign religion.—And, as your Age of Reason seems too well calculated to unsettle the faith, and deprave the morals, of no inconsiderable number of your readers, I have been induced to submit to their impartial consideration, a few observations upon that performance.

As you had, you say, reserved the subject of religion to a more advanced period of life, and intended it to be your last offering to your fellow-citizens of all nations, by way of apology for obtruding this work so prematurely upon the world, you allege, that “The total abolition of the whole

“ national order of priesthood, and of every thing
 “ appertaining to compulsive systems of religion,
 “ and compulsive articles of faith, not only precipitated your intention, but rendered a work of this
 “ kind exceedingly necessary, lest, in the general
 “ wreck of superstition, and false systems of govern-
 “ ment, & false theology, we lose sight of morality,
 “ of humanity, and of the theology that is true.”

It was then, it seems, more necessary to make an attack upon what you call false theology, in a state of wreck—in its ruins—than when it was guarded by sanguinary edicts, and protected by the laws of a mighty nation! Were a writer, in a country where infidelity is losing ground, to allege as a reason for publishing a book against it, “ That such a work had become exceedingly necessary, lest in the general wreck of infidelity, we lose sight of Christianity,” how would you treat such a sentiment?

You intimate that all the theology any man has any occasion for, is contained in a belief that the hand or power that made all things, is divine, is omnipotent; and that if a man believes this, with the force it is impossible to repel, if he permits his reason to act, his moral rule of life will follow of course.* The French people then, according to this statement, could be in no danger of losing sight of morality, of humanity, and of the theology that is true, unless they were in danger of becoming atheists. And if you intended to intimate that between atheism and what you call deism, there is so little difference, that such of the French people as had renounced Christianity, were in danger of denying the God that made them too; it might have been well to have expressed this sentiment in plain, unequivocal language—

* P. 70, and 71.

“ *My fellow-citizens of France,*
 “ I tremble to behold you in such perilous circum-
 “ stances. I evidently perceive, that in the general
 “ wreck of superstition, of false systems of govern-
 “ ment, and false theology, you are in great dan-
 “ ger of becoming atheists altogether. I perceive
 “ that the glorious edifice of liberty and equality,
 “ which you are about erecting, at the expence of
 “ so much blood and treasure, is likely to be found-
 “ ed upon the ruins of morality, of humanity, and
 “ of the theology that is true. I perceive the dif-
 “ ference between deism and atheism to be so very
 “ inconsiderable, that in your revolutionary state,
 “ at least, a shipwreck of Christianity is in great
 “ danger of being succeeded by a shipwreck of all
 “ religion, and all virtue. Therefore, to prevent
 “ you from becoming a set of abandoned atheists, I
 “ find it exceedingly necessary for me to write a
 “ book against the Bible.” Such a declaration, in
 your lively and forcible manner, would, I make no doubt, have been attended with happy consequences.

And what do you wish to substitute in the room of the scriptures which you are trying to wrest from us? Natural philosophy, it seems! You say that “ Natural philosophy, embracing the whole circle of science, of which astronomy occupies the chief place—is the true theology.”* And that “ trigonometry is the soul of science.”† You also intimate, that unless we contemplate the starry heavens as *the book and school of science*, they will be to us like *an immense desert of space, glittering with shows*, from which nothing can be learned!‡ What then do you take to be the situation of the unlearned? According to your scheme of principles, they must, it would appear, live and die without ever having it in their power to obtain any just acquaintance with your theology.

* P. 75.

† P. 80.

‡ P. 87.

And yet, in direct contradiction to this sentiment, you elsewhere affirm that religion must be on a level to the understanding and comprehension of all.* Why then do you make such ostentatious parade of your scientific knowledge? Why do you muster up your levers, your wheel and axis, your orreries, your telescopes, your triangles, sines, tangents, and secants, &c? If the untutored savages of the wildernels be as capable of understanding and comprehending religion as the profoundest philosopher, I do not see what purpose this pompous apparatus can serve, unless it be, to bewilder the unlearned in a fog of mysteries, at the same time that you manifest to the really learned, the ignorance, the vanity, and the ditingenuity of the writer.

You affirm that the *creation* reveals to man *all* that it is necessary for man to know of God. And after inserting the 19th psalm, as paraphrased into English verse by Mr. Addison, you exclaim, "what more does man want to know, than that the hand or power, that made these things, is divine, is omnipotent."† What more does man want to know! Why, he wants to know whether the divine, the omnipotent hand that made, will continue him in a state of existence, after death. And will trigonometry, will astronomy, or natural philosophy resolve this important question?

Will Mercury, or Venus, or Mars, or Jupiter, or Saturn; will the Sun, or Moon, or any other luminary, or satellite, inform us whether the light of reason, in the human mind, is destined to shine with brighter radiance in the regions of immortality, or whether death will extinguish it forever? Shall we see our immortality engraved upon the heavens above us, or find it inscribed upon the flowers that spring out of the earth? Will the interchanges of day and night, the revolving seasons, or dying and

* P. 133.

† P. 70.

reviving vegetation, inform us whether the morning of a resurrection from the dead, will ever dawn upon the dark regions of the tomb? Is the human mind composed of such materials, or does it consist of an essence, which the power that made it cannot destroy? Will the powers with which it is endowed, and the passions and propensities by which it is actuated, mark and point out with requisite precision, the sovereign pleasure of the great Creator, in this interesting case? Or, can we assuredly know, from the unequal distribution of rewards and punishments in this life, that there will be a state of perfect retribution beyond the grave?

It is far from being my wish to detract any thing from the force of the arguments commonly adduced in favor of the immortality of the soul. I must, however, be permitted to observe, that they do not seem absolutely conclusive. And it merits particular notice, that such of the ancient Pagan philosophers, as paid the greatest attention to the subject, seem, for the most part, to have been the most doubtful with respect to it. Nor is it by any means uncommon for modern unbelievers to consider this life as the only period of existence allotted to man. And you seem to have very little expectations of a future state yourself. You do indeed say, that you hope for happiness beyond this life. But you afterwards express the nature of this hope, in the following remarkable words: "It appears more probable to me, that I shall continue to exist hereafter, than that I should have had existence, as I now have, before that existence began." You may, it is true, if you please, call this a relative, but it does not amount to an absolute probability—I think it more probable that you will yet become a zealous preacher of the gospel, than that the great Creator will ever bring just

* P. 150.

such another man as you are, into existence again; Yet I am far from thinking it probable, that you will ever preach the faith you are now endeavoring to destroy.

Thus it evidently appears, that man wants to know much more than the visible creation can teach him. He wants to know whether he is to live in a future world; and if he is—whether he will be rewarded or punished, there, according to the part he acts in the present state.

“What more does man want to know, than that the hand or power, that made these things, is divine, is omnipotent.” Why, admitting a state of future retribution, he wants to know how he may obtain the pardon of sin, and secure to himself a happy immortality. But none of your sines, tangents, or secants; not any, nor all, the properties of a triangle; not any, nor all, the planets, stars and suns in the universe, can give us any information, with respect to these important subjects. Whether God will pardon sin or not, and if he will, upon what terms, He only can inform us.

That the heathen nations generally entertained a hope, that it might be in their power to appease an incensed deity, and obtain forgiveness, their altars, their priests and their sacrifices evidently show: but those altars stained not unfrequently with human blood, manifest with equal evidence, that unenlightened reason, is, in this important business, an unsafe guide.

“What more does man want to know, than that the hand or power, that made all these things is divine, is omnipotent.” He wants to know what perfections, besides omnipotence, he ought to ascribe his Maker. “The only idea man can affix to the name of God, is, you say,

“that of a first cause, the cause of allthings*.” And yet, in direct contradiction to this assertion, you yourself affix the idea of mercy to that name. And it is too evident to need a proof, that mercy is not necessarily included in the idea of a first cause.

You affirm that “The visible creation reveals to man all that is necessary for man to know of God.” But we have already seen that this is not true. I agree with you, however, that “the immensity of the creation,” or rather the immense creation, manifests the power of God. But it is very inaccurate to represent the “unchangeable order, by which the incomprehensible whole is governed,” as a display of the divine wisdom. For had that order been a bad one, its unchangeableness would have been an instance, not of wisdom, but of the reverse. “Do we want to contemplate his munificence? “We see it in the abundance with which he fills the earth. Do we want to contemplate his mercy? “We see it in his not withholding that abundance even from the unthankful.” And is this all you can tell us about the munificence or kindness, and mercy of God! After the lapse of a few days, the abundance with which the earth is filled will be nothing to us. We want to hear of an everlasting abundance—an inheritance that never fades, reserved in a future world for us. But whether this be the case or not, the visible creation cannot inform us. It is, therefore, evident that the creation does not reveal to man all that man wants to know of God.

We also want to know what worship, and service, our great Creator requires of us. The ancient Pagan philosophers did, indeed, for the most part perceive that God ought to be worshipped. But instead of learning from the visible creation,

* P. 67.

how this ought to be done; the visible creation became, to their dark minds, a snare. It is a well attested fact, that the ancient Pagans, who had made the greatest advances in civilization and refinement, were, nevertheless, gross idolators—addressing divine honours to the Sun and Moon, the earth and seas, mountains and rivers; nay, even vices, as well as virtues, had among them their shrines, attended by zealous and devout worshippers. And what is not a little mortifying to human nature, is, that many of their religious rites were, not only ridiculous and absurd, but even cruel and obscene! As for our modern Deists I do not find that they are generally disposed to worship the God that made them at all. Our religious duties, according to you, do not consist in the worship and service of the great Creator, as the light of nature and common sense assure us, ought to be the case; but, “in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavouring to make our fellow creatures happy.” Now as pure and rational devotion has a powerful influence upon the morals of the children of men, we must undoubtedly need juster ideas upon the subject than can be derived from the visible creation.

“What more does man want to know, than that the hand or power, that made all these things is divine, is omnipotent.” Why, he wants to know what are the moral duties incumbent upon him, in all the various relations of life. The ancient Pagans already referred to, had the great book of nature, now exhibited to our view, spread open before them; and, for the most part, they also admitted the hand, or power which made all things, to be divine, and omnipotent; and yet their moral rule of life was exceedingly defective. In the writings of their philosophers, we do, indeed, often meet with excellent, and sometimes sublime, sentiments respecting religion and virtue. And very excellent, for the

most part, were the regulations they adopted for the support of civil government, and the preservation of good order in society. And, what merits particular attention, is, that these regulations were enforced by the awful sanctions of religion—by the fear of the immortal gods. But, notwithstanding this, they had sunk into a state of gross ignorance, and impurity. Their moral rule of life, justified fornication, and, in many instances, prostitution, with other vices, of which it is a shame to speak. Often did they consign to a cruel and untimely death, their helpless and deformed children; and in some instances, their sick and aged parents were devoted to the same hard fate. Nor can we say much in favour of the moral rule of life, which some of our modern unbelievers have adopted.—The author of the *Conservateur*, endeavours to justify those laws, which ordered old and infirm persons to be put to death. The same author, and others, have undertaken to advocate that most unnatural and monstrous crime, suicide. Dr. Tindal, and many others, object to the New Testament doctrine of forgiving injuries. And lord Bolingbroke is by no means singular in his licentious opinions, when he presumes to ridicule the virtue of chastity, as a vanity inherent in our nature, originating in a desire to appear superior to other animals.*

Indeed, if modern unbelievers have derived their moral rule of life from your word of God at all, too many of them seem to have derived it from the brutal part of the creation, and the fires of the volcano, rather than from the pure and chaste luminaries of Heaven.

You suppose that from the *munificence* of God to all, we may learn to be kind to one another.† But

* See Dr. Leland's *Christian Revelation*, vol. 2. chap. 8.

† P. 86.

I hold it impossible for you, upon your principles, to establish the fact, that God is munificent to all. Is lengthening out the life of poor mortals, in circumstances which render that life worse than a state of non-existence, an instance of munificence or kindness.

But do we not, you say, see a fair creation prepared to receive us the instant we were born? It is true; but this fair creation exhibits to our view, many tragical scenes of human wretchedness. It amuses, and deceives us, with vain hopes. It allures us into the pursuit of shadows which elude our grasp. And at the approach of death, all its enchanting prospects vanish, and leave us to darkness and the grave. "Is it we that light up the sun; that pour down the rain; and fill the earth with abundance?" No: Neither did we form our bodies of such brittle clay that the changes in our atmosphere, effected by the vicissitudes of sun-shine & rain, will often be sufficient to crumble them into dust, and render the abundance, with which the earth is filled, nothing to us. "Whether we sleep or wake, the vast machinery of the universe still goes on." Yes, it goes on—not to preserve unimpaired, but rather to wear out, the delicate machinery of our bodies, and carry us with hasty steps to the grave. "Are these things, and the blessings they indicate in future, nothing to us?" Yes, Sir; establish a connection between these things, and a happy immortality beyond the grave, such as Jesus Christ hath brought to light by his gospel, and these things will be much to us. But this you have not yet done.—Indeed, Sir, I cannot help thinking that you might, upon your principles, inculcate the interests of humanity to much better purpose, by reversing the scene.

"Do you not perceive, my fellow-mortals, that our great Creator hath prepared a vale of misery to receive us the instant we were born?—That he hath

armed the beams of the sun; the showers which water the earth; the abundance with which the earth is filled; the air in which we breathe; and all the elements; against our health, our peace, our life? And will you swell the dreadful catalogue of human woes, by implacable resentments, unrelenting ferocities, and mutual hostilities! This would be unnatural in the extreme. The sufferings which the author of our being inflicts, is certainly enough for us to bear. And you ought to learn, from his afflictive hand upon all, to be kind to one another."

Should an untoward disciple say, "I evidently perceive that my Creator often punishes the insults offered to his majesty; and that he beholds his own creatures languish for days, and weeks, and years, in pain and sorrow; though he could, without any difficulty, afford instantaneous relief: I am therefore determined, neither to permit any one to insult me with impunity; nor to give myself much trouble for the relief of the afflicted." Could you put him to silence by arguments deduced merely from the divine munificence to all in this life? I imagine not. For, in forming our estimations of the munificence or kindness of God to us, we must undoubtedly take into view the sufferings he inflicts, as well as the blessings he bestows. Nor can you obviate these objections, and establish your doctrine of the divine munificence to all in this life, by taking futurity into the account; unless you could prove, not only that there is such a state; but also that the afflictions of this life are calculated to promote the future happiness of such as suitably improve them. And this a devil cannot do.

You might, it is true, say "Perhaps there may be a future state; and, if there be, perhaps the afflictions of this life may be conducive to future happiness; and if both these peradventures could be reduced to well established facts, you ought then, to learn from the divine munificence to all, to be kind

to one another." And is this the way you mean to promote the interests of morality and humanity? This, Sir, is not the way to promote, but to undermine these great interests. It gives too full scope to the infernal passions of revenge; and is too well calculated to render the heart of man callous to the sufferings of a brother. Thus I think it evidently appears that we stand in great need of a moral rule of life, which will not follow, merely from a belief that the hand which made all these things is divine, is omnipotent, and which the visible creation can never furnish.

"What more, you say, does man want to know, than that the hand, or power, that made all these things, is divine, is omnipotent." He wants to know how the children of men may most effectually be induced to fulfil the great duties of religion and virtue, when made acquainted with them. And, notwithstanding all that you have said to the contrary, I am still of the opinion that the religion of Jesus Christ is better calculated to accomplish this great purpose, than all other systems of morals and science in the world besides. For, to the religious and moral instruction, derived from the visible creation, from human science, and every other source, it adds the weight of an authority too great to be disputed. It exhibits our duty, not enveloped in the mysteries of science, accessible only to a few; but expressed in plain and intelligible language; and it employs the most alluring and awful motives to induce us to comply therewith—it exhibits to our view a Divine Legislator, always present to superintend the execution of his own laws; and who will most assuredly reward the righteous, and punish the wicked.

I should, however, be glad to be better informed, if I be in an error. And can you, sir, behold with indifference your fellow-men sunk in ignorance and vice—abandoning themselves to those crimes which disgrace human nature; embitter the pleasures of

social intercourse; and shake the firmest foundations of virtue and government? Do you not perceive that because of lying, and cheating and rapine, and drunkenness, and lewdness &c. the land mourns? Exert yourself then, as it becomes a citizen of the world, and a philosopher, for the recovery of your erring fellow men to the paths of virtue. Call a solemn assembly, and take with you the philosophical, and astronomical lectures, of Martin and Ferguson; a pair of globes; and above all some good system of trigonometry; and with this apparatus fly to the deluded votaries of vice, and try what influence a scientific sermon, such as the following, will have upon them*.

"My dear fellow-citizens,

"Be not surprised that I appear on this occasion, in the character of a moral and theological teacher. For, 'My father, being of the quaker profession, it was my good fortune to have an exceedingly good moral education, and a tolerable stock of useful learning.' Yet, 'I cannot help smiling at the conceit, that if the taste of a quaker could have been consulted, at the creation, what a silent and drab coloured creation it would have been! Not a flower would have blossomed its gaieties, nor a bird been permitted to sing. Though I went to the grammar school (at Thetford in Norfolk) I did not learn Latin, not only because I had no inclination to learn languages, but because of the objection the quakers have against the books in which the language is taught. But this did not prevent me from being acquainted with the subjects of all the Latin books used in the school. The natural bent of my mind was to science. I had some turn, and I believe some

** This discourse, what is contained Italic characters excepted, is taken verbatim from the Age of Reason.*

talent, for poetry. But this I rather repressed, than encouraged, as leading too much into the field of imagination.

As soon as I was able, [I purchased a pair of globes, and attended the philosophical lectures of Martin and Ferguson, and became afterwards acquainted with Dr. Bevis, of the society called the Royal-Society, then living in the Temple, and an excellent astronomer.

I had no disposition for what was called politics. It presented to my mind no other idea than is contained in the word Jockeyship. When, therefore, I turned my thoughts towards matters of government, I had to form a system for myself, that accorded with the moral and philosophic principles; in which I had been educated. I saw, or, at least thought I saw, a vast scene opening itself to the world in the affairs of America, and it appeared to me that unless the Americans declared themselves independent, they would not only involve themselves in a multiplicity of new difficulties, but shut out the prospect that was then offering to mankind thro' their means. It was from these motives that I published the work known by the name of *Common Sense*.^{*} *And the Americans seem much obliged to me for their independance; and mankind for the prospects now offering to them in consequence of that event.* For, I wrote *Common Sense* the latter end of the year 1775, and published it the first of January, 1776. Independence was declared the fourth of July following.

There are two distinct classes of what we call thoughts; those we produce in ourselves by reflection, and the act of thinking, and those that bolt into the mind of their own accord; and it is from them (*these last*) I have acquired almost all the knowledge that I have. As to the learning that any person gains from school education,

it serves only, like a small capital, to put him in the way of beginning learning for himself afterwards. Every person of learning is finally his own teacher; the reason of which is, that principles, being of a distinct quality to circumstances, cannot be impressed upon the memory. They are never so lasting as when they begin by conception.

From the time I was capable of conceiving an idea, and acting upon it by reflection, I either doubted of the truth of the christian system, or thought it to be a strange affair; I scarcely know which it was: but I well remember, when about seven or eight years of age, hearing a sermon read by a relation of mine, who was a great devotee of the church, upon the subject of what is called *Redemption by the Death of the Son of God*. After the sermon was ended, I went into the garden, and as I was going down the garden steps (for I perfectly recollect the spot) I revolted at the recollection of what I had heard.—

And, I, moreover believe, that any system of religion, that has any thing in it that shocks the mind of a child, cannot be a true system.* It cannot then, surely, be presuming, for a scientific, poetical, and political genius, now on the verge of three score, to appear in the character of a moral and theological teacher. Well aware that such a rare assemblage of talents, were not intended merely for my particular advantage, but for the general benefit of mankind; I have not been negligent, and I hope not altogether unsuccessful in their cultivation.

* I have ransacked sea and land, in quest of useful knowledge. I have traced the laws by which our solar system is governed—nay I have

* P. 100—108.

“ extended my researches to the incomprehensible ex-
 “ pansion of unbounded space, and from those far
 “ distant orbs, the fixed stars, and their attendant
 “ systems of invisible worlds, I have collected intel-
 “ ligence of the last importance.

“ *Would you be acquainted with true theology?*
 “ Search not the book called the scripture, which
 “ an human hand might make; but the scripture
 “ called the creation, the true word of God. But
 “ in order that you may read this book to the great-
 “ est advantage, it is indispensibly necessary for you
 “ to acquaint yourselves with astronomy. For na-
 “ tural philosophy, embracing the whole circle of
 “ science, of which astronomy occupies the chief
 “ place—is the true theology.

“ That part of the universe that is called the so-
 “ lar system, (meaning the system of worlds to
 “ which our earth belongs, and of which Sol, or
 “ in English language the Sun, is the center) con-
 “ sists, besides the Sun, of six distinct orbs*, or
 “ planets, or worlds, besides the secondary
 “ bodies, called satellites, or moons, of which
 “ our earth has one, that attends her, in her an-
 “ nual revolution round the Sun, in like manner
 “ as the other satellites, or moons, attend the
 “ planets, or worlds to which they severally be-
 “ long, as may be seen by the assistance of the te-
 “ lescope.

“ The Sun is the center, round which those
 “ six worlds or planets revolve, at different distances
 “ therefrom, and in circles concentric to each
 “ other—Every time that a planet (our earth for
 “ example) turns round itself, it makes what we
 “ call a day and night; and every time it goes en-
 “ tirely round the Sun, it makes what we call a
 “ year; consequently our world turns 365 times
 “ round itself in going once round the Sun. The

* Other modern astronomers say seven.

“ Sun, as before said, being the center, the pla-
 “ net, or world, nearest the Sun, is Mercury; his
 “ distance from the Sun is thirty four million miles;
 “ and he moves round in a circle always at that
 “ distance from the Sun, as a top may be supposed
 “ to spin round in the tract in which a horse goes
 “ in a mill. The second world is Venus; she is
 “ fifty-seven million miles distant from the Sun, and
 “ consequently moves round in a circle much greater
 “ than that of Mercury. The third world is this
 “ that we inhabit; and which is ninety five million
 “ miles distant from the Sun, and consequently
 “ moves round in a circle greater than that of Ve-
 “ nus. The fourth world is Mars; he is distant
 “ from the Sun one hundred and thirty four milli-
 “ on miles; and consequently moves round in a cir-
 “ cle greater than that of our earth. The fifth is
 “ Jupiter; he is distant from the Sun 557 million
 “ miles, and consequently moves round in a circle
 “ greater than that of Mars. The sixth world is
 “ Saturn; he is distant from the Sun, 767 millions
 “ miles, and consequently moves round in a circle
 “ that surrounds the circles, or orbits, of all the
 “ other worlds, or planets.

“ The space therefore—that our solar system
 “ takes up in a straight line, is 1526 million of
 “ miles.

“ But this immense as it is, is only one system of
 “ worlds. Beyond this, at a vast distance into
 “ space—are the stars called the fixed stars.—They
 “ have no revolutionary motion.”

“ They continue always at the same distance
 “ from each other, and always in the same place—
 “ The probability, therefore, is, that each of those
 “ fixed stars is also a Sun, round which another
 “ system of worlds, or planets, though too remote
 “ for us to discover, performs its revolutions, as
 “ our system of worlds does round our central Sun.”

“ For a further elucidation of these divine subjects,
 “ I must refer you to these philosophical and astron-
 “ mical lectures, these globes, this orrery, this tel-
 “ lescope, and especially to this system of trigono-
 “ metry.—The scientific principles that man em-
 “ ploys to obtain the foreknowledge of any thing
 “ relating to the motion of the heavenly bodies,
 “ are contained chiefly in that part of science that
 “ is called trigonometry, or the properties of a tri-
 “ angle, which when, applied to the study of the
 “ heavenly bodies, is called astronomy, when ap-
 “ plied to the construction of figures, drawn by a
 “ rule and compass, it is called geometry; when
 “ applied to the construction of plans of edifices, it
 “ is called architecture; when applied to the mea-
 “ surement of any portion of the earth it is called
 “ land surveying. In fine, it is the soul of science.
 “ It is an eternal truth: it contains the mathemati-
 “ cal demonstration of which man speaks, and the
 “ extent of its uses are unknown.”

“ After such luminous exhibitions of the nature of
 “ the true theology, and of the nature and excellence
 “ of virtue, it does not seem necessary to say much
 “ in the way of improvement. The principal infer-
 “ ence, I wish to draw from what has been now said,
 “ is, that the Christian system cannot be true. For,
 “ if the Almighty hath so many other worlds to su-
 “ perintend, it would undoubtedly be too much trou-
 “ ble for him to pay as much attention to our little
 “ globe, as that system ascribes to him*.

“ The instructions I have now communicated must
 “ certainly be worthy of your most serious attention.
 “ For almost all the knowledge I have, has been de-
 “ rived, not from reading, or conversation, or re-
 “ flection, or the act of thinking; but from those
 “ voluntary visitors or thoughts, which have from
 “ time to time belted into my mind of their own ac-

“ cord*. And consequently, almost all I know must be
 “ ascribed to divine inspiration, to some scientific and
 “ benevolent genius, or to the reflected splendours of
 “ my own genius, and in either case you may easily
 “ perceive that it would be very hazardous to slight
 “ or neglect my admonitions.

“ As I consider prayer an impious attempt to di-
 “ rect the Almighty what to do in the government of
 “ the universe, it would be quite out of character for
 “ me to pray for you. I do, nevertheless, most
 “ devoutly wish that the illuminations of natural phi-
 “ losophy, the benign influences of astronomy, and the
 “ holy counsels of trigonometry may be with you, now,
 “ henceforth and forever, if you are to live forever.
 “ Amen.”

LETTER II.

S I R,

AS precision is of singular importance in con-
 troversial writings, it was, no doubt, very proper
 for you to define, as accurately as possible, the
 meaning of the terms Infidelity and Revelation.
 “ Infidelity does not, you say, consist in believing,
 “ or in disbelieving; it consists in professing to be-
 “ lieve what he does not believe.” No, Sir, this
 is downright lying; it is not infidelity in opposition
 to a belief in any religious system, or in the sense
 in which the term is commonly used in the contro-
 versy between Deists and Christians. Nor can I
 conceive how you could fall into so palpable an er-
 ror; unless, at the time you thought proper to pro-

self a regard for the Christian religion which you had not, you considered yourself as the *standard* of infidelity, and your conduct as a practical comment upon the meaning of the term.

“ When a man has so far corrupted and prostituted the chastity of his mind, as to subscribe his professional belief to things he does not believe, he has, you say, prepared himself for the commission of every other crime. He takes up the trade of a priest for the sake of gain, and in order to qualify himself for that trade, he begins with perjury.* And must it not be equally disingenuous and base, for an unbeliever to appeal to the scriptures as to the oracles of God, in confirmation of his political sentiments; or to speak of them in any of his writings in a way calculated and intended to induce his readers to believe, that he reveres them as the word of God, while he holds them in perfect detestation? And you know, I presume, Sir, who has done this.

As prejudice is one of the most powerful engines which has ever been employed against Christianity, I am not at all surprized that you should try to prepossess your readers against Jesus Christ, and his religion, by intimating that religious impostors and impositions have not been uncommon in the world. But it would be certainly very illogical to conclude, that because there is some counterfeit money, there is, therefore, no genuine coin in circulation.

And who are the mighty impostors, and what are the religious impositions, which you venture to bring into competition with Jesus Christ and his religion? After much insignificant parade about impostors, false religions, pretended revelations, and spurious words of God, you have brought into view only one solitary impostor, and one religion, originating in imposture. For, the Jewish Church,

* P. 60.

the Roman Church, the Greek Church, and the Protestant Church, have all the same divine origin. Nay, even Mahomet himself, seems rather to have corrupted and perverted a divine, than to have instituted a new religion. For, “ with the Jew he maintained the inspiration of Moses, the authority of the Pentateuch, and of the prophetic writings. With the Christian he admitted the divine mission of Jesus Christ, and the truth of the gospel. He even attempted to found his own pretensions on the preceding revelations of Moses and Christ; and professed, with much plausibility, that he was sent to purify a religion which originally came down from Heaven, from the pollutions it had unhappily contracted during its residence among a frail and degenerate race of beings; to shut the book; to close the seal of prophecy; and to communicate the last gracious offers of divine mercy and instruction to sinful man.”

And is this the man whom, with unblushing petulencē, you presume to oppose to Jesus of Nazareth, as a rival for the honour of a true prophet! A man who was so far from founding his religion upon miracles, that disclaiming the power of working miracles, he “ attempted to found his own pretensions on the preceding revelations of Moses and of Christ;” and who, availing himself of the ignorance and degeneracy of the times, and of the religious and political state of the country in which he lived, established his absolute dominion over the persons and consciences of his followers, not by miracles, or prophecy, or reason and argument; but by the sword—by oppression, and bloodshed. And would you place in competition with the holy, meek, and beneficent Jesus, this patron of lust, this man of blood, and scourge of nations!* Sir, I am

* White p. 55.

persuaded that such a competition, or rather contrast, would, provided justice were done to the character of each, be one of the most effectual measures you could possibly adopt for establishing the credit of that religion you hate and oppose. You might as well affirm that it is impossible to distinguish the sun from the planets and satellites belonging to our system of worlds, or to know, that it is the sun, and not the moon or some planet, that is the *luminary* of that system, as to allege that the pretensions of Mahomet, or any other man, to a prophetic character, darkens or renders dubious our Saviour's claim to a divine mission.

“Every national church or religion has, you say, established itself by pretending some special mission from God, communicated to certain individuals.” Be this as it may, we must admit that the greatest legislators among the heathens, found it necessary to impose their laws upon the people, under the pretended sanctions of revealed religion. But what would you infer from this? That there is no such thing as genuine revelation? You ought rather to infer the reverse. This circumstance affords a striking evidence, that a belief in such revelation has a very salutary influence upon public happiness; nay, that it is impossible to preserve good order in the world without it. And can it be the will of a beneficent Deity, that the world should be governed by impositions and lies? or that there should never be any such thing as good order and government in the world?

“Revelation, when applied to religion, means, you say, something communicated immediately from God to man.

“No one will deny or dispute the power of the Almighty to make such a communication if he pleases. But admitting, for the sake of a case, that something has been revealed to a certain person, it is revelation to the first person only—

“and hear-say to every other; and consequently they are not obliged to believe it.”

“It is a contradiction in terms and ideas, to call any thing a revelation that comes to us at second hand, either verbally or in writing.”*

According to this logick, it is not in the power of God himself, to transmit to us a revelation of his will, by the hand of any of his ministring servants, whether man or angel. Civil magistrates, however, are not circumscribed within such narrow limits, in the exercise of the powers with which they are invested. They can, without any difficulty, transmit to us, by the hands of others, well authenticated transcripts of the laws they have enacted. And why cannot the great Ruler of the universe do the same? Is he inferior in power or wisdom to earthly rulers! You do not deny or dispute the power of the Almighty to reveal his will to man. Nay, you admit, for the sake of a case, that something has been revealed to a certain person. And will you, for the sake of a most ridiculous hypothesis, deny that the almighty hath power to send, by the hands of whom he will, a well authenticated transcript of the laws and institutions he hath ordained for us? We are not permitted to suppose, that you would chuse thus wantonly to blaspheme your maker. Still you insist, however, that the laws thus transmitted would not be a divine revelation. Be this as it may, they would undoubtedly be divine laws, or the will of God made known to us. And if this be admitted, we are not very solicitous about the *name* by which you may chuse to distinguish the sacred code. But why may not such a discovery of the will of God to us, be called a *revelation*? Because “revelation, when applied to religion, means, you say, something communi-

* P. 13.

cated *immediately* from God to man. But this I absolutely deny; and what is more, I will make you, in this instance, refute yourself. You say that the creation we behold, is the word of God, and a divine revelation; and that it reveals to man all that it is necessary for man to know of God. Now if the creation makes known to us the will of God, it must be a medium by which he himself reveals his will to us; and consequently God does not in this way communicate his will to us immediately, but mediately; or through the medium or instrumentality of the creation.—No, Sir, revelation only means a *supernatural* discovery of the will of God to man; and it is of no consequence through how many mediums this discovery passes before it arrives to us, provided we have satisfactory evidence, when we receive it, that it is indeed the will of God.

Let us suppose, for example, that the children of Israel knew most assuredly that the divine commandments, which they received from the hands of Moses, were originally written upon tables of stone, by the finger of God himself, and that they were, by the command of God, delivered to them by Moses, precisely in the same state in which he received them from the hand of God; would not these institutes be, in that case, a revelation to the Israelites as well as to Moses? No—you say “it is a contradiction in terms and ideas, to call any thing a revelation that comes to us at second hand, either verbally or in writing.”

These commandments then, must have undergone some very mysterious transformation, in passing from the hands of Moses to the hands of the Israelites. A transformation so mysterious, that it would require another Age of Reason to develop it. For in both cases, the tables are the same, both as to substance and form; the writing and the sense the same; every paragraph, and sentence, and word, and letter, and mark, and character the

same. Nothing is added—nothing erased or altered in the least degree; and yet, according to your logick, in the hands of Moses these institutes would be a divine revelation; but in the hands of the Israelites nothing more than vague rumours or hearsays, which no person would be obliged to regard! This is certainly a *contradiction in terms*, or, at least, in *ideas*. It is transubstantiation, without a change of substance, either real or imaginary.

“When Moses told the children of Israel that he received the two tables of the commandments from the hand of God, they were not, you say, obliged to believe him, because they had no other authority for it than his telling them so.*” But this is begging the question. You here take for granted what you ought to prove—That the Mosaic history is not true, or, at least, not to be depended upon. You admit, nevertheless, that Moses did tell the children of Israel that he received the tables of the commandments from the hand of God. And by what authority do you admit this, at the same time that you consider the books, in which this fact is recorded, unworthy of credit? If the Mosaic history be true, the children of Israel had much better evidence to establish the divine origin of the ten commandments than the solitary, unsupported testimony of Moses. For that history assures us that they heard the great Jehovah *himself*, pronounce with *his own voice*, all the words of these holy commandments, while attendant flames of fire, the trembling earth, and re-echoing thunders, proclaimed his awful presence, and assured the astonished Israelites that the tremendous voice they heard, was indeed the voice of God. “And you have, you say, no other authority for it, than some historian telling you so.” You ought, however, to consider that your ignorance does not detract any thing from the credibility of the fact. A little acquaintance with the subject you have undertaken to write

upon, might have convinced you, that there is authority upon authority, proof upon proof—a vast concatenation of evidences to establish the divine origin of these commandments. All the arguments which are adduced to prove the truth of Christianity, may also be brought to establish the authenticity of these institutes. For, if the gospel of Christ be true, so are his laws.

As your thoughts upon religion are thrown out upon us in strange disorder, I shall not attempt to follow your tract; and I consider this a proper place to introduce your account of the origin of our scriptures. “When the church mythologists established their system, they collected all the writings they could find, and managed them as they pleased. It is a matter altogether of uncertainty to us, whether such of the writings as now appear, under the name of the Old and New Testament, are in the same state in which those collectors say they found them; or whether they added, altered, abridged, or dressed them up.”

“Be this as it may, they decided by vote, which of the books, out of the collection they had made, should be *THE WORD OF GOD*, and which should not. They rejected several; they voted others to be doubtful, such as the books called Apocrypha; and those books which had a majority of votes, were voted to be the word of God.”*

If confident assertions, without the least shadow of authority or proof, be sufficient to destroy the credit of all ancient records, you have, no doubt, carried your point. But your story seems to carry its *own refutation* along with it. For, after the detail you have given us, of what you say was done by the church, you also say, “Who the people were that did all this, we know nothing of; they call themselves by the general name of the church;

“and this is all we know of the matter.” Now, I hold it impossible, or, at least, very improbable, that any record should authenticate the facts you state, and yet give us no account of the agents in this strange business, only that they call themselves by the general name of the church. But this is not all; you elsewhere affirm that “no external evidence can, at this long distance of time, be produced to prove, whether the church fabricated the doctrine called redemption or not (for such evidence, whether for or against, would, you say, be subject to the same suspicion of being fabricated).” Now as external evidence to prove, that the books containing the doctrine of the atonement are not authentic, would be *some* external evidence to prove that the doctrine itself was fabricated by the church, and as your story must be external evidence, if it be any at all, it evidently follows, from your own words, that it is so liable to the suspicion of being fabricated, as to be *no* evidence in the case under consideration. And this inference is certainly just. Your most ridiculous story is a fabrication, or, at least, such a disingenuous misrepresentation of the case, as to be no evidence at all, either for or against the authenticity of the scriptures.

“How much, or what part of the books called the New Testament, were written by the persons whose names they bear, is, you say, what we can know nothing of.” Is it possible! Why, Sir, have you undertaken to write upon a subject of which you are so extremely ignorant? This is very far from being any thing to your credit. And if you will attend to me, I will tell you something about this interesting affair. You will undoubtedly admit, that there is at this time in the world, a society of people denominated the Christian Church; and that,

as this society could not exist from eternity, it must have had an origin. Nor is it difficult to prove that the origin of Christianity is rightly ascribed to Jesus Christ.

From your admired *heathen* writers* you may easily learn, not only that there was such a person as Jesus Christ, that he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, and that Christianity has derived both its name and origin from him; but also that his religion was in a short time spread to an astonishing extent through the world, and that his disciples were early and often exposed to the most cruel and unnatural persecutions. And, how much soever you may be disposed to doubt the truth of any thing a Christian may say, you will, I am persuaded, admit that the books which the Christians wrote in the first century, are satisfactory evidences that the Christian religion was then in existence.

But it is not necessary to enlarge upon this part of the subject. You admit that there was such a person as Jesus Christ, that he preached most excellent morality, that he was crucified as a malefactor, and that the Christian religion was set up in pretended imitation, at least, of the humble Jesus. Nor do we find that these interesting facts were ever called in question, either by Jews or Pagans, in the early ages of Christianity.

We may, therefore, undoubtedly consider it as a well authenticated fact—a fact which no unbeliever versed in ancient history, can deny, that Christianity did derive its *origin* from Jesus Christ, and

* Such as Tacitus, Suetonius, Epictetus, Pliny, Martial, Arrian, Lucian, and Marcus Antoninus. It is not intimated, that each of these authors bears an express testimony to each of these facts; but from the whole, the facts above stated may be easily collected.

that, in the *country*, and at the *time* our gospel history states. And, as it is an event of a very peculiar nature, and quite dissimilar to every other event within the compass of our knowledge, it must have had a peculiar cause.

Now the books of our gospel history, give us a very circumstantial, and, if true, a very satisfactory account, of this peculiar and astonishing event.—But if we reject this account, where shall we find another, that is at all adequate to its singular nature, and satisfactory to a candid and impartial enquirer? Not in all the annals of former ages. And is this admissible? Can it be supposed that so remarkable a revolution as Christianity has effected in the world, should take place within the era of authentic history, and that in the very heart of the republic of letters, and yet that no historian of that eventful period should think it worth his while, to trace out the nature, the origin, and progress of this revolution, and to commit to authentic record the result of his researches? This is very far from being probable. We may safely affirm, that there never was an event since the art of ~~printing~~ was found out, more likely to attract the notice of a Christian historian, than the introduction of Christianity into the world. It must, therefore, be probable in a high degree, that some of the first preachers of the gospel would reduce to writing and commit to the church, an authentic account of the gospel they preached.

Now, admitting this to be done, we have great reason to believe, that so precious a treasure would be preserved with peculiar attention, and transmitted, without any material injury or alteration, from generation to generation, to our own times. And it is not unworthy your particular attention, that we do find ourselves in possession of histories of the life and doctrines of Jesus Christ, which profess to be written by ear and eye witnesses, and such as

were perfectly acquainted with the important transactions they relate: And I must be permitted to add, just such books as such men might be expected to write.

These books certainly bear very striking marks of genuine history. The particularity with which the *time*, the *place*, the *persons*, and other circumstances, implicated in their narrations, are marked, would afford an easy opportunity for detection, had any material part of the evangelic history been fabulous. The remarkable coincidence between a great variety of facts recorded in that history, and by Josephus, and several Pagan historians of good repute, is, by very competent judges considered almost decisive in itself.* And the great apparent piety and probity of the evangelists; the artless simplicity with which they describe the most interesting scenes, and relate the most important facts; and their great candour in recording their own faults, and admitting into their history a great variety of circumstances, which it is scarcely possible any impostor should chuse to fabricate; seem utterly incompatible with the basest hypocrisy and imposition. But we are not left to rest a matter of such vast importance, merely upon such evidences as have now been stated, decisive as they may appear. No; we have positive and express testimony to prove that the books of our gospel history, were written in the *Apostolic* age, and by the *persons* whose names they bear.

In the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, who had lived and conversed with some of the Apostles themselves, we meet with various *quotations* from, and *allusions* to, those books.† But it is im-

* See Paley's *Eviden.* part 2. chap. vi.

† Such as Clement Romanus, Ignatius, Polycarp and Papias.

possible that any books should be quoted or alluded to, before they were written. We have therefore positive and direct testimony to prove, that these books are not the spurious fabrication of a later period, but that they were written and published, while some of the apostles were living. In writings of the next age, we have very clear and express testimony, to prove, not only that the books of our gospel history were written in the apostolic age, but also that they were written by the very *persons* whose names they bear. And this decisive evidence is confirmed by succeeding ages in the most satisfactory manner.* We have also the corroborating testimonies of the various sects of Christian *heretics* in general. Nay; the most *virulent enemies* to Christianity, who wrote against it, in the second, third, and fourth centuries, acknowledge the books of our gospel history to be *genuine*. And are not these evidences sufficient to establish the genuineness of these books?

If such striking internal and external evidences—if the united testimonies of contemporary writers and succeeding ages; of the orthodox and heretics; believers and infidels; friends and enemies—if all these evidences should be thought by any man insufficient to establish the genuineness of the books of our gospel history, we may venture to conclude; that neither would he be satisfied, though one should arise from the dead—that no evidence, which the nature of the case will admit, would satisfy him. But admitting these books originally to have been written by the persons whose names they bear, and consequently genuine, you insist, nevertheless, that they may, perhaps, have been wilfully altered since

* Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, &c. See Paley's *Evidences*, Part 1. Chap. IX.

that time. Wilfully altered! Do you then seriously imagine, that the whole Christian church—the *laity* as well as the clergy, would be prevailed upon to unite in so wicked and foolish an enterprize? These writings were quickly spread so extensively throughout the churches and the world; translated into so many languages; and so uniformly read in the public assemblies of devout worshippers; as to render any material alteration, whether from accident or design, morally impossible; unless the churches in general were accomplices in the infernal plot. Nor would even this answer your purpose. For, the vigilant eyes of Jews and Pagans, and especially the numerous sects of *heretics* which soon sprang up among themselves, would, after the lapse of a few years, render such a nefarious project utterly impracticable.*

And now, Sir, what do you think of your most ridiculous tale, respecting the origin of our scriptures? Do you consider it any evidence or authority against them? Do you suppose it possible, that the books of the N. Testament, which were acknowledged as authentic and divine writings from the very apostolic ages, could derive their origin, or the least authority from the council of Laodicea in the year 363, or any other council at so late a period?

In short you have no way of discrediting the authenticity of these books, but by supposing them originally fabricated by the apostles or first preachers of the gospel. And whatever you may imagine, you will I am persuaded find it impossible, to induce any impartial enquirer after truth to admit, that the first preachers of the gospel, would, were it even in their power, fabricate spurious gospels, in order that they might have the pleasure of dying to support the credit of their own fabrications. This pre-

* For a more full refutation of this cavil, see Leland against Tyndal, Vol. I. Chap. IV. and V.

tence, however, we shall afterwards have occasion to examine.

And now, notwithstanding all you have endeavoured to say to the contrary, I cannot help thinking that we have satisfactory evidence, not only that some of the first preachers of the gospel probably would, but also that they actually did, reduce to writing, and commit to the church, an authentic account of the gospel they preached, and that this account is transmitted down to us, without any material injury or alteration. And this being admitted, it will follow, that Christianity must be true. These men could have no interest in deceiving their fellow men in this instance. Nor, had they even been wicked and stupid enough to attempt it, could they have been successful in the imposition of so ill concerted and barefaced an imposition, as the story they relate if fabulous, must have been.

You have, however, intrenched yourself so deep in scepticism, that these considerations are not likely to make much impression upon you. You seem determined, as we shall see presently, to renounce all faith in all history, and in all testimony of every description, whether ancient or modern, rather than believe the bible—After proscribing all external evidence in favour of the scriptures, at the same time that you are inconsistently endeavouring to bring forward external evidence against them, you enter your protest against internal evidence, in the following remarkable words; “Did the book, called “the Bible, excel in purity of ideas, and expression, “all the books now extant in the world, I would “not take it for my rule of faith, as being the word “of God.” You suppose it impossible that the word of God should exist in any written, or human language; and you affirm that no prophecies, or miracles, even admitting them to be real, would be sufficient to prove any writings, or doctrines, to be divine! And do you not perceive the evident pur-

port of these observations and assertions? You might, Sir, just as well declare to the world at once, that though your maker should have written, or should yet write, a book of divine laws in human language, and assure you that he hath done so, by all the attestations of prophecies and miracles in his power; yet you are determined that you will not believe him! I hope, however, that few of your readers will chuse to be equally sceptical and impious.

L E T T E R III.

THOUGH you profess to believe that there is a God, who created the heavens and the earth, and man, yet you are not willing to admit, that our Creator hath communicated to us any supernatural information with respect to this peculiarly interesting event. A little attention, however, and a little more philosophy, might convince you, that man would, at first, need much supernatural instruction. Had he been thrown a huge overgrown infant upon an uncultivated earth; and left to shift for himself, in that forlorn situation, without assistance and without instruction; he would, no doubt, have perished with hunger, before he could have learned to provide for his own subsistence. We may therefore consider the present existence of man, as a satisfactory evidence that such instruction was afforded to the first parents of our race.

Now, in whatever way, this instruction might be communicated, it would be to them a supernatural revelation. And can it be supposed that the great God would, in this way, instruct his highly favoured

creature man, how to preserve the life he had so lately received from the hand of his Creator, and yet not inform him to whom he was indebted for existence? This seems utterly inadmissible. On the contrary we have reason to believe, that the great Creator would communicate to our first parents not only a satisfactory account of their own original, but also of the formation of the visible creation around them. And this being admitted, though the original revelation might be obscured by fable, and rendered indistinct by the long lapse of ages, yet it is scarcely possible that it should ever be entirely lost. It is scarcely possible that a single age should pass away in any country, without the occurrence of thunder, a hurricane, an earthquake, or some phenomenon to induce fathers to refer their sons for a solution, to the power and operation of the great Creator. And we find in fact, that traditionary accounts of the creation have been very general among the inhabitants of the world, in all ages.

In confirmation of this assertion I might appeal to the general history of man; but I chuse rather to produce for this purpose, a passage which you have thought proper to introduce in opposition to the Mosaic history of the creation. "The case is, you say, that every nation of people has been world-makers, and the Israelites had as good right to set up the trade of world-making, as any of the rest." You cannot possibly mean that all nations have made, or professed to make, worlds; and that the Israelites being very expert at the business of world-making, converted it into a trade—rolling world after world from their creative hands, to sell to others. This would be too romantic and ridiculous even for the author of the Age of Reason. You must then undoubtedly mean that traditionary or fictitious accounts of the creation have been very general among all nations. But whether these accounts be fictitious or not, they are certainly tra-

dictionary; for they have been transmitted from father to son, through a long succession of ages. And, what is very remarkable, the nearer we ascend to the source, the purer and more rational do the sentiments of mankind, with respect to God and the creation, appear. A striking evidence this, that these sentiments were originally derived, not from the book of nature, or from human science, but from *revelation*.

In support of this important truth I might introduce numerous quotations from Pagan authors of great antiquity, and good repute.* But I find you ready to afford me some assistance in this instance also. You shrewdly enough observe, that the heathen mythology "Did not begin in the state or condition in which it ended." And you affirm, that there was an "ancient system of Theism, that admitted the belief of only one God." This is an important concession. A concession which ill accords with your theory of scientific theology; and which, as it appears to be founded in fact, is happily calculated to confirm the sentiment I am advocating—that God did, originally, grant the first parents of our race a supernatural revelation.

You have, nevertheless, several things to object against the bible history of the creation. You are not willing to admit that Moses is the author of that history; for, "It begins, you say *abruptly*. It is nobody that speaks. It is nobody that hears. It is addressed to nobody." How then would you have had the history of the creation introduced? "I Moses, the son of Amram and Jochebed, say unto you, ye children of Israel, that in the beginning, &c." Is this the way in which histories whether ancient or modern, are usually begun?

It has been said that you had once a design of writing a history of America. Would you then

* See *Leland's Chris. Rev.* Vol. I. p. 80, et. seq.

have begun it in this manner—"I Thomas Paine, author of *Common Sense*, the *Rights of Man*, &c. say unto you, Americans, that I am going to write a history of your country?"

"Moses does not, you say, take it upon himself, by introducing it with the formality that he uses on other occasions, such as that of saying, *the Lord spake unto Moses, saying*." No; nor does he in this manner take upon himself a single article in this book.

But "the silence and caution that Moses observes, in not authenticating the account, is, you say, a good negative evidence that he neither told it, nor believed it." Moses must then have written the book in which this account of the creation is found, and allowed it a place in that book, otherwise it would be quite ridiculous to suppose that he could observe any caution at all about it. What caution then does he, according to your own statement of the case, observe? None at all. By allowing it a place in a book he wrote, without contradicting it, and without any intimation that he is not the author of it, he must undoubtedly authenticate it. Thus your *good negative evidence* to shew that Moses neither told, nor believed the account of the creation with which the book of Genesis opens, proves to be good positive evidence that he both told, and believed it, and also, that the book of Genesis is a genuine book.

You are not willing, however, to admit that the book of Genesis, or any other book, can contain a divine revelation, for, the word of God must, you allege, necessarily be unchangeable, and therefore, it cannot, you conclude, exist in any written or human language.* As if the providence of God is not sufficient to preserve his word, though written in a mutable human language, from undergoing any change which would unfit it for the pur-

* P. 46.

poses of religious instruction and edification! And yet, extraordinary as this requisition evidently is, it seems to be almost realized in our scriptures. The languages in which they are written, may be said to be unchangeable. For they are now, and have long been, *dead languages*; and consequently their meaning must be unalterably fixed.

But it is, you affirm, "impossible to translate from one language into another, not only without losing a great part of the original, but frequently of mistaking the sense."* If so, the life of man must be too short for him to acquire an accurate knowledge of any language besides his vernacular tongue. But every person who has learned another language, must know the reverse of this to be the case. And when a man of good sense, who has learned to write with accuracy and propriety, thoroughly understands two or more languages, he can most undoubtedly translate out of one language into another, with great accuracy and precision.

You affirm, nevertheless, that the best Greek linguist that now exists, does not understand Greek so well as a Grecian ploughman did, or a Grecian milkmaid; and the same, you subjoin, for the Latin, compared with a ploughman or a milkmaid of the Romans. If this be a fact, I think I might venture to affirm, that the *peasantry* among the Greeks and Romans must have cultivated their respective languages, with much greater attention and success than you have done your mother tongue. For, it is by no means uncommon for modern authors to write Latin, at least, more correctly than you write English.—Are the Greek and Latin languages, then, so abstruse or difficult, that it would require a life-time to obtain an acquaintance with them? No; you say, "The difficulty of learn-

* P. 64.

ing the dead languages does not arise from any superior abstruseness in the languages themselves; but in their *being dead*, and the pronunciation entirely lost. It would be the same with any other language when it becomes dead." Now, I would have thought that a ploughman or milkmaid among the Hottentots, might know better than this. It supposes such an intimate connection between the sound and the meaning of words, as must very much facilitate the acquisition of language. But this is a most ridiculous chimera, "Words—taken in the general, may be considered as symbols, not as imitations; as arbitrary, or instituted, not natural signs of ideas."* The words in which a certain connection between the sound and sense can be traced, are few, and even in these, it is seldom, if ever, possible to know the meaning by the sound.

But perhaps I have paid too much attention to this frivolous objection—"All wise men will grant that it is possible for us, at this distance, to understand books written a great while ago, in dead languages, so as to be sufficiently certain of the sense of them; and that those that do not understand those languages themselves, may yet, by the help of translations, attain to sufficient certainty of what is contained in those writings." † I shall not trifle with the reader so far as to attempt to prove this.—It is what all the world grants, and it may be justly affirmed, that take the most corrupt Translation of the Holy Scriptures that ever was made, it is sufficient to give the people a right notion of the Christian religion, or of the faith & morals contained in the sacred writings. †

* Blair.

† Leland against Tindal.

“Jesus Christ, you observe, wrote no account of himself.”* And do you seriously imagine that he ought to have done this! Or, would you have been more disposed to believe his own testimony of himself, than the testimonies of ear and eye witnesses, who could have no interest in deceiving the world in this instance? Whatever you may imagine, I cannot help thinking that it was much more proper, that some of his faithful disciples who had been with him from the beginning to the conclusion of his public ministry, should write a history of his life—should record the glorious works he performed, in attestation of his divine mission, than that he should have done it himself.

But the world is, you seem to intimate, too extensive for the news of salvation to be published over the whole globe. And yet, as if you intended to refute so groundless a conceit yourself, you assure us, “that a man walking at the rate of three miles an hour, for twelve hours in a day, could he keep on in a circular direction, would walk entirely round it in less than two years.”†

“The Christian system—has you say, abandoned the original and beautiful system of theology to distress and reproach, to make way for the hag of superstition.” Such is your delicacy! You go on, “The book of Job, and the 19th psalm—are theological orations conformable to the original system of theology.”‡ If this be the case, it is the Deist, and not the Christian, who has abandoned the original system of theology—For in the book of Job God himself is represented as communicating to him, in the way of supernatural revelation, much instruction; and in the 19th psalm, we have one of the finest eulogies upon the written law of God or revealed religion, any where to be met with. And yet you pretend to adhere to the original system of theology,

* P. 19. † P. 64. ‡ P. 76.

and censure the Christians for having abandoned it to distress and reproach!

If you refer to natural philosophy, which “Is you say the study of the works of God and of the power and wisdom of God in his works.” It is a groundless aspersion.—You cannot prove that there is any inconsistency between the Christian system and the system of the universe. Nor can you produce a single prohibition of such studies, either in the old or new testament.

There are, you intimate, obscene stories in the scriptures.* It appears to me however, that the bible only contains some plain and instructive narratives of obscene and lascivious practices of man. And are you, Sir, offended because these works of darkness, and shame, are brought to light, and exposed to public infamy!

You also charge the scriptures with containing an account of torturous executions, and unrelenting vindictiveness. But do the scriptures affirm, that God authorised any cruelty, or wanton vindictiveness, with which, any executions they relate, might be attended?

You have, I make no doubt, a particular reference to the vindictiveness and cruelties which you suppose the Israelites to have exercised towards the nations of Canaan. Nor have I any inclination to vindicate the conduct of that highly favoured people, in every instance. I have no doubt but they often transgressed the limits of their commission. We believe, however, that the Israelites had a *special commission* from God himself, to be the ministers of his righteous indignation against nations devoted to destruction, or, at least, to exemplary punishment, for their enormous crimes.

In this dispensation there is, I well know, something peculiarly awful and alarming. It proclaims the evil nature, and fatal consequences of sin, in much louder accents, than similar punishments, in-

* P. 38.

flicted in the ordinary course of Providence. But I cannot consider this as any just reason why you should be offended. Had the earth opened her devouring jaws, and swallowed up all the inhabitants of Canaan, in an instant, you would not, I am persuaded, have considered this unjust.

But such calamities take place, perhaps you will say, by the operation of the laws of nature. And what do you call the laws of nature? Are they not the laws of God? Yes; you admit this. For when the rain descends from heaven, and when the earth is filled with abundance, you ascribe it to God. You must therefore admit also, that, when thousands of every age & sex, are ingulphed by an earthquake, or destroyed by a pestilence—"The Lord hath done it." And are you so well acquainted with the rights of the divine sovereignty, and the laws by which the universe ought to be governed, as to take upon you to affirm, that though God might justly have cut off the guilty nations of Canaan, in an instant, by his *own hand*, it would nevertheless have been unjust for him to have *employed the hands* of any other nation for that purpose? This, Sir, would, I think, be too arrogant and too impious, even for the author of the Age of Reason.

"The Bible is, you say, a history of wickedness." Of nothing but wickedness! Are there no accounts of virtue and piety in the Bible? What think you of the history of Joseph? Was it wicked for him to resist, with unshaken firmness, the pressing and repeated solicitations of an amorous mistress? What think you of the history of Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego? Was it wicked for them to prefer the flames of a glowing furnace, to the crime of idolatry? What think you of the history of Daniel, who is said to have been a man of science, as well as of singular integrity?

It is, you say, a history of wickedness. No, Sir,—you ought rather to have said, that the Bible con-

tains a history, or, at least, some very instructive sketches, of the history of human nature. And I think it a very unreasonable charge you have thought proper to advance against the Bible, that it contains an account of the vices as well as the virtues of man; or, in other words, that the sketches of the history of human nature, which we find in it, are true sketches—taken from the life.—Now, a well written history of the vices and the virtues of man, with their natural and ordinary consequences, must undoubtedly be one of the best methods of discountenancing vice, and promoting the interests of virtue.

You venture to intimate, that the Bible contains a collection of the most paltry and contemptible tales. But, it ill becomes the author of the Rights of Man, and the avowed enemy of kings, and dignitaries, to despise the humble poor, in cottages and tents; or, to view, with supercilious contempt, the artless simplicity of ancient manners. It is, if I mistake not, in such situations that human nature exhibits to our view, the greatest variety of characteristical features. If you would know what man is, you must retire from the pomp and parade of courts and national assemblies, and the pageantry of gay society, to the walks of private life, where the human heart is permitted to appear without a mask; where that artifice, and those various disguises, which are too often employed to conceal the heart of man from man, are little known. Besides, you ought to consider, that it is, for the most part, of small occurrences, that human life is made up. Nor is it unfrequently the case, that events, in themselves trivial and uninteresting, are rendered worthy of particular attention, by reason of their connection with events and revolutions, of singular importance.

But the Bible is, you say, a book which any man might make. It is, however, as far as I can learn,

the opinion of such critics as are best qualified to decide the case, that some parts of the Bible are, in point of sublimity, superior to all other writings in the world. But it would be very unreasonable to expect, that the whole should be written in this manner; and it would be equally so, to look for profound philosophical or metaphysical researches in the Bible.—Such writings would not be calculated for general utility—would not be intelligible to plain unlettered men. And you will certainly admit, that the great Creator cannot be ambitious of the character of an eloquent orator, a profound philosopher, or an acute metaphysician.

When we consider this life as a state of trial, we may assuredly conclude, that any revelation which God may condescend to afford us, must be calculated for that state. And this consideration seems to suggest the probability, that such a revelation may become a stumbling block to the *proud scorers* of this world, at the same time that it serves as a lamp to the feet, and a light to the path of the *meek and teachable*.

But let us, for a few moments, turn our attention from the book of grace, to the great book of nature, and see whether we cannot discern some evident traces of a striking analogy. Is there nothing to be observed in the visible creation, but grandeur, and sublimity?—Very grand and sublime—like the sublime of scripture, are the prospects which the heavens open to our view; but the earth on which we live adopts much humbler language—The visible creation, Sir, employs for our instruction, a great diversity of style and manner. And why may not the scriptures do the same?

We must not, however, forget man himself, from whom more of God and virtue may be learned, than from the whole visible creation besides. But how are we to contemplate man, so as to derive from him theological and moral instruction

to the greatest advantage? We must undoubtedly contemplate him in the development and exercise of all the various powers and passions with which he is endowed. We must view our fellow-men in all the various relations of domestic, social, civil, and religious life; we must consider their charities and their avarice, their humanity, and their torturous executions and unrelenting vindictiveness; we must observe them in the sober exercise of their reason, and in their intoxications and vomitings; nor must their obscenities and lewdness pass unobserved.

And now, is it possible for you to imagine, that man appears to greater advantage in real life, than as depicted in the history of the Bible? Or will you any more presume to censure the written word of God for adopting a mode of instruction, similar to that which his created word has adopted, and constantly employs?

You venture to affirm that “the declaration which says, that God *visits the sins of the fathers upon the children*, is contrary to every principle of moral justice. But you might have known, that the declaration you so severely censure, does not imply, that God does, in a strict and proper sense, ever punish children *for* the sins of their parents. No; it only imports, that he sometimes takes an occasion from the crimes of parents to withhold from their children blessings to which they have no claim, and, perhaps, also, to expose them to temporal sufferings which they might otherwise have escaped—That is to say, by intimating to parents the inauspicious influence which their crimes may be expected to have upon their offspring, a beneficent Deity hath been pleased to bind parents to the conscientious discharge of their various duties, by *by all the strong cords of parental affection*.

Besides a little acquaintance with the world in which you live, might have convinced you, that

children do often suffer in consequence of their parents crimes. It is by no means uncommon, for wicked and profligate parents to expose their children to poverty and reproach, and at the same time to entail upon them some painful disease.—Now these things must take place in consequence of the appointment of God himself. And surely you do not intend to charge your Maker with any thing, that “Is contrary to every principle of moral justice.”

L E T T E R I V.

I SHALL now proceed to consider some of your principal charges against Christianity and Christians. You blame the Christian system for having laid all (the fields of science) waste, and affirm, that “If we take our stand about the beginning of the sixteenth century, we look back thro a long chasm, to the times of the ancients, as over a vast sandy desert, in which not a shrub appears to intercept the vision to the fertile hills beyond.” Whereas, “Had the progression of knowledge gone on proportionably with the stock that before existed, that chasm would you say, have been filled up with characters rising superior in knowledge to each other, and those ancients we now so much admire, would have appeared respectably in the back ground of the scene.” No, Sir; according to the fine landscape you have given us, Your admired ancients would not have appeared at all.—Your sandy desert would have been quite filled up with shrubs, or rather with stately cedars, towering to the heavens in proud luxuriance, to intercept our vision to your fertile hills beyond.—And is it prudent, or mo-

dest for a man, who cannot imagine and delineate the scenery of a petty landscape, without danger of falling into error and confusion—is it prudent or modest for such a man, to decide as peremptorily as you have done, with respect to the measures which ought, or which ought not, to be employed in the government of the universe?

“The christian system; you say, laid all waste.”—I do not know whether this illiberal aspersion ought to be attributed to your ignorance, or to ingratitude and malice. But whether you know it or not, it is a fact, that you are chiefly indebted to christians for your boasted scientific knowledge. Had it not been for the attention of christians to science, and the care and pains they took to preserve the writings of your admired ancients from the general wreck of barbarian devastation, these writings would, there is reason to believe, have been all lost, and the very names of their authors buried in oblivion: and you yourself admit, that “the event that served more than any other to break the first link in” what you call “the long chain of despotic ignorance, is that known by the name of the reformation of Luther.”

You have thought proper, nevertheless, to affirm that “the setters up and advocates of the christian system of faith could not but foresee that the continually progressive knowledge that man would gain by the aid of science, of the power and wisdom of God manifested in the structure of the universe, and in all the work of creation, would militate against, and call into question, the truth of their system of faith.”—But without a discernment vastly superior to that which falls to the lot of man in our day, it must have been utterly impossible for the first preachers of the gospel to foresee, had it even been a fact, that any future discoveries in science would “militate against, and call into question, the truth of their system of faith.”—Sir Isaac Newton, after all his profound researches into the structure of the universe, could not perceive any inconsistency between that structure or the works of

creation, and the christian system. You go on—“therefore it became necessary to their purpose to cut learning down to a size less dangerous to their project.”—Necessary! on what account? why, to prevent, it seems, the inconsistency between their system of faith and the structure of the universe (an inconsistency, according to you, already obvious to illiterate men) from being brought to light by the investigations of the learned!

You represent the “setters up of the christian system” to have been sagacious enough to perceive, that future discoveries in science would call into question the truth of their system; and yet you affirm that the christian system is “a fable, which for absurdity and extravagance, is not exceeded by any thing that is to be found in the mythology of the ancients.” And do you seriously imagine, that men of such extraordinary sagacity could, at the same time, be so extremely stupid, as to be the authors of such a ridiculous system? Or determined, as they evidently were, to support their system at the hazard of their lives, would they, think you, chuse to set it up in a form, which they plainly foresaw “could not be maintained against the evidence which the structure of the universe afforded?”

“It became necessary to their purpose, you say, to cut learning down to a size less dangerous to their project, and this they effected by restricting the idea of learning to the dead study of the dead languages.” And yet you also say, that “Almost all the scientific learning that now exists, came to us from the Greeks, or the people who spoke Greek.” Do you then verily suppose, that the first preachers of the gospel would direct the attention of any one, to the language and writings of the Greeks, in order to prevent him from becoming acquainted with *their sciences*? This most ridiculous chimera, Sir, refutes itself.—Besides you ought to have known that the Greek and Latin languages, to which you, no doubt, principally allude, were, when christianity was set up, and for several centuries afterwards, not dead, but living languages.

“It is, you say, a fraud of the christian system to call the sciences *human inventions*; it is only the application of them that is human.”* The acquisition then must, it seems, be divine! But how do you establish this heavy charge against the church? Why, you introduce the term *make*, as if it were synonymous with the term *invent*, and you then fill up eight or nine pedantic pages, in trying to prove, that man could not make the principles upon which science is founded, or, which is the same thing, that he could not create our solar system, and establish the laws by which it is governed. This is truly farcical.

You have also thought proper to assert, that the christian “despises the choicest gift of God to man, THE GIFT OF REASON.”† And how do you make this appear? Why, “he ungratefully calls it human reason,” you say. And why may he not call it so? Because man could not, you intimate, give reason to himself. It is true. Neither could man give being to himself. Is he therefore a divine being—a god!

The christian, you say, despises the choicest gift of God to man, the gift of reason. It appears to me, however, that your Age of Reason furnishes us with a refutation of this invidious charge, which, to you at least, ought to be entirely satisfactory. For it would, I think, be quite uncandid to suppose, that you would substitute gross misrepresentations, low buffoonery, the most illiberal invectives, and mere gratuitous assumptions, in the room of argument, had you been able to cope with the advocates for christianity in the field of fair argumentation.

“The christian system of faith appears to you a species of atheism—a sort of religious denial of God.” Why?—Because “it professes to believe in a man rather than in God.” But you ought certainly to have some regard to consistency at least, in the charges you advance against the christian system. To say that a belief in Jesus Christ, as a person sent by God to be

the Saviour of the world, implies a sort of religious denial of God, is a contradiction in terms.

You charge the christian with "the boldest presumptions," because he presumes to pray to God, his maker and benefactor. "We cannot, you say, serve God in the manner we serve those who cannot do without such service." It is true. Neither can we injure him, as we may injure one another. Are we therefore justified in hating and blaspheming him! The question, Sir, in this case is not, What service can we do to God? but, Doth he require us to pray? And that he doth, the spontaneous aspirations of the human heart in distress, and the sentiments and practice of all nations, in all ages, evidently declare. By rendering a sense of the divine presence familiar to the mind of the sincere worshipper, prayer must undoubtedly strengthen every virtuous principle, and consequently promote both the honour of God and the happiness of man. But the christian "takes on himself, you affirm, to direct the Almighty what to do, even in the government of the universe. He prays dictatorially." This appears to me as puerile as it is invidious. Do children, by respectfully soliciting a parent for a piece of bread, arrogate to themselves a right to dictate what ought to be done in the government of the family! With a view of cultivating a dutiful temper in a child, it is no uncommon thing for parents to require him to ask in a becoming manner, for what they have previously determined to bestow. And it would certainly be too presuming for you to affirm, that the great parent of mankind may not do the same. This, Sir, would be nothing less than taking "on yourself to direct the Almighty what to do, even in the government of the universe." But the amount of all the christian's prayers is, you intimate, "an attempt to make the Almighty change his mind, and act otherwise than he does."—Will you never have done with your atheistical objections against religion! What ideas do you entertain of God your Maker? Do you not admit him to be omniscient, as well as almighty? To deny this is

atheism, or at least a species of atheism. And if God doth know all things, the future as well as the past and present, he must undoubtedly know how to hear and answer prayer, without ever altering any of his purposes, deranging the laws of nature, or throwing any part of his dominions into confusion.

The scripture account of the original apostacy of man, you endeavour to turn into burlesque. But it is certainly more philosophical, as well as pious, to believe that man fell from a state of perfect rectitude by his own voluntary crime, than to suppose him originally formed such a creature as he now is.

It cannot surely be incredible, that man should be required to undergo a trial, before admission to a state of unchanging and assured happiness. And it appears to me impossible to imagine a trial more equitable and proper, than that assigned our first parents. They were placed in a Paradise, munificently furnished for their accommodation. The fruit of a single tree only was interdicted, as a test of obedience; and a constant monitor to remind them of the absolute sovereignty of the great Creator, and the fatal consequences of disobedience and apostacy. And what was the fruit of a single tree to them, amidst such profusion of the divine bounty!—Say not, the interdicted action was not, in itself, a crime, and therefore not a proper test of obedience. For an action, in itself indifferent, seems evidently the best possible criterion of a disposition to obey the great Creator, from a pure regard to his authority. And the authority of God Almighty must, undoubtedly, be sufficient to stamp criminality, and that in a high degree, upon actions in themselves indifferent.

But still you may, perhaps, think it strange that our first parents should transgress so easy and equitable a command. Why then do you scornfully reject, and try to render ridiculous, the best possible solution of this difficulty, viz. that they were seduced into disobedience, by the artful solicitations of the old serpent, the devil. We have certainly no reason to conclude, that

man is the highest exertion of creating power and goodness. Nor, admitting the existence of such creatures as the scriptures denominate angels, can it be incredible, that some, among innumerable myriads, should revolt and apostatize. And you are, undoubtedly, too well acquainted with seductions of various descriptions among men, and the artifices employed to accomplish them, to have any reason to think it improbable, that an apostate angel should envy the happiness of innocent man, and adopt for his ruin, measures too likely to gratify his malice and ambition at our expense.

You seem, however, very apprehensive, that the first woman would have been startled to hear a dumb animal talk. But you ought to consider that Satan, who was, no doubt, well acquainted with the original state of animated nature, might easily take such precautions as would, it is probable, prevent an event of this kind—And this appears to have been, in fact, the case; for Moses informs us that *Hannachash*, that or this serpent, and not, it would seem, every individual of the species, was more subtle than any beast of the field; and this is the only reason he assigns for its being capable of making the following address to Eve: “Yea, hath God said ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” We may therefore fairly conclude that the extraordinary subtilty, so particularly noted by so sensible a writer, was adequate to the effect for which it is intended to account. And with this singular circumstance our first parents would, it is probable, be well acquainted. But shall we suppose such extraordinary faculties natural to this or any other serpent? By no means. We must undoubtedly ascribe them to the influence and superior sagacity of the old serpent, the devil; to whom the seduction of our first parents is, in other parts of scripture, unequivocally attributed*.—This appears to me the

* See Poole's annotations.

most natural and obvious meaning of the passage, as illustrated by other parts of scripture. And it seems to be, itself, a sufficient refutation of all the material objections, which have ever been made to the Mosaic history of the fall of man.

Were we, however, to admit, that Eve might at first have been startled on the occasion—would this discredit the history under consideration? I cannot perceive any foundation for such a sentiment.—Do you seriously imagine, that the devil is so utterly devoid of genius, as not to have been capable of devising some expedient to prevent this seemingly unpromising circumstance from defeating his malicious purposes?—Might he not, if no better device occurred, have made the instrument of seduction ascribe both the faculties of speech and reason, to the extraordinary virtues of the forbidden fruit? Such a device as this, would, there is reason to think, have been more than sufficient to relieve the first woman from any disagreeable apprehensions, which the novelty of the scene might possibly occasion. It must also, it may be presumed, have been admirably calculated to excite in a generous mind, a strong desire to experience the unknown & astonishing virtues of the forbidden fruit; and consequently to facilitate the deception.

It is, Sir, easy for a wit, and not very difficult perhaps for a buffoon, to attach ludicrous ideas to the Mosaic account of the seduction and apostacy of man, and to almost any thing else. And in this way it is also too easy to impose upon the ignorant and unwary—especially among the profligate part of mankind, and to induce them to join in the laugh at religion, and virtue, and providence, as well as at the word of their Maker. But before you undertook to write upon so grave a subject, you certainly ought to have known, that there is absolutely no argument in a scoff, a sneer, a witticism, or the loudest burles of profane laughter. Nor can the firm foundations of christianity ever be shaken by such means.

You seem unwilling to admit that our first parents could, in the case under consideration, be guilty of any crime. But you might as well call in question the existence of God. For if there be a God, he must undoubtedly have a right to ordain, for his own moral offspring, what laws, and to appoint them what trials he pleases; and this being admitted, it evidently follows that the voluntary breach of a command delivered in express terms, and enforced by the most solemn and awful sanctions, must be something more than simply "eating an apple." It could be nothing less, Sir, than open and direct rebellion against the Almighty Sovereign of the universe.

But why do posterity suffer or lose any thing in consequence of a crime which they could not personally commit? Why! Because they are the offspring of degenerate, apostate parents.—Do you mean by the reproaches you have cast upon this dispensation, to impeach the justice of your Maker?—You suppose that "man stands in the same relative condition with his Maker he ever did stand since Man existed." Unless, therefore, you be an atheist under the mask of deism, or mean to charge your Maker with palpable injustice, you must admit that it is just for God to make man such a creature as he now is. And while you admit this, you cannot without manifest inconsistency and absurdity imagine, that it would be unjust for God to take an occasion from the voluntary apostasy of our first parents, to let their posterity sink from any superior degrees of purity, and dignity, and happiness, to their present state. This seems too plain to need either proof or illustration. And is it not astonishing that any man possessed of common sense, who takes to himself the name of a deist, should lay the least stress upon this atheistical objection!

Against the vicarious sufferings of Jesus Christ for sinners, you have thrown out some objections, which you seem to think very formidable.

"From whence," you ask, "could arise the solitary and strange conceit that the Almighty, who had millions of worlds equally dependent upon his protec-

tion, should quit the care of all the rest, and come to die in our world." From whence could this strange conceit arise! Why, Sir, the impious idea arose, most undoubtedly, from the impotent malice of some visionary infidel. And yet, it is an idea upon which you love to dwell, and which you have exhibited to view in various forms of expression too shocking to be transcribed. I cannot, however, persuade myself, that you are so exceedingly ignorant, as to consider this a just representation of the doctrine which you wish to oppose. No: mortifying to human nature, as the reflection is, I am constrained to consider such charges against the Christian redemption, as nothing less than pure unmixed calumny. For you elsewhere acknowledge that the subject, which the apostles dwell upon in their writings, is not that of the Almighty, but of a man dying upon a cross.*

But "A fever would, you affirm, have done as well as a cross, if there was any occasion for either."† No, Sir: a fever would not have exhibited the justice of God in such a striking light—would not have represented the evil of sin in such strong colours—would not have illustrated to such advantage, the moral excellencies of the suffering Redeemer—would not have afforded such an opportunity for confirming his claim to a divine mission, by the fulfilment of prophecy, and the miracles which attended his death—would not have sealed with blood the truth of the doctrines he taught—would not have collected so many spectators to be witnesses of his resurrection from the dead, nor led on to the various and satisfactory evidences we now have of that interesting event.

According to St. Paul "There are, you say, two Adams; the one who sins in fact, and suffers by proxy; the other who sins by proxy, and suffers in fact."—Did Adam then appoint Jesus Christ to suffer for him, or did Jesus Christ employ Adam to sin for him! Does Paul say so? He does not. How could you allow

yourself to throw out so vile and malicious a slander against the apostle Paul? He was, it is true, one of the best witnesses of the truth of Christianity: but this is certainly no just reason why you should misrepresent and calumniate him.

“This sentence of death, which, they tell us was passed upon Adam, ~~and~~, you say, either have meant dying naturally, that is, ceasing to live, or have meant what these mythologists call damnation. Consequently, the act of dying on the part of Jesus Christ must, according to their system, apply as a prevention to one or other of these two things happening to Adam and to us.” This inference, however, will by no means follow from the premises which you have laid down. For if “this sentence meant dying naturally,” what Christ has done and suffered for us, might be intended, not to apply as a prevention of this event, but to obtain for us a better life than we lost in Adam. “With respect to the second explanation, it is, you affirm, impertinently representing the Creator as coming off, or revoking the sentence, by a pun or quibble upon the word death.” Can you then, by the help of a pun or quibble upon the word death, transfer, in a literal sense, to Jesus Christ, the original denunciation against Adam in case of disobedience—“in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die?” If you can, you must understand the arts of punning and quibbling infinitely better than the art of reasoning. Nay, if you can make this peremptory and unequivocal denunciation against Adam, refer either to Adam, or to Jesus Christ, indiscriminately, you must also be able to annihilate all distinctions of person among the descendants of Adam, and to make any proposition whatever, mean any thing you please.

Had you, Sir, been a little better acquainted with the writings of “that manufacturer of quibbles,” as you illiberally call him, the apostle Paul, it might have preserved you from the infamy of this senseless cavil. This apostle would have taught you that Jesus Christ died for sinners, not to give the Creator an

opportunity of coming off, or revoking the sentence, by a pun or quibble upon the word death, but to deliver them from a state of actual ruin—from that state of moral death, condemnation, and misery, into which our guilty race have sunk, in consequence of that sentence and actual sin—“That as in Adam all die, and as sin hath reigned unto death; even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life.”

But “Moral justice cannot, you say, take the innocent for the guilty, even if the innocent would offer itself. To suppose justice to do this, is to destroy the principle of its existence, which is the thing itself. It is then no longer justice. It is indiscriminate revenge.” *Indiscriminate revenge!*—A madman may, it is true, vent his rage indiscriminately against any person who happens to fall in his way, but revenge cannot be transferred from the object of resentment, to a person in our estimation innocent and not at all connected with that object. To suppose revenge to be thus transferred, is to destroy the principle of its existence, and consequently, the thing itself.—*Indiscriminate revenge!* Why, Sir, revenge is not the object of penal inflictions, in any regular and just government in the universe. And if revenge be not the object of such inflictions as they respect a criminal, much less would it be so, were an innocent, voluntarily substituted in the stead of a guilty, life.

It is, however, far from being my intention to intimate that any government on earth has a right to admit of such a substitution. No: this would be evidently wrong. For it would be robbing society of an useful life, and prolonging a life that might be expected to prove a pest. But is it possible for you to be so undiscerning as not to perceive, that the cases under consideration are by no means parallel? No man on earth has, either a right to lay down his life at pleasure, or power to resume it again from the grave. But Jesus Christ had power to lay down his life, and he had power to take it again. His life is not lost to society. It was not possible that he should be holden

under the dominion of death. Because an innocent person, who could neither reform a ransomed criminal nor disengage himself from the fetters of death, ought not to be allowed to die for a criminal, are we authorized to pronounce it unjust for our Maker to permit Jesus Christ to lay down his life, and resume it again, for our salvation! No, Sir—It is the man who presumes to do this, and not the humble supplicant at the throne of grace, who “takes on himself to direct the Almighty what to do, even in the government of the universe.”

But if Jesus Christ died for us, you seem to imagine that it would be necessary for him to die for the inhabitants of every other world in the universe also. Have you then any evidence that there are other worlds inhabited by animate creatures such as we are? No; not the least. You must, however, obtain such evidence, before so wild a chimera can merit our attention. Till you have done this, it can be nothing more than a most unphilosophical opposition of mere hypothesis to well established fact.

You venture to affirm, that no man can believe that God hath created as many worlds as there are fixed stars, and, at the same time, believe in the christian system. And why not? Because if God hath so many other worlds to take care of, it would; you insinuate, be quite ridiculous to suppose him to pay that attention to our particular interests, which that system ascribes to him. Ye parents of a numerous offspring! when one of your children was seized with a dangerous disease, did you reason after this manner? “I will not employ a physician, or use any means for preserving the life of this child: for if it should die, *I have children enough besides.*” Oh! Sir, how could you allow yourself, thus to insult and dishonor the great Parent of mankind! It is absurd to the last degree to suppose that a Being of infinite perfection, can be less attentive to our particular interests, on account of any number of other worlds he may have called into existence. Thus we may see that this objection, not-

withstanding all the pomp and parade with which you have set it off, is, in reality, a species of atheism.—It imports that there is no being in the universe possessed of infinite perfection.

L E T T E R V.

AS you have thought proper to reject the account which the gospel history gives us of the origin of Christianity, you seem sensible that it is incumbent on you to furnish us with a better in its stead.

“It is, you say, curious to observe, how the theory of what is called the christian church sprung out of the tail of the heathen mythology.”* And you might, it appears to me, as well have said, It is curious to observe how the sun sprung out of the moon. “A direct incorporation took place, you allege, in the first instance.” And it is curious to observe how you attempt to establish this ridiculous assertion.—You try to palm upon the first christians, who were all Jews, a most impious and obscene story, respecting the incarnation of Jesus Christ, and yet you, at the same time, acknowledge, that *it was only the people called Gentiles, or Mythologisers, that believed it.*† You go on—“The trinity of gods that then followed was no other than a reduction of the former plurality, which was about twenty or thirty thousand.” That is to say, Christianity does not acknowledge as many gods as the heathen mythology (and you ought to have said, that it admits of but one only) therefore the Christian theology must have been derived from the heathen mythology!

* P. 17.

† *Ibid.*

‡ Elsewhere Mr. Paine says, *The christians have five deities. And with equal propriety he might have said—five thousand.*

But, as if it were a light thing to charge upon the first christians a most impious and shocking opinion, which, according to your own concessions, they must have rejected with abhorrence, you try to load these inoffensive men with the follies, the superstitions, and the crimes of posterity: or, at least, you endeavour to make christianity responsible for its perversions and abuses. For as an additional evidence in favour of the impure origin, which you have presumptuously assigned the christian theory, you observe (alluding to the church of Rome) that "the statue of Mary succeeded the statue of Diana of Ephesus. The deification of heroes changed into the canonization of saints," &c.—But you know, undoubtedly, that Christianity did not originate at Rome. Nor was it till after the lapse of several ages, that the church at Rome assumed an appearance, which bore any resemblance to this invidious representation. In the first and purest ages of the church, Mary had no statue at all: nor, in that auspicious period, was a single saint distinguished by the rites of superstitious veneration. What would you think of a visionary dabler in politics, who, with a view of bringing civil government into disrepute, should take it into his head to charge it with all the crimes which have been committed under its sanction!

You make one pitiful exertion more to support your ridiculous hypothesis.—"The ancient mythologists tell that the race of giants made war with Jupiter, and that one of them threw an hundred rocks against him at one throw; that Jupiter defeated him—and confined him afterwards under Mount Etna." And to this fable you ascribe the scripture ideas of apollate angels. "For the fable of Jupiter and the giants was, you affirm, told many hundred years before that of Satan." What stupidity! In the same way it may be proved that the principles contained in your Rights of Man, are derived from the Mohammedan Alcoran: for the Mohammedan Alcoran was written many hundred years before the Rights of Man.

But how do you establish the antiquity of your fable? By mere assertion only. But mere assertion, in opposition to all the evidence which can be collected from all the writings of antiquity transmitted down to us, is calculated only to bewray the ignorance and presumption of its author. It is not, you ought to observe, in the New but in the Old Testament—in books written *many hundred years* before we have any account of your Pagan fable,* that we meet with the first account of this enemy of God and man, whom we call Satan. And if you would only take the trouble to obtain any tolerable acquaintance with antiquity, you might easily perceive, that the fable which you have been imprudent enough to introduce—Nay, that the Pagan mythology in general, with which you make so much insignificant parade, is calculated not to undermine, but rather to establish the credibility of the Bible history.†

You imagine the Christian system to have originated in imposture, and "from the first preachers, the fraud went on, you say, to the second, and to the third, till the idea of its being a pious fraud became lost in the belief of its being true.‡ And yet, in the very next page, you inconsistently intimate a strong apprehension, that even after the idea of its being a pious fraud became lost in the belief of its being true, "the church had" still "some record or some tradition that it was originally no other than a pious fraud," or that the

* See *Stilins. Orig. Sacr.*

† Perhaps our readers may be of our opinion, when we offer it as a conjecture, that the tales of the war of the Peri and Dives, originated from a vague tradition concerning good and bad angels: nor is it, in our opinion, improbable, that the fable of the wars between the gods and giants, so famous in the mythology of Greece and Italy, was imported into the former from the same quarter.—*ENCYCLOPEDIA.*

‡ See *Holw. Mythl. Dictionary.*

§ P. 128.

still knew it to be false; for this must certainly have been the case, if she foresaw "that it could not be maintained against the evidence that the structure of the universe afforded."

And what, think you, could induce the first christians to propagate a system of known falsehood, at the hazard of their lives? Why, "The persons " who first preached the christian system of faith, and " in some measure combined with it the morality " preached by Jesus Christ, might, you say, persuade " themselves that it was better than the heathen my- " thology that then prevailed."—But the morality preached by Jesus Christ might undoubtedly have been propagated to much greater advantage without combining it with any false system whatever; unless the great interests of truth and morality are most effectually promoted by hypocrisy and falsehood. Besides you ought to consider that the pure morality preached by Jesus Christ and his apostles, forbids hypocrisy and falsehood in the most express terms, and under the awful penalty of *damnation*. Could the first preachers of the gospel then, verily imagine, that the best way of promoting the interests of the morality they preached, was to live in the daily and flagrant violation of all its principles! Or, were they, think you, so captivated with the charms of this pure morality as to be willing, for its sake, to render themselves of all men the most immoral and miserable, in this life, and that without any expectation of any reward but *damnation*, in the world to come! If you are capable of believing all this, I am not at all surpris'd to find that, in your estimation, "Credulity is not a crime."

Mystery, miracle, and prophecy, you represent as the principal means which have been employed in all ages to impose upon mankind. The word mystery cannot, you say, be applied to *moral truth*, any more than obscurity can be applied to light. You imagine then, it seems, that there is a direct opposition between mystery and moral truth. But this is a

palpable absurdity. You might as well imagine a opposition between the length of your arms and the circuit of the earth.—Whatever surpasses our comprehension, how plain soever it may be to persons or intelligences of superior discernment, is to us undoubtedly a mystery. But "The God in whom " we believe is, you observe, a God of moral truth, " and not a God of mystery or obscurity. Religion therefore, being the belief of a God, and the practice " of moral truth, cannot have connection with mys- " tery."—Can you, then, comprehend the Being and perfections of God your Maker, and explain to us how it is that he is possessed of an independent and underived existence? If you cannot, religion according to your own account of it, must necessarily have connection with mystery. But the belief of a God is, you intimate, easier than the belief of an Atheist, and therefore it cannot, you conclude, *have any thing of mystery in it*. And in the same way you might prove, that there is no such thing as mystery in the world of nature. For in the world of nature there is nothing as incomprehensible as the atheistic system. Besides you ought to consider, that religion is a belief in the infinite perfections of God, as well as in his existence.

"Every thing we behold is, you admit, in one sense a mystery to us. The fact, however as different from the operating cause is not, you observe, a mystery, because we see it." That is to say, The evidence we have that the world is full of mysteries, is not mysterious or doubtful, but certain evidence. Besides, that we see or know any thing, is itself a mystery.

"When men whether from policy or pious fraud " set up systems of religion repugnant to human " comprehension, they were, you allege, under the " necessity of inventing, or adopting, a word that " should serve as a bar to all questions, inquiries, " and speculations. The word mystery answered " this purpose."—Christianity, however, does not

require you to believe any thing without evidence. You have, therefore, ample room for all the questions, and inquiries, and speculations, and objections, and cavils, and quibbles, which you can bring into operation against the Christian system. But while you acknowledge that you cannot comprehend any thing in the system of material nature, a system which you admit to be from God, it must be very unreasonable as well as inconsistent, for you to reject any well authenticated system of revealed religion, because it contains some mysteries which you cannot fathom.—And these observations are, I think, a sufficient reply to all the mysterious things which you have said against mystery.

You proceed to miracle and affirm that, “unless we know the whole extent of those laws [the laws of nature] and what are commonly called the powers of nature, we are not able to judge whether any thing that may appear to us wonderful or miraculous, be within, or be beyond, or be contrary to her natural power of acting.” And you afterwards observe that “we know not the extent to which either nature or art can go.” Now if these assertions be true, it will follow that it would be utterly impossible for us to distinguish, in any instance, a miraculous from an ordinary event:—

Were the pen in my hand to assume a human voice, and entreat me not to make it the unhappy instrument of transcribing any more of the blasphemous things which you have written; were the table on which your Age of Reason rests, to utter the most dolorous groans under the burthen of such a mass of impurity, and supplicate in tears for a deliverance; and were the fire on my hearth to claim your book as its *just prey*, and reaching forth a glowing arm, snatch it from my grasp and reduce it to ashes in an instant—were all these strange things to happen to me, and your Age of Reason, it would, nevertheless, according to you, be impossible for me to know that it was not all

quite natural, and perfectly consistent with the laws of nature!

Instances may, perhaps, be produced, in which it is not easy to know whether an event *be within, or be beyond* the powers of nature. But a great variety of the astonishing facts recorded in the Bible are of such a nature that, admitting their authenticity, they must undoubtedly be real miracles, and consequently a satisfactory evidence of the truth of Christianity.

You have, however, several things to object against miraculous evidence in favour of any religious system. “It is, you say; the most equivocal sort of evidence that can be set up; for the belief is not to depend upon the thing called a miracle, but upon the credit of the reporter, who says he saw it; and therefore the thing, were it true, would have no better chance of being believed than if it were a lie.” A real miracle then, performed in confirmation of a system of religious doctrines, would be nothing more, it seems, than equivocal evidence, and have no better chance of being believed than if it were a lie! I cannot however, imagine you to have so much faith in the devil, as to suppose him the author of a real miracle.*—And if God Almighty should undertake to establish a system of religious truth by miracles, it appears to me, notwithstanding all you have said to the contrary, that he would be able to accomplish his purpose. Now it is absurd to the last degree, to suppose that a system of religious truth established by real miracles, would be attended by no peculiar circumstances calculated to confirm the testimonies of eye-witnesses in behalf of the miracles by which it was established.

You go on “Suppose I were to say, that when I sat down to write this book, a hand presented itself in the air; took up the pen, and wrote every word that is herein written; would any body believe me? certainly they would not.—Be this as it may, the assertion would be utterly incredible. For a good spirit or genius would not write so impious a book; and whatever may be said with respect to the scurrility

and buffoonery with which it abounds, the devil would, undoubtedly, be ashamed of the *bad reasoning* and *nonsense* which it contains. It is therefore quite impertinent for you to ask "would they believe me a whit the more if the thing had been a fact." But had you affirmed that when you had finished your book, such a hand presented itself, and wrote upon the face of it, *MI NE, TE KE L*, or any other form of reprobation, it would have been a very different case.

Would they believe me a whit the more if the thing had been a fact?—And who do you mean to make yourself to be? Because your single testimony would not be sufficient to authenticate a miracle in itself utterly incredible, a miracle unworthy of the devil himself; do you infer, that no testimony whatever can be sufficient to authenticate a miracle evidently worthy of God!—O! Ye deists, is this your Champion!

With a view of overthrowing all miraculous evidence in support of christianity, you ask, "Is it more probable that nature should go out of her course, or that a man should tell a lie? We have never seen, in our time, nature go out of her course, but we have good reason to believe that millions of lies have been told in the same time; it is therefore at least millions to one, that the reporter of a miracle tells a lie." Thus, with a disingenuity that can scarcely be exceeded, you endeavour to reduce all the various and striking evidences we have, of miraculous attestations in behalf of revealed religion, to the solitary, unsupported testimony of a stranger. But have there been no truths told in our time? It is certainly more natural, and much more common, for men to speak the truth than to tell lies. Were we, therefore, to decide upon the credibility of the testimony under consideration, merely from the number of lies and truths which have been told in our time, the decision would undoubtedly be much in its favour. *We have reason to believe that millions of lies have been told in our*

time. But is it common for men to lie, when they consider it their interest to declare the truth? or can you produce any instances of persons dying in attestation of a known falsehood? it is, Sir, to no purpose to enumerate any number of lies, which have been told in circumstances entirely dissimilar to those in which the ear and eye witnesses of miracles performed in confirmation of Christianity, gave in their testimony.

But, "We have never seen, in our time, nature go out of her course." You ought, however, to consider that it was, we have reason to believe, chiefly, if not solely, for the sake of mankind, that the laws of nature, as they respect our world, were originally established, and the world itself brought into existence. It cannot, therefore, be incredible that the beneficent Creator, should occasionally deviate from those laws, or suspend their natural influence, when the good of mankind might, in that way, be most effectually promoted.

Revelation, when we take into view the goodness of God, and the great need we stand in of a more perfect rule of life than the unassisted light of nature, ought by no means to be considered as an improbable event. And this being admitted, it will follow that no event, necessary to authenticate such a communication of the will of God to man, can be improbable. "Now in what way can a revelation be made but by miracles? In none which we are able to conceive. Consequently in whatever degree it is probable that a revelation should be communicated to mankind at all, in the same degree is it probable that miracles should be wrought."*

But *we have never seen nature go out of her course.* Neither have we seen the course of nature established, or the world brought into existence. Ought we, therefore, to call in question the reality of these facts? What reason have we to suppose

that, if miracles were introduced to establish the truth of christianity in the first instance, they would also be repeated in every succeeding age, after the purpose for which they were originally intended was accomplished? None at all. To say, We have never seen any miracles performed in confirmation of the truth of christianity, after such evidence ceased to be necessary, therefore no testimony can be sufficient to prove that any miracles were performed in confirmation of its truth, in order to its establishment in the world at first, appears to me quite puerile. And this I take to be the real amount of Mr. Hume's boasted arguments against miraculous attestations in behalf of christianity, which you have mangled so miserably.

When the peculiar circumstances, under which the original witnesses of the christian miracles gave in their testimony, are taken into view, it appears with satisfactory evidence that their testimony must be true; unless human nature in them, was something very different from what it is in other men; and if human nature was not the same in them, that it is in other men, nature must, with respect to them, have gone out of her course. The proper statement, therefore, of the case under consideration appears to be—not, "Is it more probable that nature should go out of her course, or that a man should tell a lie?"—But whether is it more probable that nature should go out of her course, for a benevolent and very important purpose, or for no purpose at all only to deceive and mislead the children of men? and this question is certainly very easily decided.

As an evidence that miracles would not answer the purpose of establishing the truth of any religious system, you introduce a very curious case: you suppose Jonah to have swallowed a whale, to have carried him to Neneveh, and cast him up in sight of the inhabitants, of the full length and size of a whale; that he might be taken for the devil; or at least, this would, you insinuate, have been the result of the strange affair. Thus we may see that you are determined we shall have something to admire; for "The more un-

natural any thing is, the more is it capable, you say, of becoming the object of dismal admiration." But it is only with the logical import of your monstrous case, that I have any particular concern. And in this respect it proves to be as feeble in operation as it is dismal in aspect. Expressed in plain language, it amounts only to this, It is incredible that God should work a miracle in order that Jonah, or any other man might be taken for the devil, therefore it must also be incredible that God should exert a miraculous power, for the important purpose of accomplishing the salvation of countless millions of immortal souls! And is such the reasoning and philosophy by which you expect to prevail against the miracles of the Bible!

"The most extraordinary of all the things called miracles, related in the new testament, is, you say, that of the devil flying away with Jesus Christ, and carrying him to the top of a high mountain, and to the top of the highest pinnacle of the temple, and, showing him and promising him *all the kingdoms of the world.*" But in the new testament we have no such account. The mountain whether he was led by the Spirit of God might, perhaps, be the scene of all the transactions and temptations with which you, on this occasion, make yourself so profanely merry.* If, however, Jesus Christ should have permitted his greatest adversary to follow him, or should even have gone with him, not to the top or point of a spire, (as you seem to imagine) but to one of the battlements of the temple, I can see nothing in such procedure unbecoming the character of the great friend of men, who was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil. It could not surely, be either disreputable or improper for the Captain of our salvation to teach us, by example as well as by precept, how to resist and overcome this subtle and powerful enemy.

* Vid. Cyprian, p. 877, Calvin in loc, and Ridley, p. 492.

With a view of eluding the force of every argument derived from prophecy in favour of revealed religion, you endeavour to prove that the venerable men we denominate *prophets*, were nothing more than *poets* or *musicians*. The false prophets then must, no doubt, have been *bad* poets or musicians. And if this were the case, it is not a little singular that the Lord should be represented as much displeas'd with them, and that such terrible judgments should be denounced against them, merely for *bad poetry* or *music*. But this account of the prophets of the old Testament is too romantic to merit a serious attention. As they were, we have reason to think, often inspir'd to utter the praises of their God in sacred songs, that the word *prophesying* should sometimes be us'd to denote such exercises, is far from being strange. But it is too evident to need a proof, that these men did profess to foretel future events; and, if you would give yourself the trouble to peruse with attention any well-written treatise on the subject, you might evidently perceive, that not a few of their predictions have been so very exactly and circumstantially fulfilled, as to constitute a glorious evidence of the truth of the scriptures.

“But it is, you say, with prophecy, as it is with miracle. It would not answer the purpose even if it were real.” And the reason you assign in support of this extraordinary assertion is, that it would be impossible for us to distinguish a real prophecy from a conjecture, an accident, or a lie. Had Porphyry known this, instead of being reduced to the humiliating necessity of alleging, that the book of Daniel was written after the events which it describes with almost historical exactness, he might boldly have maintained, that Daniel might have conjectured the whole. Nay, according to you, Daniel might, for any thing we know to the contrary, have written in the way of mere conjecture, as accurate a history of the British, the American, and French revolutions, as any mo-

dern historian has been able to compile from authentic records! And can you expect a serious attention to such wild and ridiculous fancies? If neither miracles, nor prophecy, nor both in conjunction, would be sufficient to authenticate any writings, or communications of the will of God to us, as divine, it seems evidently to follow that, though God can (this you yourself admit) reveal his will to man, yet, without an immediate revelation to each individual, it is not in his power to let us know that he hath done so!—Perceive you not, how intimately your *deism* is connected with atheism?

L E T T E R VI.

AS the resurrection of Jesus Christ is an article of primary importance in the Christian system, your objections to its credibility seem to merit a particular attention.

“A thing which every body is required to believe, requires, you say, that the proof and evidence of it should be equal to all, and universal.”* If this be a fact, it will follow that when any inferior number are required to believe any thing, the proof and evidence must be equal to them also; but the testimony of another is not equal to that of our own senses; consequently, we are not, according you, required to believe any thing, upon the testimony or report of another. But though the testimony of another is not equal, yet, in many instances, it approaches so near to that of our senses, that, if the former be an insufficient, the latter can be no more than an uncertain ground of belief: so that this strange proposition, upon which you seem to lay so much stress, leads directly to universal scepticism.

“The resurrection and ascension, supposing them to have taken place, admitted, you observe, of pub-

* p. 18.

lic and ocular demonstration—to all Jerusalem at least.” Would the united testimonies of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, then, have been satisfactory to you? No: the united testimonies of the whole human race would, it seems, have made no impression upon your invincible incredulity; for you declare that without ocular and manual demonstration, you will not believe.—what reason have we to suppose that the Jews, who were so infatuated by their prejudices against Jesus Christ, as to ascribe his miracles to infernal agency, would have been convinced, had he appeared to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem after his resurrection? Why might they not also have attributed his resurrection and ascension to the same agency, had they been eye-witnesses of both? Let us, however, suppose them, in consequence of this event, to have been all convinced, and proselyted to the Christian faith; would unbelievers have been, in that case, any thing better satisfied than they are now? On the contrary, it would have furnished them with a more plausible pretext than they now have, for representing Christianity as a cunningly devised fable, fabricated to subserve the interests of a venal priesthood or intriguing statesmen.

But, if you are still dissatisfied, and still insist, that Jesus Christ ought to have appeared to *all Jerusalem at least*. I must refer you to the miraculous attestations in behalf of his resurrection, exhibited to the inhabitants of Jerusalem on the ever memorable day of Pentecost; and not to them only, but also to the astonished multitudes from various countries, then assembled in that city, to observe that solemn festival. The miraculous gifts conferred upon the disciples of Christ, and the many astonishing miracles which the apostles were enabled to perform in his name, afforded the highly favoured spectators as certain evidence of his resurrection, as if they had seen him arising from the tomb and ascending to heaven. For these miracles were performed in express testimony to the reality of that glorious event.

You have nevertheless the audacity to affirm that, “The story, so far as relates to the supernatural part, has every mark of fraud and imposition stamped upon the face of it.” Had the first preachers of the gospel, then, any prospect of accomplishing any mercenary purpose, by falsely asserting the resurrection of a person, who had been crucified as an infamous malefactor? No: Such a measure could promise them nothing but disgrace, and poverty, and misery. And are these your every mark of fraud and imposition! A very little acquaintance with the philosophy of the human mind might convince you that men do not, nay, that they cannot, without a motive, endeavour, or even wish, to deceive and impose upon one another. Since, therefore, the original witnesses of the resurrection could have no motives to induce them to sacrifice all that is dear to humanity in order that they might impose upon their fellow men in this instance, they must have been utterly incapable of the base and ungenerous design.—It is in vain to oppose to this conclusion the strangeness of the event, for the supposed fraud and imposition would, in their circumstances, have been, not only more strange, but absolutely impossible, if human nature was the same then that it is now. †

“The best surviving evidence we now have respecting this affair is, you say, the Jews. They are regularly descended from the people who lived in the times this resurrection and ascension is said to have happened, and they say, *it is not true*.” And do you then seriously mean to introduce the present Jews, as evidences in a case which took place above seventeen hundred years ago? Strange! that you should have so little respect for your readers, and so little regard for your own reputation. You go on. “It has long appeared to me a strange inconsistency to cite the Jews as a proof of the story.” But this is, it appears to me, entirely owing to your great ignorance. It is not, you ought

† Mr. Pain's objections to the genuineness of the people's history have already been obviated. See p. 277—

to observe, the modern, but the ancient Jews, the men who were accessory to the death of Christ, that we cite for this purpose.—They say, that his disciples came and stole him away, while his guards were asleep. And this is certainly valuable evidence in favour of the resurrection of Christ. For had he been still in his tomb, instead of having recourse to such a ridiculous fabrication with a view of checking the progress of his religion, they would no doubt have gone directly to the tomb itself, and produced his body, to the confusion of his disciples, and utter ruin of their cause. Now there is no reason to suppose that it would have been in the power of his disciples, either to elude the vigilance, or to overcome the force of an armed band of Roman soldiers, and carry away the body of their crucified Master.—Nay, we have no reason to suppose that they would have wished to do this. * (what could they have done with his body, had they obtained possession of it, but commit it to the earth again?) And we may be sure that his enemies would not remove him from the tomb, in order to fix a lasting infamy upon their own character, and promote the interests of a religion which they held in abhorrence. The probability, therefore, arising from the evidence with which the Jews have furnished us in this interesting case, is, most undoubtedly, that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.

“A small number of persons, not more than eight or nine, are, you allege, introduced as proxies for the whole world, to say, they saw it.” But this is not true. The witnesses of the resurrection are numerous as well as respectable. He was seen of more than five hundred brethren at once. It appears to me, nevertheless, that the testimony of the apostles themselves, would have been sufficient to establish the interesting fact.

They appear to have been men of great integrity, and good sense; they were very intimately acquainted with Jesus Christ, having been with him from the

beginning of his public ministry; they saw him arrested by wicked hands, and knew assuredly that he was put to death; after his resurrection they saw him frequently, for the space of forty days, and that in the day time, as well as in the night; nay, they were permitted to converse familiarly with him, and even to touch him, and to eat with him; and they saw him ascend to heaven.—Such at least, is the testimony of the apostles. And you may easily perceive that it was not possible for them to be under any deception, in such a case as this.—Had they been deceived, a visit to the tomb of Christ would have convinced them of their mistake.

You seem, however, to imagine that the apostles, though not themselves deceived, might consider it their duty to endeavour to deceive others and palm a false religion upon the world: and you appear to be confident that they did actually undertake this extraordinary business. * What! would these men whom, according to this supposition, Jesus Christ must have deceived, and misled, and covered with lasting infamy—would they be induced by a sense of duty or any other motive, to vindicate the honour and advocate the cause of a known impostor, who had imposed upon them so miserably! Have you ever attentively considered what is implied in this most ridiculous supposition?—“The charm is dissolved. All my prospects of power, honour, wealth, or any advantage, either in this or a future life, from Jesus Christ, are for ever blasted. That arm which was to have broken the fetters of the Roman yoke, exalted my nation to universal empire, and swayed a resistless sceptre over the world, has been nailed to the ignominious cross, and is now fast bound in the fetters of death. Yes, I see that I have been misera-

* “The persons who first preached the Christian system of faith—might persuade themselves that it was better than the heathen mythology that then prevailed. From the first preachers the fraud went on to the second.” p. 128.

"bly deceived, and imposed upon, by that man in
 "whom I placed the most unreserved confidence.
 "Strange! that the heart of an infamous impostor
 "should be concealed under so fair a semblance of
 "piety and virtue! But so it was. There is no lon-
 "ger any room for doubt in the case. That Jesus,
 "whom I took to be the Messiah of the Jews, is, I
 "now perceive, an infamous impostor, and as such, I
 "dislike and hate him. And yet, I am determined,
 "notwithstanding all this, to consecrate my future
 "life to his service, and to exert myself to the utmost
 "of my power, to promote his honour in the world.
 "And for this purpose I am resolved to enter upon a
 "course of solemn and public lying, in the name of
 "God Almighty.—From the world, I have, I well
 "know, nothing to hope, and every thing to fear.
 "So greatly are both Jews and Gentiles prejudiced
 "against the deceiver I am going to serve, that
 "from them I can expect no favour. And, what is
 "still more awful, I can expect no mercy from a God
 "of truth and judgment, I am nevertheless deter-
 "mined to go on.—O ye persecutors, or rather, ye
 "just avengers of my unexampled crimes, set up
 "your crosses, erect your scaffolds, kindle the funeral
 "pile, prepare your instruments of torture. You
 "may tear this flesh from these bones, and reduce my
 "bones to ashes; but the steady purpose of my soul
 "you cannot shake.—I count not my life dear unto
 "myself, so that I may finish the ministry of iniquity
 "and deceit, which I have undertaken; promote the
 "honour of an impostor whom I hate; and accom-
 "plish the deception of my fellow men whom I love."
 —Now I cannot imagine you so undiscerning, as not
 to perceive, that if the apostles were capable of form-
 ing and executing such resolutions, they must have
 possessed a very different nature from other men, and,
 consequently that, as has already been observed, na-
 ture must, with respect to them, have gone out of her
 course.

If, however, you should be capable of supposing,
 that the apostles might be stupid enough to undertake

and fulfil such a ministry as this, with a view of im-
 posing a known falsehood upon the world; I must ob-
 serve, in the last place, that it would not have been in
 their power to accomplish such a purpose. For it
 would certainly require very convincing, I think I
 may safely say, miraculous evidence, to induce such
 multitudes of Jews and Gentiles, to deny
 themselves, take up their cross, and follow a
 crucified Jesus, to the scaffold or the stake. And
 such, indeed, was the evidence which the apostles
 professed to produce: they not only appealed to mi-
 racles performed by Jesus Christ in public, but they
 also professed to be themselves endowed with miracu-
 lous powers, and to communicate miraculous gifts to
 others, for the confirmation of the truth of his gos-
 pel. But, to suppose that illiterate, artless men, or
 even men of any description, could have imposed pre-
 tended public miracles upon the whole church, and
 that for a series of years, without ever being detected,
 either by friends or enemies, is quite ridiculous. Nor
 would an appeal to public miracles falsely ascribed
 to Jesus Christ, be any thing better calculated to es-
 tablish the credit of the Christian cause.—Were twelve
 Jews, in our day, of the first erudition, to give out
 that a malefactor lately executed in London, is the
 Messiah whom their nation has been so long expecting,
 would it, do you suppose, be in their power to impose
 such a fiction as this upon thousands of the inhabitants
 of that city, by appealing to public miracles which no
 one had ever seen? I cannot imagine you so very un-
 discerning as to think so. How then is it possible for
 you to be so undiscerning and so extremely credulous,
 as to believe that it might be possible for twelve illiter-
 ate Jews, in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, to induce,
 in this way, so many thousands of the inhabitants of
 Jerusalem, to worship as their Lord and Master, a
 person whom they had, a few days before, seen executed
 as an infamous malefactor!

Had the apostles retired to some distant country, be-
 fore they thought proper to publish the resurrection of
 their Lord and Master, there might, perhaps, have

been some pretext for supposing an imposition possible in such a case as this. But instead of this, they went directly to Jerusalem, and displayed the banners of the cross where the cross itself had been erected. In calm defiance of the implacable resentment of their numerous and powerful enemies, they ventured to assert, and proclaim, and preach the resurrection of Christ, in the very city where he had been condemned, and executed, and interred, and that within a few days after his death. And is it possible for you to imagine that crafty impostors would concert their measures with so little address? Had their history of the resurrection of Christ been false, the detection must, in this case, have been extremely easy. And the enemies of Christianity were certainly well qualified for a work of this kind. They had learning, eloquence, wealth, reputation, laws and government, and, upon this supposition, truth too, on their side. And what had poor fishermen and mechanics to oppose to all these advantages? Nothing at all, according to this state of the case; unless a most mysterious faculty of lying, purely for the love of infamy, chains, tortures, and a cruel, untimely death, be exceptions. Now in this case the contest could neither be dubious nor of long continuance. Learning, eloquence, power and truth, would soon have obtained an easy victory over ignorance, stupidity and falsehood. And yet Christianity prevailed, and obtained a great many profelytes, even in Jerusalem, to the inexpressible regret and chagrin of its persecuting and powerful enemies. And from Jerusalem it made its way, with astonishing rapidity, over a great part of Asia, Africa and Europe, eradicating in its progress the deep-rooted systems of Pagan superstition, and overturning the strong holds of Jewish prejudice and bigotry, which stood in the way. And what merits a particular attention, is, that all this was accomplished, not by the policy of great statesmen and the sanction of civil laws; not by violence and blood shed; not by the charms of a sensual paradise or an insidious accommodation to the passions and prejudices of the people: but by the weapons of

the cross, and the instrumentality of illiterate, artless men; and that, in direct opposition to the powers of the world, and the strongest prepossessions of the human heart. A plain evidence that it had truth and Heaven on its side.

But it is only a few sketches of the evidence that might be produced in favour of the resurrection of Christ, that the limits which I must observe will permit me to bring into view. And yet the observations now made are, it appears to me, sufficient to show, that the apostles could neither be themselves deceived with respect to the testimony they have borne to this great fact; nor attempt to deceive others in this instance; nor succeed in so stupid and wicked an attempt; and, consequently, that *Jesus Christ is risen from the dead*. And, this being admitted, it evidently follows that Christianity, against which you have made such a virulent and injudicious attack must be *true*. For we know assuredly, that the God of heaven would not exert a miraculous power, to raise an impostor from the dead, to deceive the world.

I shall trouble the reader and myself, with only one more of your objections to Christianity: I mean the immoral influence, which you suppose it to have upon the lives of its professors.—Are unbelievers, then, distinguished by any particular degrees of sanctity and virtue! Are they more pious, more sober, more chaste or unblameable in their lives and conversation than the members of the Christian church! Degenerate as too many professing Christians are, Christianity has, from such a contrast, nothing to fear. It is, however, far from being my intention to impute gross and open immorality to every unbeliever indiscriminately. Some of this description will, I make no doubt, long retain many of the sentiments which they have imbibed, and the habits to which they have been formed, under the influence of a Christian education. But the observations already made upon the subject, are, it appears to me, sufficient to show that infideli-

ty is very far from being favourable to the interests either of piety or morality. A very large proportion of modern unbelievers appears to be either speculative or practical atheists; denying the very existence of God, or, (what in a moral view appears to be nearly the same thing,) the immortality of the soul.

You profess, however, to be a deist, and hope for happiness beyond this life. But do you expect to be miserable beyond this life, in case you should die a profligate, abandoned sinner? I do not recollect the least intimation of any such apprehensions, in your whole book. Nay you seem to intimate the reverse*. Now it is the observation of a profound politician that, when men believe in future rewards without fearing future punishment, civil laws cannot have any influence †.—Such ideas must, undoubtedly, weaken the power of conscience, weaken or rather annihilate the religious obligation of an oath, and lead to general and unbridled licentiousness. Remove from the minds of your fellow-men all dread of an invisible avenger, and you shake the firmest foundations of civil government; you encourage the false witnesses to take the name of God in vain, and strengthen the hands of the wicked; you violate the interests of humanity, and endanger a return to the barbarism of your ancestors; you put a rod of iron into the hands of the oppressor, and rivet the chains of the oppressed; you arm the robber for pillage, and the assassin for blood.

But how widely different is the genius of that benign religion which you hate and oppose! If any who take to themselves the Christian name live immorally, it cannot be the fault of Christianity. For at the same time that it furnishes us with the purest system of morals, and sets before the righteous the most transporting prospects beyond the grave, it reveals the *wrath of God against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men*. You might therefore as well deny that the strongest passions of the human heart, have any influence upon the life of man, as suppose that a hearty belief in the great and interest-

* p. 18 & 150.

† Montesquieu.—*Spirit of Laws*.

ing truths of Christianity, is not calculated to produce a very salutary influence upon the heart and life of a Christian.

There is, it appears to me, much ingratitude as well as dissingenuity in this unfounded charge against the Christian religion. For it has already done much, not only for its friends, but even for its most virulent enemies. “Though that dispensation is far from having hitherto produced its full effect upon the world, yet we can clearly trace its influence, in humanizing the manners of men.—Wherever Christianity prevails it has discouraged, and in some degree, abolished slavery. It has reduced human nature from that ignominious yoke, under which, in former ages, the one half of mankind groaned. It has introduced more equality between the two sexes, and rendered the conjugal union more rational and happy. It has abolished the ferociousness of war. It has mitigated the rigour of despotism, mitigated the cruelty of punishment; in a word, has reduced mankind from their ancient barbarity into a more humane and gentle state*.

Nor are we without confident and well grounded expectation, that this benign religion will yet become universal, and productive of more abundant fruits in the lives of Christians. There was a time when there seemed to be less probability that it would ever make the progress, it hath already made, than there is now of its diffusion throughout the whole earth? Very violent, indeed, is the opposition which unbelievers are now making to the religion of Jesus Christ. But what can they do to oppose its progress, which has not already been attempted without effect? Often have the kings of the earth, and the mighty men, and subtle philosophers, taken counsel together and plotted the ruin of Zion. All that reason and sophistry, calumny and falsehood, ridicule and low abuse, violence and persecution, could do, has been tried to accomplish her destruction:—But in vain.—Her bulwarks still breathe defiance to the fierce and numerous troops of new assailants;

* Blair.

not one of her towers has been broken down; her spire still glitters in the heavens; and her foundations stand firm as a rock against which the angry billows beat, only to waste their strength and die away.

Having, therefore, weathered all the storms, and sustained, without injury, all the assaults of eighteen hundred years, what has she now to fear? The arm of Zion's king is still able to defend. Nor is his ear heavy that he cannot hear.—We may, therefore, look forward with pleasing anticipation, to the time when the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters do the channels of the sea; when the people shall be all righteous; and when they shall not hurt nor destroy in all the holy mountain of the Lord.

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THE END.

E R R A T A.

Page 259, line 29, for your word of God, read, the visible creation. Ib. l. 31, for the, r. that. P. 278, l. 2, of the note Dele Arrian. P. 282, l. 22, for New Testament, r. Gospel History. P. 283, l. 1, r. afterwards.