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OF THE

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY,

AND OF

THE INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

OF THE

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS,

COLLECTED PRINCIPALLY

FROM THE SCRIPTURES THEMSELVES.

IN NINE DISCOURSES,

FROM

SUNDRY PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE.

By SAMUEL TAGGART, A. M.

PASTOR OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN COLRAIN.

We have a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place. ST. PETER.

We have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. PHILIP TO NATHANIEL.

Greenfield:

PRINTED BY JOHN DENIO.

1811.

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MASSACHUSETTS, TO WIT:
Distria Clerk's Office.

BE IT REMEMBERED, that on the fifth day of Feb-
L. S. ruary, A. D. 1811, and in the thirty-fifth year of
the independence of the United States of Ameri-
ca, SAMUEL TAGGART, of the said district, has deposited
in this office the title of a book, the right whereof he claims
as author, in the words following, to wit:—

“ A View of the Evidences of Christianity, and of the
inspiration of the scriptures of the Old and New Testa-
ments, collected principally from the scriptures themselves.
In nine discourses, from sundry passages of scripture. By
SAMUEL TAGGART, A. M. pastor of the presbyterian
church in Colrain. We have a more sure word of proph-
ecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto
a light that shineth in a dark place.—*St. Peter.* We have
found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets
did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.—*Philip
to Nathaniel.*”

In conformity to the act of the congress of the United
States, intituled “ an act for the encouragement of learning,
by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books, to the
authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times
therein mentioned,” and also to an act, intituled “ an act
supplementary to an act, intituled an act for the encourage-
ment of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts,
and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies,
during the times therein mentioned; and extending the
benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving, and
etching historical and other prints.”

WILLIAM S. SHAW,
Clerk of the Distria of Massachusetts.

ADVERTISEMENT TO THE READER.

WHAT is presented to the view of the public, in the following discourses, was, in part, written many years ago, when the author was in early life, without any immediate view to its publication. An incident which may perhaps be deemed trivial, i. e. an occasional conversation of only a few moments with a gentleman, whose name I am not at liberty to mention, turned my thoughts to a more particular investigation than I had previously bestowed upon the subject. He barely mentioned an observation, not as his own, but as one which he had heard repeated in a circle of his acquaintance, to this effect—That preachers were in the habit of proving, or pretending to prove, all their doctrine by the Bible, but they neglected to prove the Bible itself. But they ought, in the first place, to prove the Bible before they attempted to prove their doctrine by it. This remark, incidentally made, struck me with considerable force, and (if I recollect right) I made no reply to it at the time. I had no doubts in my own mind but the Bible was true, and a book divinely inspired, and that the gospel really and truly brought life and immortality to light, but I was conscious to myself that I had not paid that attention to the evidences of christianity and the proofs of the inspiration of the scriptures that I ought, and that it was the duty, especially of a public teacher of religion, a business I had then lately commenced, not only to be fully persuaded that that gospel which he preached was no cunningly devised fable, but to be also able to render a reason of the hope that was in him, and if possible to convince gainsayers. I afterwards occasionally turned my thoughts to a more particular investigation of the subject. It was not, however, until after a lapse of some years, that I composed a number of discourses which I delivered to my own congregation, comprising the substance of a considerable part of what is here presented to the public. These I took some pains to revise and transcribe after the

delivery, in order to put them in a more convenient form for preservation than my usual short notes, thinking that I might, perhaps, some time or another, at a more advanced period of life, and when I should be more at leisure, again revise them so as to render them more worthy of the public eye, should their publication ever be deemed expedient. For upwards of twenty years the manuscript, although not altogether forgotten, yet lay by me neglected, without taking a single step in the contemplated revival. This was its situation until between two and three years ago, when, on accidentally taking it into my hand, I reflected that life was rapidly wearing away, and that if any thing was done in the contemplated revival, it must be done soon. Finding no prospect of the arrival of the contemplated period of leisure for that purpose, I have, principally during the intervals of business, while engaged in a public employment to which I have been called by the voice of my fellow citizens, brought it into the form in which it now appears, which is very different from that of the original manuscript. The original discourses, which were seven in number, were all from one text. Two discourses are added to the number and separate texts are prefixed to each. The additional discourses, with the alterations and enlargements of the others, will probably amount to more than half of this publication. When I first undertook the revival of the original manuscript, I had no view of attempting its publication at this time, but merely intended that this, with some other manuscripts, might be preserved in a more perfect form, and, if ever published, it should be at some future time, when the writer probably was no more. But having communicated a part of the manuscript to some of my friends, whose judgment I feel myself bound to respect, I have been encouraged to proceed with the revival, and to issue proposals for publication. Apologies for appearing in print are generally considered by the public as proceeding from an affected rather than from a real modesty. I shall not therefore trouble the reader with any. I shall merely observe that without presuming this performance to be superior or even equal to many learned and excellent works which are extant on the same subject, if I had not thought

it might be useful to those readers who have neither the opportunity of access to, nor leisure to peruse more voluminous and elaborate performances, I should not have consented to the publication. The christian religion is not like the speculations of the ancient philosophic schools. These were principally confined to the schools in which they originated. The philosophers did not view themselves as the instructors of mankind at large, and the great mass of society was considered by them, and considered themselves as having little interest in, or concern with their speculations; and, in general, the mysteries of the pagan worship were known only to the priests and the initiated. But the gospel is addressed to man as such. It is one of the peculiar excellencies of christianity that it is an institution adapted to the great mass of mankind; that it equally concerns all ranks and orders in society. Both the nature and evidences of the christian religion are equally the concern of every man. An attention to these evidences by all becomes more immediately necessary, as attacks upon religion, which were, half a century ago, principally adapted to the situation of the learned, have of late been conducted in a manner peculiarly calculated to corrupt the principles and deprave the morals of the great mass of society. Besides the consideration that the pages of revelation alone bring life and immortality to light, and open a door of hope to the guilty, by pointing out a way in which a transgressor may be pardoned and restored to the favour and enjoyment of God, consistent with the glory of all the divine perfections, an attentive observation of what has passed in the world for the last twenty or thirty years, and an intercourse with mankind, are sufficient to impress the mind of every observer with clearer and clearer evidences of its importance to society. Should the enemies of christianity succeed in effecting its overthrow (an event of which, blessed be God, there is no ground for fear, because Christ will always defend his church) it would not only do irreparable injury to the souls of men, by depriving the Christian of his best hope, and throwing an awful gloom over futurity, but would go far, very far, towards dissolving every tie which connects man to man in society.

The nature of the maxims of an infidel philosophy, as well as the views of the champions of irreligion, have become daily more and more manifest, and their tendency has been tested in other countries by their pernicious fruits, and the deleterious effects of these principles, or rather of this entire prostration of every principle of morality and religion, have been both seen and felt in our land. The subject of which an illustration is attempted in the following discourses has been so often discussed, and is so far exhausted, that they who are acquainted with the learned works already extant, will probably be disappointed if they expect to find much originality in the following sheets. Indeed it is hardly to be expected that, at this day, much that is new or original can be either said or written on the subject. But as the attacks made of late upon christianity are not by urging any new arguments against it, but by the repetition and new modelling of old objections, which although often answered, are daily by an unusual share of effrontery, palmed upon the world for new arguments, it becomes necessary to combat these objections anew, although it should be with old weapons. There is this advantage, also, attending new publications, i. e. sentiments and arguments which would lie neglected in an old book, written a century, or half a century ago, will oftentimes be attended to in a new publication merely because it is new. It is also an objection which many consider as of some weight against many excellent works written in defence of christianity, that, from their size or other considerations, they find their way only into the libraries of the learned, and are rather calculated for their use than for general circulation. Other small works are, perhaps justly, deemed too superficial to entitle them to the character of any thing like a general defence. Whether the following discourses will do any thing towards remedying this defect, or give something like a competent view of the evidences of christianity a more general circulation among those not favoured with the higher advantages of education, by putting them into an additional number of hands, must rest with the candor of the public. As it is not pretended that there is any great share of originality in these discourses, so not only

sentiments but sometimes entire paragraphs have been selected from authors, to some of whom it is now out of my power to make particular acknowledgments, as extracts were made many years ago, and the books from which they have been made, are not now within my reach. I have therefore troubled the reader but little with references and quotations. It is necessary however to observe in general, that for several remarks, particularly in the 2d, 3d, 4th, and 7th discourses, I feel indebted to Dr. Leland's excellent work entitled a view of Deistical writers, a book which, as I have not been able to find it in any bookstore, I have supposed to be out of print, at least in this country. From this I made several extracts many years ago, which I have freely used in this work, some paragraphs perhaps nearly verbatim and others abridged. Some thoughts in the fourth discourse are also borrowed from West on the Resurrection; and the sixth is, in part, abridged from Dr. Newton's dissertation on the Prophecies, and some things less material are borrowed from other authors. It was not contemplated in these discourses to enter into any particular historical detail, by collecting testimony in favour of christianity from the writings of either Jews or heathens. However important this species of evidence may be in itself, it was not conceived to be of that kind which is, from the nature of it, placed within the reach of the great mass of readers. Nor is it conceived to be that kind of proof which is calculated to bring home the most forcible conviction, either to the understandings or hearts of the majority of those who are interested in forming a correct decision. It will be easy with persons who have a predisposition to harbour doubts of the evidences of christianity, to call in question either the faithfulness or the validity of such testimony. Besides, Paley's excellent treatise on the evidences of christianity, a work which is in many hands, is so full on that part of the subject that nothing needs to be added. The object which I had most immediately in view, in the following discourses, was to place the evidences of christianity and of the inspiration of the scriptures in such a point of light, as to bring them within the comprehension, and render them obvious to the

view of common readers, so as to enable them to judge of their force, without any laborious perusal of authors, or any recurrence to testimony either Jewish or heathen. To this end it has been my study to draw the evidence of the divine authority and inspiration of the scriptures principally from the scriptures themselves. After all that can be said, and all the Jewish or heathen testimonies which either have been or can be collected, if sufficient evidence of the divine original of christianity, and of the inspiration of the books of Moses and the Prophets as well as of Christ and his Apostles, is not to be found in the scriptures themselves, all proofs from testimony will be inconclusive. But when the scriptures themselves are examined and shown to contain such internal marks of a divine original as are sufficient plainly to distinguish them from all human writings, and to make it apparent, not barely that they are no human invention artificially contrived, but that it is impossible in the nature of things that such a book should exist, on any other principle than by admitting its divine origin, this brings the evidence home both to the common sense and the hearts of mankind. Happily the scriptures carry their own evidences within themselves. As the sun is seen by his own light, so no other light is necessary to discover the divine original of the scriptures than that which is furnished by the scriptures themselves. How far I have succeeded in placing these evidences in a convincing point of view, must now be submitted to the public to decide. The design I am persuaded is a good one, and not unseasonable at this time. All I can say with respect to the execution is that if I had possessed more talents, and had had more leisure, it would have been more worthy of the subject. The length of the following discourses, so disproportionate to what is usual in modern printed sermons, may perhaps be considered as requiring an apology. I have no other to offer, only that I conceived it expedient to finish what I had to say on a particular branch of the subject in a single discourse, which occasioned them to be protracted to a more than usual length. Some of the more critical readers may perhaps take exceptions that the same sentiment is sometimes repeated in dif-

ferent discourses. This may be in some measure owing to their being written piecemeal, or not only at different times, but after long intervals. Some of what might be called repetitions have been expunged in the present copy, and if any should still remain, as they occur when taking different views of the subject, I hope they will not be found either altogether useless or impertinent. As it respects the style of the work, the thing principally aimed at has been perspicuity, and not to please the fastidiousness of criticism. Such as it is, it is recommended to the blessing of heaven and the candor of the public, by

THE AUTHOR.

Colrain, September 3d, 1810.

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ERRATA.—Typographical errors in this work are not very numerous or very important. A few, however, have escaped the corrector's eye—the principal of which are as follows :—

Page 31, line 17 from top, in part of the copies, dele *a*, between *suppose* and *prayer*.—P. 34, l. 38, for *appears* read *appear*.—P. 67, l. 26, for *promiser* r. *promises*.—P. 70, l. 13, for *derived* r. *devised*.—P. 83, l. 3, for *truths* r. *truth*.—P. 88, l. 24, for *confrmed* r. *confined*.—P. 127, l. 20, for *importuncly* r. *importunately*—l. 29, for *set* r. *sat*.—P. 217, l. 32, and p. 235, twice in l. 13, for *bare* r. *base*.—P. 230, l. 4, for *Gadaza* r. *Gadara*.—P. 277, l. 10, for *statute* r. *statutes*.—P. 295, l. 3 of the note, dele *that*.—P. 336, l. 30, after *it* insert *is*.—P. 368, last line, in part of the copies, for *of* r. *from*.

DISCOURSE I.

I CORINTHIANS, i. 21.

The world by wisdom knew not God.

WISDOM, absolutely considered, is one of the essential perfections of Jehovah. Divine wisdom, like all the other perfections of Deity, knows neither bounds nor limits, but embraces in one comprehensive view, things past, present, and to come. From the fountain of his own inexhaustible fullness, God has been graciously pleased to communicate a portion of wisdom to his creatures, particularly to his creature man. He has taught him more than the beasts of the field, and made him wiser than the fowls of the air. Wisdom, as applicable to man, is in scripture, frequently put for religion and virtue. *Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.* In the more usual acceptation of the term however, and frequently in sacred writ, by wisdom we are to understand an intellectual endowment, common to persons of different and opposite moral characters, and is generally considered as implying two things. 1st. Prudence and discretion, which although an endowment of nature, may be cultivated and improved by experience. 2dly. Knowledge, which is principally acquired. The man who inherits from nature, or rather from nature's God, a sound judgement, a retentive memory, and accurate reasoning powers, especially if these powers are cultivated by a proper education, and improved by application, and when the exercise of these powers is under the direction

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of prudence and discretion, is denominated a wise man. Such wisdom properly improved, tends to the discovery of many things useful and important to mankind. Such was the wisdom of the heathen world before the coming of the Messiah. Many of their more enlightened characters possessed accurate reasoning powers, cultivated and improved by education and application. In the exercise of these powers, they made numerous important discoveries in various arts and sciences. In several branches of knowledge, each succeeding generation might, and probably did improve on the acquirements of that which preceded. But notwithstanding all the wisdom of the world, and all the discoveries which were made during the long period of four thousand years or upwards, in which there was an abundance both of time and opportunity to make the trial, we are told by the Apostle, that the world by wisdom knew not God.

The text, taken in connexion with the other clauses of the verse, may be thus paraphrased. q. d. "After God had, agreeably to the dictates of his own infinite wisdom, permitted the wisdom of this world to make a fair and long trial, during the space of four thousand years, and it had been found by experience that no progress whatsoever had been made in arriving at the true knowledge of God and our duty, by all the efforts of human wisdom, it pleased God mercifully to interpose, and by the preaching of the Gospel, (a mean which human wisdom never could have discovered, and which, when discovered, the wise men of the world were disposed to treat as foolishness,) to save them that believe." Intending by the leave of providence, to take a brief view of the evidence of the inspiration of the Holy scriptures of the old and new Testaments, and of the divine original of the Christian religion, as it rests on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, what I propose from these words is rather a preliminary discourse, introductory to the main subject. My design is to illustrate the truth contained in the text, which asserts the insufficiency of human wisdom as a guide in matters of religion, and to show that divine revelation is of course, necessary to direct mankind in the

path of duty, and in the pursuit of happiness. If a revelation is found to be necessary to this great and important end, then this will be, at least, a presumptive argument that God has given such a revelation to man. I shall enter no farther into a particular consideration of the words than to consider them as containing a proposition which it shall be the business of this discourse to illustrate by plain matters of fact. The proposition to be illustrated is this :

That human wisdom, unaided by revelation, is utterly insufficient to instruct mankind in the knowledge of God, and to direct him in the path of duty. *The world by wisdom knew not God.*

It has long been a common place topic with infidels, when attempting to decry revelation, to extol the light of nature, as being not only a sufficient, but the only guide to instruct mankind in his duty, and direct him in the pursuit of happiness. Many fine and plausible things have been said on this subject by men of learning and ingenuity, who wished to throw away the Bible, and too much countenance has been given to sentiments of this kind by others who were the professed friends of revealed religion, by attributing too much to the religion of nature and too little to revelation. Even some of the most essential principles of Christianity have been represented as clearly taught by this all powerful instructor. But there is an essential difference between the discovery of a principle by mere unassisted reason, and our viewing the same principle as rational when presented to the mind in the pages of revelation. In the illustration of this subject there is but little place for reasoning. Our appeal must be made to matters of fact. Had it not been for aid derived from revelation, is it probable that all these fine things would have been said about the light of nature ? Certainly not ; else why would they not be found in the works of heathen writers of antiquity, as well as in those of modern theorists ? The question is not what men of learning and ingenuity may suppose that the light of nature can do ? But what has it done ? What has it done in times past, in the ages before revelation became generally known ? What has it done, or is at this day doing, among the present heathen nations ?

To these questions all the absurdities of ancient and modern Paganism furnish an answer. Here let us not confine the enquiry to what the light of nature has done among unlettered barbarians, ancient or modern? But what has it done among the ancient Greeks and Romans, the enlightened and polished nations and sages of antiquity? However great the progress which they made in arts and sciences, a progress in which they have been seldom outstripped, and in some branches of knowledge, scarcely equalled by the moderns, yet in religious knowledge, in just ideas of the natural and moral perfections of the Supreme Being, in purity of worship, or in a complete and consistent system of morality, they have made few or no advances beyond the most ignorant and unlettered barbarians. The question may still recur, what has this boasted reason done among the modern champions of infidelity, only to add farther confirmation to the truth contained in our text? So far have they been from making progress, that the farther they have wandered from revelation, and the greater refinements they have made upon their own systems, the more they have heaped absurdity upon absurdity. Lord Herbert was the first Apostle of deism in Great Britain, if not in Europe. He adopted several important truths, which he engrafted into his system, such as the unity of the Godhead, the necessity of virtue, the immortality of the soul, and a future state of rewards and punishments. These truths, which were undoubtedly borrowed from revelation, he received under the name of natural notions, or notices of truth and duty, imprinted on the minds of men by the light of nature. The greater part of these principles have been rejected by others who have pretended to follow nature's light more closely. While both have united in rejecting a divine guide and conductor, what has been to one a clear and universal principle, imprinted on the minds of all by nature, has, by another, been ridiculed as the height of absurdity. Some moral writers have endeavoured to reduce almost every thing in religion to what they are pleased to call a natural notion. But, had not such theorists borrowed from revelation, many parts of their theories had never existed, and

the theorists themselves, instead of amusing the world with their fine spun notions, might have been, at this day, bowing down, before stocks and stones, like the Pagans of antiquity.*

But in order to prove that the light of nature is sufficient to discover many important principles of religion, we are referred to the history of Socrates, Plato, Seneca, Epictetus and others, who, although it does not appear that they ever either renounced or discountenanced the prevailing idolatry and Polytheism of the age and country in which they lived, had, it must be confessed, some ideas of the Supreme Being which were more rational, and more

* The ancient heathens seem, almost universally, to have entertained an opinion, either derived from the light of nature, or received by tradition, that there was a necessity for such a revelation. To this purpose are the words of Cicero de divinatione. "Deliberation," says Socrates, "is proper for us. But concerning things that are obscure and uncertain, we ought to consult Apollo, whom the Athenians consult publicly concerning things of great importance." And in another place, Cicero says thus; "There is an ancient opinion, drawn even from the Heroical times, that there is among men a certain divination, which the Greeks call prophecy or inspiration, *i. e.* presension and knowledge of future things." Again Cicero says, "I see no nation either so polished and learned, or so unpolished and ignorant, as not to think that things future may be pointed out, and may be understood and foretold by some men." The insufficiency of the light of nature cannot be better described than in the words of Cicero. "If we had come into the world," (saith he,) "in such circumstances, as that we could clearly and distinctly have discovered nature herself, and have been able, in the course of our lives, to have followed her true and uncorrupted directions, this alone would have been sufficient, and there would have been but little need of teaching and instruction. But now nature has given us only some small sparks of right

worthy of God, than was common to the bulk of heathen worshippers. Although we, by no means grant, that the religious discoveries of these sages of antiquity, were as clear as many would wish to have us believe, yet, admitting for the sake of argument, every thing contended for, it will not follow that the light of nature, or human wisdom unassisted by revelation, is sufficient to discover the true knowledge of God and our duty.

1st. The ideas, even of these much boasted examples of the sufficiency of nature's light, were very much confined, and mixed with much error and absurdity, and their system of morals wretchedly defective; vice, in many instan-

“ reason, which we so quickly extinguish with corrupt opinions and evil practices, that the true light of nature no where appears. As soon as we are brought into the world, immediately we dwell in the midst of all wickedness, and are surrounded with a number of most perverse and foolish opinions, and evil practices; so that we seem to suck in error with our nurse's milk. Afterwards when we return to our parents, we are committed to tutors, then we are farther stocked with such a variety of errors, that truth becomes perfectly overwhelmed with falsehood, and the most natural sentiments of our minds are entirely stifled with confirmed follies. But when, after all this, we enter upon the business of the world, and make the world, conspiring every where in wickedness, our great guide and example, then our very nature itself is wholly transformed, as it were into corrupt opinions. A livelier description of the present corrupt state of human nature is not easily to be met with.”

Clark's Evidences of Nat. and Revel. Religion. Page 225.

The following quotations are from the same work.

“ Ye may even give over all hopes of amending men's manners for the future, (says Socrates,) unless God be pleased to send you some other person to instruct you.”

“ And Plato. Whatever, (saith he,) is fit, right, and as it should be in the present evil state of the world,

ces passing for virtue and virtue denominated vice. And with respect to some of the most important principles of religion, viz. the natural and moral perfections of the Deity, the way to ensure his favour and escape his displeasure, the immortality of the soul and a future life, as well as divers others, all was doubt and uncertainty, as I shall shew more fully in another place.

2d. Had the moral and religious systems of some particular Philosophers even embraced all the essential principles of religion, and included the whole system of moral duty which we owe to God and our neighbours, it

“ can be so only by the particular interpretation of God.”
 “ Another passage is as follows : “ It seems best to me,
 “ (says Socrates, to one of his disciples,) that we expect
 “ quietly, nay it is absolutely necessary, that we wait with
 “ patience till such time as we can learn certainly how we
 “ ought to behave ourselves, both towards God, and to-
 “ wards men. When will that time come, replies the
 “ disciple, and who is it that will teach us this ? It is one,
 “ answers Socrates, who has now a concern for you, with
 “ more to the same purpose. From a general notion that
 “ prevailed in the first ages, that religion was to be taught
 “ by a revelation from the Gods, all such as gave institu-
 “ tions and rules for religion, pretended to have received
 “ them from the Gods, by divine revelation, as Romulus,
 “ Lycurgus, Numa, Minos, in Crete, and Syphis, in E-
 “ gypt. If reason only had been the first guide in mat-
 “ ters of religion, rulers neither would have thought of,
 “ nor have wanted the pretence of revelation, to give
 “ credit to their institutions. Whereas, on the other
 “ hand, revelation being generally esteemed in all nations,
 “ to be the only true foundation of religion ; kings and
 “ rulers when they thought fit to add inventions of their
 “ own to the religion of their ancestors, were obliged to
 “ make use of that disposition which they knew their peo-
 “ ple to have, to receive what came recommended to
 “ them under the name of revelation.”

Ibid. Page 136, to 159.

would not have superseded the necessity and importance of a revelation. To prove this source of knowledge to be inherent in human nature, these principles must be so plain and obvious as to meet the reason and common sense of every man, and not the mere discovery of a particular Philosopher, or sect of Philosophers. The tenets of the ancient philosophic schools had little or no connexion with, or influence upon either the religion or morals of the world at large. These teachers did not view themselves as the instructors of mankind generally, nor did the great mass of the people consider themselves as at all interested in, or concerned with their speculations. Their tenets were esteemed merely as the dogmas of the particular schools, with which the public at large, had little or no concern. Whatever might be the private speculative opinions of the Philosophers, on subjects of religion, externally they complied with the established idolatry and superstition of the age. This they were so far from discountenancing, or taking any pains to reform, that they urged the necessity of conforming to the religion of the state. But a rule of religion is of universal concernment to mankind, and was never designed to be confined to the schools of Philosophers. How far the boasted discoveries of Socrates himself, corresponded with the common sense of mankind, or even with that of his own countrymen, appears from the treatment he received from the Athenians for a supposed attempt to deviate from the established superstition.

3d. It cannot be proved that these comparatively bright ideas of a deity, which are to be found in the sayings and writings of particular heathen Philosophers, were the mere dictates of unassisted nature and reason, or the discoveries of human wisdom. There is the highest probability that they were derived, either directly or indirectly from revelation. There was then a revelation in the world. The writings of Moses justly claim a much higher antiquity, than those of any heathen author, whose works have been handed down to our time, and we have evidence, amounting to a high degree of probability at least, if not to absolute demonstration, that many of the principal heathen au-

thers, whose works have escaped the wreck of time, were acquainted with these writings, from which, as they had opportunity, so it is probable that they did borrow some of their most luminous thoughts, although they did not acknowledge either their divine authority, or original. Tradition might also convey to others who never had seen the writings of the old Testament, many things derived originally from revelation. These things, when presented to their minds, they might deem reasonable, and accordingly adopt and use them, in order to embellish their own systems, although they never could have discovered them by the mere unassisted light of nature. It has been very justly observed that, as the canon of scripture approached nearer to its completion, and the sacred writings became more generally known, as was the case during and after the Babylonish captivity, by means of the dispersion of the Jews and their mingling with the nations of the world in consequence of that event, the ideas of the Supreme Being, to be collected from Heathen authors, begin to brighten, and their moral systems to contain something a little more like a faint approach towards consistency. At least, a few rays began to shine very faintly, it is true, in the midst of midnight darkness. This does not prove that the more modern heathen writers were either men of greater penetration, or endued with talents for discernment superior to their predecessors. It rather proves that they derived greater advantages from the revelation which was then in the world. Their situation resembled, although in a very small degree, that of modern infidels. They did not own revelation as such, but many of them had free access to the sacred pages, from which they had the opportunity of selecting what they thought proper, in order to enrich and adorn their own systems.

But even if we leave the discoveries and dogmas of the philosophic schools out of the question; it will be difficult to prove that all the knowledge of religion which was to be found in the systems generally prevalent among the heathen nations, scanty as it was, was derived from the mere unassisted light of nature. Nay, it will be difficult to prove that there ever have been any just notions of religion

in the world, since the apostacy of the first pair, but such as may be traced, either directly or indirectly, to revelation. These notions having been handed down from generation to generation, through the corrupt and vitiated channel of tradition, generally, in time, assumed a form essentially different from the true knowledge of God; yet, in their first original, they had revelation for their source.

By turning our views back upon remote antiquity, we at length arrive at a period when all mankind then in the world, were acquainted with that portion of revelation which God had, at that time, been pleased to communicate to his church. This was the situation in Noah's family after the flood. It would have been strange indeed, if his posterity, when they afterwards dispersed into various parts of the earth, had carried with them, in their peregrinations, no traces of the religion learnt in the family of their renowned ancestors. Their ideas, undoubtedly became corrupted by degrees, yet it would be very strange indeed, if there was not some thing borrowed from the original revelation, blended with the darkness and superstition handed down through the channel of vitiated tradition.

When revelation was again revived, confirmed, and somewhat enlarged, by the communications made to the Patriarch Abraham, a fresh opportunity was afforded for tradition to derive some thing from it. That distinguished personage was not only well known throughout the land of Canaan, but also travelled both into Egypt, then the greatest seat of learning in the world, and into the Philistine's country. He was also a person of great note, and highly respected in all the countries in which he was known, and was likewise very careful in instructing his household, which was numerous, in the principles of true religion and piety. It would be, therefore, strange indeed, if no traces of the religion of such a distinguished personage should be left in the countries, wherein he was so long and so intimately acquainted. From this source, no doubt an opportunity was afforded, for several traditions, the basis of which was, originally, a divine revelation, to circulate into many parts of the world. The

same observations are applicable to his immediate descendants, Isaac and Jacob, and will, perhaps, apply with still more force to Joseph, on account of the exalted station which he held among the Egyptians. It is probable that during the long residence of the children of Israel in Egypt, they became, in a great measure, leavened with the idolatries of the Egyptians, and that the principles of the true religion made but little progress among their oppressors, yet, from the communications which must necessarily take place between the Israelites and the Egyptians, it would be strange indeed, if the latter should not borrow something of the former, while the former adopted so much from the latter. By the commerce of the Egyptians afterwards with the Greeks, many opportunities were doubtless afforded for tradition, to diffuse some beams of light derived originally from revelation throughout the world.

It deserves also, to be farther observed, that there are very few monuments of ancient heathen literature now extant, which can claim a higher antiquity than the Babylonish captivity. At least those writers who are principally referred to, as affording proof that the heathens, at least some of them, entertained some consistent ideas of a Supreme Being, as well as possessed some knowledge of certain leading truths of what is now called natural religion, have principally, if not all, flourished since that period. One of the most ancient of this class, and one whose sentiments are quoted, perhaps, more frequently than those of any other, as a sample of the attainments of the ancient heathen Philosophers, in religious knowledge, is Socrates. He flourished since the captivity. Xenophon his scholar, was cotemporary with Cyrus the younger, and commanded the Greeks in the famous retreat of the ten thousand, an event so much celebrated in ancient History. But he was nearly a century later than the elder Cyrus, in whose reign the Jews returned from Babylon. An event so calamitous to the Jews as the Babylonish captivity was not without its advantages to other nations. By means of their dispersions during that captivity, and the opportunity thereby given to the learned and curious to have access to their sacred books, their writings became more extensively

known than they had been at any former period. Although, during the seventy years captivity, the bulk of the nation was in a state of depression and servitude, yet this was not the situation of all. Daniel and his companions, and probably many others, were exceptions. As for Daniel, he was not only a Prophet, and a man eminent for piety and intimate converse with his God, but also a great and enlightened statesman, who, for many years, was in high favour with several Princes in succession, being greatly esteemed, and much courted by his contemporaries. Doubtless he would not neglect the many opportunities which his high and exalted station afforded, to diffuse the knowledge of his religion among his fellow men. This furnishes a very natural reason why Socrates and his successors entertained more consistent notions of a Deity than other writers of greater antiquity, scraps of whose works have been handed down to our time. If the writings of Seneca, Epictetus, Longinus, Ammonius, &c. contain still brighter ideas of a Deity, as well as more sublime precepts of morality, a sufficient reason may be given for this, from the consideration that they lived in a still later period, some of them at least, at a time when something of the nature of the principles of christianity had become pretty generally known throughout a large portion of the civilized world.

It farther deserves notice that the earlier the period in which any nation migrated from the place where revelation was originally given, and the more remote the place of their migration, the fewer traces of any thing approaching towards the true knowledge of God and religion is to be found among them. But surely neither the early date of their dispersion, nor the greatness of the distance to which they migrated, could destroy the light of nature, or obliterate those common notices of himself which the great Creator of the universe had imprinted upon the minds of all mankind; had this alone been the source from which man derived whatsoever knowledge of divine truth he possessed. But if we suppose that, whatever just notions of religion were entertained by any in the heathen world, were derived from certain traditions originally founded on

revelation, this is a sufficient reason why this light should be found either increasing or diminishing, as we either approached nearer to, or receded farther from the original seat of information.

It is by no means difficult to trace the original of many of the religious rites in the heathen world to this source. Though they come to us disfigured by many absurdities, derived from the corrupt channel of tradition through which they flow, yet, separating them from these, it is easy to trace their original to a previous revelation. We may instance the rite of sacrificing, which, in one form or another, has almost universally made a part of Pagan worship. This religious rite appears, at first view, to have had no other origin than a positive institution of Deity. It could have no foundation, in either nature or reason, any farther than what arises from the consideration that the will of God is the supreme law. Although the Pagan nations were almost universally ignorant of the true object, design and intent of sacrificing, yet, as the rite itself obtained generally, if not universally in the heathen world, it is at least, highly probable, that this practice never would have become so prevalent, had it not been originally founded on a divine revelation. Even the most absurd, cruel, and impious sacrifices which were ever offered by the most barbarous nations, I mean the immolation of human victims, may be traced to the same source, viz. the corruption and abuse of a revelation, the most glorious and most important which was ever communicated to fallen guilty men; that of the Messiah, God in our nature, who was to be cut off but not for himself. This event was typified by Abraham's intencional offering up his son Isaac, (a transaction probably extensively known,) and pointed out in all that variety of sacrifices, which were offered under the Mosaic economy. Exclusive of such rays of light as were most probably derived from revelation, the residue of Paganism ought rather to be termed the darkness than the light of nature.

But if even the faint discoveries of heathenism cannot be proved to flow exclusively from nature's unassisted light, much less are we to consider the systems of modern infidels, or the fine spun theories of moral writers on what

they are pleased to call the religion of nature, to be merely natural discoveries, the legitimate fruits of the researches of human wisdom independent of revelation. On the other hand, we have, I think, evidence amounting to more than a simple probability, that there is nothing consistent with truth in the moral systems of either the one or the other, but what is derived, either directly or indirectly from revelation. If our modern theorists had derived no greater advantages from revelation than the sages of ancient Greece and Rome, it is not at all probable that they would have entertained any more consistent ideas of the Supreme Being, and of the worship and honour which is his due, than others who paid their adoration to stocks and stones, the work of men's hands, or offered sacrifices and burnt incense to the Sun, Moon, or Stars, or all, or any of the host of heaven. They might, like the ancient and enlightened Romans, have shewed in the capitol the picture, or statue of the Wolf who suckled their Supreme Deity, *Jupiter Optimus Maximus*, in his infancy, or like the enlightened Egyptians, they might have worshipped a Serpent, an Ox, a Crocodile, or some other poisonous reptile or stupid beast. The truth of the matter appears to be this, that, however men may sometimes reason themselves into the belief that the whole of their theories have been discovered, or are at least discoverable by the light of nature, yet, had it not been for what they have surreptitiously borrowed from revelation, the light which is in them would have been nothing but darkness, and but little would have remained of their present fine spun theories excepting the absurdity.

But should we make the most liberal allowance possible to the powers of nature, and ascribe nearly all the latitude claimed, to the discoveries of human wisdom, there are still many truths of the utmost importance to mankind, truths, without the knowledge of which, all the light in the world would be but of little consequence to mankind as a creature formed for an immortal existence, of which the light of nature either gives no intimation, or one so faint as to have little or no influence on human hopes, or

human conduct, but of which we have a satisfactory discovery in revelation.

Among these we may notice the following :

1. The unity of the Supreme Being, or the simple proposition that there is but one God. No proposition which has any connexion with religion, can be of greater importance, if it may be deemed equally essential with this. When once it is discovered and presented to the mind no proposition appears more rational, or more agreeable to the common sense of mankind than this,—that there is *one Supreme, Eternal, Almighty, Omniscient and Unchangeable God, who is the Creator and Governor of the world.* But, whatever may be said of a few solitary individuals, I believe it will hardly be pretended that this truth, which to be a natural notion ought to be obvious to the reason and common sense of all, has ever appeared so clear as to become an article of belief in the national religion of any one nation whatsoever, whether ancient or modern, who did not derive it from revelation. That there are some superior invisible powers, who have a certain superintendency over the affairs of mankind, and to whom some kind of homage is due, is a point which has obtained the general, although I am apprehensive not the universal consent of nations. If we may credit the apparently well authenticated accounts of travellers and discoverers, there are some nations so far sunk in ignorance and barbarism, as to retain little or no sense or impression of any superior powers whatsoever. Whether this general consent of nations be derived from the light of nature or tradition may admit of a dispute. It is however certain that there has never been a generally prevalent belief of the doctrine of the unity of the Supreme Being, or that there is but one God, in any one nation whatsoever, who had not the opportunity of deriving it from revelation. The multitude of supposed Deities, has not been barely equal to the number of nations. It has extended much farther. Not only every nation, but every city or village, often times every family, and even the several individuals, in the family, have had each their tutelar Deity to whom they paid some kind of homage. Nay, it was far from uncommon, for the same

individual to pay his adoration to several Gods. Had there been any principle in nature, independent of revelation, adequate to such a discovery as that there is but one God, is it probable that mankind would have almost universally mistaken it, and adopted the absurd system of a plurality, and almost an infinity of Gods? Or is it probable that the Jews, a nation no way eminent for their knowledge of the arts and sciences or the sublime discoveries of Philosophy, should be the only people upon earth who had any consistent ideas on a subject so necessary, and even fundamental to all true religion, and so congenial to the reason and common sense of mankind when once it is known, while it escaped the observation, and baffled the researches of the most enlightened nations and sages of antiquity? But so far was this article of the Jewish religion from being the natural discovery of that nation, and so little was it agreeable to their innate conceptions on the subject, that the severest sanctions of their law, and the many fore national chastisements with which they were, from time to time, visited, were scarcely sufficient to deter them from participating in the idolatry and Polytheism of the nations by which they were surrounded. Is it not therefore, very probable at least, if not absolutely certain, that Socrates, and perhaps others, whose ideas on the subject were raised somewhat above the common level, borrowed them, either immediately from the writings of the old Testament, or mediately from such rays of light as were derived from that source by tradition? But certainly the unity of the Supreme Being, or that there is but God, is a truth the knowledge of which is of the utmost importance to mankind. And if the light of nature gives to man no adequate information on this head, the plain and obvious inference is a direct confirmation of the truth of the proposition in our text, that the world by wisdom knew not God.

2. Human wisdom is equally inadequate to the ascertaining of the character of the Supreme Being, as it is to the discovery of the unity of his essence. After a belief in the existence of one God the next thing in importance to be known, is to be able to answer the enquiry. What

fort of a Being God is? What are the attributes, what are the perfections of that Being who is the object of worship? But if we search throughout the whole tribe of heathen Deities, and examine all the imaginary perfections which have been attributed to them by their votaries, we will not find a single perfection answerable to the character of the true God. The Jehovah of the Bible hath proclaimed himself to be, *The Lord, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abundant in goodness and truth. He is Holy, Just and Good. He is Almighty, Eternal, Unchangeable, every where present, &c.* But what resemblance can we find to any one attribute or perfection of the Jehovah of the Bible among the whole host of heathen Deities? God is a Being of infinite holiness, of spotless purity. Even angels veil their faces before him, and cry out holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty. But instead of immaculate purity, we find a tribe of Deities clothed in all the vices of mortal men; infamous for their cruelty, envy, rage and lust. Even the Jupiter Optimus Maximus of the Romans, was little better than a common-debauchee, constantly engaged in criminal amours, which involved him in frequent bickerings, with his supposed wife Juno. We find the Gods themselves, also, frequently occupied with their own petty feuds, in a manner which would be highly disrespectful to men making any pretensions to reputation or character. In their interference with the affairs of men we find them split into parties, and taking sides just as whim or caprice directed. We find them oftentimes exciting those they chose to favour, to acts of treachery, cruelty and revenge, countenancing and assisting their votaries, not for their virtues, but many times, for their vices. Instead of one Almighty Being, able to direct and controul the affairs of the Universe, we find a multitude of Deities, which, so far from acting in concert, are constantly thwarted in their schemes and designs by one another, and, oftentimes, by mortal men. Instead of one God who is every where present, we find an innumerable multitude of local Deities, confined to particular nations; oftentimes to particular districts, cities, towns or villages, and sometimes even to particular families or individuals. Instead

of one eternal God, the Creator and Governor of all things, we are presented with a multitude of supposed Deities which have been propagated by natural generation. We are, in imagination, carried back to a period in which they did not exist, and are amused with the history of their progenitors. Instead of the Lord who changeth not, who is of one mind and none can turn him, we find Deities shifting and changing according to the whims of the moment. It is not to be doubted but that these supposed immoralities of their Deities were one great source of the immorality prevalent in the heathen world. Having no ideas of a perfect character, and having the knowledge of no standard agreeable to which they could draw such a character, they cloathed their divinities with such imaginary characters, good or bad, as they saw among mortal men. Having once cloathed their Deities with their own vices, it cannot be thought wonderful if they should practice those immoralities, which they saw, or believed to be prevalent among the objects of their veneration, and that their worship should be equally impure with the divinities they adored. We accordingly find one Deity worshipped by rioting and drunkenness, another by debauchery and the most licentious prostitution, another by cruelty, treachery and bloodshed. All these things, which it is not my present purpose to detail at large, furnish so many proofs that, however great were the attainments of some in the heathen world, in the several other branches of knowledge, they were yet awfully ignorant of the character of the true God; and that the world by wisdom knew not God.

3. Equally deficient is human wisdom, or the wisdom of this world, for the purpose of instructing mankind in the nature of that worship and homage which is due to God from his creatures. If there is a God and but one God, it naturally follows that he, and he only, is to be worshipped. If he is to be worshipped, it is not to be expected that either the substance or form of his worship should be left to the uncertain conjectures of men. A knowledge of the nature, as well as of the object of worship, is of the utmost importance to mankind. But in order to discover either the substance or form of worship,

we will explore the researches of human wisdom as much in vain as we will if we attempt to ascertain the unity, and learn the nature of its object. The utmost stretch of human reason unassisted by revelation, could never give a satisfactory answer to that important question.—*Where with shall I come before God or bow myself before the most high?* Hence the endless maze of uncertainty in which they are involved, and the almost infinite variety of conflicting opinions, which prevail among those who have forsaken the fountain of living waters; I mean our modern advocates for the sufficiency of reason, and for discarding revelation. Although in general, they retain so much of what they have learnt from revelation as to profess their belief in the being of a God, yet they scarcely agree in any thing else. Some profess to believe that this God is to be worshipped, others discard all ideas of worshipping him. Some suppose a prayer to be a necessary, or at least, a proper part of worship, while others deride it and treat it as the most absurd and ridiculous superstition. Some profess their belief in a Providence which directs and controuls the affairs of men, while others suppose that God concerns not himself with the trifling affairs of mortals. And it is not to be expected, that, so long as all is left to vague conjecture, there should be any agreement on this subject, or that there should be any thing else than endless disputes. Indeed there appears to be but one way in which it seems practicable to get rid of such disputes; and that way seems to be pretty generally adopted by the advocates for the sufficiency of nature's light, i. e. to discard the worship of God altogether. And truly a society of worshipping Deists would be a novel spectacle in the world. All this confirms the observation in our text, that the world by wisdom knew not God.

4. Neither the light of nature, nor all the researches of human wisdom could ever discover a way in which an offended Deity could be appeased, or even whether, when once justly offended, he was reconcilable in any way whatsoever. Nothing can be of greater importance to mankind than such a discovery as this. Many heathens either discovered by the light of nature or received from

that traditional revelation, of which numerous traces appear in their writings, some impressions that human nature was corrupted, that they themselves were subjected to the impulse of tumultuous passions and vicious inclinations, and that the Gods were offended. But, in what way their offences could be expiated, or whether any expiation could take place, were points concerning which they had no other guide than uncertain conjecture. It is true, an opinion seems to have been pretty generally prevalent in the heathen world, that the anger of the Gods was to be appeased by sacrifices either of one kind or another. On this head they pushed their enquiries to the very utmost. Having imbibed the opinion by tradition, that a sacrifice was necessary to expiate guilt; they consulted the light of their own reason in vain, in order to ascertain the nature of that sacrifice which would be acceptable. No sacrifice was so costly, no object was so dear to them, but they would offer it in order to calm the tumult of guilt and procure the favour of the Gods. Their enquiries might even proceed as far as those stated by the Prophet; *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?* With whatever anxiety these questions might be asked, the light of nature could never answer them. Without a revelation for that purpose, the conscience of the guilty could never be satisfied that God would accept the sacrifice, and pardon the offender. How could he discover that the blood of bulls or of goats, or even of whole hecatombs of offerings could take away sin? Without some knowledge of a more efficient atonement, a knowledge to be derived from revelation alone, and not from the investigation of human wisdom, the mind could never be satisfied of their efficacy. And, with respect to the immolation of human victims, a practice formerly prevalent among many nations, particularly during times of general calamity, and which some of the more ignorant and barbarous practice still, nothing

shows more forcibly the insufficiency of nature's light, and the imperfection of human wisdom, as a guide in matters of religion, than that the remotest idea should be entertained, that the kind and beneficent parent of the universe should be delighted with such acts of cruelty and barbarity. So that, although the heathen nations, in general, appear to have entertained an opinion which they derived either from the light of nature, or as is most probable, from tradition founded originally upon a divine revelation, that sacrifices were to be offered as a part of the worship and homage due to the Gods, they were utterly at a loss to whom they were to be offered, and had no light sufficient to satisfy their minds that they would be accepted.

Some, however, presume to tell us that a connexion between repentance and pardon, or that if men repent of their sins they shall be forgiven, is a dictate of natural religion, a discovery conformable to, and clearly founded upon the light of nature. But although it is readily admitted that repentance is necessary to pardon, and that the connexion between repentance and forgiveness is inseparable, or that God will, in all cases, pardon such as are truly penitent, i. e. such as hate sin and turn from it with a sincere heart, yet it does not follow, either that repentance alone, without any other satisfaction, is sufficient to expiate the offence and avert the penalty justly incurred by transgression. or that the connexion between repentance and forgiveness was, either actually discovered, or is discoverable by the light of nature. Revelation plainly intimates the contrary. *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God for he will abundantly pardon.* is the language of revelation. But, as if this certain connexion between repentance and pardon was something essentially different from what usually takes place among men, it is added, *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.* Surely the idea that repentance and forgiveness are inseparably connected, is not founded on any

thing analogous thereto among mankind. Mere repentance can make no satisfaction to justice for injuries and offences past. The most that it can do is to put the man in the way of his duty for time to come. What confusion and disorder would it introduce into society, if such was the construction of human laws, that every man who repented of his offence, or who appeared to be penitent, (for man can judge only from the appearance,) should be absolved from the penalty justly due to his crime? The number of penitents would equal that of delinquents, and punishments would cease. The consequence would be the destruction of all confidence in the protection of the laws, if not the utter ruin of society. Human laws, therefore, know nothing about either the penitence or impenitence of the offender. Certainly then reason could never discover that that which does, in no instance, satisfy a human law, should, by a divine constitution, have the invariable effect, so far to satisfy the law of God as, in all cases, to absolve the transgressor from the penalty. If there is, therefore, a connexion established between true repentance and forgiveness, that connexion cannot be discovered by the light of nature. Our knowledge of it must be derived from revelation. Should we admit therefore that man could, without any other aid than nature's light and the exercise of his own reason, discover the disease of sin, and the just displeasure of the Almighty against him as a sinner, he must, nevertheless, be left in absolute despair of a pardon, until a way was discovered by revelation.

5. The immortality of the soul, and a future state of rewards and punishments in an unseen world, are, admitting them to be realities, points, the knowledge of which is of the greatest importance to mankind. For satisfactory information upon them we shall, however, search in vain throughout all the discoveries of human wisdom. Many very plausible arguments may be adduced from reason in favour of the immortality of the soul and a future life; drawn from a consideration of the various powers and faculties with which man is endued, and which appears adapted to nobler purposes than any which are attainable in this life; from the ardent thirst after immortality which

appears to be interwoven with human nature, and from the many inequalities which are in the situations of men in this world, and the manifest advantages which the wicked frequently have over the righteous. But all the arguments derived from this source do not reduce the matter to a certainty, and it is at least very questionable whether all these ingenious things would have been suggested, had not their authors borrowed, either directly or indirectly, from revelation. But although we allow all these arguments their full force, still it is the voice of scripture that puts the matter out of dispute. Although more obscurely revealed in the old, it is the new Testament in particular, which hath brought life and immortality to light. Some Heathens, it is true, entertained certain confused notions about the immortality of the soul, but the point never was considered as fully settled.* With the most enlightened characters, and the most plausible reasoners on the subject, it was considered rather as a probability than a certainty, as what they wished might prove true rather than as a point which they considered as established by sufficient evidence. It is, if possible, still less considered as an estab-

* With respect to the immortality of the soul, notwithstanding the strength of the arguments used by heathen writers, which sometimes seemed to them convincing, yet, at other times, the greatest and wisest among them express themselves with great doubt and uncertainty concerning it. "I am now (said Socrates a little before his death,) about to leave this world, and ye are still to continue in it. Which of us has the better part allotted to us, God only knows." Again at the end of his most admirable discourse on the immortality of the soul, "I would have you know" (said he to his friends who came to pay him their last visit,) "I have great hopes that I am now going into the company of good men. Yet I would not be too peremptory and confident concerning it. But if death be only, as it were, a transmigration from hence to another place, and those things which are told us be indeed true, that those who are dead to us are all alive

lished point among modern unbelievers. The more ancient deists, following their founder, Lord Herbert, admitted the doctrine of the soul's immortality, and of a future life, as parts of natural religion, truths taught by the light of nature. But more modern Infidels, in whom is verified that passage of holy writ, that, *Evil men and seducers wax worse and worse*, I believe, pretty generally deny it, and consider death as an eternal sleep. Many of the Heathens had, it is true, their Elysium and their Tartarus, as places of future rewards and punishments. But as this belief was far from universal, so it is probable that whatever notions of these things they entertained, were originally derived, either from some tradition founded on a prior revelation, which, though pure at first, became by degrees more and more vitiated by means of the corrupt channel through which it was transmitted. Or it might be derived from an acquaintance with the sacred writings, although they did not acknowledge them as divine revelation, or from some communications, either direct or indirect, with those who had access to the sacred Oracles. But from whatever source it was derived, it had not such

there, then &c." So likewise Cicero, speaking of the same subject. "I will endeavour, (says he,) to explain what you desire. Yet I would not have you depend upon what I say as certain and infallible, but I may guess as other men do, at what may seem most probable, and farther than this I cannot pretend to go." Again "Which of the two opinions (says he,) that the soul is mortal or or that it is immortal, be true, God only knows; which of them is probable is a very great question." And again in the same discourse, having brought all his arguments in favour of the immortality of the soul together he adds, "Yet we ought not to be over confident of it. For it often happens that we are strongly affected at first with an acute argument, and yet a little while afterwards stagger in our judgment, and alter in our opinion, even in clearer matters than these. For these things must be confessed to have some obscurity in them." And again

a degree of clearness, or such a force of evidence as to have much influence on human conduct. Their notions both of future rewards and punishments, as well as of the particular virtues or crimes, which were either rewardable or punishable in their Elysium or Tartarus were fraught with absurdity. But thanks to him who is the light of the world, that he hath made that discovery of himself which human wisdom had long searched for, and must have forever looked in vain, had not the gospel brought life and immortality to light.

6. It is of the utmost importance for mankind to be informed wherein consists the true source of rest and happiness, or what are those objects, the possession and enjoyment of which will render a man perfectly happy. For a satisfactory answer to this enquiry, we will search throughout all the discoveries of human wisdom in vain. Man is, by nature, or rather by the God of nature, endued with such powers and faculties, with such a constitution both of body and mind, as to have an ardent desire after, and be constantly engaged in the pursuit of happiness. But what are the particular objects in the enjoyment of which true

“ I know not ; (saith he,) when I read the arguments in
 “ proof of the soul’s immortality, me thinks I am fully
 “ convinced. And yet, after I have laid aside the book,
 “ and come to think and consider of the matter alone by
 “ myself, I fall again, insensibly, into my old doubts.”
 And Seneca says, “ I easily believed the opinions of great
 “ men, promising rather than proving a most agreeable
 “ thing.” Socrates also speaks of his own arguments
 with the same doubt and uncertainty. “ We ought to
 “ lay hold of the strongest arguments for this doctrine,
 “ which either ourselves or others can suggest to us. If
 “ both ways prove ineffectual, we must however put up
 “ with the best proofs we can get, till some promise or
 “ revelation shall clear up the point to us.” But quotations are endless. See much more on this subject, collected from various authors, in Edward’s Miscellany, Page 163 and 243 to 256, Edinburgh Edition.

happiness consists? How are these objects to be obtained? Is all our happiness to be expected and enjoyed in the present life? Or is there an hereafter, a future state of existence and happiness beyond the grave? Or, if there is such a thing as future happiness, what is the nature of that happiness? What are the particular objects in the full possession of which it is to be enjoyed? And what are the particular qualifications of those who may be considered as candidates for the enjoyment of that state of felicity? are questions for an answer to which we shall look to human wisdom in vain. From this state of darkness and uncertainty flowed that endless diversity of opinions among the ancient philosophers about the chief good, or man's ultimate happiness. Some placed it in virtue without approaching any nearer to the end of their enquiry, because what was virtue was a question equally undetermined with what was happiness. Some placed happiness in the pleasures of the mind, some in an absolute dominion over the passions, and their subjection to right reason, and some in sensual pleasure. Authors reckon up hundreds of opinions among philosophers about the chief good, or ultimate happiness of man, all equally remote from the truth; none that I know of placing it in the enjoyment of God here and hereafter, or in eternal rewards to be had at his right hand, or in the perfection of his nature, having the soul assimilated to God, and dwelling in his blissful presence forever. How mean and contemptible are all their ideas of the chief good, or of the ultimate happiness of man compared with those of the Psalmist. *Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee In thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore.* If certain individuals entertained some faint ideas of future rewards, how mean and contemptible were the pleasures of their Elysium? They were such as were unworthy of God to bestow, and unworthy of the dignity of a rational creature. The utmost exertions of human wisdom never discovered a true source of rest and happiness.

7. The world by wisdom never discovered a universal, or a consistent system of moral duty. This must be admit-

and to be a matter of great importance in religion. Religion without morals, without purity of heart and life, is but little better than no religion at all. If we examine, one after another, all the various institutions bearing the name of religious institutions which have appeared in the world, we will scarcely find one, Christianity, or the religion of the Bible excepted, which had any reference to, or foundation in, either purity of heart or purity of morals.* Their Gods were offended, not by immoralities, but by the neglect of some rites and offerings, and they were to be appeased, not by repentance or amendment of life, but by some expensive offerings, some decorations of their Temples, or, as the case might be, by the practice of

* The religion of the Bible is the only religion which appears to have any necessary connexion with a system of moral duty. So far were the various modes of heathen idolatry from inculcating any thing like a system of pure morality, that many parts of the worship of some of their principal deities consisted in the practice of the grossest immoralities. The most barbarous oppressors, the most cruel tyrants, and murderers, and the lowdest prostitutes, such as were the most just objects of execration while living, were frequently added to the list of their deities when dead, and their worship was suited to the nature of the divinities they adored. The worship of one was celebrated with noise, riot and drunkenness, another by the most shameless lewdness and prostitution, and another by acts of cruelty and murder, by the immolation of human victims, not only their enemies, but frequently of their own children, and sometimes of themselves. It cannot be supposed that such worship would have any good effect on the morals of the people. As the heathens oftentimes clothed their deities with all the vices of the vilest of men, so they did not consider themselves, as under obligations to be better than their Gods. And accordingly, not only indulged their lusts out of principle, but run into customs of the most horrid and abominable nature. The Apostle gives the most melancholy picture of the immorality of the

some flagrant immorality. So far were many of the Pagan rites from having any tendency, either to purify the hearts or reform the lives of the worshippers, that the rites themselves, many times consisted in the practice of the grossest immoralities. It need, therefore, excite no surprise if the Pagan system of morality should be very defective. It is true some of the heathen writers have said many things well about several moral virtues, particularly about justice, temperance, fortitude, government of the passions, and maintaining an equanimity of mind in all conditions. But the systems even of the best, were lame and defective. Morality, taken in its just extent, comprises the whole of the duty which we owe to God and our sel-

heathen world in the 1st chapter of the Romans, and this is abundantly confirmed by heathen writers. Not only was lewdness of every kind common, but some nations exposed their children to be torn in pieces by wild beasts, others throwing their new born infants into rivers, and only saving those that swam, others killing their parents when they became helpless, in order to free themselves from the charge of maintaining them; and the politest assemblies of both sexes, in the politest countries, attended for their amusement, on the fights of Gladiators, and to see their fellow creatures maiming and killing one another, was their sport and pastime. Revenge and self murder also were not only tolerated but esteemed virtuous and heroic by the best and wisest among them. The principles of morality inculcated by their best men and philosophers were also of a piece with their general practices. The most unnatural crimes were justified, as it would be easy to shew, did it not exceed the bounds of a note. The virtuous sentiments discovered by philosophers on some occasions, will neither palliate their principles, nor suffer us to think those who could abet them, to be the fit instructors of mankind. And their practices were of a piece with their principles. Even Socrates and Plato have not escaped censure, for crimes of the very deepest die, and one cannot detail the conduct of others who ranked high as

low creatures. It includes purity of heart, as well as innocency of life. Although several philosophers, said many things about certain civil and social duties with propriety, yet, if we consider morality as including the peculiar duties which we owe to the Supreme Being, comprehended in the general idea of piety towards God, or as including the obligations we are under to love, honour and adore him as our creator and constant benefactor; to obey him as our king and lawgiver, and to imitate him as our pattern in his imitable perfections, we must go somewhere else than to the schools of philosophers to learn our duty. Add to this that many eminent moral duties, the

philosophers, without putting decency to the blush. But instead of such a detail, which although coming from contemporary authors, yet being derived through the hands of christian writers, may be suspected of a design to blacken their characters, I shall add the testimony of a noted patron and champion of infidelity, of the last century, who cannot be suspected of prejudice or partiality, or to have willfully distorted the features, or deepened the shades of the picture.

“ I think (says Mr. Hume.) I have fairly made it appear that an Athenian man of merit might be such as, with us, would pass for incestuous, a paricide, an assassin, an ungrateful perjured traitor, and something else, too abominable to be named, not to mention his rufficity and ill manners. And having lived in this manner, his death might be entirely suitable. He might conclude the scene by a desperate act of self murder, and die with the most absurd blasphemies in his mouth. And notwithstanding all this he shall have statues, if not altars erected to his memory, poems and orations shall be composed in his praise, great sects shall be proud of calling themselves by his name, and the most distant posterity shall blindly continue their admiration, though were such a one to arise among themselves, they would justly regard him with horror and execration.” *Hume's Essays, Vol. 2, Page 299.*

practice of which is essential to true religion, were either treated with neglect or considered as an evidence of weakness, and of a mean dastardly spirit, while some diabolical vices were adopted into their system of morals, and cherished as the perfection of virtue. Humility, that ornament of the christian character, was treated as a meanness of spirit, inconsistent with true greatness of mind, while the reverse of humility, viz. pride and haughtiness, were treated as virtues. Revenge was also considered as an evidence of a noble mind, while the patient bearing and forgiving of injuries was considered as manifesting a most dastardly meanness. Chastity was so far from being considered, in all cases as a virtue, that in some instances, prostitution made a part of their worship, and the most unnatural species of murder, viz. suicide, was advocated by all and practised by many. But even supposing a much more perfect system of morality could be collected from their writings than really exists in their works, or than any, of which they formed or could form a conception, it could have been but of little use to the world at large. Their systems were, by the public regarded only as the peculiar tenets of the different philosophic schools, things with which the great mass of mankind had little or no concern, and their precepts were not pretended to be enforced by any authoritative sanction. But that a system of morality may be adequate, it must not only explain the principles of moral duty in their just extent; an explanation which we may look for in vain, in all the writings of heathen philosophers, or in all the researches of human wisdom; its precepts must be sanctioned by proper authority, no less than the authority of God, enforced by proper rewards and punishments. So far therefore, is the light of nature from inculcating a universal, and an adequate system of moral duty, that there is scarcely one moral virtue but what has been denied or derided either by those who have not been privileged with divine revelation, or by those who, by rejecting the sacred oracles, have forsaken the fountain of living waters.

Many other truths might have been mentioned, the knowledge of which is of great importance, but which ne-

er can be learnt from the light of nature, such as the origin of this world, and the general and particular providence of God in governing it, the manner in which moral evil was introduced into the system, whereby mankind became sinful and miserable, the resurrection of the body and a future judgment. But enough has been said to establish our main proposition, I shall therefore close this discourse with a few practical remarks.

1. This subject teaches clearly, the entire insufficiency of human wisdom, independent of revelation, to instruct and direct mankind in the path of duty. Or in other words, we are taught the truth and importance of that proposition of our blessed Lord, *I am the light of the world*; and that the distinction between natural and revealed religion, so much insisted upon, is, in a great measure unfounded. In pointing out the line of distinction between natural religion, and that which is a matter of pure revelation, it has been common for the professed friends of revealed religion to draw conclusions from wrong premises, thereby ascribing, by far too much to the former and too little to the latter; some even making human wisdom, if not altogether, yet almost sufficient to lead mankind to the knowledge of God and his duty. The only solid foundation on which we can proceed in determining what the light of nature can do, is by an appeal to facts. But instead of proceeding in this way it has been usual with many who have treated on the subject of natural religion to build their hypothesis on a course of abstract reasoning. They inform us what they suppose the light of nature and human reason might discover, and then take it for granted that all these things are merely natural discoveries, without producing the least shadow of evidence that the mere unassisted light of nature has ever made one of the discoveries in question, and without duly considering that all the improvements of their own reason in matters of religion, above that of the most unlettered barbarian, may, for any thing which they can know to the contrary, be borrowed from revelation. It is true, if by natural religion, we understand the knowledge of such truths and the practice of such duties as naturally result from the re-

lation in which we stand, and the obligations we are under to God and our fellow creatures, then all true religion may, in a certain sense, be termed natural. Or if by natural religion we understand such a temper of heart and course of conduct as, admitting them to be perfect, would be the natural temper and conduct of sensible creatures, then it must undoubtedly be acknowledged that there is an important distinction between natural and revealed religion, the latter having for its basis the mediator and his atonement, and for its object the restoration of fallen man to the favour and image of God. But, if by natural religion we understand a system of religious belief and practice which may be discovered by mere reason, or the innate common sense of mankind, independent of any assistance derived, either directly or indirectly from revelation, it is, to say the least, highly problematical whether there is any such thing as natural religion in the world. To talk and reason about powers in human nature which have never, in one single instance been carried into effect, is to use words without a meaning. It cannot be proved that this light of nature, of the sufficiency of which so much is made, has ever, in one single instance, led even a solitary individual to the knowledge of God and his duty. Such notices to be natural must be not only common, but universal, and not the mere discovery of a particular philosopher or sect of philosophers. Supposing it true, that a few instances have happened in which certain individuals have had discoveries a little brighter than the bulk of mankind, these, as has been already observed, may be easily traced to traditional revelation. Such hints may have been improved by reason in such men as Socrates, but they will not prove against the whole current of evidence, that this light is sufficient for every, or even for any man, or that the world by wisdom ever did or could arrive at the true knowledge of God.

2. Is such the insufficiency of human wisdom to instruct man in the knowledge of God and his duty, hence we infer the vast importance of revelation to mankind. This importance was felt by many in the heathen world. They

were sensible of their own ignorance and felt the necessity of a divine instructor. They were not backward to confess their need of instruction and their great blindness in moral and divine things, and that truth was hid from them in an unfathomable depth. This might easily be made to appear by quotations from the writings of their wisest and best men, such as Socrates, Plato, Cicero and others. They were not like our modern champions of reason, who fastidiously throw revelation behind their backs. Divine revelation is, by way of eminence, a light shining in a dark place. In a moral and religious point of view, what a dark wilderness would this world be, had we not the lively oracles of God for a light unto our feet and a lamp unto our path? Probably it would be some degrees darker than ancient Paganism itself, for that had, undoubtedly, some rays of light derived from revelation. Whether therefore are they to be looked upon as the friends or as the enemies of mankind, who studiously endeavour to undermine the evidences of revelation, and lead us back to an unknown, and unknowable something called the light of nature? These champions of reason frequently reason themselves into the grossest absurdities, and endeavour to impose the most palpable inconsistencies upon the world as the perfection of reason and philosophy, while they forsake the fountain of living waters, and hew out to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water. Did not modern infidels borrow from that revelation which they not only vilify and despise, but endeavour, with all their might, to undermine and destroy, they might, and probably would, with all their boasted reason and superior mental endowments, have been, at this day, worshipping the host of heaven, or some of the most absurd idols of the present eastern pagan nations.

3. Is human reason so utterly insufficient to lead mankind to the knowledge of God and his duty, and is a revelation of such necessity and importance, then this affords, at least presumptive evidence, that God has actually given such a revelation to mankind. It is true, we cannot say that God was under any particular obligations to give such a revelation; for he can be under no obligation to any of

his creatures, any farther than as such obligations either grow out of the perfections of his own nature, or are stipulated by promise. But when we consider the divine goodness in other respects; especially when we consider it as displayed in the formation of man with such powers and faculties as render him capable of worshipping, serving, and adoring; of knowing, loving, and enjoying himself, it is at least probable that he would give him such a revelation as would be sufficient to direct him in the path in which this enjoyment was to be obtained. Whether such a revelation has been actually given, and, if given, where it is to be found, will be the more immediate business of some future discourses. At present I shall only observe that another thing which farther strengthens the presumptive evidence in favour of revelation, is the desire and expectation which has been common to almost all nations. If God never had given to man a revelation, nor given him any ground to expect that he would give one, how can we account for that desire and expectation which was not confined to the Jews, but was, in a great measure common to all nations? Many of the heathens were fully sensible of their blindness and ignorance, and longed for a divine instructor, and were not without the expectation that God would at some time, and in some way, though at present unknown, dispel that darkness in which they were enveloped. This desire and expectation, no doubt laid the foundation for practising a variety of impositions by endeavouring to palm pretended revelation on the world. Not only Jews and Christians, but also Pagans and Mahometans have had persons among them who professed to receive communication from the deity. Some of these pretensions must, of course, be false; but, if God never gave a revelation, nor any grounds to expect one, whence the idea of counterfeiting? the very existence of a counterfeit necessarily supposes that there is something genuine which an attempt is made to imitate. This affords strong presumptive proof, at least, in favour of revelation.

4. Is human reason an insufficient guide in matters of religion, then the evidences of revelation call for a fair and candid examination. As we are, on the one hand not to

believe without evidence; so, on the other, we ought carefully to weigh, and impartially to examine the proofs on which we are required to believe that the scriptures contain a revelation from God. These evidences have stood, and it is believed, will still stand the test of the most rigid scrutiny. Let us therefore, while resolved on the one hand not to believe without evidence, give to the proofs their proper force, not requiring a species of evidence which is, in the nature of things, impossible, and which is required for the establishment of no other fact, and, if not swayed by prejudice and prepossession, we will be convinced that the Gospel is no cunningly devised fable. This examination will be more particularly attempted in the following discourses.

DISCOURSE II.

PSALMS, XIX. 7, 8, 9.

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul : The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart : The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever : The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

IN a former discourse I endeavoured to offer some considerations tending to illustrate the necessity of revelation, grounded on this argument, that human wisdom is an insufficient guide to direct us in matters of religion. We have seen that this insufficiency was felt, and the necessity of revelation acknowledged by many of the wiser heathens. Instead of imitating modern unbelievers, by rejecting that sure word of prophecy which providence had put in their hands, because it was not, in every punctilio, suited to their preconceived notions and prejudices ; or to the standard which they had set up in relation to what a revelation ought to be, they longed for that divine direction and instruction which they had not. We have also seen that, together with the desire, there was an expectation prevalent in the heathen world, that God would, at some time, and in some way, communicate the knowledge of his will to mankind. No doubt many impostors took the advantage of this desire and expectation, and abused the credulity of mankind by fictitious pretensions that they had received communications from heaven. Not only Jews and Christians, but Pagans and Mahometans have pretended to receive communica-

tions from the deity. Many of these pretenders have, without doubt, been impostors, yet this is far from amounting to a proof that none of their pretensions were well founded. Counterfeits are usually imitations of something real. Where there is nothing of the kind which is true and genuine, there is nothing to counterfeit. Base counterfeit coin never would exist, were there no genuine money. If God had never given any revelation of his will to mankind besides the light of nature, or such common notices as are inscribed on the minds of all by the creator, nor ever given man any grounds to expect a revelation, what could possibly have suggested to any individual of the human race, the idea of counterfeiting such a revelation on the one hand, and of expecting it on the other? How can we account for that desire and expectation which was so generally prevalent in the world, as well as for the many pretences to actual communications with the deity, if God never gave a revelation of his will, nor gave mankind any grounds to expect one? The business of the present discourse will be to show that the sacred books of the old and new Testament contain internal characteristics of a revelation every way worthy of God to give to man; and that it is impossible that such writings could ever have existed, unless they had been divinely inspired. By the law, testimony, statutes, judgments, commandments, &c. mentioned in the text, we are to understand the word of God in general, whether revealed by Moses or other prophets and holy men after him. The Psalmist cannot be said to refer in this passage, immediately to the new Testament scriptures, because that part of the sacred canon was not penned until many ages after his day. But the characters here given of the law, testimony, &c. are as strictly applicable to the new Testament scriptures, as to the writings of Moses and the prophets, viz. that they are the means of converting the soul, rejoicing the heart, enlightening the eyes, and making wise the simple. I shall not attempt to explain what is distinctly to be understood by the different phrases, law, testimony, statutes, &c. Perhaps they are only amplifications of the same meaning, tending to express more fully, the high and exalted opi-

ion which the Psalmist had of the sacred writings, as well as to state their manifold use. The improvement which I shall make of them, will be to show as plainly as I can within the compass of a single discourse, that the sacred scriptures do, in reality, contain all these internal characters of excellence which the Psalmist ascribes to them; characters which plainly manifest them to be a revelation from God.

In attempting this, I shall

I. Take a brief survey of the variety of subjects contained in that volume which we call the Bible, noticing the evidences of divinity which appear in each.

II. Notice some general characteristics which are applicable to the entire sacred canon.

Some parts of the sacred scriptures are historical. Indeed history occupies a very considerable portion of the sacred volume. Some parts of this volume are doctrinal, some devotional, some prophetic, some moral, and some contain positive institutions, depending for their importance on the will of the institutor, which alone is the supreme law. In each of these portions of sacred writ, we may observe numerous, and very evident indications of their author.

1st. With respect to the historical parts of sacred writ, we may, throughout the whole, perceive a simple artless relation of facts, apparently well known to the relator, which he states without hesitation, like one conscious that what he related was the truth. Here are no pompous fictions to amuse, no idle tales of romance to divert, and no attempts to interest the passions rather than inform the judgment. It is true, the scripture histories are stored with the relation of a series of extraordinary events; but even these are related without any of the airs of fiction, and the facts stated are invariably set in a light calculated to give glory to God, and not to man. The principal part of the history of the old Testament, relates to one nation, viz. the Jews. But, had this sacred history been the forgery of a Jew, or of any number of Jews, invented for the purpose of aggrandizing their own nation, although many of the principal facts therein related, might have had

place, yet, in how different a point of light would many things have been presented to our view? What additions, omissions, and variations would we find in the relation of the facts there recorded, if the sacred historian had not imposed it upon himself as a principle not only not to contradict the truth, but not even to disguise or conceal it? To this impartial regard for truth, we may attribute what the sacred historian relates concerning Jacob's obtaining the birth right and blessing by fraud. For, although it appears from the prophecy, which was delivered before the children were born, that the patriarchal blessing was originally intended for Jacob, yet the method which, by the advice of his mother, he took to obtain it, had the appearance of fraud and circumvention, which, considering the known jealousy and enmity subsisting between the two nations, Edom and Israel, and the occasion which this gave to the former to insult and reproach the latter, whenever he had it in his power, it might have been expected that a Jewish historian would have endeavoured to conceal.

To the same impartial regard for truth, we may attribute the account which we have of Reuben's incest with Bilhah, his father's concubine, and of Judah's, with his daughter-in-law, Tamar, from which incestuous connexion, two of the principal families in that tribe were descended, as also the record of the cruel and perfidious act of Simeon and Levi, in murdering the unsuspecting Shechemites, and the curse pronounced against them by their father Jacob, on that account. Although the latter of these, was Moses' own immediate ancestor, we find the fact was not to be concealed. To these instances we may add, that the cruelty, envy, and treachery of Jacob's other sons, in selling Joseph their brother into Egypt, with their punishment on that account, Aaron's making the golden calf, Moses' passion which excluded him from the land of Canaan, David's adultery and murder, and Solomon's idolatry, are things, which, had it not been for a most sacred regard to truth, a Jewish historian would have concealed. If we come to the new Testament history, we find the same impartial regard to truth, guiding the pens of the sacred his-

torians. To this impartiality, we may attribute the accounts recorded by the Evangelists, of the dullness of the apprehensions of Christ's own disciples, of their gross mistakes concerning the nature of his kingdom, of their own petty feuds and contentions about which of them should be greatest; of Peter's denying his master, with all the aggravating circumstances attending it; of the cowardice of all the disciples in deserting their Lord during his most dreadful sufferings, and of the unreasonably obstinate incredulity of Thomas, after his Lord was risen from the dead. The acts of the Apostles were written by the friend and companion of St. Paul, and a large portion of that book is taken up in recording the travels and labours of that Apostle. Had any thing different from the most scrupulous regard to truth dictated the pen of the writer, he would neither have recorded the account of his persecuting the church, nor the contentions among the Apostles. It deserves, in a special manner, to be noticed, that this candid relation of the failings of great and eminent men does not appear to flow from any malevolent desire to detract from their merits or to tarnish their reputations. Their virtues are related with the same impartiality and artless simplicity, whenever the circumstances of the narrative require it. It appears as if the writers had no other object in view than to relate truth without disguise. This is done by the sacred writers, with such a degree of unaffected simplicity, every where apparent in their writings, as has not a parallel in the works of any other historians.

What farther evinces the impartiality of Moses as well as of the other sacred historians of the old Testament, is, that they not only, without disguise, relate the faults of their great men, but, in like manner, inform us of the frequent revolts and rebellions of the Israelitish nation, and of the severe chastisements inflicted on them on that account. Had it been the intention of the Jewish historians to write panegyrics, in order to flatter the vanity, or aggrandize the name of the Jewish nation, or had they been influenced by any other motive than the most impartial regard to truth, many things which are recorded, would

undoubtedly, have been suppressed. Josephus, the Jewish historian; accordingly omits several things which had the most direct tendency to brand them with infamy. Had the intention of the historian been to write a panegyric, we should have had no mention made of such facts as the making of the golden calf, already mentioned. This was a reproach to the whole nation, as well as to Aaron. Neither would we have heard of their frequent murmurings, both against God and against Moses, while passing through the wilderness, nor of their manifold rebellions, and the severe chastisements with which they were, on that account visited, not only during their journey through the wilderness, but also in the subsequent parts of their history, both during the period when the Judges ruled, and in the days of their kings. These and other instances of a similar nature, which represent them as a stiff-necked and rebellious race, are, by no means, calculated to flatter their vanity. It is true the sacred history records many signal interpositions of divine providence in their favour. But this is generally done in such a way, and the affair is placed in such a point of light, as makes but little for their national honour. Certainly, had the sacred historians intended to flatter their vanity, they might have represented them as special objects of the divine favour, without giving such an account of their conduct as should afford occasion for their enemies to reproach them, as the most perfidious, ungrateful, and obstinate race which ever appeared on earth. Nothing could induce the Jewish historians to record facts which gave such a disadvantageous view of their nation, but such an honest and impartial regard to truth as is rarely, if ever to be found among other historians.

Another thing which, in a still more special manner, distinguishes the sacred historians, is the spirit of unaffected piety which, every where, breathes in their writings. We observe throughout the whole, a profound veneration for the deity, a zeal for the glory of his great name, and an ardent desire to promote his fear, and maintain his worship, as well as to excite and engage men to a ready and cheerful obedience to his law. The sacred history

was not written merely for political purposes, or to gratify curiosity. Far more noble ends were in view. It was to instruct mankind in things which immediately concerned their happiness, to be a standing history of the dispensations of divine providence, towards his church and people, and to inculcate the principles, as well as furnish powerful motives to the practice of true piety, comprising a right temper of heart, as well as the outward performance of the duties which we owe to God and our neighbour.

It may tend to cast some farther light on the internal characters of divinity, apparent in the scripture histories, to notice the amazing difference which is observable, between the ancient histories of the Jews, recorded in the Bible, and the antiquities of other nations. While the records of the latter are filled with false stories and incredible fictions, calculated to amuse the fancy, corrupt the mind, and support the long established idolatry and superstition; while, instead of exhibiting any just views of the character of the Supreme Being, such a portrait of their Gods, is drawn, as would be disgraceful in a man making any pretensions to reputation or character, as if it were their principal object to debase the characters of their Divinities, so as to reduce them to a level, or even beneath their own, the conduct of the Jewish historians is, in every respect the reverse. However, debasing the views which they give us of human nature, how dark soever the picture of human conduct, which they exhibit, the ideas which they give of the Jehovah of Israel, are always worthy of the Deity. Surely this could not be owing to any superior sagacity or penetration of the Jews above other nations. It must be because the pens of their historians were guided by the spirit of God.

2dly. With respect to the doctrinal parts of the sacred canon we may observe, that the peculiar truths which the scriptures unfold are every way worthy of God to reveal, and truths, the knowledge of which, is of the utmost importance to mankind. The scripture doctrines carry with them internal evidences of their divine original, and they are such as, without a divine revelation, it would never have entered into the heart of man to conceive, but such

as, when once known and revealed, appear calculated to display the glory of God, and secure and promote the greatest happiness of man. Divine revelation clears up innumerable difficulties, as it were without the least apparent labour or exertion, which were of the utmost importance to mankind, difficulties in the solution of which, the light of nature, and the utmost exertions of human wisdom, found insuperable obstacles. Among these we may notice the origin of the world, or its creation by God. Had there been no other guide than human wisdom, this would have been always a subject of the utmost uncertainty to mankind. Human reason here wandered in an endless maze of uncertainty. Perhaps it might be able to detect the absurdity of the opinion that the world came into existence by chance, or was formed by a fortuitous concourse of atoms, or it might, perhaps, demonstrate the improbability at least, of its having existed from eternity. Still a divine instructor was wanted, to inform mankind how this grand event of the world's coming into existence took place. But what never could have been accomplished by human wisdom, is unfolded by Moses, in the first chapter of Genesis, by a plain, easy, and natural narrative, like that of a man who relates, without hesitation, facts with which he is perfectly acquainted. It was also of importance to mankind, to know how moral evil came into the world. That there is such a thing as moral evil in the system, is a truth of which the experience of all ages and nations affords confirmation. Of this melancholy truth, many of the wiser Heathens appear to have had full conviction, either from the light of nature or from some other source. But they could give no rational solution of the manner in which it came into the world, and the numerous conjectures on this head are nothing more than a heap of the crudest absurdities. The Bible clears up this difficulty in the most satisfactory manner. It is also of the utmost importance for man to have right conceptions of the character of the Supreme Being, both as it respects the unity of his essence, or there being but one God, and as it respects his glorious attributes and perfections, whether natural or moral, and as it relates to his dominion over his

creatures, by a providence which extends to all, as well as to the nature of that worship and homage which is his due. It has already been observed in a former discourse, that for satisfactory information on this subject, we will search in vain throughout all the discoveries of human wisdom. But here divine revelation steps in as a bright light shining in a dark place. The ideas on this subject communicated in the Bible are every way worthy of God. The view given in scripture of the manner in which God declares himself to be reconcilable to guilty men through the atonement, is also a doctrine of pure revelation, and relates to a point on which information is of the last importance to guilty men. We have seen that the light of nature leaves it a matter of awful uncertainty whether God is reconcilable in any way. Surely, of such a way as that which the gospel reveals, it gave not even the remotest discovery. Such is the wonderful display of divine wisdom, love, and grace, in the gospel scheme, that it shows it to be, altogether of divine original; something conceived, only in the divine mind, and communicated to those alone, to whom God saw fit to reveal it. In this plan of salvation, all the attributes of Deity harmonize. Mercy is glorified in the highest, justice is satisfied to the utmost, and peace and friendship restored between an offended God and offending man. This doctrine of redemption through the blood of Christ, was revealed, though in a manner comparatively obscure, to the old Testament church. The coming of the Messiah, and the work which he was to do, was prefigured in the types and foretold by the prophets. Whatever obscurity may be in this manner of revelation, it is all dispelled by the gospel dispensation, in which life and immortality are clearly brought to light. The doctrines of the immortality of the soul, of the resurrection of the body, of a judgment to come, and of a state of rewards and punishments in a future and unseen world, are, if true, of the last importance to mankind. But if these were not all wholly undiscoverable by human wisdom, any traces of either of them, which were upon the minds of men, were so faint, and the intimations given so exceedingly obscure and confused, that they could have

little or no influence upon mankind. These important points of doctrine, are, in the holy scriptures, set in a perspicuous point of view, not by laboured deductions, or inferences drawn from a long course of argumentative investigation, but by a plain simple statement, as of things well known, points fully established. This could not be the fruit of any wisdom short of that which was divine. We may farther add that, to know what is the chief good, the ultimate happiness of an immortal soul, is an important discovery to creatures formed with an ardent desire after happiness, and whose constant enquiry is, who will shew us any good? We have already seen that, on this point, human wisdom wandered in an endless maze of uncertainty. Here God's word is a light unto our feet and a lamp unto our path. Instead of detailing the numerous absurd conjectures of those who were guided only by nature's unassisted light, a source of happiness is directly proposed, every way worthy of its author, a happiness worthy of God to bestow, and calculated to raise the creature to the highest dignity and perfection of which his nature is capable, viz. the enjoyment of his God. What source of happiness could God possibly propose to man, more worthy of himself, and better calculated to raise human nature to the highest perfection of which it is capable, than that proposed in the scriptures? Here we have a species of happiness proposed, suited to the nature of an immortal being, who, having once departed from God the fountain of living waters, can find complete satisfaction in nothing till he returns unto God again as his centre and rest. Surely such glorious, such necessary discoveries, exhibit the strongest internal evidence that those sacred writings which contain them are really a revelation from heaven.

3dly. The devotional parts of scripture, also, breathe the most exalted spirit of piety, and are unquestionably excellent. Free from the gloom of monkish superstition, here all is manly, all is rational. What exalted representations of the Deity? What earnest longings after his presence? What devout breathings after assimilation to him in his imitable perfections? What a cordial acquiescence in his providence, and a steady uniform dependence

on his promises? What humbling views of creature unworthiness, and what rapturous commendations of divine grace, are to be found in the Psalms, and many parts of the writings of the prophets? The evident tendency of the devotional parts of scripture, is to perfect human nature by drawing the affections off from terrestrial enjoyments, by elevating the mind from earth to heaven, and opening to our views solid and substantial enjoyments in the place of such as are fleeting and transitory. Compare true scriptural devotion with any known form of human invention, which hath not revelation for its basis, and we are instantly struck with the amazing difference. In the latter we usually find nothing but some senseless, useless austerity, destitute of rational piety, and without one elevating manly sentiment. Such was the devotion of the ancient Stoic and Cynic philosophers, such is that of the eastern dervises, and of many devotees in the church of Rome. How different these from the rational sublime devotion of the sacred scriptures.

In the prophetic writings also, which comprise such a considerable part of the canon of the old Testament, as well as a portion of the new, we may discern many remarkable internal characters of a divine, and heavenly original. As the subject of scripture prophecy will probably be reassumed in another discourse, I shall not enter very particularly upon it at present. I shall only make one or two general observations. It pleased God, during the continuance of the old Testament dispensation, to raise up a succession of prophets, by whom he made communications of his will to mankind from time to time, adding gradually to the sacred canon until the whole of the revelation which he had determined to give to the old Testament church was completed. In every page of the prophetic writings a fervent zeal for the glory of God and the purity of religion is apparent. As they not only foretold future events, but were also the public instructors of the people, so the scope of all their predictions and instructions was, either to guard the Jewish nation against, or reclaim them from idolatry, vice and wickedness, and engage them, by promises on the one hand, and threatenings

on the other, to perseverance in the true worship of God, and the practice of universal obedience. Their messages are delivered with a boldness which they could not have assumed, had they not known themselves to be commissioned from heaven. With what noble freedom and impartiality do they reprove their Kings, Princes, Priests, and People, denouncing the most awful threatenings on such as persevered in their sinful courses, and at the same time, encouraging them by the most gracious promises of pardon, to repentance and new obedience? The divine mission of the prophets was also confirmed by the most exact accomplishment of many predictions of future events of the most contingent nature, such as no human sagacity could foresee. This gave the prophets such authority among the people that, although they were oftentimes ill treated, reproached, and persecuted while alive, and some of them even put to violent deaths, yet both their characters and writings were afterwards regarded by the whole nation with the profoundest veneration. It may be also farther observed, that not only the Jews, but mankind in all ages, have discovered too great a propensity to place religion in outward forms, or the external observation of certain sacred rites, as if this would compensate for the want of purity of heart, and the neglect of the more substantial moral duties. To guard against this evil, we find many passages in the sacred scriptures, particularly in the writings of the prophets, which paint, in the most lively colours, the absolute insufficiency of all external modes of worship whatsoever, while the worshipper is destitute of holiness of heart and life, and even speaking of them in a very diminutive manner, and in a language nearly bordering on contempt, when opposed to, or substituted in the place of moral goodness or virtue. To quote particular passages from the writings of the prophets to this effect, would be needless, as this is evidently the general scope of their writings. In a word the prophets attest the truth of the sacred history, and both prophets and historians, breathe the sublimest strains of morality and devotion.

4thly. As it respects those parts of the sacred scripture usually denominated moral, it is an undoubted fact that

the purest, the sublimest morality, comprising the whole of our duty to God and our neighbour, is in scripture set in a just point of light, and taught in its utmost latitude. As it respects piety towards God, the idea given of it in scripture, is amiable, engaging, and every way worthy of its object, as well as suitable to the relation in which creatures stand to their creator. We are required to fear God, not with a servile but a filial fear, and to love him with all our hearts. We are encouraged to address ourselves to him as our heavenly father through Jesus Christ the son of his love, and, in his name, offer up our petitions, confessions, praises, and thanksgivings, with such humility as becomes creatures deeply sensible of their own unworthiness, yet in the exercise of faith, hope, and holy confidence. We are required to yield the most entire unreserved submission to the divine will, by resigning ourselves to his disposal, and acquiescing in the dispensations of his providence, not merely from a firm persuasion of his sovereign right and uncontrollable dominion, but also in the most entire confidence that he does all things well. We are to set the Lord always before us, to consider ourselves as constantly in the presence of him who is our all-seeing witness and will be our final Judge, whose glory ought to be our highest end, and the enjoyment of whom is our chief good, and destined to be our ultimate happiness. Above all, we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our strength, and with all our mind, and to evidence our love by keeping his commandments, by aspiring after conformity to him in his imitable perfections, and by endeavouring, as far as we are able, to glorify him in the world. As to outward worship there is, according to the idea given of it in the new Testament, a noble simplicity in it, calculated to impress the mind with the sublimest sentiments of piety, and the warmest feelings of devotion.

As the sacred scriptures give the most exalted directions concerning piety towards God, so they inculcate the purest morality, in relation to the duties which we owe to our fellow creatures. This branch of morality, as well as the former, must have its foundation in the

heart, and is founded on universal benevolence. The substance of the duty which we owe to our fellow creatures is to do to others as we would have them do to us. Where this principle influences human conduct, it tends to promote the constant practice of righteousness, justice and fidelity, to dispose men to render unto all their dues, and excite them to the diligent and faithful discharge of the duties incumbent upon them in their several callings, stations and relations, not merely from civil considerations, but as a necessary part of religion, and for conscience sake. True benevolence is here advanced to the noblest height, and carried to the greatest extent. It strengthens the natural ties of humanity and adds other sacred and most endearing motives to bind mankind to one another. We are taught to love our neighbour as ourselves, and to rejoice in, and endeavour to promote his prosperity and happiness. We are enjoined to do good to all, as far as we have ability and opportunity. We are not only to do good to our friends and benefactors, but to love, pray for, and forgive our enemies; to render good for evil, and overcome evil with good. Scripture morality has a tendency to suppress all malice, envy, hatred, and revenge; all those boisterous and unruly passions which have done, and are still doing so much mischief in the world. As it respects self government, the holy scriptures lay down rules which tend to perfect human nature. Although they do not inculcate a stoical apathy, yet they teach us to regulate, not barely our outward actions, but also the inward affections and dispositions of the soul, to keep the heart with all diligence, to labour after inward purity, simplicity, and godly sincerity, as branches of the christian temper, without which, no outward forms of piety or morality could be well pleasing to God. Scripture morality strikes immediately at the root of all disorder and corruption, and gives no toleration to the gratification of any lust, but on the contrary, enjoins such a regulation of the affections as is calculated to wean them from things below, and to place them on things above. As it respects bearing with the ills of this present life, there are no motives equal to those furnished in scripture to inspire the noblest

fortitude and patience, and to cause the mind to rise superior to transitory evils. The christian, in particular, is there taught that God will cause all things to work together for his greater good, and for the furtherance of his final happiness. I need not cite particular passages to show that this is really the morality of the Bible, however little resemblance there may be to this standard in the morals of many who lay claim to the christian name.— How happy, as well as amiable, would the christian world be, did such a temper of heart, and such a system of morals as the gospel inculcates, prevail to an extent commensurate with the christian profession.

And as that divine temper which christianity has a tendency to inspire, and that course of conduct which the sacred oracles enjoin mankind to pursue, is most excellent in itself, so the scriptural motives to induce men to walk in the way of gospel simplicity and obedience are proportionably strong. For the purpose of furnishing proper motives for the discharge of duty, all the pretended systems of natural religion, are extremely defective, but the motives to christian morality, exhibited in the sacred scriptures, are the most cogent, the most animating. The express authority of God must needs give the greatest weight to scripture precepts and directions. All the charms of divine goodness, grace and love, are set in the strongest light, with a view to lead the sinner to repentance and engage the christian to greater diligence in prosecuting his christian course. The important solemnities of a future judgment, an awful period when all must be summoned to the bar of God, to give an account of the deeds done in the body, are also exhibited to our view in striking colours. Nothing can possibly be a more powerful motive to holiness than the idea given us in scripture, of a glorious resurrection, and of that eternal life which is prepared for the followers of Christ in the heavenly world, a state of felicity which is represented, not as a paradise of sensual delights, but a happiness which consists in pure and holy enjoyments, in the perfection of our natures, and in the immediate vision and fruition of a holy God. We may farther observe that, in addition to these all powerful

motives to excite to duty, the most perfect patterns or examples are set before us for our imitation. God himself is held up as a pattern for our imitation in his imitable perfections. We are to be followers of God as dear children. The most perfect example of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was a living pattern of the purity and holiness of the divine law, is proposed as an example for us to follow, and our imitation of him is enjoined, on penalty of forfeiting our claim to him. Holy men of God are also set before us as patterns for our imitation. We are to be followers of them, who, thro' faith and patience, have inherited the promises. For the believer's greater encouragement, and that he may be excited to walk worthy of his holy calling, he is invested with high and glorious privileges. He is brought into a state of peace and friendship with God, adopted into his family, and admitted to the enjoyment of communion and fellowship with himself.— And, for his still farther encouragement, the true believer and holy walker is privileged with many great and precious promises. God's children have a promise that he will be a Father unto them and they shall be his sons and daughters; a promise that he will never leave them nor forsake them, and a promise of the gracious influences of the spirit to enable, as well as encourage, them to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, and to encourage, strengthen and assist them in a course of holy obedience. Can the boasted sufficient light of nature afford such motives as these? No, all the motives which the most celebrated heathen writers of antiquity could urge, were resolved into some cold jejune discourses, about the beauty of virtue, and the deformity of vice. Even that very defective system of morality which their writings recommend, is encouraged by no suitable motives, and enforced by no adequate authority, the sublimest parts of christian morality are left out, and the doctrine of a future judgment entirely omitted.

5thly. As its respects the positive institutions of scripture, great exceptions have, it is true, been taken against them. Here infidels endeavour to take, and flatter themselves that they have fairly got the advantage, and even.

triumph, as if the existence of these institutions in the Bible was, of itself, sufficient, completely to invalidate the authority of the sacred canon. But if God is our creator and governor, it can be but little short of absolute atheism to assert that he cannot give to man positive commands, which he is under indispensable obligations to obey, without assigning any other reason why they ought to be obeyed than merely his own authority. Positive institutions were somewhat numerous, during the continuance of the Mosaic dispensation. But it appears, likewise, that they had a remarkable significance peculiar to that dispensation, as they had a tendency to keep up a most forcible impression of some doctrinal truths upon the mind of an Israelite, in a way adapted to the genius of that peculiar age of the church, in which future and spiritual things were veiled by a great variety of types and shadows. It is not my present intention to enter into a detailed examination of the various positive institutions of the old Testament. Of some of them, perhaps, it may be difficult, at this time, to give a particular explanation. In general however, it appears that those positive institutions, which have drawn forth so large a portion of contempt and scorn, from modern infidels, and have been represented as calculated, only to establish and foster superstition and tyranny, had a remarkable tendency to convince that people of sin, and that God, although always ready to absolve the penitent, yet required a sacrifice for sin. They tended to impress the mind with an awful sense of the justice and holiness of God, as well as to give an amiable idea of his goodness and mercy, to be dispensed to the penitent sinner, through a sacrifice which he himself would provide; a sacrifice typified in these institutions. The positive institutions of the New Testament are few and simple, and have a remarkable tendency to keep up in the mind, a relish for the doctrines, and a feeling of the spirit of christianity, as well as a devout remembrance of what Christ has done, and a sense of the indispensable obligations we are under to walk, in a manner conformable to the christian calling. Such is eminently the use of the institutions of Baptism and the Lord's supper, which, un-

der the gospel dispensation, are the distinguishing badges of the christian profession.

Having thus briefly touched on the internal characters of a divine original, in the various kinds of subjects particularly treated of in the sacred scriptures, I proceed,

II. To notice some marks or characters, indicating a divine original, applicable to the sacred books generally, and which afford incontestible proof, that that book which we call the Bible, is no cunningly devised fable, but in reality a revelation from God.

1st. The extreme facility with which the sacred writers explain the most deep and mysterious things, is a peculiar characteristic of Divinity, every where apparent in the pages of Holy writ. There are some subjects on which it is exceedingly difficult to write. Men of the strongest minds, the most acute penetration, the most solid judgment, and the greatest erudition feel the embarrassment. They find their subject oftentimes too great for their abilities. No subjects, of which a discussion was ever attempted, were more embarrassing than many of those which occupied the attention of the inspired penmen. But few of the sacred writers had any peculiar advantages for erudition, and it does not appear that they derived from nature a greater native strength of mind than others. They were, in general, poor illiterate men.* They wrote on the most difficult of all subjects; subjects many of which had employed the thoughts and pens of the wisest in every age, to little purpose; yet they seem always equal to their subject. They appear to feel no embarrassment, nor to be ever at a loss for either ideas or words. Scripture doctrines are not clouded over with a heap of ambiguous conjectures, nor do they appear in the form of uncertain consequences, drawn from first principles, by a laborious process of argumentation. The inspired writers proceed directly to their subject, they enter immediately into the spirit of it, and unfold the most abstruse doctrines with the same clearness and facility as if the writer derived his

* Introduction to the New Testament.

knowledge from immediate intuition. This might be illustrated by a great variety of instances from scripture. Nay there is scarcely a portion of revelation but what may serve for an illustration. Two or three instances may be noticed. What volumes upon volumes of vague conjectures, and crude absurdities have been written about the origin of the world, many of them by men, deficient neither in talents nor erudition? But after all, Moses in the brief narration contained in the first chapter of Genesis, throws infinitely more light upon the subject, than is to be found in all the laboured productions of all the other writers who ever lived, who did not borrow their light immediately from him. This narrative is given in the language of plainness and simplicity. Nothing is left to vague conjecture, and the whole is given with that apparent ease and assurance of its truth, which could have appeared, had the narrator been an eye witness of the facts which he relates. The same observations are also applicable to the account given by the sacred penman, of the origin of evil. Here we see the fall of man, and the consequent corruption and depravity which prevails throughout the world, traced to its source, and placed in a perspicuous point of view by a statement of facts and not of conjectures. The same facility appears in that which constitutes the principle excellence of revelation. I mean, in the unfolding of the glorious mystery of man's redemption. The terms in which a sinner may be accepted of God, or the way in which a fallen guilty mortal may be reinstated in the divine favour, are unfolded in a clear and perspicuous manner, and expressed with no more doubt and hesitation than would have appeared, if the relator had been present when the plan of redemption was laid, and the council of peace established. Whence all this facility of the sacred penmen, in treating of subjects which the wisdom of the world could never reach? What other reason can be given why they had such a clear insight into these subjects, which baffled the wisdom of all the world besides, only that they were infallibly guided by the Holy Spirit, or, to use an expression borrowed from scripture, "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

2dly. The majesty which every where appears, both in the matter and stile of the sacred scriptures, affords striking evidence that they are divinely inspired. Although there is an admirable plainness and simplicity in the scripture style, yet such a divine majesty beams forth in the sacred writings as is an assured indication of their original. How frequently do we meet with solemn appeals to God, as the author of what is spoken, where the matter communicated is prefaced with, *Thus saith the Lord?* This mode of speaking is particularly observable in the writings of Moses and the Prophets. They urge divine truth, and press the necessity of regarding the messages which they bring, not by a laboured course of reasoning upon the moral fitness of things, but by a direct appeal to the authority of him in whose name they speak. *Thus saith the Lord.— Thus saith the high and lofty one who inhabiteth eternity.* It cannot, it is true, be denied, but this mode of speaking, and attempting to sanction the thing spoken by the authority of God, became, in process of time, common both to the true and false prophets. But had there never been a true revelation, whereby such a form of speaking was, in the first place sanctioned, it is difficult to conjecture how it should come into common use, or in what way it could have been invented. This majesty of stile appears both in the relation of matters of fact, in the commands and prohibitions, and in the threatenings and promises of the word. All are delivered in such a manner as to avouch the authority of Jehovah. The promises of eternal life are delivered, in that peremptory and majestic manner which is suited to the dignity of the promiser, and the most excellent nature of the thing promised, and the threatenings of eternal death are also delivered with a majesty calculated to strike the sinner with awe, as well as evince the dignity of the Supreme Being who never threatens in vain.

It is true, some ignorant and fastidious critics object against the scripture stile and phraseology, as mean and unworthy of the spirit of God, as if they meant to tie down the Almighty to the arbitrary rules of human eloquence. But they ought to consider that the subjects discussed and explained in the sacred scriptures are too important, and

too interesting to need to be recommended by the tinsel ornaments of modern eloquence. Yet, under all the disadvantages necessarily attending literal translations, an appeal may be made to the English reader of taste and erudition, whether ever he met with any thing in all antiquity, of the affectionate and persuasive kind, which excells the last addresses of Moses and Joshua to the children of Israel, or of Judah to his brother Joseph, requesting that he might be detained as a servant in Egypt, instead of Benjamin his brother? or any thing in history more moving and affecting than the account which we have of the scene of Abraham's intentional offering up his son Isaac, on mount Moriah, or any thing more truly pathetic than the scriptural account of Joseph's making himself known to his brethren in Egypt? The same appeal may be made whether the tragic muse, either ancient or modern, furnishes any more masterly, more natural, and more affecting pictures of the most poignant distress, than are to be found in many passages of the lamentations of Jeremiah; or a model of forensic eloquence, more correct, or more persuasive, than Paul's defence of himself and his profession before King Agrippa and Festus the Roman governor? And for specimens of correct reasoning, where shall we find any more conclusive than many which may be found in some of Paul's epistles? Where also shall we find any thing possessing more true sublimity than many passages in the Psalms and the Prophets? The following instances, se-

* The late Sir William Jones, who, for learning and taste as well as character, has left but few equals, and perhaps no superior, thus expresses himself concerning the style and matter of the holy scriptures. "I have regularly and attentively read these holy scriptures, and am of opinion that this volume, independent of its divine original, contains more sublimity and beauty, more pure morality, more important history, and finer strains of poetry and eloquence, than can be collected from all other books, in whatever age or language they may have been composed."

lected out of many, may serve as a specimen. Job's contrast between his former prosperity and his present adversity, chap. 29. *The young men saw me and hid themselves ; and the aged arose and stood up. The Princes refrained talking, and laid their hand on their mouth. The nobles held their peace, and their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth. When the ear heard me, then it blessed me ; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me. Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me ; and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me ; my judgment was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a Father to the poor ; and the cause which I knew not I searched out.* How affecting and how truly sublime is the contrast in the following chapter. Take for another specimen the following description of the war horse from the same book, chap. 39. *He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in his strength : He goeth on to meet the armed men. He mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted ; neither turneth he back from the sword. The quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and the shield. He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage : neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpet. He saith among the trumpets, ha ! ha ! and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.* Take also the following descriptions of the march of the Almighty, the first is taken from the Psalmist, Psalm 18. *The earth shook and trembled ; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth. There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured : coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down : and darkness was under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly : yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness his secret place ; his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies. At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed ; hail stones and coals of fire.* The other passage I select from the Prophet Habakkuk. *God came from Teman, and the Holy one from mount Paran. Selah. His glory adv-*

ored the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. *And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power. Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet. He stood, and measured the earth; he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered; the perpetual hills did bow. His ways are everlasting.* Where can we find instances of more true sublimity? In a word, if we will but only consider, with impartiality, the nature of the truths revealed in scripture, and the scope and design for which they were severally revealed, we will be obliged to confess that the wit of man could not have derived a more appropriate stile and phraseology, for the conveyance of those truths to mankind, than that in which they are clothed by the sacred penmen. In human writings the stile, many times, soars above, and as often, sinks below the dignity of the subject. But in the sacred scriptures every thing is perfectly in character, and the stile always adapted to the nature of the subject, and, throughout the whole, there is such a mixture of inimitable majesty, immaculate purity, and undefining simplicity, as, to an unprejudiced mind, is no obscure indication of a divine original.

3dly. Another characteristic of the sacred scriptures, which gives evidence that they contain a revelation worthy of God, is their strict purity and holiness. But the necessity of an illustration of this particular has been, in a great measure, superseded by observations which have been already made, when treating on scripture morals.— I shall therefore dismiss it and proceed to observe,

4thly. That the harmony which appears to subsist between all the various parts of the sacred scriptures is, taken in connexion with other proofs, a striking evidence that the pens of those by whom they were written, were guided by the hand of unerring inspiration. From the time in which the writing of the old Testament was commenced by Moses, to that in which that part of the sacred canon was completed by Malachi, the last of the prophets, a period elapsed of nearly, or quite one thousand years. A considerable space also intervened between the

commencement and the completion of the new Testament. If we take into consideration, the manner in which the sacred scriptures were written, i. e. piecemeal, by a great variety of penmen, persons living in ages very remote from one another, of different characters and situations in life, and different educations and habits, and no doubt of very different passions and prejudices, no writings whatsoever, could be supposed to be more liable to be filled with inconsistencies and contradictions. Indeed, bringing all these circumstances into view, unless we admit their divine inspiration, it would be nothing less than a miracle if they contained any thing else than a heap of absurdities and inconsistencies. Yet, although those various tracts collected together in that book which we call the Bible, were written in different ages, on different occasions, and on a great variety of subjects, and by persons of a great diversity of talents, still an admirable harmony prevails. All give the same views of God and religion, and the scope and design of them all appear to be directed to the same end. I cannot but think that this is a stronger evidence of the divinity of the scriptures than is generally imagined. If we examine the sentiments of the followers of any of the ancient philosophers, or of the adherents of any religious sect, either of Jews or of Christians, we will find them constantly varying, not only from one another, but from their founder. Such was the case of the followers of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, &c. as well as of different sects among the Jews and ancient Christians. And such is the case among the modern followers of Luther, Calvin and others. No such thing has taken place among the inspired writers, but a harmony of sentiment, principle and design appears among them. What reason can be given for this, only that the followers of the ancient philosophers had nothing but reason to guide them, and the followers of christian sects were guided by their own sense and construction of the words of Christ. But Moses' followers, I mean the succeeding inspired penmen of the sacred scriptures, were guided by the unerring spirit of inspiration. This harmony will appear still more remarkable if, in addition to what has been said

of the scriptures being penned at different times, and in periods remote from each other, it be observed that the subjects are various, and the manner of treating them very different. It has been already observed, that of the sacred scriptures, some parts are historical, some doctrinal, some moral, some devotional, some parts are in prose, and some poetical. Still a most wonderful harmony prevails. This agreement may be observed between the type and things typified, the same things which were prefigured in the type, obtaining an exact accomplishment in the Anti-type.

The same harmony of sentiment principle, and design, appears between the historical and moral parts of scripture, as well as between scripture precepts and scripture promises, between scripture prophecies and their exact accomplishment in the event.

It is true the labours of infidels, in order to discover contradictions in the sacred scriptures, have been unwearied. But, by all their labours they have not been able to fasten upon them the charge of any real inconsistency.— My present limits will not permit me to pay attention to all the various things which have been alledged, in order to prove either real or seeming inconsistencies in scripture. There is no difficulty of this kind but what has already been solved in a satisfactory manner to every unprejudiced mind, by persons favoured with abilities and leisure, and furnished with proper helps for such an undertaking. But although infidels have often triumphed in some of these seeming contradictions, as if they opposed insurmountable difficulties in the way of believing the scriptures, yet, I apprehend that, if we duly and candidly attend unto the following considerations, they will serve as a clue to solve the principal difficulties of that kind.

1st. Some times different circumstances in relation to the same fact, are related by different writers who have treated on the subject. Circumstances omitted by one are frequently related by another. Instances of this kind, sometimes occur in the writings of the four evangelists.— But such is the nature of the variations in their manner of relating particular facts, that they are so far from proving a contradiction, that they rather confirm, than invalidate

their testimony, by making it evident that they did not write by collusion, or in concert with one another.

2. Let it be observed that different facts and incidents are frequently recorded, between which there exists a similarity in some particular circumstances. This apparent similarity of some circumstances, is a reason why facts and incidents, although really distinct, are oftentimes mistaken for the same. Superficial observers mistaking, in the first place, the facts for the same, and upon examination, finding not only different, but contradictory circumstances occurring, consider them as contradictions between different writers speaking of the same fact, whereas the facts which the several historians relate, are really distinct. This observation will, I apprehend, be sufficient to solve all the difficulties which occur, in the different accounts given by the several Evangelists, of the various appearances of Christ after his resurrection. Infidels have frequently triumphed in these accounts as being absurd and contradictory.

3. It is to be observed that, in the relation of facts, there are frequent allusions to particular circumstances which, at the time when the narrative was penned, were well known and understood, but, at this time the knowledge of them is lost. This may, and doubtless does, sometimes occasion such a degree of obscurity in the narrative as to amount to the appearance of inconsistency, which, had we a knowledge of these particular circumstances, would be entirely removed, and every thing appear plain and consistent.

4. It is farther worthy of notice that the same persons and places have, frequently, different names given them in scripture. This may be a very satisfactory reason, why different writers, while speaking of the same transaction, sometimes seem to represent an event as happening in different places, each writer designating the same place by a different name. Sometimes a similar mistake happens where the same person is designated by a different name. Whatever seeming inconsistency this may sometimes occasion, the contradiction is only apparent, not real.

5. With respect to the historical, and especially chronological matters contained in scripture, it is to be observed that some of the sacred writers begin their computation of time at one period, and some at another. This may account for several variations in the computation of time between the books of the Kings and Chronicles.—Some of the Kings reigned jointly with their Fathers several years, and afterwards reigned alone. It is not an uncommon thing for one sacred writer to begin his computation of the period of a particular King's reign, at the time when he began to reign jointly with his Father, and another at the time in which he began to reign alone.—This occasions a variation in their narrative ; but there is no contradiction.

6. With respect to any seeming variation in relation to points of doctrine, which may be observed between any of the sacred writers, this arises from their considering the subject in a different point of light, and in relation to different objects. The most remarkable, and I believe the only variation of this kind observable in scripture, is between the apostles Paul and James, in the accounts which they give of the cause, or ground of justification. The subject of which Paul treats is a sinner's actual justification before God. This Paul asserts to be by faith. The subject of which James treats is evidential justification before men, i. e. the only way which we can shew or manifest our faith before men is by our works. Paul's design was to guard against the attempts of Judeizing teachers, who taught that, in order to personal justification before God, a man must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. In opposition to this opinion, so contrary to the gospel scheme, it was of importance to state that a man is justified by faith in Christ, without the deeds of the law. The design of James was to guard against a set of licentious professors, who, even in that early day, began to creep into the church. These denied the necessity, and decried the practice of good works.

7. It is farther to be observed that the change of a single letter, or even of a single point in the Hebrew language, will make a very material numerical alteration in

the computation of time. From the great similarity which there is between some of the Hebrew letters, such mistakes would be very likely to happen among the great multitude of transcribers. Such a small variation, it is said by those acquainted with the Hebrew language, will account for the variation between the statements given in Kings and Chronicles, of the age of Ahaziah when he began to reign, who in Kings is said to be twenty two, and in Chronicles forty two years of age, when he came to the throne. God has magnified his word above all his name. In nothing has this been done, in a more signal manner, than in guarding it against corruption, and causing it to be handed down pure to the church. And, in fact, it has been guarded effectually, in every thing relating either to doctrine or morals. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, and in transmitting it down to the church, God has been pleased to make use of fallible men. To answer all the purposes which infinite wisdom has in view, it is not necessary to suppose that providence has so watched over every particular transcriber, by a standing miracle, as to guard him against even a possibility of mistake in every minute circumstance. It is a much more reasonable supposition that such small variations may have crept in, I will not say through the negligence, but through the fallibility of transcribers, than that the sacred writers are justly chargeable with contradictions. The former supposition may be admitted without either invalidating the authority of the sacred canon, or impeaching divine providence for not taking sufficient care to have the sacred oracles transmitted free from error or corruption.— After all, these variations, all put together, do not amount to a single contradiction in any one point of either doctrine or morals. They relate to no point of importance to us, and a suitable attention will remove every seeming difficulty with regard to most of them, and such a harmony of all the parts of the sacred writings appears as clearly evidences their original.

5thly. The perfection and fullness of scripture is another characteristic whereby these sacred oracles are distinguished from all writings claiming only a human origin.

Such is the extent and variety of the matter contained in them, that they are adapted to persons of all capacities, and in all circumstances. If we consider that, so far as respected attainments in human literature, the Jewish nation was far behind many other nations, and if we farther consider, that the penmen of the principal part of the scriptures were far from ranking among the eminent and learned in their own nation, but were, with a few exceptions, plain, sensible, illiterate men; we would naturally expect that the writings of such men would, in point of worth, and of the solid wisdom and instruction conveyed in them, fall immeasurably short of the writings of the learned and wise of other nations. But when we find that, for importance, variety, fullness, and profundity of matter; for correctness of principles, and for the amount of solid instruction to be derived from them, these writings stand unrivalled, to what can we attribute it but to the unerring hand of inspiration? These writings contain matter in them adapted to every grade of intellectual endowments. Among human writings we find some adapted to the situation of those who are children or babes in intellect, and which, as soon as the first rudiments of knowledge are attained, are of no farther use. We find other writings which are only adapted to the situation of those whose intellectual powers are considerably improved, but which are of no use to children, because their understandings are not sufficiently enlarged, nor their judgments arrived at such a degree of solidity as to comprehend the matter contained in them. Other writings are calculated only for the learned, and are of little or no use to the bulk of mankind.— But there are no human writings which cannot be understood, and the full meaning of the author comprehended, if the writer distinctly understood his own meaning. The system and the ideas of the profoundest scholar may be fully comprehended by another of equal erudition. When works of this nature have been perused with sufficient attention, the whole view and meaning of the author may be so fully comprehended, that no farther instruction can be derived from his works. But this can never be the case with the sacred scriptures. Let a person be never so

great an adept in knowledge, and even in scripture knowledge, yet, if he applies to the study of the scriptures with a teachable disposition, he may find instruction. Let the wisest peruse the scriptures ever so often, he need never be at a loss for some thing new. At the same time, persons of the most slender capacity, if they apply to the study of the scriptures with honest hearts, may find many things, and those of the utmost importance, which they can easily understand. The scriptures may be ever read with improvement. While the weakest may, at any time, find something adapted to his capacity, the strongest may be always entertained with something new. It may be farther observed that, in discoveries, and in systems merely human, one man, or one generation, frequently improves on the discoveries of another. Hence it is that ancient writings, many times, grow obsolete. The knowledge possessed by later ages so far surpasses that of former generations, that many writings which, for solid wisdom and instruction were esteemed the *ne plus ultra* of their day, are now not esteemed worth the perusal. Such has been the fate of many ancient systems of philosophy, medicine, chemistry, agriculture, &c. &c. But this is not the case with the discoveries of the Bible.* Not one just idea, upon subjects either of morality or religion, has been added, beyond what is contained in the scriptures, although the last portion of the sacred canon was written more than seventeen hundred years ago. So far is the moral and christian world from getting a head of the scriptures in respect to religious knowledge, that although one man, and one generation may improve upon another, by making advances in the knowledge of what is contained in the Bible, they still remain far, very far behind the scriptures themselves, and the greater their attainments in knowledge the more will they be sensible of their humble distance.

But what still farther distinguishes the sacred scriptures from all human writings, and evinces their perfection and

* Introduction to the New Testament.

fullness, is the extensive, and even universal view which they give of the human heart in all its turnings and windings. There is no temper or exercise of heart, whether good or bad, but what may be found to be exactly described in this sacred book; and a person, by comparing his own heart with the portrait of the human heart drawn in the Bible, may judge of the same, whether good or bad. No outward circumstance in which a man can be placed, can be found, that is not taken up, considered, and proper directions given in these sacred pages. The duties of every class of men are distinctly marked out, as of rulers and ruled, magistrates and subjects, parents and children, husbands and wives, masters and servants, high and low, rich and poor. Whether a person is in prosperity or adversity, rich or poor, in health or in sickness, in the bloom of life, or descending into the dark valley and shadow of death, such is the perfection and fullness of scripture, that he will find its directions and instructions to reach his case. Not only do they embrace every variety, and reach every possible case which can occur in a person's outward circumstances; there is also no possible variation in the temper and disposition of the mind which they do not reach. Both those who have a gospel peace of mind and those who are at ease in Zion, those who are true penitents and those who are in a state of impenitency, those who are secure in sin, stout hearted and far from righteousness, and those whose consciences are alarmed with a sense of their sin and danger, those who enjoy the light of God's countenance and those who experience the hidings of his face, who walk in darkness and see no light, may all, not barely see their situation described, but may also find proper councils and directions adapted to their circumstances, in this sacred book. Can the like be said of any human writings whatsoever? Surely not. Surely such an excellent treasure cannot be found in a cunningly devised fable.

6thly. The scope and tendency of the sacred writings, which is to give all glory to God and not to man, is also an indication of their original. If there is a God, and but one God, he must necessarily be infinitely glorious, as possessing every possible perfection. Consequently, in all

His works, the display of his own glorious perfections must be his highest end. A being whose perfections are infinite, i. e. one who is infinitely wise, powerful, holy, just and good, will naturally act from the highest and best motive, and as we can conceive no higher motive than the display of his own infinite perfections, we may reasonably conceive God to act from this highest end and motive in all his actions. This is merely to act like himself, or like being what he really is. To this, the ideas given us in the sacred scriptures, correspond, which declare that he made all things for his own glory, and that for his pleasure we are and were created. To display the glory of God is the evident scope of the sacred history, particularly of those parts of it which record the narrative of numerous signal, and frequently miraculous, interpositions of divine providence, in behalf of his church and people. The same scope and tendency is observable in the christian doctrines, especially those which immediately refer to the redemption of man by Jesus Christ. That wonderful plan of redeeming love, through which sinners of our apostate race are restored to the divine favour and image, is so contrived that the whole glory of the transaction redounds to God and his grace. *Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things.* To him the glory is justly due. Hereby the sinner is humbled, while the power and glory of divine grace is exalted. Scripture precepts of morality have also the same scope and tendency. If we take a view of the morality taught in the Bible, in its just extent, we will find that christians are not barely bound to obey the moral precepts outwardly. They are to make it their principal aim, their highest end, to glorify God in their bodies and their spirits which are his. They are to present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. They are to have an eye to God's glory, not merely in acts of worship and devotion, but even in the common affairs and business of life; being enjoined whether they eat or drink or whatever they do, to do all to the glory of God. It is so necessary to have an eye to this great end, according to the christian system, that without such a singleness of aim and intention, the

fullness, is the extensive, and even universal view which they give of the human heart in all its turnings and windings. There is no temper or exercise of heart, whether good or bad, but what may be found to be exactly described in this sacred book; and a person, by comparing his own heart with the portrait of the human heart drawn in the Bible, may judge of the same, whether good or bad. No outward circumstance in which a man can be placed can be found, that is not taken up, considered, and directions given in these sacred pages. The duties of every class of men are distinctly marked out, as of kings and ruled, magistrates and subjects, parents and children, husbands and wives, masters and servants, high and low, rich and poor. Whether a person is in prosperity or adversity, rich or poor, in health or in sickness, in the height of life, or descending into the dark valley and shadow of death, such is the perfection and fullness of scripture that he will find its directions and instructions to relieve every case. Not only do they embrace every variety, and every possible case which can occur in a person's circumstances; there is also no possible variation of temper and disposition of the mind which they do not reach. Both those who have a gospel peace of mind, and those who are at ease in Zion, those who are true and those who are in a state of impenitency, the former are secure in sin, stout hearted and far from right, and those whose consciences are alarmed with a sense of their sin and danger, those who enjoy the light of God's countenance and those who experience the hiding of his face, who walk in darkness and see no light, may all find their situation described, but may also find in this sacred book. Can the like be said of any other writings whatsoever? Surely not. Surely such a rich and plentiful treasure cannot be found in any cunningly devised system. 6thly. The scope and tendency of the sacred scriptures which is to give all glory to God and not to man, is an indication of their original. If there is but one God, he must necessarily be infinitely perfect, possessing every possible perfection. Consequen-

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the works, the display of his power and wisdom, the highest and most perfect of his creatures, and the one who is himself the fountain of all grace and good, will naturally be the object of our love and admiration, as we can compare our own weakness and frailty with his own greatness and glory. This is the true way of devotion, and the only way to attain to the knowledge of God, and to the love of him. We must therefore, in our devotion, consider his greatness and glory, and our own weakness and frailty, and we must compare our own sinfulness with his holiness, and our own misery with his goodness. This will lead us to a true knowledge of God, and to a true love of him, and to a true devotion to him. We must therefore, in our devotion, consider his greatness and glory, and our own weakness and frailty, and we must compare our own sinfulness with his holiness, and our own misery with his goodness. This will lead us to a true knowledge of God, and to a true love of him, and to a true devotion to him.

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scripture standard does not acknowledge a person as a true christian. However punctual men may be in the external practice of religious and moral duties, yet, in the view and estimation of the great searcher of hearts, their obedience is not true obedience, nor does any true virtue or holiness exist, unless this is the leading motive which influences their conduct. Such is also the nature of that salvation which the gospel reveals and offers unto men, that it is, in connexion with a disposition to aim at this great end, and in no other way, that our everlasting happiness can be secured. Such a scope and design, invariably held up to view throughout the whole of the sacred canon, is far from being the mark of a human invention, or of a cunningly devised fable.

7thly. The last characteristic of the holy scriptures which I shall mention, and one which very plainly indicates their original, is the light and power which is in them to convince and convert sinners, and to build up believers in faith, holiness, and comfort unto salvation.— This is declared to be a property of scripture by the scriptures themselves, particularly in the text prefixed to this discourse. *The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.* This, it is true, is an argument which will have but little weight with a professed unbeliever, and therefore may not be so proper to be used in reasoning with men of that description. But considering this as a matter depending upon testimony, the concurring attestations of the people of God, in all ages, ought to have some weight. In respect even to visible effects, christianity will, by no means, suffer by a comparison with deism. Altho' it must be confessed, and the truth is a melancholy one, that nominal believers in christianity, many times exhibit but little of its holy nature in their lives, yet instances are far from being rare of persons whose lives have been reformed, and who, instead of persisting in a former course of vice and profligacy, have become holy and humble disciples of the cross. But I believe not so much as one solitary instance can be produced of a person who was ever reformed in his life, by rejecting the religion of the gospel, and embracing deism; although, on the other hand, thousands have

relinquished their morality, and become openly vicious and profligate, on their rejecting christianity. These things may afford some proof of the beneficial effects of the principles of revealed religion, to the world at large, and even to the infidel himself, but to the real christian, they afford the most convincing of all evidences. To him the gospel carries its own evidences along with it, in the effects which it has had upon his own soul. He can reason on the divine inspiration of the scriptures, much in the same manner in which the blind man who had been restored to sight, reasoned on the miraculous powers of Jesus of Nazareth, viz. *He hath opened mine eyes.* The holy scriptures have an admirable tendency to convince of sin.— They discover human nature, in all its turnings and windings. The person convinced feels in his own heart, those evil affections, and corrupt inclinations, which are in scripture declared to be the affections of an evil heart. As face answers to face in a glass, so does the sinner's heart to the portrait which is drawn of it in the sacred scriptures. Although divine illumination is necessary to this discovery, yet, whenever it is made to the soul, there will be an exact agreement between what is impressed upon the understanding and conscience in a work of conviction, and what is revealed in the holy scriptures. The same observations are applicable to a work of conversion. The soul savingly brought home to God through Jesus Christ, by a work of converting grace, finds his own views of a Saviour, and of the nature of the gospel salvation, exactly to correspond with the ideas given of that Saviour and salvation in the holy scriptures. Thus he that believeth on the Son hath a witness in himself. This experimental taste of the truths of scripture, gives the christian such satisfactory evidences that the Bible is the word of God as cannot fail to silence all the objections of unbelief, and the children of God, many times, feel such soul ravishing satisfaction in finding their hearts to close fully with the plan of salvation revealed in the scriptures, as they would not exchange for worlds. I might enlarge on this topic, but, as it does not belong so particularly to the present argument, I forbear, and shall close the present discourse with two or three reflections.

1st. Hence we learn that the sacred scriptures are justly entitled to all the commendations which good and holy men have bestowed upon them. The inspired psalmist was one of those who was fully sensible of the worth of the sacred writings, and is very frequent and full in commending them. This he does, not only in the passage prefixed to this discourse as a text, but in many other places of holy writ. Let us mention a few. *Thy word is very pure ; therefore thy servant loveth it.—Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.—Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way ? By taking heed thereto according to thy word.—Thy word I have hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee*—With a sense of his own blindness he prays—*Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.—He professes his affection to God's word, saying, O how love I thy law, it is my meditation all the day.—I have more understanding than all my teachers for thy testimonies are my meditation.—I love thy commandments above gold, yea above fine gold ; therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way.* These are a few of his commendations of God's word. Other holy men of old have had an equal esteem of it. How just they are, every true christian is sensible. God's word is as a light shining in a dark place until the day dawn and the day star arise. It is our light in darkness, our joy in sorrow, and our hope in life and in death.

2d. From the view which has been taken of the sacred scriptures, we derive, I think, something more than a bare presumptive argument that they contain a revelation from God. They contain a system of truth and duty, suitable for God to reveal and for man to receive. Supposing the difficulties which must be surmounted before we could become believers, were greater than they are, and the objections against revelation were more numerous and weighty than we find them, the bare consideration that such just views of God and religion are to be found in these sacred books, as are to be obtained from no other source, is more than a bare presumption that they contain a revelation from God. Although many corruptions have

been mingled with that religion taught in scripture, and many attempts have been made to found absurd and contradictory systems, upon the fountain of divine truths; yet the contradictions and absurdities which are to be found in systems, composed by fallible men, are not chargeable on christianity itself as revealed in the scriptures. Distinct from the idea of inspiration, scripture history is calculated for the most noble purposes, scripture doctrines are vastly important, containing truths worthy of God, and of the utmost consequence to mankind, truths of such a nature that they never could have been discovered in any other way than by revelation. Scripture morals are most excellent, tending to promote the welfare of society here, and to make individuals happy, both here and hereafter, and while an admirable harmony prevails throughout the various parts, the scope of the whole is to give glory to God. Here let us pause and reflect whether these be the marks of a cunningly devised fable or of a revelation from God. Let it be observed that, if the scriptures are in reality a forgery, contrived by designing men to impose upon the credulity of mankind, they must be a forgery, invented by the worst of men, aiming thereby at the worst of purposes, and influenced by the worst of motives. But can it be supposed that the worst of men, the very dregs of the human race, as all impostors must be, if they attempted to forge a religion, should forge one on which not a single trait of their own profligate character should be impressed, one which should give no toleration whatsoever to any unruly passion or vicious inclination, but was in all points of view opposite to every depraved disposition of the human heart, and should strictly forbid all those things to which the depraved inclinations of men are so universally prone? That the worst of men, acting for the worst of purposes, and influenced by the worst of motives, should do all this, without proposing to themselves any temporal reward, or the gratification of any one corrupt inclination, is a most extraordinary supposition indeed and one which cannot be admitted without the utmost stretch of credulity. The very idea of such a forgery is impossible. There are other schemes besides christianity which

have made some pretensions to revelation. But have they not all been destitute of any such characters or marks of divinity? In ancient paganism, we see a mixture of midnight darkness, error, and superstition, blended with the practice of such external rites as frequently contained in them the height of cruelty and impiety. Their system of morality, both in respect to extent, principle, and motive, was very defective, and the grossest immoralities frequently passed for acts of piety and devotion. The religion of Mahomet has, stamp'd upon it, the most evident marks of fraud and imposture; is calculated to inspire the worst of passions, cruelty, malice, and revenge, and tends to the practice of unbounded licentiousness. It is true it contains some precepts of morality, borrowed from the christian revelation, yet this system is a stranger to purity of heart, and the eternal rewards it holds up to view consist only in a paradise of sensual delights, where there is every thing to please a carnal vicious appetite, but nothing to satisfy a holy or virtuous mind. As the founder of it was a man of profligate morals, so he made use of his religion as an engine to forward his schemes of ambition, and to establish a temporal dominion. But no such thing appeared in the character and life of the founder of the christian religion. This subject, however, will be reasum'd in a future discourse. At present I conclude with this observation, that if the scriptures are so excellent, and contain so many marks of divinity, then we are under obligations to prize and esteem them. Let us search them daily, and endeavour to regulate our hearts and lives by the pattern of holiness which they exhibit.

DISCOURSE III.

LUKE XVI. 29, 31.

Abraham saith unto him, they have Moses and the Prophets ; let them hear them.

And he said unto him, if they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

THESE words are a part of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, (if it may be called a parable,) which we have recorded at large, from the 19th verse to the end of this chapter. Our blessed Lord communicated many solemn and interesting truths to his hearers in parables, but among all his discourses of that kind, we will find none more plain or more important than this. Indeed it has been a question among commentators whether it ought to be denominated a parable at all, and not rather a piece of history, literally true, which our blessed Lord related from his knowledge of the unseen world. Our Saviour does not call it a parable, nor does he add any particular illustration or explanation of it to his disciples. No such explanation appears to be necessary. In it we have a relation of the very different situation of two persons in this world, and the still unspeakably greater difference between them in a future state. The anxiety discovered by the rich man that Abraham would send Lazarus to warn his brethren, who were still in the world, lest they should also come into that place of torment, cannot be supposed to arise from any benevolent affection which he had to his brethren or his Father's house, but rather from a fear, lest,

by their coming into that place of horror and despair, they should add to his own torment, as he had probably been, by his evil example, the means of hardening them in wickedness. This request is denied, and his brethren are referred to Moses and the Prophets. The sentiments here expressed by the rich man, who was in torments, are agreeable to impressions which are prevalent among many. Mankind are prone to overlook, or at least to undervalue, those means which God has instituted, and to which providence has favoured them with a daily, free, and unrestrained access. They thus reason with themselves. If they could be favoured with such and such extraordinary means; if they were to see the truths of the Gospel confirmed by incontestable miracles; if it had been their lot to see and converse with Christ in the flesh, or live in the age of inspiration; or if one was to be sent from the dead to inform them of what passed in the unseen world, and warn them of their danger; or, if God was to send an Angel from heaven to preach the everlasting Gospel, instead of one in their own nature, a man of like passions with themselves—they would believe and turn from their evil ways. But experience has proved this to be fallacious, by showing how little effect the most stupendous miracles have, many times, had upon the minds of men. Extraordinary means, at least means which the imaginations of men would devise, if they may be called means, may alarm, bewilder, and frighten, and might, probably, promote the cause of superstition, but it is the spirit, with the word, that quickeneth. If the hearts of the children of men are not softened in the use of ordinary means, there is no prospect that a change would be effected, either by extraordinary operations of providence, or by even, inverting the course of nature. It is accordingly added, *If they bear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.* But the particular purpose, which I have in view in discoursing from these words, is to consider them in the light of an attestation, given by our blessed Saviour, to the truth or divine original of the writings of Moses and the Prophets, or of the various writings composing the Old Testament. The par-

ticular design of this discourse, taken in connexion with those which precede and follow it, will be to prove by facts, that the sacred books composing the Old Testament, are divinely inspired, or that Moses and the Prophets are worthy to be heard, and their writings received as containing an essential part of that revelation which God has been pleased to give to mankind.

Before I proceed directly to the proof of the authenticity of the Old Testament, it may not be amiss to take a brief view of religion, as revealed in the writings of Moses and the Prophets. This may be considered under two periods.

1st. As it appeared under the patriarchal dispensation. Under this dispensation, religious rites were few, and revelation confined within a narrow compass. It consisted in the true knowledge and unadulterated worship of the living and true God, as distinguished from the prevailing idolatry of the times; in a firm belief in, and reliance upon, both his general and particular providence; in a hope of pardoning mercy to penitent sinners, and in a confidence in God as the great rewarder of those who diligently seek him, which rewards they were taught to expect, not merely in this life, but principally in a future and better world: For we are told that they sought a better country, even an heavenly. From the earliest period, they had an expectation, founded first upon one, and afterwards upon a variety of promises, that a great Saviour would, in due time, appear in our nature, who was to redeem mankind from the ruins of the apostacy, and whose sufferings and death, for the purpose of satisfying divine justice, for the sins of men, were prefigured by the very ancient rite of sacrificing. In these divine promises the Patriarchs had a firm faith, in which they lived and died. The whole of the revelation of a Messiah made to our first parents, was, at first contained in that, comparatively, obscure promise, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. In the call of Abraham, and the promise made to him that in his seed should all the families of the earth be blessed, this revelation became somewhat more plain and distinct. This faith in the promises, connected

with the practice of virtue, or universal holiness, appears to have been the main principle of the patriarchal religion. The practice of this religion was remarkably exemplified in Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job, and other Old Testament saints, who *all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off and were persuaded of them and embraced them.*

The second view of religion exhibited in the Old Testament, is in the Mosaic dispensation. The covenant made with Abraham, is, by the Apostle Paul, denominated, *The covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ. This, the law which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.* This was substantially the same religion with that which was practised in the more ancient patriarchal times, with the addition of a special covenant, made with a peculiar people, among whom God was pleased to erect a sacred polity, and to whom he gave a revelation of his will, which was now, for the first time, committed to writing, as the best and safest mean of its preservation, whereas it had been, heretofore, handed down by tradition, which, on account of the long lives of the ancient Patriarchs, and the narrow limits within which revelation was confirmed, had been heretofore easy. The principal ends for which this sacred polity was erected were, to restore and preserve the true worship of God which had been corrupted, and more effectually to guard against that system of gross idolatry which now began to prevail, almost universally, among the nations of the world, by establishing such a system of laws as would keep the Jews a distinct people from all other nations, as well as engage them to a holy practice, by the purity of their laws, which were to them a rule of duty, enforced by severe penalties, under the sanction of divine authority, and to keep alive in their minds, the hope and expectation of that Messiah who had been early promised, and who was now more particularly foretold by many additional intimations, as well as prefigured in that great variety of typical institutions, which made so conspicuous a part of their worship. Whoever impartially considers the Mosaic dispensation,

will find it to be admirably adapted to these ends. The writings of Moses and the Prophets teach us to form the most just and exalted conceptions of the Deity, as a being possessing every possible perfection; as most wise, powerful, holy, just, and good; as loving holiness, and having the utmost abhorrence of all sin and wickedness, but, at the same time, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and ready to forgive the penitent; as a Being who is every where present, preserving and upholding all things by his power, and controuling and governing them by his providence, and as one whom we are under indispensable obligations to love, honour and obey. All social duties may, also, be considered as included in that comprehensive precept, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

But not to repeat the remarks which have been made on the internal characters of divinity, appearing in the scriptures, in a preceding discourse, I would here observe, that the assumed facts on which the divine authority of the scriptures of the Old Testament is predicated, are such as these.—That this world was created by God.—That man was a part of this creation, and was, as he came from the hands of his maker, in a holy and happy state.—That he soon fell from this state of holiness and bliss, and consequently became the parent of an apostate progeny.—That God early gave to his creature man, some intimations of a way of relief from the ruins of this apostacy.—That, with a view to pave the way for the final accomplishment of this purpose of mercy, God was graciously pleased to enter into a covenant with Abraham, in order to separate from the rest of mankind a peculiar people to himself, and to institute and maintain the true worship of God among them.—That this separation between that branch of the posterity of Abraham, afterwards called Jews, and other nations became more marked, and the distinction between them and the rest of the world greater, by the addition of the Mosaic dispensation, and the establishment of a particular system of written laws.—That this separation and establishment was effected by such a series of unquestionable miracles as evidently discovered the finger of God.—That during the continuance of the Mosa-

ic economy, the compass of revelation was, from time to time enlarged, and became, by degrees, more clear, by the writings of extraordinary Prophets who were successively raised up under that dispensation, and whose divine mission was attested, both by the miracles which they wrought, and by the exact accomplishment of many of their predictions.

In order to illustrate the divine authority and inspiration of the Old Testament, it will be proper to begin with the writings of Moses, as these are unquestionably the most ancient of the sacred writings, and as they are the key to the Old Testament. The divine authority of these being established; that of the other sacred books will follow of course.

That there was such a person as Moses, who flourished between fourteen and fifteen hundred years before the christian era, and who conducted a vast number of the descendants of Abraham out of Egypt, leading them through the deserts of Arabia, towards the land of Canaan, and who gave them a system of laws which are still extant, and for which the nation has always entertained the greatest veneration, is clearly proved, not barely by the testimony of the Jews themselves, but also from the writings of other nations, particularly the Egyptians, Greeks, Syrians, Phenicians, Chaldeans and Romans, as appears from Josephus's two books against Appian, as well as from many fragments of ancient historians, which are still extant, as has been made abundantly to appear by the researches of the learned.

If we consider Moses in no other light than that of a faithful historian, his history is entitled to peculiar regard on account of its great antiquity. Moses, according to the concurrent testimony of all antiquity, flourished between fourteen and fifteen hundred years before the christian era, and there is no profane history now extant which can lay even the remotest claim to authenticity, which is not nearly a thousand years later than that date. Herodotus, who is styled, by Cicero, the father of history, wrote, according to computation, about one thousand and fifty years after Moses. Xenophon, Thucydides, Diogenes,

Lærtius, and other Greek and Roman historians, are still of a later date than Herodotus. So that there are no authentic historical writings now extant, which are not at least one thousand years later than Moses. He had the best opportunity to obtain correct information concerning the facts which he relates as an historian. The greatest part of the Mosaic history contains a relation of facts and events which fell immediately within the sphere of his own observation, and to a principal part of which he was an eye witness. Such was the whole of the Israelitish history, from the time in which he was sent to announce their deliverance out of the bondage of Egypt, until they were on the point of going over Jordan, to take possession of the promised land. To all that series of extraordinary miracles which were wrought, either in Egypt in the presence of Pharaoh at the Red Sea, at mount Sinai on the occasion of the giving of the law, and at divers other times and places, during the whole of their forty years march through the wilderness, he was, for the most part, an eye witness. As to that part of the sacred history which is contained in the book of Genesis, and relates to events which happened before Moses's time, the principal part of it relates to the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, and to the settlement of the children of Israel in the land of Egypt. These are subjects concerning which he may well be supposed to have had good information. With respect to events which happened before Abraham's time, the accounts contained in the Mosaic history are generally, very short, consisting chiefly of brief anecdotes, the memory of which was easily preserved, especially if we take into view the long lives of the ancient Patriarchs, and through how few hands a tradition must pass, in order that it might reach from Adam to Abraham. The most circumstantial account which we have of any event during that period is the history of the deluge, and of the salvation of Noah and his family in the ark.— This was an event, so singular in its nature, and remarkable in all its circumstances and consequences, that the memory of it was easily preserved. It is also a strong presumption in favour of the authenticity of the Mosaic

writings, and of the fidelity of the historian, that his history is entirely free from those fabulous romantic narratives with which later accounts of that period of which he treats have been filled, whereby its real history has been disguised. Neither does he give in to the extravagant antiquities of the eastern nations, but assigns the era of the world's creation to a period consistent with reason and the appearances of nature and within the bounds of credibility. Add to this that many of the principal facts recorded in the Mosaic history, are confirmed by collateral testimony, the ancient historians of other nations recording substantially the same events, although frequently disguised and disguised with fable. Authorities to this purpose may be found collected by the learned and judicious Mr. Stackhouse and others who have written on the subject. Perhaps it cannot now be fully explained in what particular way the memory of past events was handed down to posterity, before the method of committing them to writing was adopted. But, that they had ways of doing this, which to them were very intelligible, is without a doubt, and by their having to pass through so few hands in order to their being transmitted, the difficulty was greatly diminished. Thus the Mosaic history, justly deserves great credit, even if we allow the writer no more honour than that of being a faithful historian. But if we suppose him to be divinely inspired, a point of which in the sequel of this discourse we shall attempt the proof, there cannot a doubt remain but he was infallibly assisted in recording such events as were to be of future use to the church.

There are, also, invincible facts to prove the divine original of that peculiar constitution which was given unto the children of Israel by Moses, and of that system of laws by which the nation was to be governed. Here let it be observed that, at the time when the laws of Moses and the Israelitish constitution were established, it is a fact which cannot be contested, that idolatry and polytheism were spread, almost universally, throughout the world. If this was the case, a truth abundantly attested by stubborn facts, there was very little ground for the expectation that ever mankind would be recovered out of that sink of idol-

atry and corruption into which almost the whole human race had fallen, without some extraordinary expedient, above what either philosophers or legislators could effect. If therefore, it pleased God to interpose, in an extraordinary manner, in order to accomplish this end, it ought to be acknowledged as a signal instance of his goodness and wisdom. If ever there could be a suitable time for such an extraordinary interposition, it was on the present occasion, when such an important purpose was to be effected as the restoring and maintaining an essential article of religion which had been, either entirely lost, or grossly corrupted. This was one principal design of the erection of the Mosaic economy. To promote this end was the scope of the extraordinary miraculous facts by which it was attested. Its chief aim was to establish the worship of the one true God, the maker of heaven and earth, and to suppress, as far as its influence reached, that idolatry and superstition which the wise men of other nations, either encouraged, or found it impossible to abolish. Now, how the most ignorant, barbarous, and superstitious of all people, (a character very liberally bestowed upon the Jews by the enemies of revelation,) happened to hit upon such a constitution, and by what means they obtained such a clear understanding of the unity of the Supreme Being, and entertained such worthy thoughts of God and divine things; how it came to pass that these things became known, not only to a few of their wise men, but became a part of the national belief and profession, and incorporated with their civil constitution, while the wiser nations of Greece and Rome were sunk into the grossest idolatry and superstition, notwithstanding their far greater attainments in human learning, can be accounted for in no other way than by supposing that the former derived their notions originally from divine revelation.

It is true nothing has afforded infidels and profane wits a more fertile subject for ridicule, than the notion that the Jews were a chosen people. To reproach and vilify that nation, seems to be a common place topic with unbelievers in every age, that they may thereby render ridiculous the idea of their being a peculiar people to whom the or-

acles of God were committed. A noted deistical writer of the last century observes,* "That it is absurd to suppose that God would select a people to himself, among whom he would erect a peculiar constitution, for the preserving his knowledge and worship, apart from the rest of mankind. Or if he had thought fit that the sacred deposit should be committed to a people chosen to preserve it till the coming of the Messiah, no people was less fit for this trust than the Israelites, upon many accounts. They broke their trust continually. The revelations made to them were shut up in a little corner of the world, among a people, by that very law which they received, excluded from commerce with the rest of the world. A people so little known, and contemned by those who knew them, were very unfit to propagate the doctrine of one God to the world."

But it is in vain to pretend to reason, much less to cavil against a plain matter of fact. For however the notion that the Jews were a chosen race may be ridiculed, it still remains a fact which cannot be contested, that, as a people, they were remarkably distinguished from all other nations of the world, by their knowledge and worship of the true God. Whoever impartially compares the ancient heathen writings with the Jewish sacred books, must be struck with the amazing difference: It must be acknowledged that several gentile nations, particularly the ancient Greeks and Romans, were famous for learning and politeness, eminent for their knowledge of the liberal arts and sciences. In these attainments the Jews bore no comparison with them. But in matters of religion, we everywhere meet with the most unquestionable proofs of idolatry and polytheism, not only universally prevalent among the common people, but countenanced by their greatest and wisest men, statesmen and philosophers, and sanctioned by their laws. On the other hand, if we turn to the Jews, a people no way eminent for their knowledge of the liberal arts and sciences, we find that the knowledge

* Lord Bolingbroke.

and worship of one true God, the Lord and maker of heaven and earth, and of him alone, was a fundamental principle of their religion, and incorporated with the civil constitution of their state, while all worship of inferior deities, or of the true God by images was expressly forbidden by their laws. At the same time, their sacred writings every where abound with sentiments of the most profound veneration for the Deity, with the most exalted ideas of his incomparable perfections and his all disposing providence. Nor is this the spirit of their moral and devotional writings only. We have seen that it also breathes in their histories, the principal design of which is to promote the great ends of religion, by representing the happy state of their nation, when they adhered to the true worship of God and were governed by his laws, and the calamities and miseries which befel them as a punishment for their rebellion. It is therefore a very natural enquiry what can be the reason of this amazing difference between the Jews and the most learned and civilized heathens? It will readily be allowed that, of themselves, they were neither more wise, more knowing, or better philosophers, or capable of making deeper observations and researches, than other nations. Nor does it appear that their dispositions were naturally more virtuous. We have, therefore, every reason in the world to believe, that, if left to follow the dictates of their own judgements, and the prevailing bias of their own inclinations, they would have been involved in the common idolatry of the times, as well as the other nations by whom they were surrounded. That this was not the case, but that, on the other hand, they were so remarkably distinguished from all other nations, was only owing to the advantages of a revelation, and to that peculiar constitution which they were under, which was of divine original, and confirmed by so many miraculous attestations. Thus notwithstanding all the outcry and ridicule against the Jews, as the most unfit people upon earth, to have the sacred deposit committed to their care, it appears that they were the only people to be found in all antiquity, of whom there exists any sufficient evidence in the records of history, that they made a public national ac-

knowledge of this great principle of the unity of the Supreme Being, and had it incorporated into the constitution of their state. This could be owing to nothing else than the divine inspiration of their sacred Books.

We may farther add, that the noble disinterestedness which is every where displayed in the conduct of the Jewish Lawgiver, in the part which he took, both in delivering the children of Israel out of their Egyptian bondage, and in leading them so long through the wilderness, affords most conclusive evidence that he acted by a divine authority and impulse. If we allow to the Jewish Lawgiver but a moderate share of common sense, we must necessarily admit that he could be actuated by no worldly motive, when he was induced to leave Egypt, and undertake the hazardous and hopeless project of delivering his brethren out of their Egyptian bondage. (For hazardous and hopeless his prospect must be, unless he acted by a divine commission.) Brought up and educated in the Egyptian court, being the reputed son of Pharaoh's daughter, and if not heir apparent to the crown of Egypt, as some suppose, and as I believe Josephus asserts, at least heir to the most honourable offices and principal emoluments of the kingdom, what man in his senses would have abandoned the certain prospect of so fair an inheritance, for the desperate project of delivering a number of slaves out of the hands of a cruel tyrant, by the mere force of persuasion, backed with a variety of pretended signs and wonders in which he was himself conscious there was no reality. Slaves too who were neither looking for, nor expecting any such thing as deliverance, and whose spirits had become so completely depressed, by the long continuance of their cruel bondage, that they were not only incapable of moving a single step towards their own deliverance, but were even incapable of believing the report of it when it was told them. Had Moses forged the messages which he brought to Pharaoh, what prospect had he that a haughty cruel tyrant would hearken to them? How would he have dared to have delivered them, when, instead of having even the smallest prospect of success, he must expect to be with as a fugitive from justice?

And surely no sinister motive could render him ambitious of the task of leading that congregation through the vast and howling wilderness, after he had brought them out of Egypt, while, during a tedious pilgrimage of forty years, he was almost perpetually vexed with their rebellions and murmurings. Had he not acted by divine authority, having the promises of Jehovah for his encouragement, and been supported by divine aid, he must have sunk under the task.

In framing the civil constitution of the Jews, Moses also acts with such a noble disinterestedness as shows God to be the immediate author of his laws, and that they were no invention of his own, having for their basis a plan to aggrandize either himself or his family. Although he was chief ruler and judge among the Israelites, this was rather a burthensome than a profitable office. Besides the great and constant fatigue of his office, it exposed him to the envy of those of superior rank and to the repeated murmurings of a rebellious, refractory multitude; while he neither enriched nor aggrandized himself, nor made any provision for the continuance of the supreme power in his family. He leaves his posterity in the rank of common Levites, of that family to which, according to his own laws, the most laborious services were assigned, while the priesthood, an office both of honour and profit, was assigned to the family of his brother Aaron. These are such acts of disinterestedness as plainly show us that the Jewish Lawgiver acted by a divine commission and authority.

It is also worthy of observation, that nothing short of the fullest persuasion, both of the divine authority of the laws, and of the divine inspiration of the Lawgiver, confirmed by the most undoubted facts or miracles, could have imposed such a peculiar constitution upon the Israelites as in fact separated them much, contrary to their inclinations, from the other nations of the world. It appears from the whole tenor of the Jewish history, that, as a people, they had a very strong predilection for the idolatrous customs of the surrounding nations. At the time of their coming up out of Egypt, they appear to have been

greatly leavened with the superstition and idolatry of the Egyptians, among whom they had so long sojourned. It cannot, therefore, be supposed that, in so short a time after their coming up out of Egypt, they would receive a law as divine, which prohibited all these idolatrous customs, towards which they had such a strong inclination, under the severest penalties, unless they had the most convincing proofs that the prohibition came from God. This will appear in a still stronger point of light when it is considered that a strict adherence to their law, which prohibited, in the most peremptory terms and under the severest penalties, all connexion, or communion with their neighbours in their idolatrous customs, not only thwarted their own inclinations but exposed them to the contempt and frequent hostilities of the surrounding nations. Nor would Moses have attempted to impose such a law upon them without divine authority. None of the famed legislators of antiquity, whatever were their private sentiments about the prevailing idolatry of the times, were ever found hardy enough to enact laws for its reformation or suppression. Had the Jewish Lawgiver, therefore, attempted to forge a body of laws with a view to ingratiate himself with the multitude, or in order to pave the way for his personal aggrandizement, he could not have made a more unfortunate choice than in the system which he imposed upon the Jews. Had this been his view he would have flattered their inclinations, and adapted the spirit of his laws to their tempers, dispositions and prejudices. He would not have enacted laws, sanctioned with such severe penalties, which were so contrary to the humours and inclinations of a people who, from the general tenor of their conduct, appear to have been sufficiently intractable and ungovernable. Had not both Moses and the Israelites been fully persuaded that these laws came from God, the one would not have enacted, nor the other submitted to them.

There are several laws contained in the Israelitish code which, had not God miraculously counteracted their destructive tendency, would, humanly speaking, have gone near to have ruined the Jewish state, but having God for

their author, they were well calculated to impress upon the minds of that people a sense of their constant dependence upon the author of their being. Such were the laws of the sabbatic year, by which they were obliged to leave their grounds uncultivated one whole year in seven, and of the Jubilee which obliged them to abstain from tillage two whole years in succession, viz. every forty ninth and every fiftieth year. These laws must have, finally, produced a famine, and ruined the Jewish commonwealth, had not God continued, miraculously, to fulfil his promise of greatly blessing the sixth year. Such was also the law by which all their males, from sixteen to sixty years of age, were obliged to appear at Jerusalem three times in a year, viz. at the Passover, on the day of Pentecost, and at the feast of Tabernacles. At these seasons their frontiers must be left entirely defenceless, and exposed to the ravages and incursions of those numerous hostile nations by which they were on all sides surrounded. Such was also, in a degree, the law of circumcision, which was a rite not only painful in itself but one which rendered the Jews very ridiculous in the view of the surrounding nations.

The law enjoining sacrifices and offerings was also very laborious and expensive. They were, moreover, put to great charges for the maintenance of the Priests and Levites, and for the building, repairing, and adorning the Temple, as well as for many other things requisite in their instituted worship. The prohibition of particular meats, some of which were flattering enough to the appetite, as well as their laborious washings, cleansings, and purifyings, which so frequently occurred, were, also, severe restraints upon the liberties of the Jews. Now can it be supposed, either that Moses would have enacted, or that the Israelites would have received, and tamely submitted to such laws, if they had not had the most convincing proofs that they were sanctioned by the express appointment of heaven?

* "There is no other instance than that of the Mosaic code, of a body of laws being produced at once, and

But that which puts the divine authority of the writings of Moses, and consequently of the whole of the Old Testament, past all dispute, is the series of miraculous facts by which it is attested, and to which Moses appeals as a proof of his mission. Here let it be observed, that as miracles compose so considerable a part of the proof of the divine authority and inspiration both of the Old and New Testaments, it may not be amiss, once for all, to make some brief observations upon that species of evidence tending to show in what sense such works may be relied on as proofs.

1st. It cannot, with any appearance of reason, be denied but God may enable persons, commissioned by him, to work miracles, or to do works above the common powers, and contrary to the usual course of nature. To which of the Divine attributes is this a contradiction? May not the same God who created the sun, and first put it in motion, stop that luminary in its course for a time as he did in the valley of Gibeon, or cause the shadow on the dial of Ahaz to go backward? Cannot he, who first breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life, restore the vital spark after it has been extinguished, or its operations suspended?

“ remaining without alteration afterwards. Those of
 “ Mahomet and other impostors have generally been com-
 “ piled by degrees, according to the exigencies of the
 “ states, the prevalence of particular factions or the au-
 “ thority who governed the people at his own will. Ma-
 “ homet made his laws not to curb the passions, but to
 “ humour the genius of the people. They were there-
 “ fore altered and repealed for the same causes. Where-
 “ as the body politic of the Israelites, took upon it a com-
 “ plete form at once, conformable not only to its then
 “ present necessities in the wilderness, but to all its future
 “ circumstances when settled in a regular government,
 “ surrounded by neighbouring nations in the land of Ca-
 “ naan, and has preserved the same form to the present
 “ time, and that under the highest external disadvantages.”

Age of Revelation, Page 37.

If he can do this by his own power, a position which none will deny, what hinders him from enabling persons, commissioned by himself, to do such things in his name? To deny him this power would be to limit the Almighty.

2dly. When God does thus enable persons to work unquestionable miracles, and rests the proof of the divine mission of those who are sent by him on that kind of evidence, such miraculous works are to be esteemed as valid proofs, especially where the appeal is made, not to a single fact, but to a series of extraordinary operations, wrought, not merely in private, but publickly for the conviction of all. Such were the extraordinary and miraculous works, of which an account is recorded in the sacred scriptures, particularly the miracles wrought in Egypt, at the Red Sea, at Mount Sinai on the occasion of the giving of the Law, and on various other occasions during Israel's journey through the wilderness. Such were also the miracles, both of our Saviour and his Apostles which are recorded in the New Testament. There is a remarkable difference between the miracles recorded in scripture, and those pretended strange feats so much cried up among Papists in Catholic countries. With respect to the latter, we don't find that it is usual for them to be publickly wrought for the conviction of all, and submitted to the inspection of both friends and enemies. They are commonly wrought in private, among those who are highly prejudiced in their favour, or who, if they have any doubts on the subject, are prevented by the dread of fire and faggot from expressing them, but not submitted to the impartial examination of unbelievers for their conviction. The occasions on which they are pretended to be wrought are, for the most part trivial, altogether unworthy of any special interposition of heaven; oftentimes nothing more than for the settlement of the claim of some pretended saint to precedence in the calendar. The accounts have not always been published in the same age and in the same country in which the pretended miracle was said to have been wrought. The facts themselves, even supposing them to be true, are usually such as are not strictly miraculous, but consist only of some ingenious slight of hand tricks.

and the works when performed, as has been observed, of little or no use to any one. Such, without doubt, are the characteristics of most pretended miracles. Nothing like this appears in the accounts we have of the miracles recorded in scripture. Moses's miracles in Egypt were not wrought in the sight of the Israelites only, but in the view of the Egyptians, before Pharaoh and his court; before men who had every desirable opportunity, as well as the strongest inclination, to detect fraud, had any existed, and to prove their falsehood, had they been fictitious. The miracles in the wilderness were wrought before a vast congregation, which, including persons of both sexes and of every age, could not amount to much less than three millions of souls. Our Saviour's miracles were also done openly in the view of both friends and enemies, and many of them were of such a nature as to extort an unwilling conviction, even from his adversaries. *What do we, for this man doth many miracles,* was a confession extorted from the Scribes and Pharisees. The works done were truly miraculous, such as no slight of hand could effect. Of this kind was his plaguing the Egyptians with a great variety of evils, such as none but God could inflict, and, at last, slaying the first born, dividing the Red Sea, bringing water out of the rock, and feeding so many thousands in the wilderness with Manna for the long space of forty years. Our Saviour's miracles consisted in such real works as were of essential benefit to mankind, and which could not be effected without a divine power; such as healing the sick, raising the dead, feeding the hungry, giving eyes to the blind and feet to the lame.

I cannot but think that even pretended miracles, of which, it must be confessed, there have been a great variety in the world, however artfully they may be used by infidels in order to discredit the miracles of scripture, do nevertheless afford presumptive evidence, and in fact go far to establish the existence of such as are true.

If a real miracle had never existed, it can hardly be conceived how any man could have formed the idea of working a pretended one, or what a person could propose to himself by such an imposture. All counterfeits suppose

the existence of something genuine which the counterfeit attempts to imitate. Were there no genuine coin, no attempts would be made at adulteration. So the existence of true miracles is implied in all attempts to forge such as are spurious. And it is at least extremely absurd and preposterous for a person, who probably scarcely acknowledges the existence of angel or devil, to assert that all strange feats which are above the reach of human power have been wrought by the assistance of evil spirits.

It will probably be objected by the opposer of revelation, that many of the facts recorded in the Bible must be confessed to be miraculous if true; but the difficulty consists in bringing satisfactory proof that these works, said to be miraculous, were really done. A miracle is said to be an infraction upon the usual course of nature. By a uniform experience which has never been interrupted, we find that this course of nature has not been broken in upon, in one single instance. Therefore, as these supposed miraculous facts go to establish a system of nature different from what we find by experience, this is, of itself, sufficient to occasion, at least, a mistrust of their truth.

This is, however, a mode of reasoning evidently fallacious, and of no more force than that of the Indian prince resident in Siam, against the possibility of the existence of ice and frost, because he never saw any thing like it in Siam. Having always lived in or near the torrid zone, in a climate in which frost and ice never make their appearance, their existence was contrary to his uniform experience. Experience, however, is a very uncertain guide in matters of fact. One plain and undoubted fact, established by sufficient testimony, cannot be set aside by a course of experience ever so long and uniform. Supposing a person to have had a uniform experience, that a certain creek or river had been crossed, from ten to forty times a day, for fifty years in succession in perfect safety, and that in all that time not a single accident had ever happened to break in upon that constant and uniform course of experience in so much as one instance, yet if, at the end of that period, one credible witness was to assert, upon his perfect knowledge of the fact, that a boat had been upset, and that the

whole crew had perished, we would not hesitate to admit the truth of his testimony, the long and uniform experience to the contrary notwithstanding. With the same propriety might the person who had always resided in this country deny the existence of such phenomena as the burning mountains of Etna and Vesuvius, or of the hot-spouting springs of Iceland, because he had never experienced any thing similar in the United States. That a thing is contrary to our experience, or to the experience of the age and country in which we live, is no evidence that it is untrue. If a particular fact does not imply any contradiction, or direct opposition to the attributes of the deity, (a thing which, it has already been observed, cannot be alledged with regard to miracles,) however contrary the fact may be to our experience, yet, if it is confirmed by sufficient testimony it is to be believed. Our experience, let it be observed, is but very limited. Supposing miracles were to take place so frequently as to be obvious to the experience of every one, they would, for that very reason, cease to be miracles, and not answer the end proposed. — But if they take place only on extraordinary occasions, such as to attest the divine mission of a person sent of God to communicate a revelation of his will to mankind, they answer a most valuable purpose. Never could miraculous works be more necessary, or a divine interposition in that way more seasonable, than when exerted for the purpose of humbling a haughty tyrant, and thereby delivering God's covenant people out of their iron bondage; for establishing a body of divine laws upon unquestionable authority, and for erecting a peculiar people into a sacred polity so very different from that of other nations, and for restoring and preserving the pure worship of God among that people, at a time when the nations of the world were, almost universally sunk into the grossest idolatry. If therefore miracles are well attested by a sufficient number of credible disinterested witnesses, who had the best opportunity to know the facts, and who could be under no temptation to impose forged accounts upon the world, then let them be never so contrary to our own uniform course of experience, we may not only consistently believe them, but disbelief may be in the highest degree criminal.

The only point then to be determined is, what evidence have we, after so great a lapse of time, amounting to convincing and irrefragable proof that these miracles were really wrought? Here let it be observed that the subject of the present enquiry is the evidence which we have of the reality of the miracles said to have been wrought by Moses. With respect to the evidence which we have of our Saviour's miracles, that subject will be considered in another discourse.

It is observed that we have no other evidence of the reality of the miracles said to have been wrought by Moses, than barely his relation of them, and that his honour was deeply engaged in their support.

In answer to this, let it be observed that Moses's miracles were facts of a public nature, done in the presence of six hundred thousand men, besides women and children. We accordingly find Moses urging the necessity of obedience to his laws from this very consideration, that they had been eye witnesses of the extraordinary facts on which the divine authority of the laws was founded. Deut. xi. *—* *And know ye this day, for I speak not with your children which have not known, and which have not seen the chastisement of the Lord your God, his greatness, his mighty hand and his stretched out arm; and his miracles and his acts which he did in the midst of Egypt unto Pharaoh the king of Egypt, and unto all his land. And what he did unto the army of Egypt, unto their horses and to their chariots; how he made the water of the Red Sea to overflow them as they pursued after you, and how the Lord hath destroyed them unto this day. And what he did unto you in the wilderness, until ye came into this place. And what he did unto Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben; how the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up, and their households and their tents and all the substance that was in their possession, in the midst of all Israel. But your eyes have seen all the great acts of the Lord which he did. Therefore shall ye keep all the commandments which I command you this day.* To suppose that such a vast congregation would receive as authentic, a relation of facts said to be done before their eyes, and adopt a system of laws the authority of which

was pretended to be founded upon and established by these facts, while, at the same time, no such miracles had been wrought as was pretended, is a supposition far more extravagant and incredible than any thing which either is or can be alledged as an obstacle in the way of our belief in revelation. We must admit as a fact, that some part, at least of that vast congregation had a small share of common sense, and were capable of judging of facts by the testimony of their senses. In these miraculous facts there is a direct appeal to their senses, and the works were of such a nature that the senses could judge of their reality, and judge with certainty, or without any hazard of mistake. Let us instance in a few. They must have known for certainty whether the first born were slain in the miraculous manner described. They could certainly distinguish between a passage through the sea, while the waters parted hither and thither, and were as a wall on the right hand and on the left, and a passage along shore during the ebb of tide. Whether Pharaoh and his host were or were not actually drowned in the Red Sea, were facts, the truth or falsehood of which they must know. They could certainly distinguish between the act of striking the rock, and fetching water out of it, and an accidental discovery of a spring in a rock. They must also certainly know whether the Manna was rained round about the camp, in the manner which Moses describes; whether they actually gathered and eat it, and whether they received any real nourishment from it during the forty years in which they wandered in the wilderness. Whether the earth actually did open her mouth and swallow up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, was also an event easily proved, if true, or disproved, if false, by the testimony of the senses. The division of the waters of Jordan, so as to afford the children of Israel the opportunity of passing over upon dry land, and the falling down of the walls of Jericho, so as to afford the men of war the opportunity of marching into the city, every one straight forward, when the Priests blew with the trumpets, were also facts of which the senses could judge. So that, instead of the single testimony of Moses to these extraordinary facts, we have the testimony of the

whole congregation, who upon the evidence of their senses, believed that these miracles were really wrought, and received as divine that constitution and code of laws which they were intended to sanction.

Nor is there the least ground for the insinuation that the whole congregation conspired with Moses to impose the belief of these extraordinary facts upon the world, in order to promote their national aggrandizement. For, as has already been observed, these laws were a severe check upon their inclinations, and the accounts which we have of their conduct tend so little to their national honour that, had they been influenced by sinister motives, they would be rather disposed to conceal the existence of these extraordinary facts if true, than connive at a forgery in order to impose the belief of them upon the world. Nothing therefore, short of the fullest conviction of the truth of the facts, could dispose them to admit them, or submit to the laws.

It is farther to be observed, that there is such a mixture of these extraordinary miraculous works with the laws of Moses, which were received and adopted by the Israelites as divine, that it is impossible to account for their reception of the laws in any other way than by admitting the truth of the facts. In many of the laws there is a direct appeal to the truth of the facts, and there is no way to support the authority, or account for their submission to the laws, only by admitting the truth of the facts. To suppose therefore that Moses should give a system of laws to the children of Israel, the authority of which was grounded on facts of a most publick nature, resting, at the same time, the divine authority of the laws on the alledged truth of the facts, and urging the necessity of strict obedience to the laws from the same consideration, which facts were obvious to the senses, and were said to be done publicly in the same age and country, and among the same people who adopted the laws, while no such miracles were wrought, is a supposition too extravagant, and too contrary to every principle of reason and common sense to be harboured for a single moment.

This might be illustrated by a reference to a variety of institutions. I shall barely mention two or three. The

passover was instituted in commemoration of the deliverance of the children of Israel out of Egypt, when they were brought out by a strong hand and an outstretched arm, and has a particular reference to the preservation of Israel when the Lord destroyed the first born in Egypt. *Exod. xii. 25, 26, 27. And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the Lord will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service. And it shall come to pass when your children shall say unto you what mean ye by this service? That ye shall say it is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians and delivered our houses.* It is impossible to account for the institution in any other way than by admitting the truth of the facts on which it is said to be founded. The miracles, also, which are recorded in the 19th chapter of Exodus, are plainly supposed in the law of the ten commandments, recorded in the 20th chapter. Without admitting the reality of the one, we cannot account for the reception of the other. The dedication of the first born to God, both of man and beast, by a perpetual law, and the acceptance of the Levites instead of the first born throughout their tribes, were also institutions in commemoration of the same events with the passover. The budding of Aaron's rod, which rod was kept in the ark, in commemoration of the rebellion and wonderful destruction of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and for confirmation of the covenant of Priesthood in the tribe of Levi and family of Aaron; the pot of Manna which was kept in memory of their being fed with it forty years in the wilderness; the Brazen Serpent which remained until the days of Hezekiah, and which was kept in memory of their wonderful deliverance from the bite of the fiery flying Serpents, effected by only looking at this Serpent of brass, and the feast of Pentecost which was instituted in memory of the dreadful appearance of God on mount Horeb, as well as many other institutions, were so interwoven with the extraordinary facts in commemoration of which they were instituted, that they cannot possibly be separated. That the Jews did most firmly believe that these facts were

done, not only at the time when they were wrought, but in all succeeding ages, is a truth which admits of no dispute. That they should receive a code of laws, many of which were, as has been already observed, very contrary to their inclinations, as they prohibited them from having any communion with the surrounding nations in those idolatrous customs to which they had the strongest propensity ; and that they should also observe a number of institutions which were enjoined in commemoration of these facts, affords proof nearly as conclusive as mathematical demonstration, that the miracles were real and not fictitious. That the Jewish Lawgiver was enabled to work such stupendous miracles, was also an evidence of his divine mission and authority. Thus the laws and facts mutually confirm and support each other. That the Jewish nation received this system of laws on the authority of these miraculous facts, was an evidence that the works were really wrought before their eyes as related, and the working of these miracles was an evidence of the divine inspiration of the Lawgiver, and of the divine authority of his laws.

It will probably be still objected, that it is an easy thing to impose a pretended revelation upon an ignorant, credulous and superstitious multitude, as appears from the gross imposition which the impostor Mahomet afterwards practised upon the Arabians, a people every way as capable of judging of the pretensions of Mahomet, as the Jews were of the pretensions of Moses.

The two cases are, however, by no means parallel.— The Arabians were, without doubt, sufficient vouchers that the Koran was the book left them by Mahomet, which he pretended was a revelation from God. To scruple their testimony in this particular, or to insinuate that this complement was not left them by Mahomet, but was the forgery of some other person or persons, in a different age or country, would be highly unreasonable.— Farther than this their testimony does not go. But, how stupid soever the Arabians might be, Mahomet, with all his art and cunning, could never have persuaded them that the truth of his revelation was attested by a series of won-

derful and miraculous works done before their eyes, an appeal for the truth of which was made to their senses, while no such works were done. The crafty Arab was too wise to rest the proof of his revelation on such a species of testimony as this, where, how stupid soever the multitude might be, on whose credulity he endeavoured to impose his revelation, the fraud might have been easily detected by the testimony of their senses. Hence it was that the author of this imposture constantly and uniformly disclaimed all pretensions to the power of working miracles. When he was much pressed, and even harassed with the demands and reasonings of his opponents concerning his possessing the power of working miracles, he was evidently put to a variety of shifts in order to invent plausible reasons why this power was withheld. The following are said to be some of the principal reasons which he gave in answer to that enquiry.—1. The sovereignty of God, who is not to be called to an account for what he gives nor what he withholds—2. The uselessness of miracles, because every man is foreordained either to believe, or to remain in unbelief. This decree no miracles could alter.—3. The experienced inefficacy of miracles in former times.—4. The mercy of God who had denied them this evidence, because the sin of their incredulity, in case he had granted it, would have been so heinous that he could not have respited or tolerated them any longer.—5. The abuse to which miracles would have been exposed by infidels, &c. &c.* Had the books of Moses and other inspired writings of the Old Testament been ushered into the world in the same manner, there would have been some grounds for a suspicion of fraud; but the manner, as has been observed, was vastly different. An appeal was made to such facts as were obvious to the senses.

It may tend to set this matter in a still clearer point of light to notice the vast difference which there was between Moses and other celebrated legislators of antiquity. There have been other Lawgivers, such as Minos, Ly-

* Vide Campbel on miracles in answer to Hume.

curgus, Numa Pompilius, and probably others who, in order to obtain respect for and insure submission to their laws, pretended that they had communications with the gods, and that their laws were the fruit of inspiration.— They, however, never attempted to support their pretensions by miracles. In this way the fraud would have been easily detected. Whatever their private sentiments might be, none of these celebrated legislators dared so much as to make the attempt to take the people off from their superstition and idolatry. And with respect to any communications which they might have with the Deity, the truth of their pretensions depended only on their bare word.— Had Moses pretended only to such private conferences with the Deity as Numa Pompilius did with the goddess Egeria, to which no one was a witness but himself, or had he, like Minos and Lycurgus, pretended to secret information from oracles no person knew when or how; or had he, like the impostor Mahomet, hatched up a ridiculous account of a long journey which he took to heaven, in the dead time of the night, upon his Nag-Elborac, or pretended that the Pentateuch was privately brought unto him, chapter by chapter, by the angel Gabriel, as was Mahomet's pretence with regard to his Koran, while he could bring no proof whatsoever to support his assertions only his bare word, then there might have been some grounds for placing his merit upon a level with that of the famous impostor mentioned, and for suspecting the genuineness and authenticity of his revelation. But when we take into view all the circumstances of the case we will find no possible ground for collusion or imposture.

It is still objected, or rather insinuated, that the writings of Moses are confessedly of great antiquity if genuine.— The question is how can we be certain, after so great a lapse of time, that the books containing a record of these laws and facts are the genuine writings of Moses, and not the spurious invention of later ages, devised to do honour to the Jewish nation? This is what infidels would insinuate, and to this insinuation, groundless as it is, they are very fond of obtaining credit.

Nothing can possibly be urged more totally destitute of

foundation. If we suppose that the relation of these extraordinary facts is not true, and that the laws which, it is pretended, were founded upon these facts were not introduced at that time, but were the spurious invention of later ages, upon what period can we fix for their introduction, in which the whole nation was so totally bereft of all memory and recollection of past events as to be made to believe that the accounts of these extraordinary facts had been handed down from generation to generation, and that the system of laws said to be founded upon these facts was the same system by which their nation had been governed, ever since they had been incorporated into a civil polity, while at the same time they had never before heard of the facts or been governed by the laws? That an ignorant and barbarous people may be imposed upon by a pretended revelation is readily admitted. Instances of such imposition have been frequent in the world. Still the influence of art and imposture over credulity has its bounds. That there either is at this time, or ever was in the world, a nation so completely ignorant and barbarous as not only to receive a pretended new revelation, but, in addition to their giving full faith and credit to it as a revelation from heaven, to believe that this new system, of which they never had heard before, was one which they had always believed and received; one in which they had been always instructed, and which had been handed down from generation to generation for time immemorial, would be something surpassing the powers of fraud to effect and the bounds of human credulity to admit. In this age, when a rage for novelty and experiment is, perhaps, too prevalent, we may suppose it to be at least a possible event, that a number of artful and designing men might, by a combination of force and fraud, effect a total change in the system of Government within the United States.— But to suppose that they could be able to persuade the people at large, or even the inhabitants of a single district, that this new system, whatever it might be, was the system by which these states had been always governed ever since they became a nation, and that no change or alteration, whatsoever, had taken place, is a supposition too ex-

travagant to be harboured for a single moment. Let me put another supposition which will, perhaps, better correspond with the ideas which infidels wish us to entertain of the Jewish nation. It is said that, of late, the gospel has had remarkable success, and that christianity has made considerable progress among the inhabitants of southern Africa. Now supposing that Messrs. Vanderkemp, Kircherer, and other pious missionaries, had, in addition to their endeavours to explain and enforce the belief of the peculiar doctrines, and to urge the practice of the precepts of Christianity, attempted to make their converts believe that this was the religion of their forefathers, in which they themselves had been instructed from their infancy, and which had been handed down from generation to generation for time immemorial, can we suppose that so much as one, even of the most ignorant Caffres, Boschmen, or of the inhabitants about zak river, would have believed them? The question answers itself. The attempt would have been ridiculous, and success impossible.

To suppose these books to have been forged in the days of Joshua, or of the elders who outlived him, would be the same as to suppose them forged in the days of Moses. It must then have been very well known whether these were the laws which were given by Moses, and whether the miracles, to which they refer as facts known to the whole nation, were real or pretended: After the death of Joshua and of those other elders who had lived in the days of Moses, who could have had authority enough to have imposed the belief of these facts, and the reception and obedience to these laws, upon the nation? Their deliverance out of Egypt, their journeyings through the wilderness, with the laws and constitutions appointed by Moses in the name of the Lord, as well as their introduction into Canaan, with the manner of their settlement in the promised land, must then have been comparatively fresh in their recollection. However ignorant the Jews are represented to have been in other respects, yet it appears that in every period they were pretty well acquainted with their own ancient history, particularly with what happened in the time of Moses. This was a portion of their

history, the knowledge of which great pains were taken to inculcate from generation to generation. Probably knowledge never was at a lower ebb in Israel than in the days of the Judges, but even then they appear to be well acquainted with their ancient history. It appears from Jephthah's answer to the king of the children of Ammon, Judges xi. 12. that in his time, the children of Israel were very well acquainted with these parts of their history. The same appears evident from the Song of Deborah and Barak, Judges v. 4, 5. and from the answer of Gideon to the Angel, chap. vi. 13. It cannot therefore be supposed that they could, at that time, have a body of laws imposed upon them as the laws of Moses; laws by which they had been governed ever since his time, had they never known of these laws before. Nor could they be made to believe that the extraordinary facts, to which these laws refer, were facts to which their whole nation had been witnesses, which they themselves had received from their ancestors, and the memory of which had been constantly preserved among them, if they never had heard of these facts; or that those particular rites and ordinances had been instituted by Moses and constantly solemnized in their nation ever since, in commemoration of these facts, if they had been, until that time, strangers both to the facts and to the laws and institutions which were pretended to be founded upon them. What renders this supposition still more improbable is that during that period there was for the most part no general governor in Israel who had authority over the whole nation as the kings had afterwards. The several tribes seem to have been very much independent of each other, and to have had a government within themselves. Few of the Judges appear to have exercised authority over all the tribes, nor were any of them Priests until the time of Eli. In such a state of things, how was it possible to impose a new body of laws and history upon the whole nation, especially laws and customs so different from the laws of all other nations, laws which enacted the severest penalties against those idolatrous customs which were universally prevalent among the surrounding nations; customs which, before the Babylonian-

ish captivity, the Israelites were at all times too prone to imitate, but, at no time did this predilection appear in a stronger point of light than during the period in question? If some one of the tribes might possibly have been induced to receive the new system, what prospect was there that these laws should be adopted by all as the genuine laws of Moses, and obligatory on the whole nation, when they were so contrary to their inclinations, had never been imposed on their nation before, and pretended to be founded upon a series of miraculous facts, to any knowledge of which they were total strangers? No authority short of that which Moses claimed in the name of his God, attested by such illustrious miracles as he is said to have wrought, could have prevailed with them to have received these laws.

After the age of the Judges, succeeded that of the Kings. David lived early in this period; and there is the fullest evidence from the history and writings of that great prince, that the law of Moses was, in his time, held in the highest veneration, as of divine authority, and that the facts recorded in the Mosaic history were universally believed and acknowledged. And, although some of the succeeding Kings deviated from the pure worship of God, by falling into the idolatries of the surrounding nations, yet the law never lost its authority, and under reforming princes and magistrates the observation of it was soon restored. And whenever the Israelites were visited with severe national judgments, they were made to confess that they came upon them as a just punishment for their deviations from the law of Moses, and for their compliance with the idolatrous customs of the neighbouring nations. One principal object aimed at by the Prophets, of whom there was a succession raised up from time to time during that period, was, in addition to their foretelling future events, to keep the people close to the observation of the law of Moses, and to cherish in their minds a constant remembrance of the extraordinary facts by which it was established; and upon the credit of the law and the facts, they still looked upon themselves to be God's peculiar people. Upon the whole, a regular series of satisfactory

evidence that these sacred books were written by Moses and could not possibly be the forgery of later times, may be traced back to the very time in which they were written.

It is still urged that whatever authority the Jewish sacred books might have among the Jews before the Babylonish captivity is altogether immaterial, and may be involved in some uncertainty : but there is, at least, great probability that the Jewish sacred books were lost during the captivity, a period in which they, in a great measure, lost their language and adopted that of their conquerors, and that the present sacred canon is the work of later ages, generally attributed to Ezra.

Upon this, I barely observe, that it is evident from the accounts which we have of the return of the captives from Babylon to Judea, that the Jews preserved their genealogies in Babylon ; and it is unreasonable to suppose that they would be less careful about their sacred books and their religion. If the Jews had been for changing their religion and their customs after the captivity, it is natural to suppose that it must have been with a view to the adoption of those of their conquerors, and of the country to which they had been carried captive. That they did not do this, in fact, is evident from this consideration, that after their return, the whole system of their worship, as well as of their civil polity, was in almost every respect different from that of the Babylonians. If therefore they learned their language, and afterwards used their characters in writing, as seems probable from some passages in the book of Ezra, they neither worshipped their gods, nor adopted their sacred rites ; they still adhered to their own. So far were they from adopting the religion of their conquerors, that it is evident that the captivity and desolation of their nation, which they justly looked upon as a punishment for their manifold revolts, idolatries, and deviations from their law, tended to increase and not diminish their veneration for it, as well as their abhorrence of those crimes which had been the causes of their sufferings ; as may be seen by comparing the history of the Jews before and after the captivity.

From the account which we have of Daniel's solemn supplication and fasting, when the time marked out by prophecy for their return arrived, it appears that he had the book of Jeremiah's prophecies before him; and the confession which he makes is remarkable. Dan. ix. 11, 12, 13. *All Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him and he hath confirmed his words which he spake against us, and against our Judges that judged us, as it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us.* From hence it plainly appears that there was a written law of Moses extant in his time, known to him and the people, which was regarded as the law of God himself, and that by disobeying this law, they had exposed themselves to the dreadful judgments denounced therein against transgressors. Soon after this, when a number of the captives had returned to Judea, under the conduct of Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the High Priest, we find them assembling for the purpose of celebrating the feast of Tabernacles, and offering the daily burnt offerings, as well as the offerings of the new moons and set feasts, according as it was written in the law of Moses the man of God. Ez. iii. 4, 5. This plainly shows that they had the written law of Moses with them. They also appointed the Priests and Levites in their courses, and the singers, and all the services of the Temple, according to the ordinances of David the man of God. Ez. iii. 1. The sacred Hymns and Psalms which had been before used in the Temple worship, were, therefore, not lost during the captivity. The Psalms carry in them the most evident marks of genuineness and authenticity, and the preservation of so many of their sacred songs, some of which contain an abridgement of their history, is a striking evidence of the care which they took of their sacred books during the captivity. The commission, also, which was given to Ezra by Artaxerxes, king of Persia, plainly supposes the law of Moses to be in being, and of the highest authority, as it empowers him to regulate every thing according to

that law. He is described in the commission, as a ready scribe in the law of Moses, as one greatly skilled in that law, and able to instruct others. Soon after Ezra, came Nehemiah, a great man in the Persian court, who was appointed governor of Judea. Every thing throughout his book discovers that both he and all the people professed the greatest veneration for the law of Moses. Upon the whole, it appears with all the evidence which the nature of the case can admit, and all the evidence necessary to satisfy an impartial enquirer after truth, that the Jewish sacred books and records were not lost during the Babylonish captivity, but that the Jews were in possession of them, and held them in the greatest veneration, before Ezra's arrival from Babylon. It would therefore be the wildest hypothesis imaginable to admit the supposition, even for a single moment, that he had it in his power, even had he been so wicked as to harbour the inclination, so to impose, not only upon the Jews who had returned to Judea, but upon all those who, either continued in Babylon, or were scattered abroad throughout the other parts of the vast Persian Empire, as to induce them all, with one consent, to receive those for their ancient laws, by which they had been always governed, and those for their ancient histories and sacred records which were not their ancient laws, histories, and records. The whole extent of Ezra's commission from Artaxerxes was to order things according to the law of Moses, and this he effected. On his arrival from Babylon he found several abuses, contrary to that law, countenanced by men of great power and interest; abuses in which several of the Priests, and a number of the chief rulers, as well as many of the common people were concerned. He accordingly undertook to regulate matters according to that law. And can we think that his regulations, particularly those in relation to the putting away of their strange wives, a point which so nearly touched so many, and some of them of principal note, both in their honour, interest and most tender affections, would have been tamely acquiesced in by the people, had it not been well understood that the laws and constitutions which he urged upon them were the true original

Laws of Moses, and had on them the stamp of divine authority.

With respect to the establishment of the sacred canon which is, by the Jewish historians, ascribed to Ezra, this is not to be understood as if the books were not reputed sacred, or were of no authority before. They were already well known and reputed sacred. They did not derive their authority from Ezra's acknowledging them, but he collected and published them because they were known and acknowledged to be authentic. Perhaps the supposition may be admitted, that some errors and variations had crept into certain copies of their sacred books, and that they needed to be revised. For this work Ezra was eminently qualified, both on account of his great skill in the law and his undoubted integrity, and, above all, on account of his being infallibly guided by the unerring spirit of inspiration; he being always esteemed by the Jews as a person divinely inspired. It is certain that the whole nation was sensible of Ezra's great merit and diligence, and ever after held him in the highest veneration. So fully convinced were they that these were their original sacred books, that they received them with the greatest applause, nor did they, unless we except Malachi, the last of the Prophets, who probably flourished after Ezra's time, ever afterwards pay the same regard to any subsequent writings of their own nation. Although the Sanhedrim still continued to have great authority among the Jews, yet that body never pretended to impose any other books upon them as divine, or as of equal authority with the sacred canon. Now, how came it to pass, that they made such a great difference between their sacred books and their other writings, that the authority of the one was owned by the whole nation and the other not? However the Jews might esteem the books called Apocrypha as valuable historical complements, or as good moral and pious writings, yet they never received them into their sacred canon. This shows that the Jews, however credulous they might be in other respects, were particularly exact and scrupulous in not receiving any books into their sacred canon, of the authenticity of which they had not the most satisfactory evidence.

Having thus pretty largely considered, and I think fully proved the divine authority of the books of Moses, (although not without some particular reference to the other books of the Old Testament,) we need now be the less particular on the evidences of the inspiration of the other sacred books. There is an evident connection throughout the whole, and the same arguments which prove the genuineness and authenticity of the Mosaic history and code of laws, serve equally to prove the divine authority of the other inspired writings. The book of Joshua is a continuation of the history of Israel, and of the wonders which God did among them. The books of Moses bring them to the borders of Canaan, and the book of Joshua gives an account of their introduction and settlement; so that by establishing the divine authority of the books of Moses, that of Joshua follows of course. In the book of Judges we have the history of another period. This likewise, contains a relation of facts which, like those recorded by Moses, were of a public nature, many of them obvious to the whole nation, and which, for that reason, would not have been received had they not been true. This book contains numerous attestations to the divine authority of the law of Moses, as God, throughout this period, governed them according to that law, and as they uniformly experienced seasons, either of prosperity or adversity, as the natural consequence of their obedience or disobedience; this period containing a history of their numerous revolts and rebellions, and of the frequent and severe chastisements which they underwent on account of their transgressions. As this book uniformly exhibits the most worthy and the most exalted views of God, constantly ascribing the glory of all their deliverances to him, and attributing the shame and disgrace of their numerous rebellions wholly to themselves, it is, on the whole, very little to the national honour of the Jews. So little is this part of their history calculated to flatter their vanity, or promote their national aggrandizement, that had it been untrue it never would have been received by the Jews.— Nothing short of the most stubborn and incontestible facts to support it, could have imposed the belief of such a nar-

rative upon the nation. The same observations are applicable to all the subsequent parts of their sacred history.— With respect to the other sacred writings of the Old Testament which may be distinguished into doctrinal, moral, devotional, and prophetic; these all suppose the divine authority of the law of Moses. The Old Testament Prophets were all zealous for their law and urged the people to reformation agreeable to this standard, not only by instructions and exhortations, but by prophetic denunciations of wrath against the impenitent and disobedient, at the same time laying much greater stress upon moral duties than upon ritual observances. The divine mission of the Prophets was confirmed by many unquestionable predictions of future events, as I may attempt to show more at large in another discourse. These predictions generally related to events of a most contingent nature. Many of them received their accomplishment in the age, and very near the time in which they were uttered, and so were, to the people of that day, proofs of the divine mission of the Prophets. Others have long since had their accomplishment, and have given, to succeeding generations, proofs of the divine mission of the Prophets which their cotemporaries had not; some are fulfilling at this day, and the whole will, no doubt, be accomplished in due time.— The disagreeable idea which the prophetic writings give of the Jewish national character, and the freedom and boldness with which they reprove the vices of all ranks, of kings, princes, priests, and people, also furnishes proofs of their divine mission. The prophecies were not written, any more than their histories, with a view to flatter the vanity of the Jewish nation. They give us a striking representation, both of their enormous vices and of their ingratitude to the Lord's messengers. Had it not been on account of their sacred regard to truth, in how different a point of light would they have set many things? Like the false Prophets, they would have prophesied smooth things, and concealed such unpalatable truths as exposed them to the vengeance of the people. But as my design is not to insist upon the argument from prophe-

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cy at this time, I shall only add, that all the other books were received as divine by the same authority which acknowledged the law of Moses. All therefore have the same claim to be acknowledged as divine inspiration.

I shall barely notice one observation farther, before I dismifs the subject of the divine authority of the Old Testament, and that is that there is an apparent unity of design throughout the whole of the sacred writings. A plan appears to have been laid in the beginning, which gradually unfolds to our view, and receives additional light, from time to time, as fast as the nature of the dispensation will admit, i. e. gradually to pave the way for a more perfect dispensation, after the coming of the Messiah. This plan for the salvation of man, which has been brought to maturity under the gospel dispensation, was first intimated in that promise made to our first parents that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. It was farther opened by the institution of sacrifices, and by additional discoveries made to Noah; but was still farther developed in the covenant made with Abraham, and afterwards more fully by the separation of the Jews, as a distinct people from the rest of mankind. The design was farther unfolded under the Mosaic economy, by a variety of institutions which were typical of good things to come. The sacred history, and even those genealogies which are now looked upon by many so jejune, barren, and useless, all contributed to the same end, and tended to show the exact fulfilment of the ancient promises, and that the Messiah actually came of that tribe and family, out of which it was foretold that he should arise. This plan still farther opens up to view in the writings of the Prophets. They gave additional discoveries of the Messiah, by describing, particularly, the character of him who was to come, and by foretelling various circumstances in relation to his coming, his life, death, resurrection and ascension. These writings are evidently calculated to pave the way for his coming, and to prepare both Jews and Gentiles for his reception, as well as for the introduction of the more glorious and spiritual dispensation of the New Testament, wherein life

and immortality are more eminently brought to light.— Hence all things that were written, either in the law of Moses, the Psalms or the Prophets concerning the Messiah, are said to have their accomplishment in Jesus of Nazareth.

I shall dismiss the subject of the evidences of the divine authority and inspiration of the Old Testament with two or three very brief reflections.

1st. Hence we see that, however the idea may be ridiculed by unbelievers, the Jews were really a people who were peculiarly favoured and privileged by heaven, above the other nations of the world. At a time when all other nations were sunk into the grossest idolatry, they were favoured with a revelation of God's will by which they arrived at the true knowledge, and were directed in the right mode of worshipping God. Whatever superior privileges we may enjoy, in having a more clear revelation of God's will, and in being delivered from a burthensome yoke of ceremonies, yet, compared with other nations, their privileges were so great that the Psalmist might, with propriety say, *God hath not dealt so with any nation, praise ye the Lord.* And the Apostle adds, *What advantage hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way, chiefly because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.* But the great and distinguishing privilege of the Jewish nation was, that in addition to the knowledge and worship of the true God, their revelation contained the promise of the Messiah, and in this promise was included a knowledge of the way in which offenders might be pardoned and restored to the divine favour, while others who had only nature's light, whatever impressions they might have of divine displeasure, were left in awful uncertainty, whether divine wrath could be appeased at all, and if it could in what way? To the Jews pertained *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 forever, Amen.*

2dly. Hence we learn the blindness of the Jews who, although they own the divine inspiration of the Old Testament, yet reject the New; own the promises which hold up to view a Messiah to come, yet reject the Messiah promised. The two Testaments are inseparably connected together, as I shall have occasion more fully to show in another discourse. The gospel was preached to Abraham. The covenant made with him was a covenant confirmed of God in Christ, which the law could not disannul, to make the promise of none effect. Still, with this light in their hands, sufficient to direct them to the true Messiah, they despise and reject him. Since the coming of the Messiah the Jewish religion has essentially changed its nature. The promises led them to expect a Messiah who was to save his people from their sins: but the Messiah whom they look for, is not one who is calculated to promote the greatest happiness of the human race, but only to advance the temporal happiness and glory of their nation. Blindness in part has happened unto Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come.

3dly. Hence we learn that, for christians to set light by, or neglect the scriptures of the Old Testament, is extremely wrong, and injurious to the cause of christianity. The writings of Moses and the Prophets were worthy to be heard and regarded in our Saviour's time. They are so still. Although the evidences of the divine authority and inspiration of either Testament are sufficiently clear standing singly and alone, yet, if we take them in their connexion together, it serves to cast additional light upon the whole, to observe that a unity of design runs through both Testaments, and that they mutually explain and confirm each other. The gospel dispensation, it is true, exceeds the Jewish in glory. The ancient Patriarchs all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, were persuaded of them and embraced them, God having provided some better things for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. But it is still a pleasing reflection for christians to consider themselves as of the same body with Abraham, Isaac, and Ja-

cob ; with Prophets and other holy men whose eyes did not see the things which we see, nor their ears hear the things which we hear. Let us remember that all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, and that there is no part but what, when rightly improved, tends to make men wise to salvation.

DISCOURSE IV.

2 PETER i. 16.

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye witnesses of his majesty.

IN a former discourse I endeavoured to bring into view some of the evidences tending to prove that the writings of Moses and the Prophets, or the sacred books of the Old Testament, are in reality what they profess to be, i. e. worthy to be received and regarded as a revelation from God. The particular purpose intended in speaking from the passage of scripture now read, is to collect and exhibit some of the principal facts which establish the divine authority of the New Testament, and of the christian religion, as a different, and a more perfect dispensation than the Jewish. As the divine authority and inspiration of the New Testament, are so plainly deducible from that of the Old, that both must either stand or fall together, little more might seem necessary than to show how the writings of Moses and the Prophets confirm and establish the New Testament. But, in addition to evidences derived from that source, the truth of the New Testament is established by a great variety of invincible matters of fact, some of which I shall, at this time, endeavour to bring into view. In the preceding part of this chapter, the Apostle Peter gives a brief summary of the christian faith and practice, and then, with great force and pathos, urges upon professed christians the necessity of the exercise of the christian graces, and of the practice of christian duties, that they might thereby make their calling and election sure, and that an entrance might be administered, abundantly, into

the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He considers the vast importance of those things which immediately concern the christian faith and practice, as a motive sufficiently powerful to excite him to diligence in frequently stirring up their minds by way of remembrance of those things, with which they had been before, in some measure, acquainted. And as he felt that he must shortly put off this tabernacle, he declares his resolution to persevere in this diligence, or to continue stirring up their minds by way of remembrance, so long as he was in the body, so that, after his decease, these things might be fresh in their recollection, and have the desired effect. In the passage prefixed to this discourse he adds a reason of this diligence, and certainly no other motive is necessary to stir up the faithful minister to the discharge of his duty than a consideration of the importance of the things themselves, which are thus, again and again inculcated. q. d. The things which I thus press upon you must be considered as of the last importance, and worthy to be repeatedly and importunately urged if true. I need therefore make no other apology for my importunity than to declare that the gospel which we preach, and which we urge you to believe, is no human fiction artificially contrived, no cunningly devised fable; but the things are equally true as they are important. These things which we declare unto you concerning the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, have not been received by us on hearsay testimony; but we the Apostles have been eye-witnesses of his majesty. We have set under his teaching during his personal ministry, we have been witnesses of his godlike miracles, we were with him at his death, and saw and conversed with him frequently after his resurrection. We were also present at his ascension into heaven, and received commission from him to go and preach this gospel to every creature.

The leading principles assumed in the New Testament, and the principal facts on the full establishment of which that part of the sacred canon depends, are such as these— That Jesus of Nazareth was that true Messiah, so long foretold by holy men of God during the Old Testament

dispensation.—That he appeared in the world in the fullness of time, and at the very period which the Prophets had foretold.—That he was born of a virgin.—That his divine authority and mission were confirmed by attestations from heaven. Such was that of the Angel to the Shepherds at his birth: *Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour which is Christ the Lord.* And that at his Baptism, *The Holy Ghost descended in bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven which said thou art my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.*—This divine authority and mission were still more abundantly confirmed by a series of most stupendous miracles, many of them done in the most public manner, and all of them such as evidenced the power of God.—That he professed to be the Messiah whom the Prophets had foretold, and appealed to the works which he did as a proof of the validity of his pretensions.—That after being condemned by Pilate, at the instigation of the Jews, he was crucified, dead and buried.—That he rose again from the dead on the third day, thereby declaring and proving himself to be the son of God, the Saviour of the world.—That after his resurrection he commissioned his Apostles to preach the gospel or remission of sins through his blood, to every creature; thereby abolishing the distinction between Jews and Gentiles.—That, for the confirmation of their mission and authority, he endued his Apostles with the gift of tongues, and with the power of working miracles in his name.—That, in consequence of these things, christianity prevailed, by the force of divine truth alone, applied to the hearts of men by the holy spirit, against worldly power and policy.

If these facts can be established it will, undoubtedly, prove the christian religion to be divine in its original, or that the gospel is no cunningly devised fable. The design of the present discourse is to produce evidence that these facts are really true.

In order to exhibit the evidence of these facts, and consequently the evidences of the christian religion as revealed in the New Testament, in as clear and concise a manner as I can, I shall attempt to show,

I. That the sacred books of the New Testament were really written by the persons whose names they bear, and are not the forgery of later ages.—II. That the facts recorded in these sacred books are attested by a sufficient number of unexceptionable witnesses.—III. That the existence of the christian religion in the world, and in a special manner, its amazing spread during the apostolic age, can in no other way be accounted for, than by admitting its truth.—IV. All these testimonies are farther confirmed by the effects which the christian religion has had, and still continues to have on the hearts and lives of mankind.

I. That the sacred books of the New Testament were written by the men whose names they bear, and are not the invention of later ages.

Nothing more is, at this time, necessary to prove this than the universal consent of all antiquity. This we have transmitted to us both by friends and enemies. Writers who were in part, cotemporary with the Apostles, and others who lived very soon after the apostolic age, have plain references to the gospels which we now have, and speak of them as known and acknowledged to be the genuine writings of the Apostles. By an argument a priori, it would seem to be, at least highly probable that the same spirit which, in such a remarkable manner, qualified the Apostles to preach the gospel, and to bear witness to the resurrection of Christ in every nation of the known world, would also, both enable and incline them to deliver those doctrines and precepts on which the faith and practice of the church in after times were to be established, down to posterity, in a manner the least liable to uncertainty and error. This was undoubtedly to commit them to writing. Accordingly these writings have been uniformly ascribed to the Apostles by the universal consent of antiquity, at a time when, had there been any grounds for a suspicion of fraud or forgery, the means of detection were at hand.—Barnabas, Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, and others who all lived in the Apostles days, have, in their writings, plain references to the gospels which we now have. And in the age immediately succeeding the apostolic, we find them universally received and acknowledged in the christ

tian church, as might easily be made to appear by indisputable historical evidence. There are many undoubted writings of the second century extant in our time, from which those who have had opportunities of research, have produced express testimonies that the four gospels were ever considered and owned by the church as truly apostolical.

Nothing, however, has a more direct tendency to put this matter out of all dispute than the confession of adversaries. The enemies of the christian religion, who lived in or near the apostolic age, were both numerous and powerful, and many of them men of great learning and acuteness. They had the best possible opportunities to know whether these books were the genuine writings of the Apostles, or the spurious invention of other men. To have found them spurious, would have given them the greatest advantage against christianity. As they were disposed to avail themselves of every circumstance favourable to their views, they would not have omitted one which would have had such a peculiar tendency to promote their own cause, and to discredit that of their adversaries. Yet so far from attempting to avail themselves of this advantage, heathen writers who lived nearest the apostolic age, and in places where the professors of christianity were the most numerous, expressly acknowledge that the books of the Evangelists were written by Christ's own disciples. Celsus, than whom the christian religion never had a more bitter adversary, and who lived in the second century, speaks of Jesus the author of the christian religion, as having lived but a few years before, and after mentioning many things recorded in the four Evangelists concerning the birth, life, miracles, sufferings, death and resurrection of Christ, tells the christians, "These things have we produced out of your own writings." It is true he does all he can to ridicule and expose them. But he uniformly admits them to be written by Christ's own disciples who lived and conversed with him. To this testimony may be added that of the Emperor Julian, commonly called the Apostate, because he had been educated in the christian religion, and afterwards renounced it. He was universally admitted to be a person of great learning and a-

curse, and no doubt, had had an opportunity of reading whatever had been written against christianity before his time. Yet he never pretends to contest the fact, that the gospels were written by the persons whose names they bear, and expressly mentions Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, as the authors of the books which go by their respective names. Had either he or Celsus met with any thing like a proof, or even a presumption that these books, so generally received among christians, were neither written by Christ's immediate disciples nor in the apostolic age, but were compiled afterwards and falsely ascribed to the Apostles, no doubt they would have improved so important an advantage to the utmost. Undoubtedly the Jews must possess every requisite advantage to know whether these books were, or were not written by Christ's own disciples. In their writings against christianity they make frequent mention of the evangelists, but never once insinuate that the gospels were not written by those whose names they bear. Thus it appears, both from the testimony of friends and the acknowledgement of adversaries, that the gospels were written in the apostolic age, the very age and country in which the events therein recorded are said to have taken place. The same observations are also applicable to the other books of the New Testament.

But it is not my intention to rely altogether, or even principally, on evidence from testimony. It will set the matter in a still more striking point of view, to consider the conclusive evidence of genuineness and authenticity which appears in these writings themselves. No task is more difficult for a writer, even of the first talents and erudition, than to pass for a real character one which is only assumed; especially to pass for a character who lived one, two, or three centuries before he was born. It will be very difficult indeed, if not wholly impracticable, for him, with his utmost care and caution, to avoid betraying his real character. If he enters largely into a relation of facts, or attempts a particular description of the manners and customs of a preceding age, pretending it to be his own time, it will be almost impossible for him to avoid falling into a great variety of mistakes and inconsistencies, by either

relating facts, or alluding to customs of a more modern date than the period in which he pretends to have lived, and of which he professes to write. This difficulty must have been insurmountable to the writers of the New Testament, had they been impostors. Neither their character or standing in society, their education, or the extent of their information, could have qualified them for a successful imposition of this kind. Yet, although we find in their writings frequent allusions, both to facts and customs of the age, not so much as a single mistake of that kind has been pointed out. The truth and accuracy with which they have written upon even a vast number of minute articles, not so immediately connected with their main subject, will, with every person qualified to judge, be an unanswerable argument in favor of the genuineness of their writings.* Three of the Evangelists make particular mention of our Saviour's predictions relating to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, yet we do not find, in any book of the New Testament, mention made that these predictions had been accomplished. This was an event so remarkable, and the slaughter and devastation with which it was accompanied so unparalleled, that, had it taken place before the books of the New Testament were written, it can scarcely be supposed but some of the writers would have mentioned it. This awful calamity befel the Jewish nation only about forty years after our Saviour's crucifixion. By comparing the beginning of St. Luke's gospel with the beginning of the acts of the Apostles, it appears that he wrote the gospel before he wrote the acts. But it is evident that the latter was written in the apostolic age, and before the death of St. Paul. From several passages in that book, compared with others in some of Paul's epistles, it is evident that the writer was the companion of St. Paul in his travels, particularly in his dangerous voyage to Rome, with an account of which, and his preaching at Rome, two full years, in his own hired house, the book

* Vide Dr. Dwight's discourse on the genuineness and authenticity of the New Testament, page 12, 13.

ends, taking no notice of his after travels, labours, sufferings, and martyrdom, which it undoubtedly would have done, as well as of that of Stephen and James, the less, had it been written after the event. It is a great proof of the high veneration which the first christians had of these writings, and of their extreme carefulness not to insert any thing in them not originally there, that no one ever pretended to make supplementary additions to that book, either with regard to Paul or any of the rest of the Apostles.

It is also worthy of observation that the total dissimilarity in respect to style or manner of writing, which there is between the sacred books of the New Testament, and any other writings of the first, second, or third centuries, affords an argument nearly conclusive, against the idea that these books are the complement of an age later than the apostolic. Some fragments of christian writers of the first century, other than those of the Apostles, are handed down to our time, and of those of the second and third centuries they are abundant. In none of these shall we find, either for matter or manner, the most distant resemblance to the sacred writings. It is true that they often refer to these records, and whatever of worth or excellence there is in them, is borrowed from that sacred fountain. But their manner of writing falls every way so short of the sacred writings, that it is impossible any of them should have been able to effect such a forgery.

The character also which is given of Jesus of Nazareth in the New Testament is, in many of its leading features, so totally different from any other real living character which ever appeared in the world, that it is, in the very nature of things, impossible that it should be feigned, or that the Evangelists could have succeeded in delineating it on any other principle than that it was real, and that they, as saith our text, had been eye witnesses of his majesty.* Equally if not more impracticable would it be for a man or men, who lived a century or two afterwards, to feign such a character. It is generally considered as a task somewhat

* Dwight, supra, page 44.

difficult, to draw a character according to nature, even where we have a living model before our eyes. Here there was none, unless the reality of the character is admitted. The Evangelists had the portraits of Prophets, and of other holy men, whose history is recorded in the Old Testament, on which to form their models. Still the character of Jesus of Nazareth is so totally dissimilar from all these, in many of its essential features, that it would be impossible for the most fertile imagination to supply the defect.* What godlike majesty, and what external poverty and meanness; what apparent inconsistency, but at the same time, what admirable harmony in relation to the accomplishment of the great ends for which he came into the world, do we find in the character of Jesus of Nazareth? On the one hand we see him professing to be the Son of God, claiming divine honours, declaring that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father.

* Various testimonies to the excellent character of Christ might be selected from ancient authors, Jewish and Heathen; some of which are mentioned in this work. But the following testimony of the celebrated Rousseau, a distinguished infidel philosopher and writer, of the last century, both to the character of Christ, and the superior excellence of the New Testament, is so remarkable as to deserve a place in a note, as a singular evidence of the force of truth, even over infidelity itself. Were it not for the concluding sentence of the passage, who would believe the writer to be an infidel?

“ I acknowledge to you, (says he) that the majesty of
 “ the scriptures astonishes me, and the sanctity of the gos-
 “ pel fills me with rapture. Look into the writings of
 “ the philosophers with all their pomp and parade, how
 “ trivial they appear when compared with the sacred vol-
 “ ume. Is it possible that a book, so simple and yet so
 “ sublime should be the work of man? Is it possible that
 “ he whose history it contains should himself be a mere
 “ man? Is the style that of an enthusiast, or of a sectary
 “ inflated with ambition? What sweetness, what purity is

On the other hand we behold him in circumstances of such extreme indigence as to be beholden to the hand of charity for his daily subsistence. *Foxes, saith he, have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.* On the one hand, causing the winds and waves to obey him, healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind, causing the lame to walk, and feeding thousands of people in a miraculous manner in a wilderness, with a few loaves and fishes; when the quantity of fragments which remained was much more considerable than all that had been prepared. On the other, betraying all the innocent weakness of human nature; weeping with those who wept, suffering from hunger and weariness, betrayed by a treacherous friend into the hands of his implacable enemies, in such agony in the garden, on the prospect of his sufferings, as to sweat great drops of blood, scourged, mocked, spit upon, and finally nailed to the ac-

his morals! What force, what persuasion in his instructions! His maxims how sublime! His discourses how wise and profound! Such presence of mind, such beauty and precision in his answers! Such empire over his passions! Where is the man or the philosopher who knows how to act, to suffer and to die without weakness or ostentation? Plato in his picture of the imaginary just man, covered with all the opprobriousness of guilt, and worthy of every reward of virtue, gives us an excellent representation of Christ. So striking is the resemblance that all the Fathers saw it, and indeed there is no such thing as mistaking it. What prejudice, what blindness, to compare the offspring of Sophronisca to the son of Mary! How immense the difference between these two! Socrates, dying without pain and without ignominy, found it easy to support his character to the very last, and if his life had not been honoured with so gentle a death we might have doubted whether Socrates, with all his understanding, was any thing more than a sophist. You will say he invented a system of moral philosophy. Others had practised it before his

curfed tree, and during the period of his sharpeft fufferings, forfaken by his difciples, as well as deprived of the wonted manifeftations of his Father's love. Now as fuch a character, though perfectly agreeable to what the Prophets had foretold, was, in many of its leading features, diametrically oppofite to what the Jewish nation, and even to what the Apoftles themfelves expected in the Mefiah, it was in the nature of things impoffible that the Evangelifts fhould have been able to draw it, had it not been real. Equally impoffible is it that the accounts of this character, recorded in the New Teftament, fhould be the forgery of later ages. If therefore, the character of Jefus of Nazareth, which is drawn in the New Teftament, is real and not fictitious, then the gofpel is no cunningly devifed fable.

It deferves to be farther remarked that all the difficulties which were fuggelted, as in the way of forging the

“ time. He only related what they had performed, and
 “ drew lectures from their example. Ariftides had been
 “ juft, before Socrates told us what juftice was. Leoni-
 “ das had facrificed his life for the love of his country be-
 “ fore Socrates had made the love of our country a duty;
 “ Sparta was sober before Socrates commended fobriety;
 “ Before he had given a definition of virtue, Greece a-
 “ bounded with virtuous men. But of whom did Chrift
 “ borrow that pure and fublime morality which he and he
 “ only taught by word and example? From the centre of
 “ the moft extravagant fanaticifm, (meaning Judea,) the
 “ highft wifdom made itfelf heard, and the vileft of na-
 “ tions was honoured with the fimplicity of the moft he-
 “ roic virtues. The death of Socrates, philofophifing
 “ coolly among his friends, is the eafieft that can be defir-
 “ ed; that of Chrift, expiring in the midft of torments,
 “ abufed, fcorned and detefted by a whole people, is the
 “ moft dreadful that can be apprehended. Socrates tak-
 “ ing the poisonous draught, returns thanks to the perfon
 “ who, with tears in his eyes, presents it to him. Chrift
 “ in the midft of his moft exquisite torments, prays for

law of Moses, and imposing it upon the Israeites many ages after his day, do as forcibly apply to prevent a forgery in the case under consideration. If we suppose these writings not to be the genuine writings of the Apostles, or of the apostolic age, but the forgery of other men or of later ages, the question then immediately occurs, when and by whom have they been forged? Although, after the death of the Apostles, many pretended gospels, epistles, &c. appeared which were ascribed to them, yet the forgery was almost immediately detected. We have no proof that these spurious writings were ever received as canonical, but undoubted evidence that they were not. Even to this day many of them can be traced up to the time of their forgery, and some of them to the very persons who forged them. Do we find any thing like this so much as pretended with respect to the apostolic writings? Surely not. On the other hand these canonical

“ his bloody executioners. Yes, if Socrates lived and died like a philosopher, Christ lived and died like a God.

“ Shall we say that the evangelic history was invented at pleasure? My friend, inventions are not made after that manner, and Socrates’ history, of which nobody entertains a doubt, is not so well attested as that of Christ. Upon the whole, it is removing the difficulty farther back without solving it; for it would be much harder to conceive that a number of men should have joined together to fabricate this book, than that a single person should furnish out the subject to its authors.— Jewish writers never would have fallen into that style, or that system of morality, and the gospel has such strong and such inimitable marks of truth, that the inventor would be more surprising than the hero. Yet notwithstanding all this, this same gospel abounds with things so incredible and so repugnant to reason, that it is impossible for any man of sense either to conceive or admit them.”—Rosseau’s *Emilius*, vol. 2, page 89, London edition, 1763.

Books were kept with the most scrupulous religious care by the several churches, or societies of christians, who did not, and on their principles could not, presume to add or curtail the least tittle. Copies of them were immediately dispersed throughout the christian world, and translations of them made into different languages, and Tertullian informs us, that in his time, the originals of the several epistles were kept in the churches to which they were directed. Indeed it appears impossible in the nature of things that, had such a forgery been attempted, it could have escaped detection. Take one of Paul's epistles, that to the Corinthians, for an example. Can it be imagined that the Corinthians would have received as genuine, an epistle not delivered unto them until many years after the death of the Apostle whose name it bore, yet appearing from circumstances therein mentioned, to have been written several years before his death? Is it not to be presumed that, in a matter of such importance not only to them but to the whole church, they would have demanded of the person who produced it how he came by it? How he knew it to be a genuine epistle of St. Paul, and addressed to them? Why was it not sent at the time it was written, especially as it appears from the epistle itself that it was written partly on a particular occasion, on account of some disturbances and irregularities which had crept into that church, and in answer to some questions proposed to that Apostle, relating to matters which required a speedy reformation? These questions, and many more, which must have been suggested by the particulars to which the epistle refers, the Corinthians would, in common prudence, have asked. And if an impostor did not answer these questions in a satisfactory manner, as it is reasonable to suppose he could not, can it be believed that the Corinthians would have admitted, on his bare word, or even on some probable presumptive evidence, an epistle which, if they acknowledged to have been written by St. Paul, they must from that time have regarded as an infallible rule of their faith and practice? Equally difficult and impracticable would have been a forgery of any of the other sacred books.

Should any person, at this day, suggest a doubt whether the works generally ascribed to Cicero, Virgil, Horace, Homer, Xenophon, Livy, Tacitus, or any of the other equally celebrated poets or historians of antiquity, were not written by the persons whose names they bear, or were the forgery of later ages, the bare expression of such an opinion or insinuation would be sufficient to render a man, making any pretensions to science, ridiculous. The universal consent of antiquity has ever been viewed as sufficient evidence. Surely the internal marks of genuineness and originality in these writings, are neither so clear or convincing, nor have we historical evidence so full and complete, that these books are the real works of the authors whose names they bear, as that the four gospels were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and the several epistles by those whose names are inscribed on them. With greater appearance of reason then, might it be pretended, that the Greek and Roman classics are the impudent forgeries of the ninth, tenth, or eleventh centuries, than that the sacred writings of the New Testament are the complement of persons who lived one, two, or three centuries after the Apostles. Indeed, the writings of the Apostles and Evangelists have all the marks of genuineness and authenticity that can be desired. And were it not that a kind of evidence is required, which is in the nature of things impracticable, and which is neither required or expected to establish us in the belief of any other ancient fact whatsoever, there would be an immediate end of doubting on this subject.

I proceed to observe,

II. That the facts recorded in the sacred writings of the New Testament, are attested by a sufficient number of unexceptionable witnesses.

Before we proceed to consider the number and characters of the witnesses, it is necessary to observe that many of the principal facts which attest Christ's divine mission, and establish the validity of his claim to be the true Messiah, were facts of a public nature. Christ's personal ministry, while he was here upon earth, was a public thing. He taught openly in the synagogues of the Jews, and in the temple at Jerusalem, as well as throughout the regions

of Galilee. He chose for some of the most peculiar seasons of his teaching, the time of the Jewish set feasts, when the greatest concourse of people was collected together. When the high priest, before whom he was arraigned, questioned him concerning his disciples and his doctrine, he appeals to his public ministry, John xviii. 20, 21, *Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret I have said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them; behold, they know what I said.* Christ's miracles were also, many of them, wrought in public, before multitudes, not merely of his friends, but some of them his inveterate enemies. The accounts of them were also published in the same age, and in the same country where they were wrought, where, neither opportunity nor inclination could be wanting to detect an imposture. They were such miracles as were obvious to the senses, and could not have their foundation in a deception. Such was his turning water into wine at Cana in Galilee. Such was his feeding, in a miraculous manner, five thousand at one time and four thousand at another. Such was his raising the dead, as in the case of Lazarus of Bethany, Jairus' daughter, and the widow's son at Nain; and of the same nature was his causing the lame to walk, the dumb to speak, and the blind to see.— To these miracles, as facts publicly known, he appeals, in order to prove himself to be the true Messiah, in the answer to the enquiry of John Baptist: *Art thou he that should come, or look we for another? Jesus answering, said unto them, Go your way and tell John what things ye have seen and heard, how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, to the poor the gospel is preached.* So far were his adversaries from discovering any fraud, that they were sometimes even compelled to own the reality of his miracles. *What do we, for this man doeth many miracles. When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than this man hath done?* are confessions of his adversaries.* All the

* The following remarks, applicable to the miracles of

various circumstances which attended his sufferings and death, were also of a public nature, such as his being betrayed by Judas, his being arraigned before the chief priests, his being condemned by Pilate, and his crucifixion. When our Lord, after his resurrection, joined himself to the two disciples, as they travelled to Emmaus, and made as if he had been a stranger to the topic of their discourse which they held by the way, they were astonished and said unto him, *Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass in these days?* i. e. the topic of their conversation, which was concerning Christ's crucifixion, was a matter of public notoriety, which was in every person's mouth. Many things which happened after his resurrection were also

Christ in particular, are subjoined as containing some farther illustration of the proof derived from miracles. It is an undeniable fact that the authority of both Testaments has been attested by a series of unquestionable miracles. There was, nevertheless, a striking difference in the general complexion of the miracles wrought, each series being adapted to the peculiar nature of the respective dispensations, and the latter, viz. the miracles of Christ, calculated to prove, not merely that he was a teacher sent from God, but that he was the true Messiah, the Saviour of the world. The principal part of the miracles of the Old Testament were of the awful or terrific kind, wrought not only for the purpose of manifesting the power of God, and attesting the divine mission of Moses, but for inflicting a just and exemplary punishment upon obstinate offenders. Such were the miracles wrought by Moses in Egypt, and at the Red Sea, so far as the Egyptians were the subjects. Such were many of the miracles wrought in the wilderness, particularly in the death of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and of the two hundred and fifty men who offered strange fire before the Lord. Such were also the miracles wrought by the Prophet Elijah, in calling repeatedly for fire from heaven to consume the captain of fifty with his fifty. All the miracles, also, which were

public. The remarkable descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of pentecost, accompanied with the gift of tongues, by which all that variety of people distinguished by the respective names of Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and in Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphilia, in Egypt and the parts of Lybia about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and Profelytes, Cretes and Arabians, all heard the Apostles speak in their own tongues the wonderful works of God, were events which did not happen in a corner. The teaching and preaching of the Apostles, with the many notable miracles done by their hands, in healing all manner of diseases among the people, in the name of Jesus, were also facts publicly known

wrought at the giving of the law, were calculated to inspire terror, and adapted to the genius of the more rigorous legal dispensation. It is true there were some exceptions among the miracles of the Old Testament, and there was always a mixture of mercy to God's people, blended with those which were the most terrible; yet it was the peculiar property of Christ's miracles to be all adapted to the nature of the gospel dispensation, and calculated to supply the wants, and alleviate the distresses of mankind. Such were his miraculous feeding of the hungry, healing the sick, and causing the lame to walk, the blind to see, the dumb to speak, and the deaf to hear, and, in certain instances, raising the dead. These were, without doubt, emblematical of the more mild dispensation of the gospel, and of the benevolent errand for which he came into the world. From this peculiar property of his miracles it was, that when the disciples, resenting the unworthy treatment which their master received, in one instance, asked him saying, *Lord shall we not call down fire from heaven to destroy them, as Elias did, he rebuked them saying, ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.* He tells them that *the Son of man came not to destroy men's lives but to save.* With the exception of the case of Ananias and Sapphira, and of Elymas the forcerer, the miracles wrought by the A-

Had not the facts stated, been true, they were of such a nature that their falacy might have been easily detected. It was an object of great consequence to the opponents of the christian religion, that they should be disproved. For the purpose of effecting a discovery of their falsehood, had they not been true, they were deficient neither in power, in talents, nor in inclination. It is therefore evidence sufficient to establish the authenticity of these facts, that, although of public notoriety, no one of them was ever disproved. Had any such detection of fraud or imposture been made, so many monuments, both of Jewish and heathen antiquities of that age, are handed down to us, that some accounts of such a discovery would have been transmitted. That neither any such account, nor any refer-

postles were also all of the same complexion. That, however, which was, in a more peculiar manner, a characteristic of the difference between the miracles of Christ and those of other inspired men, whether Prophets or Apostles, was the manner in which they were wrought. Neither Moses nor the Prophets possessed originally the power of working miracles at all times, or of working what miracles they pleased and when they pleased. Moses made no pretensions to working miracles himself. It was God who wrought the miracle, and Moses only announced that such and such a work would be done. The Prophets Elijah and Elisha also wrought miracles by calling upon God, but made no pretensions to the glory of working them themselves. The Apostles also wrought many miracles, but expressly disclaimed the idea of working them either in their own name or by their own power, declaring that they wrought them in the name of Jesus alone. God never so subjected the course of nature to either Prophets or Apostles as to enable them to work miracles when they pleased, by their own word or command, and in all the miracles wherein their ministry was used, care was taken that the glory of whatever was done should redound to God alone. But, by the miraculous works, wrought by Jesus of Nazareth, he made it manifest that

ence to such a one, now supposed to have been lost, has been handed down to posterity, affords conclusive evidence that, as no such discovery was ever made, so no account of it could be published. Doubtless the chief priests would have been exceedingly glad to have made such a discovery, and would have laid hold of it with avidity, as a vindication of their conduct in crucifying the Lord of glory. That they did not so much as make the attempt, affords conclusive proof that the accounts contained in the New Testament, were such stubborn and incontestible facts that they could not be contradicted.

Although it is not my intention to multiply testimony in favor of christianity, either from Jews or Heathens, but to rest its defence principally upon evidences arising

he had an absolute power over the course of nature; over the spiritual and invisible as well as over the material world; over the bodies and over the souls of men. He wrought miracles, not merely occasionally, but in a constant succession, from the beginning to the end of his ministry. He wrought them at all times by his own power, and men repeatedly came unto him that he might work miracles for them, in the firm faith or belief that he was able to do what they required, and this faith he constantly encouraged. The leper said, *Lord if thou wilt thou canst make me clean.* He believed that he could work miracles when he pleased and our Lord approves of his faith. *Speak the word only and my servant shall be healed,* saith the centurion, Matt. viii. 8. *My daughter is even now dead, but come and lay thy hand on her and she shall live,* saith the ruler, Matt. ix. 18. *If I may but touch his garment I shall be whole,* saith the woman who had the bloody issue, ver. 21. *Believe ye that I am able to do this,* says he to the two blind men who came to him that their eyes might be opened, ver. 28. *They say unto him yea Lord.* He also cast out devils by his own power and authority, Mark, i. 27. *With authority he commandeth the unclean spirits and they obey him.* Even the winds and waves were also subject to his power. He speaks of his miracles as works done by himself. He declares himself to be a fellow with

out of the New Testament itself, yet it may serve as an additional testimony to some of the principal facts, on the truth of which the christian religion is founded, to find them attested by enemies. Josephus, the noted Jewish historian, who wrote his history, probably between forty and fifty years after the crucifixion, and soon after the destruction of Jerusalem, although he, for the most part, studiously avoids making any mention of Christ or of christianity, yet gives this honourable testimony to its founder. "At this time (says he) lived Jesus, a wise man, "if we may call him a man, for he did wonderful things, "and was a teacher of men, and had many, both Jews "and Gentiles, his followers. This was Christ who, being accused by the princes of our nation, was crucified. "Nevertheless they who loved him from the first, did not "cease to love him. For he appeared again to them on "the third day, as the divine Prophets had foretold this

God in working. *My Father worketh hitherto and I work,* John v. 17. *For whatsoever things the Father doth, these also doeth the Son likewise,* ver. 19. And our Lord, as one having power in and of himself, gave power to his disciples, and they wrought miracles in his name. To this distinguishing trait in the manner of his working miracles, our blessed Lord appeals in his reply to the Messengers of John Baptist, Matt. xi. 4, 5, and Luk. vii. 22. When he speaks of his own power of working miracles, he does not mean merely such a power as Prophets had had formerly, and which his disciples then had in some instances, and his Apostles had more abundantly afterwards. This might have been sufficient to have proved him a Prophet or a teacher sent from God, but would not have been an answer to John's enquiry. He had no doubts on this head, and his question was not whether he was a teacher commissioned by heaven? but whether he was the very promised Messiah. To resolve him in this, our Lord refers him to his works, as containing in them those discriminating properties which plainly distinguished them from the miracles of all other inspired men.

“ and many other things concerning him. And to this day the tribe of christians named after him do continue.”* Celsus, that bitter adversary of christianity already mentioned, speaks of many of the facts related by the Evangelists as true, although he labours to turn them into ridicule against christianity. Porphyry, another noted enemy, speaks of Jesus as a holy man, whose soul was taken up to heaven; and Julian the apostate, a most subtle persecutor, acknowledges that Christ did wonderful works, but he endeavours to account for them by saying that he was a skillful magician. This was about as rational, and much in the same spirit with the insinuation of the Scribes and Pharisees, that he cast out devils by Beelzebub the prince of devils. It is true Heathens in general did not acknowledge the truth of Christ’s resurrection. It was impossible that they could do this and continue Heathens, yet their acknowledgment of other principal facts connected with that event, serves, as a collateral testimony to corroborate the accounts given by the Evangelists.

It is also true that some of the facts recorded by the Evangelists cannot properly be called facts of a public nature, such as, that Christ was born of a virgin, his fasting and temp-

* I know it is contended by some that the passage quoted from Josephus, is an interpolation, and is not to be found in the original works of Josephus, as it is wanting in some ancient copies. As I am unprovided with vouchers, I have no view of entering into a literary controversy on that subject. Nor do I conceive it to be very material to the present argument whether it is or is not genuine.— But the argument which is I believe principally relied on to prove it an interpolation, i. e. that this passage is inconsistent with the general strain of his writings, in which he observes the most guarded silence about Christ and christianity, and inconsistent with his principles and profession as a Jew, is but of little weight. Josephus might as well as many others add an involuntary testimony to christianity. Scarcely one of the ancient opponents of the gospel but what conceded things so evidently incon-

tations in the wilderness, his transfiguration upon the mount, his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension up into heaven. These facts are nevertheless attested by a sufficient number of unexceptionable witnesses. With respect to the resurrection in particular, this is an event confirmed, partially at least, by several collateral facts and circumstances which were of a public nature. Though it was not of itself an event strictly public, neither did Christ appear to all the people, but to a select number of chosen witnesses, yet various circumstances attending that event were public. From the proceedings of the chief priests, it appears to have been a matter of public notoriety that his resurrection had been foretold. The precautions which they used, in sealing the stone and setting a watch to guard the sepulchre, was an evidence that they had some apprehensions that it was an event which might possibly happen. That the body of Jesus was missing out of the sepulchre, must doubtless have been a fact publicly known. The fright and flight of the soldiers, occasioned by the earthquake, and the appearance of angels, was a matter which was probably known throughout the city, as it

sistent with what they advanced in opposition to it as completely to invalidate all their objections. This is confirmed by quotations from Celsus, Porphyry, and the Emperor Julian, who were among the most learned and able, as well as inveterate opposers. And if we were to examine the writings of modern infidels from Lord Herbert down to Thomas Paine, scarcely one can be found but has made concessions sufficient to invalidate the force of all his objections. What can set this inconsistency of infidels in a more striking point of light than the note already inserted from Rousseau. Passages little less inconsistent might be selected from Hobbes, Bolingbroke, Shaftsbury, Morgan, Tindal, Hume, &c. And notwithstanding all the scurrilous abuse which has been thrown upon christianity by Thomas Paine, he confesses "That Christ was a virtuous and amiable man, and that the morality he taught was of the most benevolent kind." If this is

would appear from the narrative, that some of them had reported the affair before they received the bribe from the chief priests. All this proved that he might be risen for any thing which they knew to the contrary, and certain it is that they never were able to disprove it, which there is little doubt they might have done had it not been true. However incredible and inconsistent the story which they afterwards put into the mouths of the soldiers, the best thing they had to say was that the disciples stole him away while they slept, a story of which it was, in the nature of things, impossible there should be any proof; for none can bear testimony to what happens in his sleep. It farther appears that the disciples proceeded with the utmost caution, in admitting the truth of the fact, as I shall show more fully in another place.

But that which puts the matter out of all dispute is, that the Apostles were such unexceptionable witnesses of the facts which they relate, as places their testimony entirely above all suspicion. When there is a concurrence of the following circumstances in the character of witnesses, their testimony is entitled to unlimited credit.—1. When the

true, the gospel must be true likewise. For if he was not what he professed to be, i. e. the Son of God and the true Messiah, he was one of the vilest impostors. That an inconsistency of this kind should be found in Josephus is no more remarkable than that it should be found in others, even supposing him to be influenced by prejudices equally strong with those of the Scribes and Pharisees. But it is not certain that this was the case. Many in that day secretly favoured christianity, although they did not publicly own it. Of this number Josephus might be one, and the guarded silence he observes in his writings might be owing either to his countrymen the Jews, or to the Romans in whose power he now was. That he says nothing in all his writings against christianity, seems almost as inconsistent with his being an inveterate enemy, as his taking no more notice of it is with his being secretly inclined to favour it.

facts in question are attested by a sufficient number of men.—2. When the witnesses are men of sound understanding, and have such a perfect knowledge of the facts they relate, that they can neither be deceived nor imposed on.—3. When their testimony exhibits the strongest marks of impartiality, and of an unfeigned love of the truth.—4. When there could be no possible motive to cause them to bear witness to a falsehood, but every inducement to the contrary.

Let us examine the testimony of the Apostles, by these marks and characters.

1st. The extraordinary facts which go to establish the divine authority of the New Testament are attested by a sufficient number of men. The law says that at the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every matter be established. In this respect christianity has all the advantages which can be reasonably desired. The writers of the gospels are four: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Beside these, we have Peter, Paul, James, and Jude, penmen of some parts of the New Testament. Eight standing witnesses, whose testimony has been handed down in writing. All the other Apostles were authorized witnesses, which makes the number twelve after the election of Matthias to supply the place from which Judas, by transgression fell; and to these was added Paul as a thirteenth. Yet these were not all. The seventy disciples, and the hundred and twenty mentioned, Acts i. 15, 21, 22, who had been with Christ from the commencement of his personal ministry, until the time of his ascension up into heaven, were also witnesses. To these may be added many others who had seen his illustrious miracles, and heard his excellent instructions. And as many of the facts were of a public nature, his miracles, as has been already observed, having been wrought, and his discourses delivered in the presence of multitudes, an appeal was in fact made to thousands in Judea, Jerusalem and Galilee. As it respects those facts which were not so public, they were still attested by a sufficient number of men. Apply this to the fact of his descent from a Virgin. In addition to the testimony of the Evangelists, we have the attestations of two inspired

Prophets, **I**saiah and **J**eremiah, who foretold that the **M**essiah, who was to be called **E**mmanuel, **G**od with us, was to descend from a **V**irgin. If the other marks of the true **M**essiah are combined in the character of **J**esus of **N**azareth, then this follows of course. We have also the testimony of the **V**irgin **M**ary herself, and of the **A**ngel who appeared to her at her conception, and afterwards warned **J**oseph in a dream to take unto him **M**ary his wife, and no doubt, to these was added the testimony of our blessed **L**ord himself. With respect to **C**hrist's temptations and fasting in the wilderness, however extraordinary the fact may be, we have sufficient testimony on which to ground our belief of its reality. Doubtless the **A**postles had their account of it from **C**hrist himself. And if it appears that he is the true **M**essiah, the **T**ruth itself, then his testimony is to be regarded as divine. And if the **A**postles were such faithful witnesses in their relation of these matters of fact which they received from their **L**ord, as to render their testimony every way deserving of credit, as I shall by and by make appear, then we have all the testimony to this fact which could be desired.— With respect to our **L**ord's transfiguration on the mount, this depends upon the testimony of **C**hrist's immediate disciples, who were, in this particular, eye witnesses of the facts which they relate, and who were under no temptations to disguise, misrepresent, or conceal the truth.— With respect to **C**hrist's resurrection it is confessedly a subject of the last importance; so fundamental to the whole christian scheme that the **A**postle declares, *If Christ be not risen then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ, whom he raised not up if so be that the dead rise not. And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins.* To discredit the truth of the resurrection is a point towards which infidels direct their most strenuous efforts. I shall, therefore, be a little more particular on the evidences of this, than of some other facts. This was not, strictly speaking, a fact of a public nature, as all the people were not eye witnesses to it; although many circumstances intimately

connected with it, and affording strong presumption that it was true, were public as has been already observed. In addition to these presumptive proofs which were of a public nature, he exhibited himself alive, after his passion, to a number of chosen witnesses whose testimonies mutually confirm and support each other. The Evangelist Luke tells us that he shewed himself alive, after his passion, by many infallible signs and proofs. He shewed himself to all the disciples in a body, to several other disciples at different times, and, at one time to above five hundred brethren at once. Some of these appearances are noted by one Evangelist and some by another. But the omission by one of what another relates is neither inconsistency nor contradiction. It is not at all probable that every appearance of Christ between the period of his resurrection and ascension is distinctly noticed by either of the Evangelists. The Evangelist Luke informs us, Acts i. 3. *That he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.* During this very considerable space of forty days which intervened between his resurrection and ascension, it is altogether probable that his appearances to and conversations with his disciples were much more frequent than barely the few instances mentioned by the four Evangelists. There were two particular and distinct purposes to be answered by these several appearances.—1. To put the matter out of all dispute that he was risen indeed, and thereby enable his disciples to be competent witnesses of this fact.—2. To instruct his disciples more fully into the nature of his spiritual kingdom, and thereby better to prepare them for the discharge of that office for which he was about to commission them.*

* It is evident from the narrative of the Evangelists that the appearances which are particularly noticed, were principally within the first eight days after the resurrection. Nor does what is objected from John xxi. 14, relative to his appearance at the sea of Tiberias, being the third time that he had shewed himself after his resurrection from the

So far as related to the first of these ends, it was necessary that the evidences of his appearing should be handed down so complete as to remove every shadow of a doubt about the reality of the fact that he was actually risen from the dead. But in relation to the latter, it was not of that importance, and it is probable that the accounts of many such appearances are entirely omitted. As it is a truth that if Christ is not risen, the whole gospel must be no better than a cunningly devised fable, so there is no one fact which the fertile invention of infidels has laboured more assiduously to discredit, than this of the resurrection. By blending the different appearances of Christ recorded by the several Evangelists together, and thereby confounding such as are really distinct, they have endeavoured to affix the charge of inconsistency and contradiction on the accounts given by the Evangelists. All these seeming inconsistencies will vanish on considering these appearances as they are in reality, i. e. as distinct and separate appearances. Besides Christ's appearance to the Apostle Paul, which he says, was as to one born out of due time, there are no less than nine separate appearances recorded in the

dead; militate against the idea of his frequent appearances during the forty days. For in the first place we are not informed how long time had elapsed between his resurrection and his appearance at the sea of Tiberias, and in the second place it is evident that by the third time is meant the third day, q. d. this is the third day on which he shewed himself. On the same day in which he arose, he shewed himself four different times.—1. To Mary Magdalene alone.—2. To the two disciples as they were travelling to Emmaus.—3. To the women as they were going to tell the disciples that they had been to the sepulchre and found the body missing, and that they had seen in a vision an angel who informed them that he was risen indeed and went before them into Galilee.—4. In the evening of the same day, to the disciples as they were met together. But as these appearances were on the same day, John reckons them for one. That day week he appeared again, and now on the third day he appears at the sea of Tiberias.

New Testament, unless, that mentioned by the Apostle Paul, of his appearing to above five hundred brethren at once, is to be identified with some of those mentioned by the Evangelists — 1. His appearing, in the first place, to Mary Magdalene alone, in the morning in which he arose, Mark xvi. 9. John xx. 14, 15, 16, 17.—2. His appearing early the same day, to two other women, Matt. xxviii. 9.—3. His appearing on the same day to two of the disciples, as they travelled to Emmaus, Mark xvi. 12. Luke xxiv. 32.—4. His appearing to the eleven as they sat at meat, on the evening of the day in which he arose, Mark xvi. 14. Luke xxiv. 36, 46.—5. His appearing to his disciples on a mountain in Galilee, Matt. xxviii. 16, 17.—6. His appearing to his disciples on the day of his ascension up into heaven, Mark xvi. 19, 20. Acts i. 9. Besides these there are two other appearances recorded by John, which are not noticed by the other Evangelists.—One is his appearing to the eleven when Thomas was not with them, eight days after the first, John xx. 26, 29. The other is his shewing himself, and eating and drinking with seven of the disciples, at the Sea of Tiberias; an account of which appearance is recorded at large, John xxi. Besides these, there is another appearance, recorded by Paul, to above five hundred brethren at once, unless this is to be identified with his appearance upon a mountain in Galilee. Here he had appointed to meet his disciples. Altogether probable this appointment was known to many besides the twelve. Curiosity would naturally cause many to flock together to see him. And, as it is said, they worshipped him there, but some doubted, we cannot suppose that these doubters were some of the eleven, for their doubts were all removed before this time. The doubters, therefore, must be some of the large company, who were collected together upon the occasion.

It is a fact worthy to be noticed again, with what extreme caution the disciples proceeded, in admitting the evidences of the resurrection. It is evident that if ever they had had any competent understanding of the prophecies of their Lord and Master, in relation to that event, that their faith in them was now in a degree suspended,

and that, when they saw him give up the ghost on the cross and to be afterwards laid in the tomb, they had little or no expectation of his rising again. As yet they were but imperfectly acquainted with the scriptures which testified that he must rise from the dead. They, like the rest of the Jewish nation, had harboured the expectation of a Messiah who would never die. The evidences of this great event were therefore laid before them gradually, and their incredulity overcome by degrees. Their first information that he was actually risen, was from Mary Magdalene, to whom he first shewed himself early in the morning on which he arose. She immediately ran and informed Peter and John of the event. Her information occasioned the two disciples to go to the Sepulchre. They found the stone rolled away, the grave clothes wrapped up and laid in different parts of the Sepulchre, and the body missing, but they saw not the Lord. The next information which they received was from two other women, the other Mary and Joanna, who accompanied her. They in the first place, informed the disciples that they had seen a vision of Angels who informed them that the Lord was risen. Still doubts arose in their minds. — Nobody had, as yet, seen him but Mary Magdalene, and she, in the first place, did not know him, but thought him to be the gardner. It was therefore possible that she might be deceived. It might be all a delusion. But as the other women were returning from the Sepulchre, Jesus met them, and saluted them saying, All Hail, and suffered them to embrace his feet and worship him, and he orders them to tell his disciples to go into Galilee where they should see him. To this there was added an order to deliver the message to Peter in particular. Still, notwithstanding all the circumstances of the vision of Angels, the report of the women, and the fact now generally known, that the body was missing out of the Sepulchre, the disciples were determined to suspend their belief, because they had not seen him themselves. And even when the two disciples to whom he had joined himself, as they were travelling to Emmaus, reported that they had seen the Lord, and that he had made himself known to them.

In the breaking of bread, returned to Jerusalem to inform the rest of the disciples what they had seen; their testimony does not appear to obtain any more credit than that of the women. Afterwards, to complete the evidence, and remove all their doubts, he appeared again to the eleven the same evening, as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief. To convince them that it was no apparition, but that he appeared with his own proper body, he shewed them his hands and his feet, directing them, not only to look at him, but to handle him, for that a spirit had not flesh and bones, as they perceived him to have. Such condescension did our blessed Lord shew to their weakness, and such infallible proofs did he lay before them of the reality of his resurrection, as silenced all their doubts, and overcame even incredulity itself. They now appear to be all satisfied excepting Thomas, who happened not to be present. His doubts were removed at another time, in a manner which showed the utmost condescension to his weakness. Upon the whole, never was evidence more complete; never was a fact better attested than the resurrection. Thus the extraordinary facts whereby the divine authority of the New Testament is established, are, undoubtedly, attested by a sufficient number of men.

2d. As a farther corroboration of their testimony, it appears that they were men of plain sense, sound understanding, and perfectly acquainted with the facts which they relate. In their narratives we find every indication of soundness of mind, no symptoms of an overheated imagination, no appearance of any of the rapturous flights of enthusiasm. We find no pomp of words, no affected eloquence. Every thing is related in a manner plain and consistent, and in a style simple and unaffected, cool and dispassionate, the argument of a sedate and composed spirit. And if they had their senses, and certainly they exhibit no symptoms of mental derangement, they must know whether the facts which they related were true or false. The facts were of such a nature, and such had been their opportunity to become acquainted with them, that it was even impossible that they should be deceived. They were

their affections for their Lord and Master, we find nothing in their narrative of his sufferings which appears as if their aim was to move the passions, nor do we find a single sentence expressive of their indignation against his cruel persecutors. And it is observable that they do not represent him as triumphing in his sufferings with an exulting bravery, as one would naturally expect in a narrative which was either highly embellished or fictitious, or designedly in the language of panegyric. On the other hand he is represented as manifesting great sensibility and tenderness of heart under his sufferings, but tempered with remarkable firmness, constancy and resignation. As a farther proof of their impartial regard to truth we may notice that although the writers of these accounts were either Christ's immediate disciples, or their intimate friends and companions, yet they freely relate many circumstances which bear hard upon their own personal characters, and which there were powerful motives to induce them to conceal. They not only relate without disguise the lowliness and meanness of their outward condition, but also their ignorance, their dullness of apprehension in not understanding Christ's plain predictions of his death and resurrection, the weakness of their faith on many occasions, and the power of their prejudices. They also relate their own divisions about the nature of his kingdom; their contentions about which of them should be the reproofs they receive from their Lord; the treachery of Judas in betraying his master, with his shameful fall in denying him; the cowardice of Peter's shameful fall in denying him; the various circumstances of its being so long delayed; the warnings from his master, and of his being in order to obtain credit to a false prophet; the cowardice of all his disciples in the period of his sharpest sufferings; the incredulity of Thomas, who although an event which he had seen, he still more unreasonable and obstinate than the others. These things, they attempt to conceal, they attempt to deny, they attempt to explain away, they attempt to say they might have been otherwise.

his companions during the whole of his personal ministry, and according to our text, were eye witnesses of his majesty. In their appointment of a successor to Judas who fell from the Apostleship by his transgression in betraying his master, they limit the choice to those who had been eye witnesses. *Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.* To this intimate acquaintance John the beloved disciple appeals, as to that which must give peculiar force to his testimony. *That which was from the beginning which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled of the word of life. For the life was manifested and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us. That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you.* Certainly no persons who were in their right mind, could believe that a long series of miraculous works were done before their eyes, when no such works were done, nor any miraculous cures effected.— They must, therefore, be as fully assured of these facts, as it is possible for a person to be assured of any facts whatsoever, of any thing which he either sees or hears. Unless we admit that they were certain of these facts, we must give up every idea of certainty in relation to any facts whatsoever. They were such as were obvious to their senses; and that with regard to the resurrection in particular, we have seen, was admitted with the utmost caution.

3d To strengthen the credit of their relation still farther, there is apparent in every part of it, the most strict and impartial regard to truth. As they impartially relate Christ's excellent discourses, his stupendous miracles, and the undeviating holiness of his life, so, with the same coolness and impartiality, do they go on to narrate the meanness and poverty of his outward condition, the bitter censures, scoffs, and reproaches, which were cast upon him by his adversaries, and the grievous and ignominious sufferings which he endured. *Notwithstanding the strength of*

their affections for their Lord and Master, we find nothing in their narrative of his sufferings which appears as if their aim was to move the passions, nor do we find a single sentence expressive of their indignation against his cruel persecutors. And it is observable that they do not represent him as triumphing in his sufferings with an exulting bravery, as one would naturally expect in a narrative which was either highly embellished or fictitious, or designedly in the language of panegyric. On the other hand he is represented as manifesting great sensibility and tenderness of heart under his sufferings, but tempered with remarkable firmness, constancy and resignation. As a farther proof of their impartial regard to truth we may notice that although the writers of these accounts were either Christ's immediate disciples, or their intimate friends and companions, yet they freely relate many circumstances which bear hard upon their own personal characters, and which there were powerful motives to induce them to conceal. They not only relate without disguise the lowness and meanness of their outward condition, but also their ignorance, their dullness of apprehension in not understanding Christ's plain predictions of his death and resurrection, the weakness of their faith on many occasions, and the power of their prejudices. They also relate their own misapprehensions about the nature of his kingdom; their vain puerile contentions about which of them should be greatest, with the reproofs they receive from their Lord; the treachery of Judas in betraying his master, with his tragical end; Peter's shameful fall in denying him, with the aggravating circumstances of its being so soon after the most solemn warnings from his master, and of his cursing and swearing in order to obtain credit to a most wicked falsehood; the cowardice of all his disciples in forsaking him during the period of his sharpest sufferings; the slowness of them all to believe the truth of the report of his resurrection, although an event which he had expressly foretold; with the still more unreasonable and obstinate incredulity of Thomas. These things, with others which might be named, they attempt neither to palliate nor conceal. This they might have easily done, and, had any

thing but the most scrupulous and impartial regard to truth guided their pens, they had motives sufficiently powerful to induce them to make the attempt.

4. As it was in the nature of things impossible that the Apostles could be deceived, in relation to the facts which they relate, so it was almost equally impossible that they should harbour any design to deceive or impose upon others. No person whatsoever, unless he is influenced by some very powerful sinister motive, will undertake and carry on, for any considerable time, a plan to deceive others. No such motives could possibly influence the first preachers of christianity. Never could there be persons more remote from all suspicion of fraud, or of a design to impose a falsehood upon mankind. Had there been any fraud committed, which had come to their knowledge, they had no motive whatsoever to join in it, but every inducement to expose it to the world. Supposing these facts to have been untrue, in bearing witness to them they must have acted from motives, such as never influenced any man or set of men, either before or since; motives, such as never, in any other case, influenced either good or bad men.—The Messiah and the religion which they preached were in direct opposition to their own deeply rooted Jewish prejudices. It appears from the history of the disciples related by themselves that after they had long resided in the family of their Lord and master, and even to the very last, they were strongly prejudiced in favour of the idea that the Messiah was to be a powerful temporal prince.—When they saw all their hopes blasted, and that instead of the powerful Monarch, which they expected, come to advance the Jewish nation to the highest pinnacle of earthly glory, their master suffered upon the cross, the ignominious death of a malefactor, unless these facts had been true, and they were now perfectly assured of his resurrection from the dead, and had become better instructed in the spiritual nature of the kingdom which he came to set up, all their prejudices would naturally, not only revive, but gain additional strength. Instead of preaching up his doctrines, and suffering in his cause, they would have been among the first to have proclaimed him an impostor. For

let it be observed, that on the supposition Christ had not risen, and that the whole of the facts to which they bore testimony were false, and known by them to be so, (and if they were false they must of necessity know it,) they must not only know that he had deceived others, but that they themselves were also the dupes of his imposture, and that all the promises and predictions, with which he had amused them, were false; consequently that they could have no hopes from him, either in this world or in a future state. To the situation in which they would be thus placed, by bearing witness to a falsehood, the Apostle alludes in 1 Cor. xv. 19. *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.* The Apostle cannot mean that christians are always, and on the whole, more miserable than other men, even in this life. Should there be nothing in religion in relation to an hereafter, the religious man enjoys that internal peace and quiet, in this life, which others do not. And should death even prove to be an eternal sleep, he will not sleep the less quiet because he was a believer. But the Apostle plainly alludes to their bearing witness to a falsehood, as that which would render them the most miserable of men. If Christ is not risen then are we found false witnesses for God. If therefore we are found bearing witness to a falsehood, knowing it to be such, as we can have no prospect of any temporal rewards here, because only bonds, imprisonments, tortures and death await us, so we can enjoy no internal peace of mind nor any prospect of rewards hereafter. We are therefore, on the supposition that we bear witness to a falsehood, of all men the most miserable. To suppose that the Apostles should so resolutely engage in the face of all opposition and danger, and persevere with such obstinacy even unto death, in preaching up the religion of an impostor, knowing him to be such—one who had not only deceived others but them—one who had frustrated them in their most sanguine expectations, must be a very extraordinary supposition indeed. By preaching up a religion contrary to the prevailing prejudices of Jews and Gentiles, the principal article of which was salvation through a crucified Jesus, they could have no hope of

either serving their worldly interest, or of answering the ends of ambition. They could scarcely entertain a reasonable prospect of gaining so much as one single profelyte to so absurd and foolish a scheme as it must have been, on the supposition that they had known all to be a fiction, and that Jesus had not risen. How could they expect to persuade the Jews to receive one for their Messiah, who had been put to death by the heads of their nation as an impostor and deceiver? How could they expect to persuade the Gentiles to acknowledge and worship a crucified Jew for their Lord, and trust in him as their Saviour, in preference to their long adored deities, and abandon their darling superstition for a strict and self-denying religion, and all this while they were conscious that the whole was a fiction?

Here it will probably be asked, what stronger temptation can there be, or to what higher honour can a man aspire than to that of appearing as a Missionary, a Prophet, or an Ambassador from heaven? Who would not encounter many dangers and difficulties to attain so honourable and sublime a character?

But as the Apostles were circumstanced, there could be no room for a suspicion or an insinuation of this kind. Had they attempted to preach up a Messiah, suited to the carnal notions and prejudices of the Jews, one who was arrayed in all the pomp and glory of earthly grandeur, they might naturally expect honour and applause to result from being his ministers. But while they were regarded as the Apostles and Ambassadors of one who had been put to death by public authority, what honour or advantage could they expect to reap? To set up for the Apostles, and to pretend to be inspired by the spirit of a crucified Jesus, and to have received commission from him to go through the world preaching forgiveness of sins in his name, instead of bringing them any advantage, would be the most direct method they could take to expose themselves to every species of ignominy and contempt. Neither the nature of the work in which they were engaged, nor any encouragement they had previously received from their master, gave them grounds to expect any thing else

than reproaches and persecutions, both from Jews and Gentiles. They could not but foresee that by pretending that Christ was risen from the dead, and by setting him up for the Messiah, after he had been condemned and crucified as a malefactor, they would incur the hatred of their own nation, and the contempt of those in authority.— Things exactly fell out according to these their reasonable expectations. Bonds and imprisonments awaited them in every city. With the single exception of John the beloved disciple, all the immediate Apostles of our blessed Lord suffered violent deaths. By admitting the truth of the facts, and the divinity of the christian religion, we are immediately furnished with a reason why the Apostles and primitive christians exposed themselves to such cruel sufferings. If we even admit that supposition, in addition to a great degree of virtue and constancy, powerful divine aid was necessary for their support. But that they should thus hazard every thing, in support of a religion which was contrary to their own strongest prejudices as well as to their worldly interest; a religion which deprived them of their dearest enjoyments, and exposed them to the most terrible sufferings, and all this to support the cause and character of an impostor, knowing him to be such; one who had not only deceived others, but one by whom they had also themselves been deceived, while so far from deriving any internal peace of mind from their fraud, they must be conscious that if there were a future state, their horrid wickedness must expose them to the most terrible punishments hereafter: that they should not only engage in such an infamous imposture, but persist in it even unto death, thereby exposing themselves to all that variety of sufferings from which human nature shrinks with the utmost degree of horror, is to suppose that which is absolutely subversive of all the principles and passions of human nature. They must, on this supposition, have been actuated by motives which never in any other instance, either before or since, influenced either good or bad men. Thus it is. I think, evident, both that the Apostles could not be deceived in the facts which they relate, and that, as the case was circumstanced, it was impossible they should

have any intention to deceive or mislead others. Consequently that the gospel which they preached was no cunningly devised fable.

I proceed to observe,

III. That the existence of the christian religion in the world, and especially its amazing progress in the apostolic age and the times immediately succeeding, can be accounted for in no other way, than by admitting the truth of the facts on which it is said to be founded.

That Christianity made a surprising progress in the world, in the apostolic age and very soon after, is clear from many testimonies both christian and heathen. By examining the history contained in the Acts of the Apostles, we find that, at a very early period, it had made great progress, not only throughout Judea, but in Syria, Pamphilia, and Phrygia. It had spread through the whole of the lesser and part of the greater Asia, and many parts of Europe. This extraordinary progress is attested by heathen writers. It was not to be expected that Pagans, continuing such, should acknowledge that the Christians were right in their notions of religion. Yet as it respects the matter of fact, viz. the surprising progress of christianity, their testimony is full and clear. Tacitus, the Roman historian, who flourished in the reign of Nero, informs us that there were a great number of christians in Rome in Nero's time, and gives an account of the terrible torments which they underwent during that persecution; although this was little more than thirty years after the death of our Saviour. He does this in a manner which shows that he was strongly prejudiced against christianity. Julian, commonly called the Apostate, who has been already quoted, speaking of the Evangelist John, whom he represents as one of Christ's own disciples, observes, that in his day, a great multitude, both in Greece and Italy, were seized with that distemper (for so he terms christianity) which John observing, was encouraged to assert that Christ was God. Pliny the younger, who was Pro Governor of Bithynia, and flourished in the reign of the Emperor Trajan, tells us that the christian faith had made such progress, in several parts of the Roman empire in his

time, that the temples of the gods were almost deserted, their sacred rites long neglected, and that there were none who would buy the sacrifices ; and that the provinces of Pontus and Bithynia were like to be depopulated by the vast numbers who suffered Martyrdom. At the same time he gives a noble testimony to the innocency of their lives, telling us that he could find nothing amiss in them, but that they used to meet together before day and sing a hymn to Christ as God. That they bound themselves, by the most solemn engagements, to the practice of righteousness and virtue, and not to commit sin or wickedness. If we examine into the reasons of this extraordinary spread of the gospel, we will find it impossible to account for the event, in any other way than by admitting the truth of the facts and the divinity of the christian religion. To set this matter in a clear light, let the following things be considered.

1. That the time when, and the place where christianity was first propagated, were both of them unfavourable to the propagation of a falsehood ; at least of such a falsehood as the gospel must be, admitting it to be only a cunningly devised fable. The christian religion was not ushered into the world in an age of ignorance and barbarism, but in an age when Pagan learning had arrived at the very pinnacle of its glory. However superstition might almost universally prevail, yet the various superstitions of the age contributed nothing to the spread of the gospel but the reverse. Neither was it propagated in a dark, ignorant, or barbarous corner of the world, but in such enlightened and civilized places as Judea, Greece and Rome, at a time when human learning flourished in all these places, perhaps to as great a degree as it ever did at any other period either before or afterwards. And although all the learning and philosophy of the age were opposed to it, yet it prevailed to a wonderful degree, by the force of divine truth alone. Had the learned and wise men of the age been able to disprove the facts alledged for its support, which they certainly could have done had they not been true, its progress would have been stopped.

2. Let the characters of many of the first converts to

christianity be considered, and it will appear that they were persons every way capable of judging of the truth of facts. Although doubtless a large proportion of the primitive professors of christianity was composed of pious illiterate people, yet a considerable number of the early converts were men eminent for talents, learning and wisdom. Before their conversion to the christian faith, many of them were strongly prejudiced against that religion which they afterwards embraced. Yet, by the irresistible evidence of the facts and the spirit by which the Apostles spake, they were not only won over to embrace it, but in consequence of their steadfast adherence to this religion, they were induced both to renounce all the honours and dignities of the world, and to expose themselves to the most cruel deaths. A remarkable instance of this we have in the Apostle Paul. Before his conversion his prejudices against the christian religion were most inveterate. He was a zealous and even a conscientious persecutor of christianity; one who verily thought that he ought to do much against the name of Jesus of Nazareth, which thing he did at Jerusalem, and went to Damascus with letters and a commission from the chief Priests. He was a man of great learning and acuteness, having been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and one who was held in high reputation by the chief rulers of the nation. On account of his zeal and forwardness in persecuting the church, his reputation was gaining ground. Yet such was the irresistible force of the evidences of christianity, when properly applied to his mind, that all his prejudices were completely overcome, so that, instead of a furious persecutor, he became a zealous preacher of the faith which formerly he had taken so much pains to destroy. This he did, notwithstanding he hereby forfeited his reputation with the heads of the Jewish nation, drew upon himself their utmost hatred and indignation, and exposed himself, not barely to poverty and contempt, but to the severest persecutions in every place where he travelled to preach the gospel. To him we may add Quadratus, Aristides, Dionysius the Areopagite mentioned Acts xvii. Polycarp, Clemens Romanus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Origen

and others, many of whom, previous to their embracing christianity, were heathen Philosophers of great note and learning ; yet they were won to the faith by the force of the evidences of christianity. There cannot be the remotest probability that they could have been won to the belief of such an incredible story as it would have been, had it had no foundation in truth. Much less that so many of them should have sealed with their blood their steadfast adherence to this belief.

3. Let it be observed, that there is nothing in the christian religion calculated to cherish the unruly passions, and please the carnal appetites of men. It tolerates no irregular gratification of inordinate lusts and affections. It, on the other hand, inculcates patience, meekness, temperance, forgiveness of injuries, self denial, and such like virtues. Had it been a religion which gave loose to the unrestrained gratification of our corrupt inclinations, or gave indulgence to unruly appetites, this might, in part, account for its extraordinary progress among the looser sort. But this is so far from being the case, that it enjoins the strictest holiness and self denial, and even requires us to take up the cross and follow Christ. It is therefore an amazing inconsistency to suppose that such a self denying religion as christianity should prevail to so great extent, at a time when the profession of it was attended with such imminent danger, without the clearest evidences of its truth.

4. Let it be farther observed, that the first converts could have no possible worldly inducements to influence them to embrace it. As it is impossible that the Apostles could be influenced by worldly motives in their preaching up this religion, as has been already observed, it is equally impossible that the first converts could be moved by any considerations of a temporal nature to embrace it. It promised no rewards which were to be obtained in this life. So far was it from holding up to view any worldly inducement, that all advantages of that kind were thrown into the opposite scale, while only bonds and imprisonments, sufferings and death, awaited the professors.

5. Let it be observed, that the means whereby the

christian religion was first propagated were the most unlikely to succeed, in the propagation of a falsehood, especially, if we consider the difficulties it had to encounter. The successful practice of an imposture is generally the triumph of art over simplicity. But the Apostles were plain simple men, strangers to that species of art and intrigue which is requisite to the successful practice of an imposture. That a few illiterate fishermen of Galilee should ever conceive the idea of propagating a new religion in the world, against such a weight of opposition as they must naturally know that they would have to encounter, and with such feeble means as they possessed, was a great miracle, but that they should succeed, in spite of all opposition, is a miracle still greater. The first preachers of christianity were not selected from the great and noble of the earth. They were not distinguished by the advantages of either birth or wealth, or by any remarkable figure which they made in the world. They were not allied to wealthy and noble families who had power in their hands, whereby they might be assisted in the propagation of their religion. They were not favoured with the patronage of princes, or other great men. They were not men who were eminent, either for their learning, eloquence, or worldly policy. They were uninstructed in the wisdom of the schools, and unaided by the civil authority, possessing no power but that of persuasion, accompanied by the influences of the spirit from on high. The religion which they attempted to propagate was contrary to the most inveterate prejudices of both Jews and Gentiles. What could be more contrary to the prejudices of the Jews, who were high in their expectations of a triumphant Messiah, one who was not only to deliver them from their vassalage to other nations, but to bring all other nations under subjection to them, than to preach up one for their Messiah whom they had viewed as a crucified malefactor; one whom they had mocked and derided, as unable to save himself or come down from the cross, much less to save others? And what could be more contrary to Gentile prejudices, than to preach up a crucified Jew for their Lord; one who had been put to death as a

malefactor, by the heads of his own nation? The Gentiles are represented as strongly attached to their idols: what prospect was there that they should receive such a Messiah for their Lord, and for his sake renounce the whole tribe of their long adored deities? Surely none humanly speaking. Farther, as christianity was contrary to the vulgar or popular prejudices of Jews and Gentiles, it was equally so to those of the learned. To the wise Gentiles it was foolishness, and in fact all the power, wisdom, learning, and policy of the world combined together to crush it in its infancy. It had to combat with every obstacle which either the wisdom or learning of the Philosopher, or the ridicule of the profane wit could throw in its way, or the whole weight of all the civil power the world could furnish. The Jewish Sanhedrim and Priesthood, the whole weight of the Roman emperor and empire, together with all the influence of the heathen idolatrous Priests, who had the direction of the popular prejudices, joined in the plot to crush it. So far was christianity from receiving any support from the civil authority of either Jews or Gentiles, that the preachers of it were represented as those who turned the world up side down, and treated accordingly. All the revelation in the world, whether real or pretended, was improved against it. The Jewish revelation, it is true, was, in reality, not against, but in the most perfect unison with it. Yet as the Jews understood the revelation contained in the Old Testament, viewing it through the distorting medium of their own strong prejudices, they considered it as opposed to christianity. It therefore had the same operation upon their minds as if this opposition had been real. All the pretended revelations of the Gentiles were against it, and calculated to maintain the reigning superstition. Their Oracles, their Flamines, their Vates, and their Augurs, were all in opposition to the gospel. To suppose that a few illiterate fishermen should so dress up a silly and incredible story about the resurrection of a crucified Jew, (and a silly incredible story it must be if a fiction,) as to cause it to be so extensively believed, in the same age and country in which these extraordinary facts were said to

have been done, where men were favoured with every possible advantage to detect an imposture if there had been any, as to baffle all the learning, wit, power, malice, cruelty, religious prejudices, worldly policy, and pretended revelations in the world, and to cause it to be believed, not barely by a few ignorant superstitious people, but by multitudes of all ranks, ages, and conditions, by many of high standing both among the learned and wise, and that they should have so strong an attachment to it as to lay down their lives in its defence, while some of them, particularly the Apostles, knew the whole story to be a fabrication, and while they, as well as others who might be duped by their imposture, could promise themselves nothing else but the most terrible sufferings for their adherence to it, is something so contrary to reason and all the principles and passions of human nature that a person must have his mind strangely blinded to believe it. To swallow this article of the deistical creed requires a much stronger faith than it does to digest any of the supposed absurd doctrines pretended to be found in the christian system.

The particular juncture in which christianity was propagated was every way favourable for exhibiting to the world the most undoubted evidence of its truth. Had the civil power of the Roman empire, on the first appearance of christianity in the world, immediately lent its aid for its support, as it did afterwards during the life and reign of Constantine the great, there might have been some ground for the supposition that it was a scheme contrived to promote worldly power and policy. But as it was in its infancy tried in the furnace of adversity so as the case was circumstanced there can be no grounds for such an insinuation. Nothing therefore, but a divine power attesting the truths of the gospel by signs and wonders, and impressing its truths with power upon the heart, can account for its prevailing to so great an extent, notwithstanding such powerful obstacles.

In order to invalidate the force of the argument in favour of christianity from its extraordinary spread, we are told that Mahometanism, although evidently a system of

falsehood and imposture, spread to a great extent in a short time. Why, it is said, might not christianity prevail in the same way without supposing it divine?

But if the following things be considered we will perceive a very great difference.

1. Let it be observed that the revolution in religious opinions and practices, which was effected by the introduction of mahometism, was far from so great as that brought about by the introduction of christianity. Let us only consider the state of the world, at the time when christianity was introduced. Not only pagan learning and philosophy, but pagan idolatry and superstition, were at the zenith of their glory. The religion then in the world had been established by long immemorial custom, and had never been called in question. It was fixed in men's minds as strongly as inclination, custom, prejudice, or human authority could fix it. How vast the overthrow when christianity was established! How strong the building, and how absolute the destruction! and how great, and how opposite in its nature from that which had stood there before, was that which was erected on its ruins!

No such entire revolution, either in men's opinions or practices, was effected by the propagation of mahometism. It consisted either in the change made in heathen barbarous nations, descended from the Scythians and Arabians, or in that effected among professed Christians.— With respect to the former, christianity had been so long known in the world, that Heathens, who were mingled with them in society in general, had some confused notions of the true God, and of several truths of what was called natural religion, which had in some measure weakened their prejudices in favour of heathen idolatry. The change then was but small, and the advancement but little, which they made by embracing mahometism. And with respect to the latter, the christian church in these parts had been rent to pieces by heretical opinions; the spirit of christianity was in a manner gone; christian knowledge greatly on the decline, and superstitious practices had become so general that the declension was small, and the change which took place by embracing mahomet-

ism hardly perceptible. In addition to this, Mahomet attempted no entire change in the customs or opinions of either Christians, Jews, or Heathens. He blended judaism, paganism, the opinions of several heretical sects among Christians, and some Bible truths, together. He retained many of the customs of the Arabians; he mixed his doctrine with the fables of the Jews, and as far as they could be blended, adapted his system to the superstitious customs prevalent among Christians, Jews and Heathens.— Still less of a change did he either attempt or effect in the moral world. Here no change at all was effected for the better. The christian religion was holy and self denying. It was calculated to make an entire change, not only in the opinions, but in the morals and in the spirit and temper of those who embraced it. No such change was attempted in mahometism. It lays no restraint on sensual gratifications. As the author of it was proud, crafty, sensual, and libidinous, he formed a religion like himself. Agreeable to the nature of this religion, it promises a paradise of sensual delights hereafter. Every thing in the mahometan notion of a future state is calculated to allure the carnal heart, but nothing to satisfy a holy or virtuous mind. All the virtue it requires in this life consists merely in the practice of such religious rites as are consistent with reigning wickedness both of heart and life. It has nothing to do with purity of heart. It is, therefore, not a matter of wonder that it prevailed to a considerable degree among an ignorant, vicious, and licentious people.

2. The time when and place where mahometism was introduced into the world were very favourable to the propagation of such an imposture. It was ushered into the world in an age of darkness and ignorance, when superstition was carried to a great height. It was first propagated among the ignorant Arabians, and others, although nominally Christians, among whom, at that time, the principles of christianity were greatly corrupted, and the knowledge of its doctrines in a great measure obliterated. And, as it was first propagated in an age of darkness, so it has always shunned the light. It does not invite investigation and enquiry, it being a command of the

crafty Arab to his followers, not to dispute about religion, but to believe, on the alternative of being butchered alive in case of a refusal.

3. Let us consider in how different a manner mahometism was propagated from christianity. The latter was propagated only by the force of light and truth; by the power of persuasion, supported by miracles and prophecies, aided by the special influences of the spirit, in the face of the most violent opposition from all quarters, and almost constant persecution. But we do not find that mahometism ever made head against persecution; and while its founder relied on persuasion alone, he had but few followers, and the progress of his imposture was but very slow. Indeed, it was his declared principle, that God sent him to convert mankind, not by the power of persuasion, nor by miracles, to the public working of which he made no pretensions, but by the sword. This was, to a considerable extent, effected in his life time; and soon after his death, both the conquests and imposture were much farther extended by his followers. The chief Apostles of this religion were, for the most part, generals of armies, potent sultans, and absolute tyrants, aided by mighty armies, who proposed their doctrine on the alternative of believe or die. How different was the conduct of that blood thirsty tyrant and his followers, in the propagation of their religion, from that of the meek and lowly Jesus, in the propagation of christianity. On the one hand we see the weakest of men, unarmed with any other weapons than meekness, humility, love, miracles, clear evidence, most virtuous, holy, and amiable examples, self denial and sufferings.— On the other we see ambition, cruelty and blood, all the worst passions of human nature. Thus, although the religion of Mahomet has been propagated to a very considerable extent, and for a long time upheld in the world, although destitute of any evidence of truth, when we bring into consideration the different nature of the two religions, and the different means by which they were propagated, this will not at all weaken the force of the argument in favor of the christian revelation drawn from the extraordinary progress of christianity.

This leads me to observe,

IV. That all these testimonies to the truth of christianity are farther strengthened by the effects which the christian religion has had, and still continues to have, on the hearts and lives of mankind.

The character of the founder of christianity was every way agreeable to the nature of the religion which he came to establish in the world. He was holy, harmless, and undefiled. To form a perfect character, and to fill it up with such traits as to make it appear like a real living and acting being, like one who has really lived and acted a part among mankind, is perhaps, one of the hardest tasks which human genius ever undertook.* How unamiable, and how grossly immoral is the Eneas of Virgil, on whom the author bestowed the utmost pains to draw a perfect character. The same observations are applicable to every character, attempted to be drawn by the greatest masters of antiquity. But, however difficult the task, it has been performed by the Evangelists in the character which they give of Jesus of Nazareth. All the parts of it are exactly suited to each other, and, when united, constitute the fairest image of pure, uniform and exalted virtue. There is nothing in it either strained or unnatural, but, at the same time, it is a character of finished perfection. The piety, wisdom, integrity and loveliness of the Redeemer have no rival, no second, even in the highest efforts of imagination. The Apostles also lived in a manner in which no impostors ever lived. They appear not only to have been virtuous and holy men, but to claim a high rank in the list of the virtuous.* To establish this distinction, nothing more is necessary than to compare them with Philosophers in general, either ancient or modern. Compare them with Socrates, Plato, Cicero, Cato, and others of the greatest and best men of antiquity; or let them be compared with infidel Philosophers, such as Voltaire, Rousseau, Bolingbroke, Hume, &c. and there will be found, not

* Dwight's genuineness and authenticity of the New Testament.

barely no resemblance, but a striking contrast. Nor are they totally superior to infidels only, but greatly so to other men of virtue and piety, among the followers of Christ — In this respect they stand alone and unrivalled. How are such characters to be identified with the propagation of a system of fraud and imposture ?

This effect of christianity was not confined to the Apostles. It has had, in an almost infinite variety of instances, a remarkable influence in reforming men's lives, and in subduing and mortifying their corruptions. In effects of this kind, christianity, (if I may be allowed the expression,) glories in a comparison with any other religion which ever appeared in the world. Indeed, if we except the religion of the Bible, scarcely any other religion which has ever prevailed in the world, appears to have had any concern or connexion with, either purity of heart or of life. They have generally consisted, wholly, in a variety of rites and ceremonies falsely denominated religious. Distinguished from all other forms of religion, the great aim of all the doctrines and precepts of christianity is to make men virtuous or holy ; to promote piety towards God, and benevolence to men. And, as all gospel precepts and exhortations are calculated to promote the strictest holiness and self denial, so it is evident that these effects were, in a remarkable manner, produced among the first Christians. The sweetness of their tempers and their benevolence to men were so remarkable, as to render this observation almost proverbial, *See how the Christians love one another.* This effect of christianity is not only attested by the Apostles in various parts of the New Testament, which it is needless to cite, and by other christian writers who lived near the apostolic age, but even by Heathens, and these not barely the more moderate sort, but, some of them, their most bitter enemies and persecutors. Besides the testimony of Pliny already mentioned, Celsus, a most determined adversary, owns that there were among Christians many temperate, modest, and understanding persons ; and the Emperor Julian recommends to the heathen Pontiff Arsacias, the example of Christians for their kindness and humanity to strangers, which was not confined

merely to those of their own religion, but extended to the Heathen; and for their apparent sanctity of life. To this cause he attributes the extraordinary spread of the christian religion. From the testimonies of Arrian, and of the Emperor Marcus Antoninus, we also learn that the Christians were remarkable for their fortitude and contempt of death. More honourable testimonies than these could not be expected from enemies, and these traits in the christian character must have been very conspicuous to be thus noticed.

Although this effect of the christian religion has not been at all times equally conspicuous, and is not so visible at this day as could be wished, although many who assume and wear the name of christians appear to have very little of the spirit and temper of the gospel, yet still it is not left without a witness. Many in every age have had their lives reformed and their hearts changed by the influence of the grace and truth exhibited in the gospel, in a way which is inconsistent with the character of an imposture. Sometimes instances of this kind are so common, and so apparent, as to extort the acknowledgement, even from infidels themselves, that the christian religion does good—it makes men better. But whatever inconsistency with the purity of christianity, there may be in the morals of professors, yet it will, I believe, be found on a close examination, that among the strictest adherents to the christian profession, there it usually the greatest purity of morals. It is an undeniable fact that many in every age, many in particular, in the age in which we live, have, on their embracing the christian profession, become reformed both in heart and life, yet not so much as one instance can be pointed out of a reformation which hath taken place on rejecting it. Instances, on the contrary, may be produced, of great numbers of individuals who have abandoned their morals in connexion with their rejection of the principles of christianity. And although this evidence cannot, at all times be exhibited in its full force, as an argument to the world, yet to the real Christian, this is of all arguments in favour of christianity the most satisfactory. **It has reformed my life, it has changed my heart, it has**

brought me out of darkness into God's marvellous light. It has had that effect upon my soul which could be produced by no system of imposture, no cunningly devised fable whatsoever. And although the effects of this system upon those nations called christian have been but partial and limited, yet if we compare christian nations, in respect to national improvement, or the means of civil and social happiness, either with the present pagan or mahometan nations, we will be instantly struck with the difference.

The following brief reflections will close the discourse.

1. Is it so that the gospel is no cunningly devised fable, then it is undoubtedly worthy of the greatest attention.— He that hath ears to hear let him hear, is a phrase often repeated by our blessed Lord. If Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, this is certainly a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance. It is to be lamented that the gospel receives so little attention, even from those who do not openly reject it. They do not make it their study to become acquainted with the principles of religion. They, at least too many, are grossly ignorant of the plainest doctrines of the Bible. Such are in a situation, the most likely of any, to be carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the slight of men.

2. If the gospel is no cunningly devised fable, but a system of divine truth, then how inexcusable are such as reject it. Its rejection does not, nor cannot arise from any defect of excellence in the system, nor from any deficiency in the evidence of its truth, but from a dislike to its contents; a disapprobation of that which constitutes the principal glory and excellency of the gospel; of that which distinguishes it from all other religions in the world, I mean its soul humbling, Christ exalting, self denying doctrines, which are calculated to hide pride from man; together with its holy precepts. These constitute the principal reasons on which it is rejected. These are in the first place disliked, and, in order to stifle the remonstrances of conscience, its evidences are called in question. But certainly if we reject christianity, merely on account of its excellence, we are without excuse.

3. Is it so that the christian religion is no cunningly

devised fable, then let us embrace it as a system of divine truth. Let us embrace it, not only by simply believing its doctrines, but by practising its duties, and especially by imbibing its spirit. Let us embrace the Lord Jesus Christ, as the way, the truth, and the life, and walk in a manner agreeable to our holy calling. Nothing has a more powerful tendency to strengthen the hands of infidels, and promote the cause of infidelity, than the unsuitableness of the lives of Christians to their holy profession. We are called with a holy calling, therefore let us be holy in heart, life, and conversation. By the unsuitable walk of professors it frequently comes to pass that Christ Jesus is wounded in the house of his friends. Let us be therefore solicitous to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. In order to be, if possible, guarded against the danger of being blinded with the sophisms of infidelity, let us seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Says our blessed Lord, *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God or whether I speak of myself.*

DISCOURSE V.

ACTS x. 43.

To him gave all the Prophets witness.

IN the discourses which have preceded this, various evidences of the divine authority and inspiration of the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments have been brought into view, arising from the necessity of revelation, grounded on the entire insufficiency of the light of nature, or all the efforts of human wisdom, to discover the path of duty, or direct mankind in the pursuit of happiness; from the excellency, perfection, and fullness of the scriptures themselves; and the impossibility that such a book as the Bible could have existed, or either its heavenly doctrines or holy precepts been communicated to men, on any other principle than that of divine inspiration; and from the manner in which both the Old and New Testaments were introduced into the world, and both the Mo-
saic and Christian dispensations established; and the impossibility that either the scriptures themselves could be a forgery, or the extraordinary facts by which they were established fictions. I shall proceed to consider evidences of another kind, viz. the proofs arising from prophecy. It is highly worthy of notice, that the principal facts, which go to establish the truth of christianity, are supported by that kind of evidence which can be alledged in proof of no other ancient facts whatsoever, I mean miracles and prophecy. To these two kinds of evidence our blessed Lord principally appealed, when he was upon earth, in support of his claim to be the true Messiah. When John sent his disciples to Jesus with this question, *Art thou*

be that should come, or do we look for another? Our Lord, instead of giving them a direct answer, refers John to his works. *Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them, and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.* In connexion with his works he directs the Jews to apply to the scriptures, particularly intending the prophecies of the Old Testament. *Search the scriptures, for in them ye think that ye have eternal life. They are they which testify of me.* We are, accordingly, often told in the history of our blessed Lord, as recorded by the Evangelists, that such and such things were done that the scriptures might be fulfilled, i. e. that some particular prophecy, whereby that event was foretold, might be accomplished. To this kind of testimony he also appeals in his conversation with the two disciples, to whom he joined himself as they were travelling together to Emmaus, the same day in which he arose; intending no doubt to pave the way for their receiving full conviction of the certainty of his resurrection from the dead. *O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.* To this same testimony he also refers in another interview and conversation with his disciples after his resurrection. *These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was with you, that all things must be fulfilled which are written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me.* Respecting the testimony from miracles, as applicable to the proof of the divine authority and inspiration, both of the Old and New Testaments, several observations have been made in the preceding discourses. With respect to the evidence from prophecy, it is different from some other kinds of proof; as it applies equally to both Testaments, and shews how they mutually confirm each other. The principal part of scripture prophecy is contained in the Old Testament, and in the New we have the record of

the accomplishment. It may be also considered as different from other kinds of evidence, in that it brightens by time. The testimony from miracles had its full force at the time when the miracles were wrought. Indeed, it would seem as if it were more immediately intended for that particular time, and had a peculiar reference to the conviction of those who were eye witnesses. But prophecy is more immediately a standing evidence to all ages, and gains additional strength in proportion as predictions are accomplished. The proofs of christianity which are to be collected from the prophecies of the Old Testament, are of two kinds.—1st. Prophecies which relate immediately to the promised Messiah, and which are alledged to have been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.—2d. Predictions of other events which have been unquestionably accomplished, and afford full and complete evidence that the Prophets who foretold them were divinely inspired—This discourse will be confined to such prophecies as relate immediately to Christ and his kingdom upon earth. The other part of the argument from prophecy must be the subject of another discourse. I shall enter no farther on the illustration of the passage of scripture prefixed to this, than to consider it as containing a proposition, the illustration of which will be attempted in this discourse. These are the words of the Apostle Peter in his sermon before Cornelius the Centurion, with whose invitation, being a Gentile, he was encouraged to comply by a vision. It is not barely to one of the Prophets, that the Apostle appeals as bearing witness to Christ, but to all the Prophets. Their testimony is not contained in a single detached passage, but in a series of predictions, continued through several centuries, and descending to a description of many minute circumstances relating to the person, character, and work of the promised Messiah. As prophecy is a kind of evidence which can be alledged in proof of no other facts, only those which go to the establishment of christianity, so it has a peculiar reference to the Messiah. Where shall we find a person who was ever foretold so particularly and circumstantially, in all the minute circumstances of his life and character, as the Messiah promised, is in those

prophecies which had their accomplishment in Jesus of Nazareth? If such is the fact, that Jesus Christ was foretold in the Old Testament, by many unquestionable predictions, which have had an undoubted accomplishment, then this affords incontestible proof both of the divine inspiration of the Prophets and of the truth of christianity. Thus the Old and New Testaments not only confirm each other, but christianity rests on such a variety of evidence that the more it is examined the clearer it appears.*

Before I proceed to introduce and examine particular prophecies, I shall make two observations upon prophecy in general, considered as an evidence of inspiration.

1. It must be admitted as an undeniable fact, that when we find, not barely a single prediction, but a series of prophecies relating to a multiplicity of future events, of a most contingent nature, which no human sagacity could foresee, to be exactly accomplished by corresponding events, this affords evidence the most complete, that the

* The following is from Mr. Wilberforce's late excellent treatise, and contains no inapt illustration to the preceding remark.

“ There is one argument (says he) which impresses my
 “ mind with particular force. This is the great variety
 “ of the kinds of evidence which have been adduced in
 “ proof of christianity, and the confirmation thereby af-
 “ farded of its truth. The proof from prophecy, from
 “ miracles, from the character of Christ, from that of his
 “ Apostles, from the nature of the doctrines of christiani-
 “ ty, from the nature and excellence of its practical pre-
 “ cepts, from the accordance we have lately pointed out
 “ between the doctrinal and practical system of christiani-
 “ ty whether considered each in itself or in their mutual
 “ relation to each other, from other species of internal ev-
 “ idence afforded in the more abundance as the sacred
 “ records have been scrutinized with the greater care,
 “ from the accounts of cotemporary or nearly cotemporary
 “ writers, from the impossibility of accounting, on any
 “ other supposition than that of the truth of christianity,

person or persons who uttered these predictions were divinely inspired. To have an absolute foreknowledge of all future events, is the prerogative of God alone. He can communicate such proportions of this knowledge as he sees fit to make known to the children of men, to whomsoever he pleaseth. Doubtless evil spirits, on account of their more perfect knowledge of second causes, and of the mutual dependence which a particular course of events, connected together as by a chain, have upon one another, may, at times, form very probable guesses about some things which are future. This was exemplified in the responses of the ancient heathen oracles. But when they pretended to give answers to those who consulted them, as they frequently did, it was usual for them to clothe the response in such terms of ambiguity and obscurity, that, let the event happen as it would, the credit of the oracle was safe, and the prediction appeared to be, in some sort, fulfilled. It may be farther observed, that the answers of the delphic oracle in particular, which was one

“ for its promulgation and early prevalence. These and
 “ other lines of argument have all been brought forward,
 “ and urged by different writers, in proportion as they
 “ struck the minds of different observers more forcibly. —
 “ Now, granting that some obscure and illiterate men, re-
 “ siding in a distant province of the Roman empire, had
 “ plotted to impose a forgery upon the world, though
 “ some foundation for the imposture might, and indeed
 “ must have been attempted to be laid ; it seems, at least
 “ to my understanding, morally impossible that so many
 “ species of proofs, and all so strong, should have lent their
 “ concurrent aid, and have united their joint force in the
 “ establishment of a falsehood. It may assist the reader
 “ in estimating the value of this argument, to consider up-
 “ on how different a footing, in this respect, has rested
 “ every other religious system, without exception, which
 “ was ever proposed to the world, and indeed every other
 “ historical fact, of which the truth has been at all con-
 “ tested.”—*Practical View, page 331.*

of the most famous in all antiquity, were usually limited to the particular case, in relation to which it was immediately consulted, and related to events which must take place within a short time, either one way or another; as about the fate of some particular expedition or battle, or the like. With respect to the final issue of such events, there might be a knowledge of the natural tendency of second causes then in operation. Farther than this, the oracles did not presume to go. They never pretended to foretel things which were to take place in periods remotely future, and on which things present and apparent had no particular bearing. Much less did they pretend to foretel any particular connected system of events, to be accomplished at different future periods. Whatever probable guesses might be made by such a knowledge of second causes, it does not militate against the truth of the position laid down, that a real knowledge of future events is in itself the prerogative of God alone. By one all-comprehensive view, he surveys all things past, present, and to come. Consequently, if God enables a person to utter, not barely a single prediction in relation to an event presently to happen, but a regular connected series of prophecies in relation to a great variety of events, a large proportion of which were not to obtain their accomplishment until after a lapse of many years, but which have been either all fulfilled or are fulfilling in their season; it is an unanswerable argument that the person or persons communicating this revelation to the world were divinely inspired. If God inspires a particular person, or a number of persons, with a spirit of prophecy, so as to enable him or them to reveal to the world what he himself will bring to pass at a future time, then the work when accomplished is to be considered as the work of God. If therefore, God raised up a succession of men, many years before the event took place, to foretel the coming of a certain glorious personage who was to appear in the world—If they do not rest in merely stating in general terms that he is to come, but point out plainly the time of his coming, and even enter into a minute description of his person, character, manner of his appearing, place of his birth, and of the work which

He was to do in suffering and dying to make an atonement for the sins of men, and in the introduction of a new and more glorious dispensation of religion into the world; and if it is found that events have all answered to these predictions—if one has appeared laying claim to the very character foretold in these prophecies, and if they have all been circumstantially fulfilled in him, then we are furnished with conclusive evidence, both that these extraordinary Prophets, who were commissioned of heaven to foretell these things, were inspired by God's Spirit, and that the person who was foretold, and who, on his appearing, so exactly answered all these predictions, was the true Messiah, a teacher sent from God, and the Saviour of the world, and his religion divine. Let us apply these observations to the proof of christianity. We find in the Old Testament a regular series of prophecies, uttered long before Christ's appearance in the flesh, wherein his character and work are so plainly delineated that from these alone we may almost collect a complete history of all that he did. As the foretelling of these things could only be from God, so the person foretold must be the Messiah sent from God.

2. We may observe that the prophecies recorded in the Old Testament were unquestionably uttered long before the events foretold took place, and are no invention of later ages. That this antiquity of scripture prophecy is real and not pretended, merely to do honour to christianity and its founder, is a fact which admits of easy proof. I purpose, however, not to enter into any laboured and lengthy argument on that subject, but merely to state one circumstance which exhibits the strongest internal evidence of that fact, i. e. had Christians ever harboured the design of forging such a series of prophecies, it was impossible that they could have succeeded in the accomplishment, and escape detection. The scriptures of the Old Testament were received, by Christians, from the Jews. To the Jews, these ancient prophecies were first committed. Although they reject the christian revelation, yet they own the genuineness and authenticity of these prophecies which clearly point out the Messiah, and never accuse the

Christians with the crime of corrupting or altering them, by inserting passages favourable to christianity and its founder. Had any such interpolation of the prophecies, by inserting passages favourable to christianity, taken place, the Jews, who without doubt, still retained many copies of the Old Testament in their hands, which never came into the possession of Christians, must have known it. Had those copies, which passed into the hands of Christians, been altered, and any thing inserted in them which was not in the original prophecies, the fraud might have been easily discovered by a comparison with those copies which still remained in the possession of the Jews. However wicked the Jews might be in many respects, yet as the lively oracles were committed to them, so it appears that they have been ever faithful to their trust, and as they never accuse the Christians of this kind of fraud, in all their disputes against christianity, this affords conclusive evidence that no such fraud did ever take place. As the same ancient prophecies are and always have been owned, both by Jews and Christians, although they differ so widely, both in their understanding and application of them, this makes it evident that the passages favourable to christianity, which are now in these sacred books, have not been invented and inserted by Christians, in order to do honour to their cause, but were really uttered many ages before the commencement of the christian dispensation. It deserves attention that, in this particular, the evidence in favor of christianity derives additional strength from the unbelief of the Jews. Had that nation received Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, immediately on the first propagation of the gospel, then there would have been some more room left for suspicion or presumption in an attempt to contest the genuineness of the ancient prophecies. It might have been then insinuated, that the Jews and Christian Gentiles had combined together to corrupt these writings, in order to favor their darling notions. But, viewing the case in all its circumstances, we can find no possible grounds for such a supposition. Jews and Christians have, in this particular, been guards upon each other, the one against inserting, and the other against expunging. If the one

therefore had attempted to expunge, or the other to insert, the alarm would have been sounded. Between them we may be assured that we have the same original prophecies which were delivered by holy men of old.

These observations being premised, I go on to state various things concerning Christ, to which the Prophets bear witness.

1. The writings of the Prophets bear testimony to the divinity of Christ. Had the Jews duly searched the scriptures in relation to this fact, they could not have charged him with blasphemy because he declared himself to be the Son of God. The revelation of this important truth of our holy religion is not confined to the New Testament. Attestations to it in the Old Testament are abundant. A few may be noticed. *Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given. And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth; for I am God and there is none else. For thy maker is thine husband, the Lord of hosts is his name, and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel, the God of the whole earth shall he be called. This is his name where with he shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness Awake O Sword against my shepherd and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts.*

It may serve to cast some farther light upon this subject to consider that there is, at least, probable evidence that Jesus the Son of God, who became incarnate in the fulness of time, was, by way of eminence, the Jehovah of the Old Testament.

When our blessed Lord says to the Jews, *Before Abraham was, I am*, there seems to be a manifest allusion to the name assumed by Jehovah the God of Israel, when he called, commissioned, and sent forth Moses, to deliver his people out of their Egyptian bondage. *Exod. iii. 14. And God said unto Moses, I am that I am. And he said, thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I am hath sent me unto you.* A name undoubtedly implying eternity, self existence and independence, and excluding all succession of past and future. This name Christ assumes as the

Son of God. He does not say I was, but *I am*, a name pretty much of the same import with that given by the Apostle. *Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever.* In Numbers xxi. 5—10, we have a remarkable instance of the murmuring of the children of Israel, both against God and against Moses. To punish this rebellious murmuring, God sent fiery flying serpents among them, which bit them, and many of the people died. It was undoubtedly against Jehovah the God of Israel that the children of Israel murmured. But this is expressly called a tempting of Christ. Compare this account with 1 Cor. x. 9. *Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.* The glory of God the Father, or the glory of the divine essence, is seen only in the Son. *No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.* But Jehovah the God of Israel sometimes made himself visible. Adam and Eve heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden, in the cool of the day. Gen. iii. 8. The Lord appeared, at different times, to Abraham,* particularly when circumcision was instituted, Gen. xvii. and when he interceded for Sodom, Gen. xviii. *The Lord also appeared unto Moses in a flame of fire in the bush,* Exod. iii. 2. Moses, Aaron, and the Elders of Israel saw the God of Israel. *And they saw the God of Israel, and there was under his feet the paved work of a sapphire stone; and they saw God and did eat and drink. And the sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mount.* Exod. xxiv. 10, 11, 17. *And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.* Chap. xxxiii. 11. *Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on his throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple.* Isa. vi. 1. *Mine eyes have seen the King the Lord of hosts.* Ver. 5. That this appearance of the Lord or Jehovah of hosts was an appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are

* These remarks were originally published, by the author of these discourses, in the Connecticut Magazine, for August, 1802.



expressly informed, John xii. 41. *These things said Esaias when he saw his glory and spake of him.*

These, as well as other visible appearances, of which we have an account in the Old Testament, were, doubtless, preludes of the future incarnation of the Son of God. It also deserves to be remarked, that names, which were peculiarly appropriate to the God of Israel, are, in both the Old and New Testaments, applied to the Lord Jesus Christ; particularly the name *Jehovah*, which the God of Israel challenges as his peculiar right, and the Jews ever esteemed as the most sacred of all the divine names and titles. Christ is expressly called by this most sacred name, Jer. xxiii. 6. *And this is the name wherewith he shall be called. The Lord (or Jehovah) our righteousness.* This we see by the context, is a name given to the righteous branch. It may tend to place this in a still stronger point of light, to observe that the name *Jehovah*, which, when translated, is usually rendered *Lord*, is constantly rendered into the Greek, by the septuagint interpreters, who were undoubtedly well acquainted with the idioms of both languages, by the word *Kurios*. This word is, in the New Testament, invariably translated *Lord*, and is an appropriate name of our Lord Jesus Christ. This affords strong presumptive evidence at least, that Jesus Christ is, by way of eminence, the *Jehovah* of the Old Testament.

The names and titles, *Holy One*, *Holy One of God*, and *Holy One of Israel*, are also names promiscuously applied to *Jehovah* the God of Israel, and to the Lord Jesus Christ. These names and titles, the last the most frequently, are used nearly fifty times in the Old Testament, and by the prophet *Isaias* oftener than by any other inspired writer. They are the appropriate names and titles of *Jehovah* the God of Israel. But they are many times used where *Jesus Christ* is unquestionably meant. To this purpose, *Psal* xvi. 10. *Thou wilt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.* *Psal* lxxxix. 19. *Thou spakest in vision to thy Holy One.* To the same purpose, *vid.* *Isa.* xli. 14, chap. xliii. 14, chap. xlvi. 17, chap. lv. 5, chap. lx. 14. The same name and title is given to Christ in the New Testament, *Mark* i. 24, *Luke* iv. 34, *Acts* iii. 14, chap.

xiii. 35. From the promiscuous application of this name to the Jehovah of the Old Testament, and to the Lord Jesus Christ, it appears at least probable, that by the Jehovah of the Old Testament, we are to understand, by way of eminence, the second person in the Trinity, who afterwards became incarnate, and that, as under the Old Testament dispensation, he wrought deliverances for his people Israel, which were peculiar to them, and also effected a most glorious redemption for his spiritual Israel from the bondage of sin, so in the effecting, both the spiritual and the temporal deliverances, he makes himself known to his people by the same names and titles.

The names of *God*, *Great God*, and *Almighty God*, are also appropriate names of Jehovah the God of Israel. But these are used and applied where it is evident that the Lord Jesus Christ is meant. To prove this, several passages of scripture, already quoted, might be mentioned, as Isa. ix. 6, chap. xlv. 18, 21, 22.

The same relations to the church, the spiritual Israel, are also sustained by Jehovah the God of Israel, and by the Lord Jesus Christ. I shall only instance in the relation of a husband, or the existence of a mystical marriage between them. Jehovah the God of Israel was the husband of his church. Isa. liv. 5. *For thy maker is thine husband, The Lord, or Jehovah, of hosts is his name.* Jer. xxxi. 32. *Which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord.* Isa. liv. 1. *More are the children of the desolate than of the married wife, saith the Lord.* Ezek. xvi 8, 20, 21. *I entered into covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine, i. e. by a marriage relation. Thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters whom thou hast born unto me, and these hast thou sacrificed, thou hast slain my children.* Hosea ii. 19. *I will betroth thee unto me forever, yea I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving kindness, and in mercies.* Jer. iii. 14. *Turn O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you.* But it is the Lord Jesus Christ who is, by way of eminence, the husband of his church. The entire book of the Song of Solomon is an allegorical representation of the mystical marriage be-

tween Christ and his church ; and he is, in the New Testament, expressly called the husband of his church. 2 Cor. xi. 2. *For I have espoused you unto one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin unto Christ.*

In addition to these remarks, let it be observed, that many passages in the Old Testament, which evidently relate to Jehovah the God of Israel, are, by the sacred penmen of the New Testament, cited and applied to the Lord Jesus Christ. From many instances of this kind, the following may be selected, as particularly deserving notice. Psal. lxxviii. 18. *Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive, thou hast received gifts for men* From the scope of the Psalm it is evident, that he who is represented as ascending up on high, is the same with Jehovah the God of Israel. This passage is cited by the Apostle Paul, and applied to Christ. 1. ph. iv. 8. When it is said, Psal. xlvii. 5, *God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet*, the words appear to be spoken of Jehovah the God of Israel. They have nevertheless an evident allusion to the ascension of Christ. Psal. xcvii. 7. *Worship him all ye gods.* This personage, whom all the gods or angels are to worship, is the same who, in the beginning of the Psalm, is spoken of as the Lord who reigneth over all the earth, and of whose throne righteousness and judgment are the habitation. This passage is, by the sacred penman of the epistle to the Hebrews, cited and applied to Christ in the character of the only begotten Son of God, with only this variation, that they who are by the Psalmist called gods, are called angels by the Apostle. Heb. i. 6. According to the opinion of all judicious commentators, Psal. xlv. is applicable to the Lord Jesus Christ, but ver. vi. *Thy throne O God is for ever and ever, the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre*, is indisputably applicable to the Jehovah of Israel. Yet this passage is cited and applied to Christ, as the Son of God. Heb. i. 8. I shall only mention two passages more, from Isaiah, chap. xl. 3. *Prepare ye the way of the Lord, or Jehovah.* That this Lord, or Jehovah, was the Lord Jesus Christ, appears from the citation and application of this passage to him in the New Testament. Matt. xxxiii. The other passage is Isa.

viii. 13, 14. *Sanctify the Lord, or Jehovah, of hosts himself, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence.* That this Lord or Jehovah of hosts, was the Lord Jesus Christ, appears from the application of this passage to him, by two inspired Apostles: by Paul; Rom ix. 33; and Peter, 1 Pet. i. 8. Other passages might be selected to the same purpose, but these may suffice to show that, so far as relates to the real divinity of Christ, there is an exact resemblance between the character which is given of him in the Old and in the New Testaments. In the Old Testament he is called the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father; in the New, we are told that *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* But that which was my principal intention in this discourse, was to take notice of some of the principal prophecies of the Old Testament, which relate to the Messiah in his official capacity, and compare them with their accomplishment in Jesus of Nazareth.

I proceed to observe, that an account of almost every thing which relates to the history of our blessed Lord; may be collected from the prophecies of the Old Testament. There we have an account of the time and manner of his appearing, of the work which he came into the world to do, and of the manner in which he performed that work, of all the circumstances of his life, death, resurrection, and ascension up into heaven, and of the nature and extent of that kingdom which he was about to set up in the world. To illustrate this, let us attend to a few particulars.

1. The time when Christ was actually to come in the flesh was clearly pointed out in prophecy. However blinded the Jews may have since been about the period of Christ's coming, it is certain that, about the time of the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth, such was their understanding of the prophecies, that the whole nation was then filled with the highest expectations of the speedy appearance of the Messiah. So closely have they since been pressed with the ancient prophecies on that head, and so

fully has it been demonstrated that the period fixed for his appearance in the ancient prophecies has been long since passed, that the only thing which they have to say, in answer, is, that his coming has been delayed on account of their sins; a reason of all others the most absurd. If this was to have any influence at all, it would seem as if it should rather hasten than retard his coming. Two or three passages shall be noticed, which point so clearly to the time of Christ's coming, that it could scarcely be mistaken. The first is Jacob's famous prophecy of Shiloh, Gen. xlix. 10. *The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and to him shall the gathering of people be.* According to the almost unanimous consent of interpreters, both Christian and Jewish, by Shiloh we are to understand the Messiah. There is not an entire agreement about what is the plain literal meaning of the term. Some explain it as signifying one who was sent, or to be sent; some suppose it to mean him for whom it is reserved, i. e. the sceptre, after its departure from Judah. Some suppose it to mean her son, or the woman's seed. The late Dr. Brown, of Haddington, who, for bible literature, has been surpassed by few, after examining a variety of interpretations, prefers to understand it as meaning a prosperous Saviour or deliverer. Some would understand it as meaning a peace-maker, &c. Let whichever of these be the true sense of the term, they all perfectly agree to the character of the Messiah, the Saviour who was to come. He was, by way of eminence, the messenger who was sent. He was truly and properly the seed of the woman, and he is the prosperous Saviour. The word here rendered sceptre, literally signifies a rod or a staff, but is frequently put for a sceptre in the proper sense, and signifies authority or government, the sign being put for the thing signified. So the word is rendered, Numb. xxiv. 17, Psal. xlv. 6, Isa. xiv. 5, Ezek. xix. 11, 14. If we understand the term strictly for the ensign or badge of sovereign power, the meaning will be that, when once the supreme power or rule came to be fixed in the tribe of Judah, as was the case when David was raised to the throne, it should not depart from that tribe until the

coming of Shiloh or the Messiah. But if every appearance of the supreme power, or of a sceptre as an ensign of government, has, long since, wholly departed from that tribe, then the Messiah has either come, or that famous prophecy of the patriarch Jacob has fallen to the ground. And if this final departure took place about the time of the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth, then this proves, both that the prophecy itself was from God, and that Jesus of Nazareth is the true Messiah, and the christian religion divine.

To this sense and application of the passage there are some objections. It is said that if we understand the sceptre to mean authority or government, it had departed from Judah long before, viz. during the Babylonish captivity, and that many of their after rulers, viz. the Maccabees, were not of the tribe of Judah but of Levi.

I answer that the Babylonish captivity may with propriety be looked upon only as a temporary interruption or suspension of the government in the tribe of Judah, and not as a final departure of the sceptre. As this was only for the space of seventy years, it is hardly to be noticed in so long a period as that which elapsed between David and Christ. Add to this that God had given an absolute promise of the restoration of the sceptre to Judah; so that this was to be looked upon rather as a sleep than as the death of the government. There was also, during the captivity, some shadow of royalty in that tribe. First, in Jehoiachin, whom Evilmerodach raised up above the captive princes who were with him in Babylon. Secondly, in Daniel, who is also said to have been of that tribe and of the seed royal, and in the successive heads of the captivity. After the return of the Jews from Babylon the supreme power was in that tribe, first in Zerubbabel, who was of the royal family of David, and afterwards in Nehemiah, whom the Jews affirm to be of that tribe. Although the people afterwards chose governors and generals, such as the Maccabees, some of whom were of the tribe of Levi, yet for the principal part of the time after the return from the captivity, the supreme power was placed in the great council called the Sanhedrim, in which,

although some of the tribe of Levi were mixed with the tribe of Judah, yet because they, as well as the tribe of Benjamin, were in a great measure absorbed or lost in that tribe; because they received their authority from the tribe of Judah, and because that tribe always composed a vast majority in the great council, the sceptre might be said still to remain in the tribe of Judah.

Should any shadow of an objection still remain, it will be removed, by considering the word rendered sceptre, as signifying, not properly royal or sovereign authority, but the rod or staff of a tribe, or that badge of distinction whereby the tribe of Judah was distinguished from the other tribes of Israel. At the time when this prophecy was uttered, Judah had no sceptre, neither was he to have any for many generations yet to come. Judah, nevertheless, had then a rod or staff of a tribe. He was constituted a tribe as well as the rest of his brethren. He should not cease to be a body politic until Shiloh came. Now let us see how this has been accomplished. When it was particularly promised to Judah that the sceptre should not depart from him, it was implied that it should depart from the other tribes. Accordingly the tribe of Benjamin became a sort of appendage to the tribe of Judah; and the other tribes, long before the coming of the Messiah, were carried away captive out of their own land, by the king of Assyria, from which captivity they have never returned. And although the Jews were not, after the captivity, always a free people, but were tributaries to the kings of Persia, and afterwards were subjected to a more rigorous servitude, first under some of Alexander's successors, and again under the Romans, yet they continued a body politic until the coming of the Messiah. But about the time of the coming of Christ, all shadow of a sceptre or government departed from Judah. This may be dated from the time when the supreme power was conferred by the Romans upon Herod, who was an Idumean. With him the Jewish sanhedrim long struggled, nor did they finally submit untill near his death, which happened several years after the birth of Christ. There was a still more total departure of the sceptre, about forty years after our Sav-

our's crucifixion ; when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Romans. When Turnus Rufus, at the command of Titus the Roman general, drew a plough over the place where the temple before stood, thereby literally fulfilling that prophecy of Micah—*Zion for your sakes shall be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps ; and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest.* All endeavours of the Jews to rebuild their temple and restore their government have proved abortive, although they had the assistance of some Roman emperors, particularly of Julian, who aided them out of hatred to the Christians. Since that time they never have been formed into a society or body politic. They have been dispersed among all nations ; their tribes and their genealogies have been confounded, and they have lived without a ruler, without a lawgiver, and without supreme authority or government, in any part of the earth. Thus Jacob's prophecy clearly referred to the time of the Messiah's coming, and has been remarkably fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

2. Another prophecy clearly pointing to the time of our Saviour's coming is contained in Daniel's account of the seventy weeks. Dan. ix. 24, 25, 26. *Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people, and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy. Know, therefore, and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem, unto the Messiah the Prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks : the street shall be built again and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself.* According to the prophetic mode of reckoning a day for a year, seventy weeks will make four hundred and ninety years. According to the computations of chronologers, from the time in which the building of the city and wall was finished, until the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth, was about four hundred and forty or fifty years, answering nearly to the sixty and two weeks mentioned, ver. 25. If we add to these the seven weeks of years, in which the work was

perfecting, it will make up the four hundred and ninety years, nearly. Indeed, so great is the exactness, in point of time, in the chronological prophecies, that it is probable there would not be found, even the minutest variation, could dates be ascertained with precision. But although there may possibly exist some difficulty in determining the time exactly (and any thing like a chronological discussion is not my present business) yet thus much is evident, that the seventy weeks have long since expired, and that they terminated about the time of our Lord's crucifixion. As this prophecy of Daniel does not barely point us to the particular time when the Messiah was to come, but also minutely describes the work which he was to do, viz. to finish transgression and make an end of sin, a work exactly answering to the pretensions of Jesus of Nazareth, which pretensions he supported by a series of incontestible miracles, as has been proved in a former discourse, it is abundantly evident that this prophecy was fulfilled in Christ, the event verifying that he came as was written of him. This is farther put beyond even the possibility of doubt by the consideration that the other remarkable events which are mentioned, ver. 26 and 27, as something which would follow the cutting off of the Messiah, have been also fulfilled with the most circumstantial exactness, in the entire and long continued desolation of the Jewish church and nation, an awful catastrophe which took place about forty years after our Lord's crucifixion. Thus the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

3. Another passage of scripture, which also points to the time of Christ's coming, is Haggai's prophecy in relation to the superior glory of the second temple above the first. Hag. ii. 7. *And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come. And I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.* Ver. 9. *The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts.* It is clear that the superior glory of the second temple did not consist in any outward glory or magnificence. In this respect it was vastly inferior to that which was built by Solomon. We are told, Ezra iii. 12, *That many of the Priests and Levites and chief of the Fa-*

thers, who were ancient men that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice. That these should weep, on an occasion of such general joy, must rise partly from the remembrance of their former desolations, and partly on account of the scanty preparations for pomp and magnificence which, in their present low estate, they were able to make for this house, when compared with that which was built by Solomon. It is clear, therefore, that the superior glory of the second temple must consist in something different from outward splendour. What was it, therefore, which rendered this house so remarkably glorious, in comparison of the other? Undoubtedly it was the coming of the messenger of the covenant, even of the desire of all nations, into his temple, and filling it with the glory of his doctrine and miracles, which caused it to excel the former house in glory. It is clear then, that, agreeable both to the letter and spirit of this prophecy, the Messiah was to appear in the world during the period in which the second temple was standing. If this temple, therefore, has been long since destroyed, and if its final destruction happened not many years after our Saviour's crucifixion, then it is evident that this prophecy had its accomplishment in Jesus of Nazareth, and can agree to no other, and that it refers to and determines the time of his coming. To the same purpose see Mal. iii. 1. *And the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in.*

4. The place where the Messiah was to be born was also as clearly and particularly foretold, as was the time of his appearance. Applied to Jesus of Nazareth, the event exactly answers to the prediction. Mic. v. 2. *But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel: whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.* Compare this prophecy with its exact accomplishment in Jesus of Nazareth. Matt. ii. 1. *Now Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king.* It is a subject highly worthy of our notice, to remark the wonderful concurrence of circumstances,

evidently combined together by an overruling Providence, in order to bring about the accomplishment of this prophecy. In the first place, it was necessary that Augustus Cæsar should, at that particular juncture, send forth his decree throughout the Roman empire, requiring every one to repair to his own city in order to be enrolled. Joseph and Mary had their usual residence at this time, not in Bethlehem, but at Nazareth in Galilee. Had they not been urged by this decree, it is not probable that they would have thought of taking a journey to Bethlehem at this time, which appears to have been not so suitable to her circumstances. Had they set out on their journey but a few days sooner, they might have returned before the full time of her delivery had arrived; and had their journey been delayed but a few days later, she must have been delivered before they set out. We see here a wonderful combination of circumstances, of which, if any one had fell out differently, the event of the place of the Saviour's birth could not have fallen out agreeably to the prediction. There must not only be a decree from Cæsar, for the enrollment of the whole Roman empire—it must be issued at that critical moment. The word of God cannot fail, and all the circumstances necessary to insure its accomplishment are in his hand.

5. The particular stock or tribe, out of which the Messiah was to arise, was also foretold. This was, in the first place, intimated more generally. As the period in which he was to be manifested in the flesh drew nigh, this was revealed more particularly and definitely. To Adam the family of Seth was pointed out, in language he without doubt understood, as that out of which the precious promised seed was to arise. To the patriarch Noah it was foretold that the Messiah was to arise out of the line of Shem. Gen. ix. 26, 27 *Blessed be the Lord God of Shem. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem.* To Abraham it was foretold that the Messiah should arise from among his posterity, in that promise that, *In his seed should all the families of the earth be blessed.* And lest he should mistake the particular branch of his seed, out of which the Messiah was to arise, it was farther declared that

to him that *in Isaac should his seed be called*. By the answer given to Rebekah before the birth of Jacob and Esau, as well as by the final destination of the patriarchal blessing, contrary to Isaac's intentions, that patriarch was taught that the line of Jacob, and not that of his favorite Esau, was to be honoured with the privilege of giving birth to him who was to be the desire of all nations. However wicked Balaam was, as a man, yet, when he foretold that a star should come out of Jacob, and a sceptre should arise out of Israel, he was, without doubt, inspired with a true spirit of prophecy. The star and sceptre, emblematical of light and power, no doubt pointed out him who was to be the light of the world, and who was to rule over the nations. To Jacob it was foretold that Messiah was to arise, not out of the tribe of his favorite Joseph, but out of Judah; agreeable to fore-quoted, Gen. xlix. 10. As the time of his appearance drew nigher, the prophecy became more distinct, and the stock and lineage of David was pointed out as the favoured family. As David was an illustrious type of Christ, many things which were spoken of him, although they had some reference to the type, yet had their full accomplishment in him who was both David's Son and David's Lord. No doubt there are many things contained in the book of Psalms, which a prophetic spirit constrained David to utter, of which he did not expect the accomplishment in his lineal descendants generally. He without doubt saw them to extend to the Messiah who was to proceed out of his loins. The following passages may be selected out of many. Psal. lxxxix. 3, 4. *I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant. Thy seed will I establish forever, and build up thy throne to all generations.* Ver. 19, 20. *Then thou spakest in vision to thy Holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people. I have found David my servant, with my holy oil have I anointed him; with much more to the same purpose, not only in that, but in many other Psalms. Should any doubt yet remain, it is removed by the express declarations of two inspired Prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah* Isa. xi. 1, 2. *And there shall come*

forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding. Ver. 10. In that day, viz the gospel day, there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek; and his rest shall be glorious. Jer. xxiii. 5. Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous branch. Compare these predictions with the accomplishment. Christ was both David's Son and David's Lord. His genealogy, both by his mother, Mary and his reputed father Joseph, is traced back to David by the Evangelists. Whatever difficulties may occur, in reconciling the different genealogies of Matthew and Luke, which learned men have attempted in different ways, yet this is clear, that, as a full accomplishment of these predictions, God has raised up a horn of Salvation, in the house of his servant David.

6. There is scarcely a circumstance which occurred, either in relation to the birth or life of Jesus of Nazareth, which we cannot, on examination, find minutely described in the writings of the Prophets. A few of the principal, and those which are the most obvious, I shall briefly notice. His forerunner John, who was to prepare the way, for his coming and be the harbinger to usher him into the world, was foretold, Isa. xl. 3, 4. *The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make strait in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made strait and the rough places plain.* Mal. iii. 1, iv. 5. *Behold I shall send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me. Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.* How exactly does this agree with what the angel communicated to Zacharias, when he came to foretel his birth. Luke i. 17. *And he shall go before him (viz. Christ) in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.* How exactly was all this fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist? How well

was his ministry every way calculated to prepare the way for the coming of Christ! That he should be born of a virgin, was also foretold by two inspired Prophets. By Isaiah, chap. vii. 14. *Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.* And by Jeremiah, chap xxxi. 22. *For the Lord hath created a new thing in the earth, a woman shall compass a man.* Compare this with the angel's declaration to the blessed virgin, when he came to announce to her that she should be the Saviour's mother. Luke i. 35. *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.* His persecution by Herod, and the consequent murder of the infants of Bethlehem, were also foretold. Jer. xxxi. 15. *A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children, refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not.* How cruelly, and at the same time, how exactly was this prediction accomplished, when Herod sent forth and slew all the children in Bethlehem and the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, in order that he might, in that way, destroy the child Jesus who was born. The manner in which he was to appear in the world, together with the general course of his life while he sojourned among the children of men, were also foretold. His appearance was to be without any external pomp or grandeur, and in circumstances of great outward poverty and meanness. Although the Jews, about the time of the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth, were so infatuated with the idea that the Messiah was to appear, clothed with all the trappings of royal majesty and grandeur, arrayed in all the pomp and splendor of the most puissant earthly prince, who was to raise their nation to the highest pinnacle of earthly glory, and, for that reason, stumbled at the outward meanness of his condition, yet it is evident that, in this particular, they both misunderstood and misapplied the ancient prophecies concerning him. These constantly speak of him as appearing in circumstances externally mean. Zech. ix. 9. *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy King cometh unto thee; he is just, and having salvation;*

lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. This was literally fulfilled when he rode to Jerusalem in triumph; the only time we ever hear of his riding, during the whole period of his sojourning upon earth. This prediction, as it was descriptive of a state of humiliation, was emphatically fulfilled throughout his whole life. Although he professed to be the Messiah, the Son and the sent of God, and supported his pretensions by a series of wonderful and Godlike works, yet his outward circumstances always bespoke poverty and meanness. Born of poor parents, although descended from the royal family of David, he was so far from affecting state and grandeur, that he was beholden to the hand of charity, both for his daily bread, and for a shelter from the inclemency of the season. He never had either house or home of his own. *Foxes, saith he, have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.* Although descended from the royal family of David, yet he appears to have come into the world at a time when either the whole family, or at least that particular branch of it from which he immediately derived his descent, was fallen into decay. This appears both from the circumstances attending his birth, and the offering at the purification of the blessed virgin. Being born at Bethlehem, during the time of the taxing or enrollment, when a large concourse of people was collected together, and the city full of strangers, no better place than a manger could be found for ushering the heavenly stranger into the world; the inns being, without doubt, occupied by guests who, in the estimation of sinful men, were more honourable than his reputed parents. And a pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons, which constituted the offering at the purification of his mother, was the offering appointed by the law of Moses for the poorest of the people. The manner in which he was to be received by the Jews was also foretold. The dignity of his person, connected with the benevolent purposes for which he came into the world, were sufficient to entitle him to the warmest and most cordial reception both by Jews and Gentiles. Yet the manner in which he was actually received was very different. In this respect,

however, he came as it was written of him. Ungrateful as his reception was, it was precisely what had been foretold by the Prophets. Isa. liii. 2, 3. *He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty, that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.* Compare this with the account which we have in the New Testament, of his actual reception. *He came unto his own, and his own received him not.* He was scorned and rejected, and finally persecuted to death by the Jews; and he is still a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to unbelievers, without any distinction of Jews and Gentiles. It was also foretold that he should execute the threefold office of Prophet, Priest, and King. His prophetic office was foretold by Moses: Deut. xviii. 15. *The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.* Ver. 18. *I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.* As a prophet, it was foretold that he should lead the blind in a way that they knew not; that he should make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. *That the eyes of them that see should not be dim, and the ears of them that hear should hearken, that the heart of the rash should understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerer should be ready to speak plainly.* That he should be a priest, was foretold by the Psalmist: Psal. cx. 4. *The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.* Agreeable to this prediction, we find him represented in the New Testament as the great Apostle and High Priest of our profession, who by one offering hath perfected forever them that are sanctified. His kingly office was also foretold in many places of scripture, particularly Psal. ii. 6, 8. *I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.* Psal. lxxxix. *I will make him my first born, higher than the kings of the earth. I will set his*

hand also in the sea and his right hand in the rivers. Isa. xxxii. 1. *Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness.* As the king and head of his church, he both rules in the hearts, and reigns over his people. In connexion with, or as subordinate parts of these three great offices, he is also known in other characters and relations to his people, which were in the Old Testament foretold. As that of a Shepherd. Psal. xxiii. 1, 2. *The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.* The Prophet takes particular notice of the tenderness and compassion which he exercises in this character. Isa. xl. 11. *He shall feed his flocks like a Shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.* Our blessed Lord, when he was upon earth, delighted to appear and exhibit himself to his disciples in that character. *I am the good Shepherd; the good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. I am the door; by me if any man enter in he shall be saved, and he shall go in and out, and shall find pasture.* He was also pointed out by the Prophets, as one who was to be a physician, who was to heal all the diseases of his people. *Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there? Why then is not the hurt of the daughter of my people recovered? By his stripes we are healed.* His preaching and miracles were also foretold. Isa. xxxv. 5, 6. *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing.* Chap. lxi. 1. *The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek. He hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.* Compare these predictions with the accomplishment. He came and preached peace to them that were afar off, and to them that were nigh. He went about doing good, working a series of miracles calculated to alleviate the sufferings of the human race, such as healing the sick, giving eyes to the blind and feet to the lame, feeding the hungry and raising the dead.

7. All that variety of circumstances which attended his sufferings and death were foretold. Out of many, I shall notice the following. As preparatory to his sufferings we find him, in the first place, betrayed by Judas. But Judas' treachery, his covenanting with the chief priests to betray him for money, and even the very price for which he stipulated with his murderers to betray him, were circumstances which were foretold. The Psalmist looks farther than the treachery of Ahithophel, in such passages as these. Psal. xli. 9. *Yea mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.* Psal. lv. 12, 13. *For it was not an enemy that reproached me, then I could have borne it; neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him. But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance.* That this treason was to be committed for money, for the precise sum of thirty pieces of silver, with the very use to which the money was to be put, are circumstances mentioned by the Prophet Zechariah, chap. xi. 12, 13. *They weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me cast it unto the potter; a goodly price that I was prized at of them.* Compare these passages from the Prophets, with the accounts given us of the treachery of Judas in the New Testament. The circumstance of their giving him vinegar mingled with gall, to drink while extended on the cross, in order to inflame instead of allaying his thirst, was also foretold. Psal. lxxix. 21. *They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.* The soldiers' piercing his side with a spear, out of which came forth blood and water, was also foretold. Zech. xii. 10. *And they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him.* The cruel mocking and derision which he experienced during his sufferings on the cross, were also foretold. Psal. xxii. 7, 8. *All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted in the Lord that he would deliver him; let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.* Compare this with the accomplishment. Matt. xxvii. 40. *If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.*

Ver. 42. *He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.* The particular kind of death of which he was to die, i. e. by being nailed to the cross, was also foretold. Psal. xxii. 16. *They pierced my hands and my feet.* The circumstance of the soldiers' casting lots for, and dividing his garments, was also foretold. Psal. xxii. 18. *They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.* And when the soldiers proceeded to break the legs of those who had been crucified with him, they were deterred from breaking his legs, that the scriptures might be fulfilled wherein it was foretold, that *A bone of him should not be broken.* That his disciples should forsake him during the period of his sharpest sufferings, was also foretold. Zech. xiii. 7. *Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, smite the Lord of Hosts; smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.* Compare this with our blessed Lord's own prediction, and with the conduct of his disciples during the crucifixion. *All ye shall be offended because of me this night; for it is written, I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.* Matt. xxvi. 31. Compared with ver. 56. *And they all forsook him and fled.* It was foretold that his sufferings were to be great, and even unparalleled. Those words of the prophet Jeremiah, which were perhaps literally applicable to the sufferings of the Jews when Jerusalem was taken by Nebuchadnezzar, are eminently descriptive of the greatness of Christ's sufferings. Lam. i. 12. *Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.* According to what was foretold by the Prophets in the Old Testament, he was to suffer, not only in his body, but also in his soul, and even to give his soul an offering for sin. He was to be wounded and bruised, oppressed and afflicted. It was even to please his Father, who had given so many testimonies from heaven that he was his dearly beloved Son in whom he was ever well pleased, to bruise him and to put him to grief. Instead of citing

chapter and verse, we may refer to the whole of the 22d and 69th Psalms and to the entire 53d chapter of Isaiah, for a prophetic description of the greatness and extent of his sufferings. They are also alluded to, and more briefly described, in many other parts of the Old Testament. Compare these predictions with the accomplishment. Follow him into the garden of Gethsemane. View him in his heart rending agony, which occasioned a preternatural sweat of great drops of blood. By contemplating this scene of soul suffering, we may learn something of what is meant by the Lord's laying on him the iniquity of us all, and by his giving his soul an offering for sin. View him scourged, buffeted, blindfolded, spit upon, crowned with thorns, and smitten with the reed or eastern cane, whereby the thorns were driven into his temples. Follow him to Mount Calvary, and there view him extended upon the cross, and nailed to the accursed tree. Hear him utter that lamentable and expiring cry, *Eli, Eli, Lama, Sabachthani, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* and there learn what the prophet means by his being oppressed and afflicted, wounded and bruised; and see how minutely and circumstantially the prediction agrees with the accomplishment. The cause of his sufferings was also foretold. For equoted Dan. ix. 24. *It was to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness.* Isai. liii. 5. *He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him.* Ver 8. *He was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.* Compare this with the account given of the cause of his sufferings, in the New Testament. Although the malice and wickedness of his enemies and persecutors, was conspicuous in all those preparatory steps which led him to the cross, yet he expressly tells them that they could have no power against him, unless it had been given them by his father. Hence the Apostle Peter. *Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.* The cause of Christ's sufferings is farther explained. Gal. iii. 13. *Christ hath redeemed us from*

the curse of the law, being made a curse for us : and 1 Pet. i. 18, 19. *You were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold ; but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.* Chap. iii. 18. *For Christ also, hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.* The manner of his sufferings was also foretold. They were to be, in the first place, voluntary. Psal. xl. 6, 7, 8. *Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire ; mine ears hast thou opened ; burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required.* Then said I, to, I come : in the volume of the book it is written of me. I delight to do thy will O my God : yea, thy law is within my heart. Compare this with the words of our blessed Lord himself. John x. 17, 18. *I lay down my life that I might take it again. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.* He withheld not his back from the smiters, nor his cheeks from them that plucked off the hair. It seems as if he laboured under a certain degree of impatience to go through the work in which he was engaged. *I have, saith he, a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished.* He accordingly quickens the traitor Judas, saying, *What thou dost, do quickly.* He was to suffer patiently and quietly. Isai. xlii. 2. *He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.* Chap. liii. 7. *He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.* Compare this with the manner in which he endured his cruel sufferings, and we are struck with the exactness of the accomplishment. He was to suffer with firmness, fortitude, and resolution. Isai. xlii. 4. *He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth.* Chap. l. 7. *I shall not be confounded ; therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.* He was to suffer solitary, or alone. Isai. lxiii. 3, 5. *I have trodden the wine press alone ; and of the people there was none with me. And I looked, and there was none to help ; and I wondered that there was none to uphold ; therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me ; and my fury, it upheld me.* These predictions

may be very naturally compared with the whole series of his sufferings, the account of which is recorded in the four Evangelists. The effects of his sufferings, as they regarded himself, were also clearly foretold, namely, that in consequence of his sufferings, he was to be greatly exalted. Psal. xxii. 30. *A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation.* Psal. lxxxix. 27, 29. *I will make him my first born, higher than the kings of the earth. His seed also will I make to endure forever, and his throne as the days of heaven.* As a consequence of his drinking the brook in the way, he was to lift up the head, to judge among the heathen, to fill the places with dead bodies, and to wound the heads over many countries—Psal. cx. Isai. liii. 11, 12. *He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death; and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.* Compare these predictions with the account of the character and work of the Saviour, which we have, Phil. ii. 8, 9, 10. *And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.* From the manner of his death, it was not to be expected that his body would be treated with any decent respect afterwards; but notwithstanding all the indignities which he suffered in his death, it was foretold that he should be honourably buried. Isai. liii. 9. *And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death.* The indefatigable Kennicot, who spent many years in a laborious search after, and comparison of the various copies of the scriptures, which are now extant, is of the opinion that the Jews have ventured to transpose one word in this text, and that originally it read, *And he made his grave with the rich, and with the wicked in his death.* In either case, the event answered the prediction. His burial was honourable. *Joseph, of*

Armithea, a rich man and an honourable counsellor, went to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus, which, when Pilate had granted, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out of a rock.

8. Christ's resurrection from the dead and his ascension up into heaven, were also events foretold in the Old Testament. His resurrection, Psal. xvi. 10. *For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.* His ascension, Psal. xlvii. 5. *God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.* Psal. lxxviii. 18. *Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also.* Let these predictions be compared with the accomplishment. In a former discourse, some notice has been taken of the evidences which we have to prove the certainty of the resurrection. The Evangelist Luke observes, Acts. i. 3, *That he shewed himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs.* One of these proofs, and there could scarcely be a stronger, Peter mentions in his discourse before Cornelius. Acts x. 40, 41. *Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly. Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.* His ascension up into heaven was also visible, until a cloud received him out of their sight.

9. The spreading of the gospel among the Gentiles, their calling in and incorporation into that body from which the bulk of the Jewish nation was to be broken off by unbelief, was also an event abundantly foretold in the prophecies of the Old Testament. An attempt to transcribe all the passages from the ancient prophecies of the Old Testament, which foretell this event, would be both tedious and needless. Christ was foretold as the desire of all nations; as one who was to be set up as an ensign for the nations, to whom the Gentiles were to seek. All the ends of the earth were to be called to look unto him and be saved. As a selection from passages almost innumerable, I shall only mention the three following. Isa. xlix. 6. *It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Is-*

rael: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth. Chap. liv. 1, 2, 3. Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord. Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; for thou shalt break forth on thy right hand and on thy left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited. Chap. lx. 1, 3. Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.—

Indeed, a very large proportion of Isaiah's prophecy, from the fortieth chapter to the end of the book, consists of a description of the glories of Christ's kingdom among the Gentiles. So plain, so particular, and circumstantial are some of these prophecies, that they seem rather to resemble an historical account of past events, than a prophecy of things to come. The accomplishment has been every way agreeable to what has been foretold. Christ has actually come as a light to lighten the Gentiles, as well as for salvation to his people Israel. After the ascension, gospel light was no longer confined to the Jews; the Apostles were commissioned to publish the glad tidings of salvation to every creature. The spread of the gospel was extensive during the lives of the Apostles, and it became still more extended shortly after. And ever since that period, the visible Church has been, and even now is, made up almost wholly of Gentile nations. We trust, however, that the time will come, when the Jews will be again engrafted into their own olive tree, from which they are now broken off by unbelief. I have thus briefly taken a view of some of the most remarkable prophecies of the Old Testament relating to the Messiah. and taken notice of their literal fulfilment in Jesus of Nazareth. There are a great variety of prophecies concerning other events besides those which relate immediately to the Messiah, which have had an exact and a circumstantial accomplishment, and many

relating both to the church and world, which remain to be fulfilled or are now fulfilling. Some of these it is my intention briefly to consider in another discourse. This I shall close with two or three reflections.

I. From the brief view that has been taken of the prophecies of scripture, we may learn that Christ is the principal subject of both Testaments. He is the bright and morning star which illuminates the whole circle of revelation. He proclaims himself the light of the world with the greatest propriety; for whatever light of a moral or spiritual nature, there either is or has been in the world, is derived from him. The light which was enjoyed under either the Patriarchal or Jewish dispensations was but faint, when compared with the meridian light of the gospel, yet it was a ray derived from the same sun of righteousness, which now, with an increased brightness and splendour, irradiates the gospel church. He was both prefigured in the types and foretold by the Prophets. He is the end of the law, the glory of the gospel, and he in whom all the promises are Yea and Amen to the believer. Salvation has been always bestowed on the penitent sinner in the same way, i. e. through faith in a Redeemer, either as actually come, or as held up to view in the promise. Hence it is said of the Old Testament saints, *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, were persuaded of them and embraced them.*

2. Hence we see a wonderful harmony subsisting between the Old and New Testaments. They not only agree in one and the same grand design, but they mutually confirm and support each other. All the evidences of the truth of the one which can be produced are also evidences of the truth of the other. If the book which contains the writings of Moses and the Prophets deserves credit, as a book divinely inspired, the same evidences will apply to prove the divine inspiration of that book which contains the history and writings of Christ and his apostles. So, on the other hand, all the evidences which go to prove the divine inspiration of the New Testament, will apply with equal force to the confirmation of the Old. They must

stand and fall together. Although these several portions of Scripture were the work of different penmen, who lived in different ages, and under very different economics; by men who could not possibly have any collusion or connexion together, yet all appear to aim at the same objects. There is the same object of faith and worship, the same system of morals, and the same source of rest and happiness held up to view in both Testaments. When, therefore, we are called to build upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, these are not different, but one and the same foundation, of which Jesus Christ is the chief corner stone. To him gave all the Prophets witness faith the text. Under the New Testament, we enjoy precisely what the Old Testament foretold; for Christ came as it was written of him.

3. Does each of the Testaments carry within itself convincing evidences of a divine original, and do these different portions of sacred writ, in addition to the evidences of divinity separately in each, mutually confirm and support each other? then we learn that unbelief, especially under such clear light as we enjoy, must be wholly inexcusable. When we contemplate the evidences that Christ was the true Messiah, which were exhibited before the Jewish nation, during the period in which he tabernacled in flesh, we are apt to be astonished at the unbelief of the Jews. These consisted of his heavenly doctrines and holy example, of the miracles which he wrought, and of the numerous prophecies which, had they not been blinded by prejudice and unbelief, they must have seen to be exactly fulfilled in him. So clear were these evidences as to render their unbelief highly criminal. Had it not been foretold, it might have given some ground for staggering to the faith of others. But under the present circumstances of the case, even their unbelief exhibits, in the strongest point of light, the evidences of the divine mission of the Messiah whom they despise and reject. Because they knew not the scriptures, they fulfilled them in condemning him. With the additional light which we enjoy, our unbelief would be doubly criminal.

Let us then acquaint ourselves with the scriptures, search them daily, and extend our researches to both Testaments. The more we search, and the more intimate our acquaintance with them is, in the stronger and clearer light will the evidences appear that they are divinely inspired. Let us search them, therefore, as the only source of that true spiritual wisdom, the only fountain of that divine light, which is capable of making us wise to salvation.

DISCOURSE VI.

2 PETER, i. 21.

For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man : but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

IT has been observed in a preceding discourse, that a series of predictions, which have been indisputably fulfilled by a course of events which did not take place until after a lapse of many ages from the time in which they were foretold, must be considered as affording unquestionable evidence of divine inspiration, because, as it is the prerogative of God to foreknow, so he only can enable men to foretel future events. That there are many such predictions in scripture, and that they were indisputably uttered long before the events took place, has also, I think, been before stated and proved. In our last discourse, notice has been taken of a variety of predictions contained in the Old Testament concerning a Messiah to come, which it was observed, were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. Although the coming of Christ into our world was, perhaps, the most important event which ever did or ever will take place, and was, for that reason, more frequently, more clearly, more fully, and more circumstantially foretold than any other, yet prophecy is not confined to this alone, but embraces a comprehensive view of the whole scheme of providence, in relation to all ages and nations; particularly so far as they had any connexion with the church. Many of these events have, long before they took place, been foretold, in such a plain unequivocal manner, as could be known beforehand, only to him who sees all things past,

present, and to come, at one comprehensive view. Our text tells us that this prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, i. e. it was no human contrivance, nor could even those who were endowed at times with a spirit of prophecy, make it subservient to their own wills, or command it when they pleased; but holy men revealed such events as were communicated to them, and spake at such times as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. As in our last discourse, our observations were confined exclusively to prophecies concerning the Messiah, my design in this, will be to select a few of these prophecies, other than those which relate to Christ, which have been indisputably fulfilled, and then I may perhaps notice one or two others, the accomplishment of which is still future.

Although I shall principally confine my observations to such prophecies as have for their object the discovery of the fate of kingdoms and nations, I shall, in the first place, mention two relating to individuals, which were so clear and distinct that they could not be mistaken.

The first I shall mention, is the remarkable prophecy concerning Josiah, wherein he is expressly mentioned by name, nearly three hundred years before he was born, by the man of God who came out of Judah to prophecy against Jeroboam in Bethel. 1 Kings, xiii. 1, 2. *And behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the Lord, unto Bethel: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. And he cried against the altar in the word of the Lord, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord. behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burned upon thee.* Compare this with the accomplishment, nearly three hundred years afterwards. 2 Kings, xxiii. 15, 16. *Moreover, the altar that was at Bethel, and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he brake down, and burned the high place, and stamped it small to powder, and burned the grove. And as Josiah turned himself, he spied the sepulchres that were there in the mount, and sent, and took the bones out of the sepulchres, and burned them upon the altar, and polluted it, ac-*

according to the word of the Lord which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words. Such a clear and unquestionable prediction could come from God alone. Nor can it, with any shadow of reason, be urged that this pretended prophecy was uttered after the event. Assertions, unsupported by the least particle of evidence, are as easily denied as made; and while nothing more than mere assertion is advanced, a denial must be considered as a sufficient confutation. In like manner, Cyrus is mentioned by name, by the prophet Isaiah, about two hundred years before his birth, as one who was to be an instrument of much good to the Jewish nation. *Isai. xlv. 28. That saith of Cyrus, he is my Shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure; even saying to Jerusalem, thou shalt be built; and to the temple, thy foundation shall be laid.* How exactly does the prophecy agree with the event. Although Cyrus caused the Jews to return, and the city to be built, yet he only caused the foundation of the temple to be laid. The building was interrupted, and was finally completed, not in his reign, but in that of his successor. *Chap. xlv. 1. Thus saith the Lord to his unointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut.* How remarkably was this prophecy fulfilled in him, when he subdued the city of Babylon, thereby putting an end to the Babylonish empire. Still more remarkably was it accomplished, when God put it into his heart to restore the captivity of his people, and permit the city of Jerusalem and the temple to be rebuilt. Not one word of the prediction has failed.

I shall now proceed to consider, a little more particularly, some predictions which are more general, and relate to the fate of kingdoms and nations. Here it is necessary to make a selection of a few out of many; and our limits will permit those selected to be only briefly considered.

It is observable that there are many prophecies in scripture relating to the final destruction of several kingdoms and nations, who were among the ancient enemies of God's people; such as the ancient **Philistines, Ammonites, A-**

malekites, Moabites, Edomites, &c. These prophecies have been long since fulfilled. For many centuries these nations have ceased to exist in a national capacity, and the principal part of the territory which they once inhabited has become a desert without an inhabitant, unless it be that it is occasionally traversed by wandering hordes of Arabs. How different from these are the prophecies concerning Ishmael. It was foretold before he was born—*That he should be a wild man—That his hand should be against every man, and every man's hand against him, and that he should dwell in the presence of all his brethren* It is remarkable that this prophecy has not only been fulfilled in the Arabians, the posterity of Ishmael, by their maintaining all their national traits of character, and their continuing a distinct and unconquered people through so many ages, but that, although uttered between three and four thousand years ago, it should so exactly describe their manners and customs, as they are found at this day. The Arabians have been constantly the enemies of all nations. During the existence and most flourishing periods of all the great empires of antiquity, they continued unconquered. Neither Cyrus, Alexander the Great, nor the Romans could ever subdue them.—they still continue the same people, and their manners and customs remain unaltered.

Egypt likewise makes a great figure in ancient history, and is particularly noticed in prophecy. The various revolutions which have taken place in that country were distinctly foretold. But although the Egyptians were to be frequently subdued and enslaved, Egypt was not to be entirely destroyed like Tyre and Nineveh. It was however to become a bare kingdom. In this state of depression and vassalage it continues at this day. In this instance history bears testimony to the exact accomplishment of prophecy.

Tyre and Nineveh likewise make a great figure in ancient history. The entire desolation of both is also circumstantially foretold in prophecy. The former, although one of the richest, as well as most ancient cities in the world, engrossing the principal part of the maritime traffic

of all nations, whose merchants are called princes, on account of their princely wealth, has been, for many centuries, an obscure place, containing only a few fishermen's huts, and occupied as a place to dry their nets. At the time when this entire destruction was foretold it was in the zenith of its wealth and glory. Isaiah prophesied of its downfall, at least one hundred and twenty years before it was invaded by Nebuchadnezzar. Ezekiel lived nearer the time of its destruction, and he declares expressly that it should be destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar; and both Isaiah and Ezekiel foretold that it should be destroyed a second time. After its first destruction by Nebuchadnezzar, it was, on the subversion of the Babylonish empire, restored, and soon, in consequence of its extensive traffic, recovered, in a great measure, its former wealth and consequence. This restoration was also foretold by Isaiah. It was to be destroyed a second time. This second destruction was effected by Alexander the Great, and altho' it in some measure recovered from this destruction, it was at last entirely ruined, and reduced to the miserable situation in which it is found at this day. Nineveh was once the greatest city, and the capital of the greatest empire in the world. But so completely has the destruction foretold by the prophet Nahum been accomplished, that, for many centuries past, the particular spot where it once stood is no longer known.

There are a few prophecies which it will be necessary to notice a little more particularly. 1. The predictions relating to the entire destruction and perpetual desolation of Babylon. This was probably, in many respects, the most splendid city on which the sun ever shone. It was a very ancient city, but owed its growth and splendor in some measure to the decline and ruin of Nineveh. Babylon was at the head of a great empire, and remarkable for its enmity to God's ancient people. Although it was first founded, as is supposed, by Nimrod, and consequently very ancient, it had been greatly enlarged and beautified by Nebuchadnezzar. When Isaiah first foretold its destruction it had not arrived to all that grandeur which it possessed afterwards. In Jeremiah's time, it was in its meri-

dian splendor. Besides what is said more briefly in other places, we find this destruction foretold at large in the 13th and 14th chapters of Isaiah, and in the 50th and 51st chapters of Jeremiah: These prophecies declare that Babylon should be not only a desolation, but a perpetual desolation—*That it should not be dwelt in from generation to generation—and that it should become an habitation to the wild beasts of the desert, and for venomous creatures.* These prophecies of the destruction of Babylon were not of such a nature as to be accomplished all at once. Its decline began with the subversion of the empire, when it was taken by Cyrus, and the supreme power transferred to the Medes and Persians. The various circumstances attending its capture at that time, as that it should be taken by the means of the diversion of the river from its usual channel, so that thereby a passage should be opened for the entrance of the Persian army, beneath its stupendous walls; that it should be taken at a time when the inhabitants were in the utmost security, and the court engaged in a drunken festival, and that it should be taken at one end, a considerable time before the other parts of the city were apprised of their danger, were matters distinctly noted in prophecy. After it was taken by Cyrus, and was no longer the imperial city, it gradually declined from its former magnificence. But its downfall became more rapid after it was taken a second time by Darius Hystaspes, about thirty years afterwards. Notwithstanding the precautions taken by Cyrus to keep the Babylonians poor and dependent, the city rebelled in the days of Darius, and the taking of it cost him much trouble. Historians inform us that, in order to hold out to the last extremity, the citizens themselves, during that siege, destroyed those of the inhabitants who were useless in the defence, that provisions might not be consumed by unnecessary mouths. It is observed that hereby the prophecy of Isaiah against Babylon was fulfilled, in which he foretold, *That two things should come upon them in a moment, in one day; the loss of children, and widowhood: and that these should come upon them in perfection, for the multitude of their sorceries, and the great abundance of their enchantments.* In

what greater perfection could these calamities come upon them, than when they became their own executioners? As soon as Darius had made himself master of the place he ordered three thousand of the principal inhabitants to be crucified, thereby fulfilling the prophecy relating to the cruelties which the Medes were to exercise upon the Babylonians. Xerxes after his return from his unfortunate expedition into Greece, being impelled, partly by religious zeal, being a professed enemy to image worship, and partly by a desire to reimburse himself for the expenses of that unsuccessful expedition, seized the sacred treasures, and plundered and destroyed the idols of Babylon; thereby effecting a farther accomplishment of the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah, particularly Isa. xxi. 9. *Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground.* Such was the state of Babylon under the Persian monarchs. Though greatly declined from its ancient splendor, it, nevertheless, continued to be a considerable city. The river Euphrates having been turned out of its usual course by Cyrus, and never afterwards restored to its former channel, one part of the city, with the adjacent country, was destroyed by the inundation. Alexander the Great, it is true, made an attempt to restore Babylon to its former splendor, with a view to make it the capital of his empire, and began by clearing away the rubbish in order to rebuild the temple of Belus, and by attempting to restore the river to its former channel. This design was however rendered abortive by his premature death. Had his intentions been carried into effect, the prophecies of its destruction would probably not have been accomplished. After the death of Alexander, the decline of Babylon became more rapid. Another city called Sclucia was built in the neighborhood by Seleucus, one of Alexander's successors, which stripped it of its inhabitants, and its buildings soon went to ruin. Some modern travellers have supposed that they have found the place where it once stood; but they do not agree among themselves, what ruins are the real ruins of Babylon. By comparing their accounts, the only thing which appears to be proved is, that they have all been

mistaken, and that the ruins which they visited were not the ruins of Babylon, but of some other cities and edifices of a more modern date; and that the place where that famous city once stood, is either wholly unknown, or cannot now be approached. By these accounts, which we have not time to examine in detail, it appears with what circumstantial exactness time has fulfilled the predictions against Babylon. When it was converted into a chase for wild beasts, then was accomplished the words of the Prophet, that *The wild beasts of the desert, with the wild beasts of the islands, should dwell there, and cry in their desolate houses.* One part of the city, with the adjacent country, was turned into a marsh by the diversion of the river from its usual course. By this means it became literally *a possession for the bittern, and pools of water.* The adjacent country is represented as overrun with serpents, scorpions, and all sorts of venomous and unclean creatures, so that, *Their houses are full of doleful creatures, and dragons cry in their pleasant palaces, and Babylon is become heaps, a dwelling place for dragons, and an astonishment, and a hissing, without an inhabitant.* For these reasons, *neither can the Arabian pitch his tent there, neither can the shepherds make their fold there. How is Babylon become a desolation! Every purpose of the Lord hath he performed against Babylon, to make the land of Babylon a desolation without an inhabitant.* How wonderful do such predictions appear, when they come to be compared with the events, and what a convincing argument do they afford of the inspiration of the scriptures. Well might the God of Israel alledge this as a memorable instance of his foreknowledge, and challenge the false gods, and their votaries, to produce the like. *Isai. xlv. 21, and chap. xlvi. 10. Who hath declared this from ancient time? Who hath told it from that time? Have not I the Lord? and there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me. Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.*

2. Another prophecy which deserves our notice is Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, re-

lating to the four great empires, which were to arise in succession. Dan. ii. and which was farther enlarged upon in his subsequent visions of the four beasts, and of the ram and the he goat. This prophecy has been strictly fulfilled. This dream related to a great image, whose head was of fine gold. Daniel interprets this head of gold to be Nebuchadnezzar himself. Ver. 38. *Thou art this head of gold*, i. e. thou and thy family, and thy representatives. The Babylonian empire was compared to a head of fine gold on account of its great riches; and Babylon was, for the same reason, called by Isaiah, *The golden city*. The Assyrian is usually said to be the first of the four great empires. But the Assyrian empire, properly so called, was subverted before this time, and the Babylonian erected in its stead, unless, as Babylon was not very far distant from Nineveh, this is to be denominated the same empire, flourishing under a different head. After the destruction of Nineveh, and Babylon had become the capital, the empire, although immensely rich, of vast extent, and apparently so strong that no human power could shake it, was but of short duration. It was at its meridian glory under Nebuchadnezzar, and ended with his grandson Belshazzar, not seventy years after the delivery of this prophecy, and but little more than thirty after Nebuchadnezzar's death; none of his successors having performed any thing good or great.

2. The breast and the arms of the image were of silver which Daniel interprets, ver. 39. *And after thee shall arise another kingdom, inferior to thee*. It is well known that the kingdom that arose after the Babylonian was the Medo-Per-
 sian. The two hands and shoulders signify that the empire of the Babylonians should be destroyed by two kings. The two kings were those of Media and Persia, which soon became united into one in the person of Cyrus, so famous in sacred history as the instrument of the Jews' return from Babylon. Cyrus, who was the son-in-law of one of these kings, and the son of the other, besieged and took Babylon, as has been already observed, put an end to that empire, and erected on its ruins the Medo-Per-
 sian, or the Persian as it is more usually called; as the Persians

soon gained the ascendancy over the Medes. This empire is said to be inferior or less than the former, because that neither Cyrus nor any of his successors carried their arms so far as Nebuchadnezzar is reported to have done. Or it might perhaps be because it was worse in quality. Historians assert that the Persian monarchs were the worst set of men who ever governed an empire. This part of the prophecy has been literally fulfilled. The Persian empire lasted about two hundred years, and ended in Darius Codomannus, who was subdued by Alexander the Great.

3. His belly and his thighs were of brass, which Daniel interprets, ver. 39. *Another third kingdom of brass shall arise, which shall bear rule over all the earth.* It is universally known and acknowledged that Alexander the Great subdued and put an end to the Persian empire. The kingdom, therefore, which succeeded the Persian was the Macedonian. This kingdom was fitly represented by brass. The Greeks were famous in history for their brazen armour; their usual epithet being *The brazen coated Greeks.* This kingdom is said to bear rule over all the earth by a figure usual with most authors. Alexander commanded himself to be called the king of all the world; not that he really conquered the whole, but he had extensive dominions in Europe, Asia, and Africa, i. e. in all the three quarters of the then known world. Historians who have written of his life and conquests, do also inform us that ambassadors came from almost all parts of the known world, in order to congratulate him on his success, and to submit to his dominion. It is well known that, after his death, his kingdom did not descend to his natural heirs. It was parted into four among his great generals, of whose kingdoms history treats particularly, under the name of Alexander's successors. This division is farther noted in prophecy in Daniel's subsequent visions and their interpretation, and among the things said to be noted in the scriptures of truth. The exact and literal accomplishment of all these predictions affords unquestionable evidence of the inspiration of the scriptures

4. The legs of the image were of iron, and his feet

part of iron and part of clay. This part of the dream is thus interpreted by Daniel, ver. 40, 41, 42, 43. *And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise. And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potter's clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided: but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay.* This part of the prophecy is, undoubtedly, applicable to the Romans and to no other nation. The Roman empire succeeded the Macedonian. It was both of greater extent, stronger, and of longer duration than any of the preceding, and it brake in pieces and subdued all the former kingdoms. As Josephus observes that the two arms were the two kings of the Medes and Persians, may we not, with equal reason, say that the two legs of the image were the two consuls, who were, for a long time, among the Romans, both their chief magistrates and the generals of their armies? Or they may represent the eastern and western empires into which the vast dominions of the Romans were at length divided: The respective heads of which were Rome and Constantinople. The iron was mixed with miry clay, so there was in the Roman empire a mixture of barbarous nations, which proved to be the cause of its dissolution. The Roman empire was, in process of time, divided into ten lesser kingdoms. These kingdoms retained much of the Roman strength, but were frequently disunited among themselves. The Roman empire therefore is represented as in a double state. First as having the strength of iron, conquering all before it, and then as weakened and divided by civil wars, and by a mixture of barbarous nations. How exactly has this part of the prophecy been, in every punctilio fulfilled.

5. But this great image representing the four great em-

pires which were to rise in succession, was not the only thing which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream. Ver. 34 and 35. *Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.* This part of the vision is thus explained by Daniel, ver. 44 and 45. *And in the days of these kings, i. e. during the continuance of the last great monarchy, shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter.* This description can be applicable only to the kingdom of Christ. And in the days of these kings, i. e. during the continuance of one of these great empires, viz. the Roman, shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed. As this stone was a very different thing from the image, so the kingdom of Christ is totally different from the kingdoms of this world. This stone is said to be cut out of the mountain without hands. So the church of Christ is called *a building of God, a house not made with hands.* The stone cut out of the mountain has been applied, and was, I believe, by the primitive Fathers, generally applied to Christ himself, and was explained as relating to his miraculous conception in the womb of a virgin. But I rather think it may be better understood of Christ mystical, or of the kingdom of Christ in the world, which was formed out of the Roman empire, not by a great number of hands or the strength of armies, but by God himself, without the aid of human means, or any remarkable interposition of second causes. Other kingdoms have been raised up by human ambition and worldly pow-

er, but this was not the work of man but of God. This is truly and eminently the kingdom of heaven, and a kingdom not of this world. Its laws, its powers, its honors, its rewards and its punishments, are all spiritual. This kingdom was never to be destroyed, as the Babylonian, Persian, Grecian, and Roman empires had been. But it was to break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and to extend and enlarge itself so as to comprehend them all within its bosom. It was to fill the whole earth. i. e. to become universal, and to stand forever. With respect to the original beginning, or founding of this kingdom, how circumstantially exact has been the accomplishment of prophecy? This kingdom was set up in opposition to worldly power, craft, and policy: It extended itself and flourished, not by human might and power, but by the spirit of the Lord of hosts. It has hitherto subsisted, and does still subsist, amidst the wreck of empires and destruction of nations. Though often assailed both from within and without, the church still lives. The gates of hell never have been and never will be able to prevail against it. Some particulars of this prophecy still remain to be accomplished, but the exact fulfillment of so many of its essential parts will not permit us to doubt of the completion of the whole in its proper season. We find a farther enlargement on the predictions contained in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, in Daniel's subsequent visions of the four beasts, and of the ram and he goat. But as these are rather to be considered as explanations and amplifications of the predictions contained in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, I shall make no particular remarks upon them, especially because, should an attempt be made to consider them in detail, it would far exceed the bounds of a single discourse.

3. There are a variety of prophecies concerning the Jewish nation deserving our notice, which have been literally, and most exactly accomplished. As a history of the Jewish nation occupies the largest portion of the historical part of the Old Testament, it cannot be thought strange that a very considerable proportion of scripture prophecy should refer to that people. The Jews, undoubt-

edly, were a most singular people. Their history is different from that of any other nation. Their miraculous journey through the wilderness where they sojourned for the long period of forty years, with the manner in which they were supported during all that time, furnishes a portion of history which hath not a parallel in the annals of nations. Their settlement in Canaan, and the various revolutions which befel them while they were in possession of that country, were also, events in their nature and circumstances very remarkable, and such as manifested the evident interposition of Providence. As they were a people, in various respects, peculiarly favored of heaven, so they suffered many and grievous calamities on account of their disobedience to the divine law. As their government was a theocracy, i. e. a government in which God was their immediate king, lawgiver, and judge, so their obedience and disobedience to that particular law or constitution under which they were placed, were more immediately the subject of temporal rewards and punishments than was the conduct of any other nation. They were several times severely chastised in the days when the judges ruled. During the period when they were under kingly government they also suffered many calamities, particularly from the Assyrians, who, at length, carried the ten tribes into captivity. The two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, who have been more generally distinguished by the name of Jews, were afterwards carried away captive to Babylon. Although they returned from this captivity at the end of seventy years, yet the nation never afterwards arose to that state of independence and opulence which it had formerly enjoyed, particularly in the days of David and Solomon, but was, successively, subjected to tribute, first to the Persian, afterwards to the Grecian, and lastly to the Roman empires. But a greater calamity still awaited them, in that terrible destruction which involved in ruins their capital city, their temple and even their very nation, when Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus. The calamities attending that siege and destruction are almost, if not altogether, without a parallel in the annals of history. Since that period the Jews have presented a novel specta-

cle to the world. They have been generally hated and despised, and for the most part persecuted by almost all nations. Still they exist as a distinct people although they have been so long dispersed over the face of almost the whole earth. The present existence of the Jews as a distinct people, notwithstanding they have been without either law or civil polity of their own, and without their customary services of either the temple or altar, for now almost eighteen centuries, can be nothing less than a standing miracle. Nations when once conquered, and especially when dispersed among their conquerors, presently become incorporated among them, and, with the loss of their national existence, soon lose every thing pertaining to national character and distinction. Nations which, in their first original, have been formed of an assemblage of people from different countries, become in a short time so blended together, by intermarriages and otherwise, as to lose every trace of their original distinctions. It is, no doubt, in many instances, impossible at this day, for an Englishman to tell whether his ancestors are derived from the ancient British, or from a Saxon, Norman, or Danish original. The people of the United States are composed of an assemblage from different nations. The peculiarities wherein their national distinctions consisted are rapidly disappearing. It is probable that, in the course of a century or two, it will be impossible for our posterity to trace their original, or to know whether their progenitors were English, Scotch, Irish, Dutch, Germans, Welch or Swedes. But the Jews, notwithstanding all their dispersions for nearly eighteen centuries, not only exist as a distinct people, but all their national traits of character are as strongly marked, and they are as well known and as easily distinguished from the people of any other nation as they ever were, or as easy as the people of any two nations are distinguishable from each other. This can be nothing less than a standing miracle, a singular interposition of providence for some great and important purpose yet future; and is a standing proof, beyond all contradiction, of the truth of revelation. If this peculiar situation of the Jews is found to be expressly foretold in scripture, it will place

the truth in a still stronger point of light. It is not my intention to notice all the particulars concerning the Jewish nation, which are the subjects of prophecy, nor to bring into view every prediction concerning those events which it may be necessary to notice. I shall barely take a view of some of the prophecies which relate to their present dispersion, and desolation; and towards the close of our discourse, I shall notice a prediction or two of their future restoration. With respect to their present dispersions, I shall first briefly consider some of the prophecies of Moses.—2. Note one or two other predictions from Prophets of the Old Testament.—3. Bring briefly into view our Saviour's prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem.

1. I shall notice some of Moses' prophecies concerning the Jews. It is observable that, although Moses was a Prophet, and probably the greatest of all the Old Testament Prophets, yet his predictions were principally uttered near the close of his life. The prophecy to which I principally refer, and the only one which I shall notice, is that contained in the 28th chapter of Deuteronomy. This was, no doubt, partially fulfilled in the Babylonish captivity. It is more fully accomplished in their present dispersions. I shall notice only a few passages of the prophecy. Ver. 49. *The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand.* The Chaldeans might be said to come from a far country, compared with the Philistines, Moabites, Syrians, and other neighboring nations who used to infest the land of Israel. But it can, with more propriety, be applied to the Romans, than to any other nation. They actually came from far, and, from the rapidity of their conquests, might be compared to Eagles, and are, probably, so denominated in allusion to the standard of the Roman armies which was an Eagle. The Roman language was also much more unknown to the Jews than the Chaldean. The enemies of the Jews are farther characterized, ver. 50, as *a nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor show favour to the young.* A character similar to this is given of the Chaldeans, when they

invaded Judah. 2 Chron. xxxvi. 17. Such an enemy did the Jews also find in the Romans, according to the testimony of Josephus the Jewish historian. He tells us that when Vespasian entered Gadaza he slew all, man by man; the Romans showing mercy to no age, out of hatred to the nation. A like slaughter was made at Gamala, where, the historian tells us, only two escaped. Their enemies were to besiege and take their cities. Ver. 52. *And he shall besiege thee in all thy gates, until thy high and fenced walls come down, wherein thou trustedst throughout all thy land.* This prophecy was frequently fulfilled. Shalmanezzer came up against Samaria and besieged it three years, and took it; Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against the fenced cities of Judah and took them, and Nebuchadnezzar and his captains took and destroyed Jerusalem, burnt the city and the temple, and brake down the wall round about. Jerusalem was a very strong place, being wonderfully fortified both by nature and art. As the Jebusites, before it was taken by David, felt confident of its strength, this seems also to have been the case with the Jews. Yet how often was it taken? It was taken by Shishak, king of Egypt, in the days of Rehoboam. It was taken by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, by Antiochus Epiphanes, king of Syria, by Pompey, the Roman general, by Herod, the Idumean, and it was finally taken and destroyed by Titus. How exactly has this prophecy been fulfilled?—In these several sieges they were to suffer much from famine. Ver. 53, 55, 56, 57. We accordingly find, *That when the king of Assyria besieged Samaria, there was a great famine in the city, so that an ass' head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver.* It also came to pass when Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem that *The famine was sore, so that there was no bread for the people of the land.* And in the last siege of Jerusalem by the Romans, there was a most terrible famine in the city. Josephus tells us that women snatched the food out of the mouths of their husbands, sons from their fathers, and even mothers from their infants; and that, in every house where there appeared any semblance of food, a battle ensued. So literally were the words of Moses

fulfilled. Ver. 54. *The man's eyes shall be evil toward his brother, and toward the wife of his bosom, and toward the remnant of his children which he shall leave; because he hath nothing left him in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in all thy gates.* And, in like manner, *the woman's eyes shall be evil toward the husband of her bosom, and toward her son, and toward her daughter.* Nay, it was expressly foretold that both men and women should eat their own children, Levit. xxxvi. 29. Deut. xxviii. 53, & 56. An instance of this kind we find in the siege of Samaria. 2 Kings, vi. 28, 29. It was fulfilled again in the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and again in the last siege of Jerusalem by Titus. We read in Josephus of a noble woman, answering to Moses' description of the tender and delicate woman, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground for delicateness and tenderness, killing and eating her own sucking child, after she had been plundered of all her substance by the tyrants and soldiers. At so many different times, in periods distant from each other, has this prophecy been fulfilled: *They were to be left few in number, whereas they were as the stars of heaven for multitude.* Ver. 62. The slaughter at the destruction of Jerusalem was almost without a parallel. The numbers destroyed in the siege of Jerusalem alone, besides those who were either slain, or otherwise perished in different places, exceeded eleven hundred thousand. Indeed there is not a nation upon earth which has been exposed to so many massacres and persecutions. If God had not given them a numerous posterity, according to his promise, the whole race would have been long since extirpated. They were to be carried into Egypt and sold for slaves, at a very low price. They had come up out of Egypt in triumph, but now they must return as slaves. They had, when they came out, walked through the sea on dry land, but now they were to be carried thither in ships. This part of the prophecy was fulfilled after the taking of Jerusalem, when such a vast number of prisoners were sent into Egypt, in order to be sold for slaves, that purchasers could not be found even at the lowest price, and

those who could not be sold, were either massacred by the inhabitants, or perished by famine. They were to be rooted-out of their own land. Ver. 63. *And ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it.* They were plucked from their own land, when the ten tribes were carried away captive, and when Judah and Benjamin were carried to Babylon. Still there was a remnant left and a gracious return promised. They were more thoroughly plucked from that land when the Romans took away their place and nation. Since that time very few Jews have had any permanent residence in the land of Canaan. But they were, not barely to be plucked from their own land; they were to be scattered among all nations. Ver. 64. *And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other.* How amply has this prophecy been fulfilled in their various dispersions, since the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans? What other people has ever been scattered so far and wide as the Jews? There is scarcely a nation on the globe to which they are strangers. They abound both in Europe and among the nations farther east, and many of them are to be found on this western continent. It was nevertheless expressly foretold that, in all their dispersions, they should not be totally destroyed, but should continue to subsist as a distinct people. This Moses foretold. Levit. xxvi. 44. *And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly.*—The Jewish nation, like the bush of Moses, has been always burning but not consumed. What a miracle is it, that, after so many wars, battles and sieges; after so many famines and pestilences; after so many rebellions, massacres and persecutions, and after so many years of captivity, slavery and misery, they are not destroyed utterly, but still subsist as a distinct people. Surely this is the doing of the lord; the history of the world furnishes nothing like a parallel. They were to find no ease nor rest in their dispersions. Ver. 65. They have been so far from finding rest, that they have been banished from city to city, and from country to country. There is hardly any nar-

tion out of which they have not, either at one time or another, been banished. From many places they have been banished divers times. They were to be oppressed and spoiled evermore. Ver. 29. And to what seizures, exactions, and confiscations have they been subject? How often have they been fined and fleeced on various pretences, by almost every government where they have resided? No other nation has ever suffered such cruel and unrighteous exactions. Their sons and their daughters were to be taken from them, and given unto another people. Ver. 32. It is well known how frequently they have been deprived of their children, in Spain, Portugal, and probably, in other Catholic countries, in order that they might be educated in the Catholic faith. They were to be mad for the sight of their eyes which they should see. Ver. 34. It is a fact that, in many instances, they have been driven, by cruel usage, to acts of madness and desperation, which could only issue in their own destruction. They were to serve other gods, wood and stone. Ver. 36, 64. And it is not an uncommon thing for the Jews, in Catholic countries, to comply, externally, with the, to them, idolatrous worship of the church of Rome, rather than to suffer their goods to be seized and confiscated. This is an event which has occurred perhaps oftener in Spain and Portugal than in other countries. Here the terrors of the inquisition have reduced them to the dilemma of either becoming hypocrites, or being burnt alive. Finally their plagues were to be wonderful and of long continuance. Ver. 59. And have not their plagues already continued for more than seventeen hundred years? Their former captivities were short in comparison of this, and Daniel and Ezekiel prophesied in Babylon. But, during this last long and dreary dispersion, they have had no Prophet to calm their woes, or to inform them how long. In former captivities they were carried principally to one place, but in this they are dispersed among all nations. Here is an undeniable instance of a prophecy uttered three thousand years ago, which we see evidently fulfilling at this day. What stronger proofs of the divine mission and inspiration of Moses can be desired? This people has true-

ly proved what Moses foretold they would be, a sign and a wonder forever.

I shall make but a very few remarks upon the predictions of other Prophets concerning the Jews. In general, we have their united testimony to the facts already detailed. To take distinct notice of particular passages would lead to a repetition of observations already made. I shall therefore only observe briefly, that it was foretold that the ten tribes should be carried captive by the king of Assyria, and the two remaining tribes should be carried to Babylon. But there was this difference in the predictions. The national existence of the ten tribes, as a distinct people from Judah, was to be dissolved and lost in the captivity, and the other two tribes were to return from theirs. *Isai. vii. 8. Within threescore and five years shall Ephraim be broken, that it be not a people.* Because Ephraim was the principal and leading tribe, and commonly the foremost in defection and idolatry, he is frequently put for the ten tribes, especially in places where judgments are threatened. No return is promised to him. But it was not merely foretold that the two tribes should return; the exact time when the event was to take place was pointed out. *Jer. xxv. 11. This whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Chap. xxix. 10. Thus saith the Lord, that after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word towards you, in causing you to return to this place.* How exactly have these predictions been accomplished? Probably a number of Ephraim, or of the ten tribes did return individual, They however became incorporated with the Jews, and never have been since known as a distinct people.

We have considered the preservation of the Jews, as a separate distinct people, through so many ages, and notwithstanding their long scattered and dispersed situation, as a remarkable event, and even as a continued miracle. The total destruction of their enemies, their having their names blotted out from under heaven, is to be considered as an event little less wonderful. Surely when we find,

in this particular also, an accomplishment of prophecy, it shows the hand of God in this destruction, in a still more conspicuous manner. Jer. xli. 28. *Fear not, O Jacob my servant, saith the Lord; for I am with thee: for I will make a full end of all nations whither I have driven thee; but I will not make a full end of thee.* From the beginning, who have been the principal enemies of the Jewish state, and who removed them from their own land? The Egyptians long afflicted them. Although the memory of Egypt is not entirely blotted out from under heaven, yet, by means of the various revolutions which it has undergone, it is entirely fallen from its ancient importance, and become a bare, or an enslaved kingdom. But bare as it is, it is not certain that any of the descendants of the ancient Egyptians are contained among the present inhabitants of Egypt. The Midianites, Amalekites, Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites and Edomites long afflicted Israel. These nations have, long since, vanished from the earth, and there are but few monuments whereby their memory is preserved, excepting such as are contained in the sacred records. The Assyrians were among the most powerful as well as most inveterate of their enemies. They wholly subdued and captivated the ten tribes, and greatly afflicted the remaining two; as we find by consulting sacred history. The Babylonians succeeded the Assyrians in the possession of supreme power, and were actuated by the same principles of enmity to Israel. Both these nations have, long since, ceased to exist. The Syrio Macedonians grievously afflicted and persecuted the Jews, particularly under Antiochus Epiphanes, and the Romans utterly destroyed the Jewish state, and dispersed the people. These have also vanished. The Egyptians, Assyrians, and Babylonians were entirely overthrown and subjugated by the Medes and Persians; the Syrio Macedonians were swallowed up by the Romans, and the Roman empire, great and powerful as it was, was entirely broken in pieces, and finally dissolved by the incursions of barbarous nations; while the Jews still exist to this day. What a wonder of Providence is it that the vanquished should, for so many ages, survive the victors, and the former spread all over the

world, while the latter are no more? How wonderfully exact and circumstantial is the accomplishment of prophecy?

Another prophecy relating to the Jews, which I shall briefly notice, is that of our blessed Saviour, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem. At the time when this prophecy was delivered, the city was in its usual prosperity, and there were no apparent symptoms of any approaching calamity. The awful catastrophe was, however, drawing nigh. It was but about forty years before its accomplishment. He foretold the same event (only in a manner more plain, full, and circumstantial) which had been predicted by Moses more than fourteen hundred years before. The places where we have this prophecy most at large, accompanied with the signs of the approaching desolation, are Matt. 24th, and Mark 13th chapters. But several other places allude to it, and it is, in a manner, interwoven with the structure of the Gospels. It is worthy of notice that there are many things in this prophecy which relate to Christians, and which obtained an accomplishment in their miraculous preservation during that awful destruction. As these do not so particularly belong to my present design, they shall be passed over. We find this destruction, with the causes of it, foretold. Matt. xxiii. 35—38. *That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias son of Baruchias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the Prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Behold your house is left unto you desolate.* It was foretold that this destruction was to extend to the temple as well as the city. Concerning the former, it is said, Mark, xiii. 2, *Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.* The same events are described by Luke. Chap. xix. 41—44. *And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, if thou hadst*

known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation. In a manner different from what was usual with the Prophets, our blessed Lord informs his disciples that all these events must soon come to pass, even during that generation. Matt. xxiv. 34. Mark, xiii. 30. *Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done.*— They were accordingly accomplished about forty years afterwards. There were to be several signs or forerunners of this approaching desolation. Christ cautions his disciples not to be terrified with these first appearances. Matt. xxiv. 6, 7. *And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginnings of sorrows.* The unbelieving Jews might well be terrified at these things which were the forerunners of their entire desolation. But Christians need not yet be troubled for themselves; they would still have time enough to make their escape. A period, however, would arrive, when they ought to be alarmed for their own safety, and when it would be necessary for them to flee out of the devoted city. Ver. 15. 16. *When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place (whoso readeth, let him understand); then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains.*— Mark represents the abomination of desolation as standing where it ought not, instead of standing in the holy place. Whatever difficulty there may be in understanding what is meant by the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place, it is removed by a parallel place in Luke, xxi. 20, 21. *And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let*

them which are in the midst of it depart out. The abomination of desolation (or the abomination which maketh desolate) standing in the holy place, is the Roman army besieging Jerusalem. The Roman army was an abomination to the Jews on account of its ensigns and images. But it would take up more time than is consistent with the brevity of a single discourse, to notice all the parts of this remarkable prophecy. The greatness of the destruction is painted by our blessed Lord in very strong language. Matt. xxiv. 21, 22. *For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortned, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortned.* This was a proverbial manner of expression among the Jews, which was applicable to any great calamity. But our Saviour did not, in this instance, apply a proverbial expression without a proper meaning. Indeed, all history cannot furnish us with a parallel to the calamities and miseries of the Jews. Rapine, murder, famine, and pestilence, within the city. Fire and sword, and all the terrors of war without. Our Saviour wept on the foresight of these calamities, and it is almost impossible for a person endued with the feelings of humanity to read the relation of them in Josephus without weeping. To the account given by St. Matthew, St. Luke adds, chap. xxi. 22, 23, 24. *For these be the days of vengeance, that all things that are written may be fulfilled. For there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.* i. e. This was the time when all those prophecies of vengeance which were uttered by Moses and the other prophets were about to be accomplished. I have not room to enlarge on the fulfillment of this prophecy. Nor is it necessary, after the observations already made on the predictions relating to the same event, delivered by Moses. Moses spake of Christ as a prophet which the Lord, the God of Israel would raise up unto them, from among their brethren like unto him. Between their prophecies of this

event, there is a great similarity. Both speak in plain language; in language easy to be understood. To point out the accomplishment of one series of predictions is to do the same by the other. I shall barely notice the manner in which the prediction that Jerusalem should be trodden down of the Gentiles has been fulfilled. Since the destruction of the city by Titus, it has never been in the peaceable possession of the Jews. It has been constantly under the dominion of some other nation. It was first in the possession of the Romans, afterwards it made a part of the dominions of the Saracens, and, during the crusades, it was, for a time, in the possession of the Franks, as the crusaders were denominated in the east. Since that time it has been possessed by the Mamaluke Sultans, and, more lately, by the Turks. And, if a few Jews have been permitted to reside at Jerusalem they have been subject to very severe oppressions and exactions, either from the Christians or Turks. All these are monuments of the exact accomplishment of prophecy.

But the foretelling of the destruction of Jerusalem was not the only prophecy of our blessed Lord. He also foretold his own death, and all the circumstances which attended it. This he did very particularly, and at different times. He told his disciples that he must go unto Jerusalem, and there suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes. Matt. xx. 18, 19. Mark, x. 33, 34, and many other places. He particularly foretold the manner of their proceedings against him, as, that the chief priests and scribes should condemn him to death, but that they should not put him to death. They should deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, scourge, and crucify him. Luke, xviii. 31, 32, 33. He foretold the manner in which this would be brought about, as, that he should be betrayed into the hands of men, and they should kill him. Matt. xx. 18. and parallel places. He particularly pointed out before hand, the man who was to betray him. He also foretold that Peter should deny him, and all his disciples forsake him during his sufferings. He also, at different times, and, on different occasions, foretold his resurrection, with the manner of it, as, that it should be on the third

day. If they destroyed this temple, meaning his body, in three days he would raise it up. That as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so must the son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, and that after he was risen he would go before his disciples into Gallilee. He also foretold his ascension up into heaven, and the descent of the Holy Ghost. He also foretold and forewarned his disciples, of the many difficulties, discouragements and persecutions they were to meet with, but that the gospel would nevertheless have remarkable success, particularly among the Gentiles. It is observable that Christ delivered his prophecies in a manner very different from other Prophets. When they uttered prophecies they were wont to introduce them with a *Thus saith the Lord. Thus bath the Lord spoken. The word of the Lord came unto me saying, son of man, &c.* shewing by such phrases, that they did not speak of their own knowledge, but by special revelation and direction from God. Christ foretold things to come in a manner and style remarkably different, holding forth as much as that he spake of his own knowledge, introducing his predictions not with a *Thus saith the Lord*, but with a *Verily, verily, I say unto you.* See Matt. xxiii. 36. Mark, xiv. 30. Luke, xxi. 31, 32. John, xiii. 38. and other places. The following place is remarkable and shows the great authority Christ attributed to his own word in his predictions. Matt. xxiv. 34, 35. *Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.* These words are annexed to the chief prophecies that Christ ever uttered. He did not barely foretell things to come, but foretold them as things which he himself would bring to pass. These things relating to Christ's prophecies show him to be not only a Prophet but more than a Prophet, viz. the true Messiah.

Besides these prophecies of our blessed Lord, I shall notice one of the Apostle Paul, in relation to the revelation of the man of sin, and the apostacy of the latter times which has had an exact accomplishment. I consider the predictions of the Apostle as one and the same prophecy,

because, altho' delivered at different times, both passages relate to the same event. The first passage we have 2 Thess. ii. 3, 4, & 7, 8. *Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition. Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.* The other passage is in 1 Tim. iv. 1, 2, 3. *Now the spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times, some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy: having their consciences seared with a hot iron. Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.—* As our blessed Saviour has cited, and appealed to the book of Daniel, so his Apostles have drawn from the same fountain. The predictions of St. Paul and St. John, are, in a manner, copies of Daniel's original, with additions, explanations, and improvements. The same times, persons, and events, are described by Paul, Daniel, and John. The day of Christ, i. e. the last coming of Christ to judgment, shall not come, except there come a falling away, or an apostacy first. In the original it is *the apostacy*. So, *the man of sin* is used with the definite article to give it a peculiar emphasis, as if it was some peculiar man of sin, or peculiar apostacy which was meant. Most probably, by the man of sin, we are not to understand any particular man, but a succession of men, as one single individual seems unequal to the work pointed out. This is agreeable to scripture phraseology, particularly to that of the Prophets. Thus a king is put for a succession of kings, and a single beast is put for an empire or kingdom, both in the book of Daniel, and in the Revelations. The woman clothed with the sun is an emblem of the true church, and

the woman arrayed in purple and scarlet, represents the apostate church. I have no intention to enter on any thing like controversy in this place. I shall therefore take it for granted that the apostacy, here foretold, is the papal, or that of the church of Rome. This apostacy was to be both more extensive, and of longer duration than any other, as all the world was to wonder after the beast, and it was to continue 1260 prophetic days, or so many years. In the Apostles' days this man of sin, this head of the apostate church, was not yet revealed, or manifested publicly to the world. But, even then, the mystery of iniquity had begun to work, by a departure from primitive purity and simplicity, and by the dissemination of errors and heresies, which began to prevail in the primitive church. Soon after the apostolic age, it began to work, both more deeply and more extensively, in the addition of a great variety of superstitious rites and ceremonies to the simplicity of Gospel worship, and in that ambition and thirst after worldly power and dominion, with which churchmen began to be actuated. This lust after dominion grew to a great height before the apostacy became publicly revealed. At the time when the Apostle wrote, there was some let or hinderance which stood in the way of the public manifestation of the man of sin. What this let was, whether person or thing, the Apostle does not say. But agreeably to the universal testimony of the primitive fathers, as well as to the generally received opinion among protestants, it was the Roman empire which was this hinderance. This, so long as it continued in a tolerably flourishing condition, was a check to the ambition of the Bishops of Rome. This may be a reason why the Apostle uses so much caution. Had he, in plain terms, foretold the downfall of the Roman empire, it might have exposed the Christians to more grievous persecutions. As the Roman empire was a powerful check on the ambitious views of the Bishops of Rome, so, as soon as this obstacle was removed out of the way, it began to shew itself, and expanded almost without bounds. His coming was to be after the power of Satan, with all power and signs, and lying wonders. It is so generally known that it needs no particular

proof, that the pretensions of the Pope, and the various corrupt and idolatrous practices of the church of Rome, have been all along upheld by feigned visions, false or pretended miracles, pious frauds, and impostures of every kind. Many of these frauds have been publicly detected and exposed by protestants. Still that church adheres to her system of imposture, and many of her votaries seem, in this particular, to be given up to strong delusions to believe a lie. This man of sin was to oppose himself to, and exalt himself above all that is called God, or is worshipped. He was to sit in the temple of God, and shew himself that he was God. These characters are applicable to the Romish hierarchy. The Pope of Rome, when in the plenitude of his power, not only arrogated to himself the title of universal Bishop, declaring himself to be supreme above all other Bishops and Ecclesiastics whatsoever, but he also claimed the supremacy above all kings and emperors, who are in scripture called gods; arrogating to himself the right to dispose of crowns and sceptres at his pleasure. This was no empty claim, like that of the kings of England, who assumed the title of kings of France. It was an assumed right which was frequently exercised, sometimes with a vengeance, by excommunicating kings and emperors, and absolving their subjects from their allegiance. If they are become more modest of late, it is owing to a weakening of the influence which superstition has upon the minds of men, whether kings, princes or subjects, and a decline of their power, and not from any formal, voluntary renunciation of the claim. Indeed the temporal power of the Pope appears to be annihilated and the whole fabric tottering. He sits in the temple of God. It is well known that the Pope has all along pretended to be the supreme head of the church, the Vicar of Christ upon earth; that he claims the divine attribute of infallibility, in determining the sense of scripture and controversies relating to matters of faith, and that he even receives divine honours and worship from his votaries, as appears from popish writers.

In the passage concerning the apostacy of the latter times, quoted from 1 Tim. iv. we will find some other

characteristics which agree to the papal apostacy. Giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, or as some say it ought to be rendered, *doctrines concerning demons*. It is well known that the Romish church has introduced, and continues to patronize a great many subordinate objects of worship; that she not only offers adoration to saints and angels, but even pays a superstitious veneration to images; on which account protestants justly charge her with idolatry. The practice of paying a superstitious regard to departed saints, particularly to martyrs, began early, I believe in the very next age to that of the Apostles: But it was several centuries before the rage for angel, saint, and image worship got to its height. Another characteristic of this apostacy is forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats. This character is easily ascertained. It is well known what church imposes celibacy on its clergy, and encourages a single life by upholding various orders of both sexes, a principal part of whose religion consists in abstaining from the marriage bed. This apostacy is more minutely described, in all its parts, in the book of the revelations. To notice all its characters would far exceed the bounds of a single discourse. The brief remarks which have been made are sufficient to show that this prophecy of Paul has been fulfilled. This man of sin, the Apostle tells us, *Christ will destroy with the breath of his mouth, and consume with the brightness of his coming*; an event which will, undoubtedly, be accomplished in its time. How far that succession of important events which are so rapidly passing before us, will contribute to that end, will be more fully unfolded, by the lapse of a little time, than can be ascertained at present. The declensions and disorders which have taken place among Christians are urged by infidels, as an argument against the truth of christianity. If the christian religion, say they, had a divine original, its author would have interposed to keep it pure. But, whatever degree of plausibility there may be in this objection, it is completely obviated by the consideration that all the noted apostacies from genuine christianity, which have taken place in the world, have been foretold, and are, therefore, so far from affording any evi-

dence against the truth of revelation, that they strengthen the argument from prophecy. Had not this apostacy taken place, and the man of sin, who was so plainly foretold, been revealed, it might have been improved as an argument against the inspiration of the Prophets who foretold such a general falling away.

Although it does not come so directly within the scope of the argument for the truth of revelation derived from prophecy, to notice predictions which are not yet accomplished, I shall, nevertheless, briefly mention two or three of that kind, which are so plainly expressed in scripture that they are scarcely capable of being misunderstood. Here let it be observed that the argument for the truth of revelation furnished by prophecy is deriving additional strength from time. It is like the path of the just, a shining light which shineth more and more, unto the perfect day. It never was the intent of scripture prophecy to make men Prophets. Hence it is that predictions, before they are explained by the accomplishment, are necessarily involved in some degree of obscurity. But as the fulfillment of prophecy is gradual, many predictions are now sufficiently plain, which, at the time when they were uttered, and for several centuries afterwards, were obscure.— The farther events proceed towards their completion, the easier it will be to understand the prediction. Many things in prophecy are much plainer now than they were not more than a century ago, and, no doubt, but, by the beginning of another century, many things will be plainer than at present.

The first event which I shall notice, as yet to be accomplished, is, the calling in of the Jews; their being engrafted into the christian church, and made partakers of the spiritual blessings and privileges from which they are now broken off by unbelief. No event is more clearly, frequently, and fully held up to view, in the prophecies of the Old Testament, than this. In connexion with their becoming an important part of the christian church, they will be restored to their own land, and become a body politic. It must be admitted that there are many passages in the prophecies of the Old Testament which foretel great

mercies to the Jewish nation, which obtained at least a partial accomplishment when they returned from the Babylonish captivity. There are, nevertheless, many others, which, although they contain in them some circumstances applicable to that return, evidently look much farther, and predict a more glorious restoration from a more dreadful dispersion. Out of many passages I shall select the following. The first is in Isaiah, chap. xi. 11, 12. *And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Potros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.* The other passage is Jer. xxiii. 5—8. *Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous branch, and a king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute justice and judgment in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely, and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. Therefore, behold the days come, saith the Lord, that they shall no more say, the Lord liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt: but the Lord liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all the countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land.* These prophecies were, in no sense, fulfilled by the return of the Jews from Babylon, nor did that dispersion answer to the one from which they were now to be restored. It has already been observed that the ten tribes never were comprehended in that restoration. But in that which is here foretold, they were to submit to the kingdom of the Messiah, and become an important part of the gospel church. As this is an event which has never yet taken place, the accomplishment must be still future. The Prophet Isaiah celebrates the happy consequences of this return to both Jews and Gentiles, in this and in the following chapter. The Prophet Zechariah, who lived after the re-

turn of the Jews from Babylon, also foretels a dreadful desolation, and a glorious restoration of the Jews, which was still future. Chap. xiv. The same happy event is likewise foretold in the New Testament, particularly Rom. xi. 25, 26, 27. Although we have not as yet seen the accomplishment of these predictions, is it not evident that many things in the dispensations of providence are preparing the way for their fulfillment? It has been already observed that the miraculous preservation of the Jews as a distinct people, during all their dispersions, is an event of which the annals of nations furnish not a parallel. They have been now, for more than seventeen hundred years, more effectually scattered over the face of the earth than any other nation ever was before. Both their civil and ecclesiastical constitutions have been dissolved, and their temple and tabernacle services abolished, and both their genealogies and distinction of tribes in a great measure lost. Their preservation as a distinct people can therefore be viewed as nothing less than a standing miracle. Miracles are wrought only for important purposes. God has in this remarkable manner, interposed for their preservation, because some great and important events which concern them as a nation are to be accomplished in their proper season. This is, so far, a fulfillment of this ancient prophecy as to be a sure pledge for the accomplishment of the whole in due season.

The entire destruction of the man of sin, at the end of the twelve hundred and sixty prophetic days, or years, is an event still future. The mystical Babylon has not yet been cast into the sea like a mighty mill stone to be heard no more at all. But although this destruction has not as yet been fully completed, as foretold, yet several passing events show it to be drawing nigh. The rise and progress of this grand apostacy we have seen to be agreeable to prophecy. The man of sin advanced, step by step, until he arrived at the height in which he was at the time of the reformation. The mystery began to work early, and after that which letted was taken out of the way, soon made its way to the spiritual throne. As he arose by little and little to the height of his elevation, so the prophe-

cies of his downfall have begun to have their accomplishment. The papal kingdom lost much of its extent at the reformation. Great Britain, Holland, Switzerland, Denmark, and a great part of Germany, then withdrew their allegiance, and, in popish countries, he lost much of his absolute sway. The important events which have taken place during the last twenty years, and which are still passing before us in rapid succession, are bringing him nearer and nearer to destruction. His temporal sovereignty is annihilated, and his spiritual authority is reduced to little more than a shadow. The downfall of superstition will, we trust, quickly follow the loss of power.

The prophecies also foretel that an universal spread of the gospel will follow, as a consequence of the downfall of the grand apostacy. This will be accompanied with the downfall of irreligion of every kind. Perhaps there is no event which is so largely unfolded in prophecy as this. On this theme the inspired penmen of the sacred canon delight to dwell. To attempt a particular description of this latter day glory of the church, would, at the present, perhaps be arrogance. Nor does it pertain to my present design. No doubt a great increase of knowledge, holiness and love, as well as of outward peace and prosperity will form essential parts of the latter day glory.

Upon the whole, from the brief and very imperfect view of the ancient prophecies which has been taken in this discourse, we see that a series of predictions were, long ago, uttered by holy men who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, which related to a variety of events that were to take place in different periods, and that many of these prophecies have already been fulfilled with the most circumstantial exactness. The fulfillment of these prophecies affords unquestionable evidence that none but God himself could be the author of the prediction, and is a sure pledge that others not yet fulfilled will be accomplished in due season. The evidence therefore, of the divine authority, both of the Old and New Testament, which is derived from prophecy, is full and complete. We have therefore all the proof that we can desire, that the gospel is no cunningly devised fable, but that the scrip-

tures are really what they pretend to be, i. e. a revelation from God.

Two or three reflection on what has been advanced in the argument from prophecy will close this discourse.

1. How wonderfully extensive is the system of events unfolded in prophecy? How unlike to the prophecies of scripture were the pagan oracles of antiquity? These were delivered only for the immediate information and direction of those who consulted them. They were usually dressed up in such ambiguous language, that, let the event turn out as it would, the credit of the oracle was safe. They were no sooner understood than despised. Directly the reverse is the truth, in relation to the prophecies of scripture. The better they are understood the more we will admire the vastness of the plan. The completion of the former only shows their fraud and futility. The fulfillment of the latter demonstrates their truth and importance. The scheme of scripture prophecy comprehends a vast and connected system of events, and extends through a long succession of ages. Indeed it will be fully completed only with the consummation of all things. The more it is understood the more comprehensive it will appear, and the more striking the evidences of the divinity of its author. What stronger proofs can be given of a divine providence, and a divine revelation, than those which appear from the unfolding of the vast scheme of prophecy?

2. From the remarks made in this discourse we may see the wonderful harmony which there is in the whole scheme of prophecy. All the prophecies contribute to the elucidation of the same system of events. Of all the Prophets of the Old Testament, Daniel has given the most extensive and connected view of a chain of events extending to the latter day. All his prophecies and visions are connected together. What a wonderful coincidence is there not only between him and the other Prophets of the Old Testament, but also between him and our blessed Saviour, the Apostle Paul, and the Evangelist John, in the New? The same persons, characters, and events are foretold by them all, and all contribute to the develop-

ment of the same extensive plan. It is plain, therefore, that they must all have been inspired by the same spirit.

3. Hence we may learn the strange and surprising manner in which many prophecies have already been accomplished. How circumstantial has been the accomplishment of the events foretold in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, and the subsequent prophecies of Daniel; in the several revolutions and changes which have taken place in the four great monarchies? How remarkably have the prophecies of Moses and of our blessed Lord been fulfilled, in the destruction of Jerusalem, and the subsequent dispersion of the Jews? For the accomplishment of these prophecies, persons have been raised up in a manner almost equally wonderful. Vespasian was promoted from obscurity, and, although feared and hated by Nero, was by him preferred to the command in that war. His son Titus was also, at various times, remarkably preserved, in order to accomplish the purpose which God had in view. Josephus, the Jewish historian, was preserved in a manner little less remarkable than Titus; the one to destroy, and the other to record that destruction. It tends, in a peculiar manner, to establish the truth of these prophecies, that the particular histories which explain and illustrate their fulfillment, are derived, not so much from Christian, as from Jewish and heathen writers; especially from Josephus the Jewish historian. Although he is very exact and minute in other particulars, yet he avoids, as much as possible, the mention of Christ, and of the Christian religion. Nothing was farther from his intention than to record the fulfillment of our Saviour's prophecies, yet had this been his express design, he could not more effectually have accomplished his purpose. As these calamities were the most deplorable of any which the world ever witnessed, so none were ever so clearly foretold. Other prophecies have been accomplished with equal exactness. Blessed be God that we have such a sure word of prophecy, to which we will do well to take heed, as to a light shining in a dark place. Let us therefore, while we enjoy this light, walk in the light, that we may be the children of the light.

DISCOURSE VII.

PSALMS, CXXXVIII. 2.

Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.

IT is objected against those copies of the sacred scriptures which we now possess, that, whatever our opinions of the original inspiration of these writings may be, no dependance is now to be placed upon them. They have been so much altered and corrupted, either by the incapacity, negligence, or wickedness of the numerous translators and transcribers, through whose hands they have passed, that they are not now to be relied on; and the several copies vary so much from each other, that, while there is no common standard by which we can compare or correct them, there is no certainty in either. Some observations on this point will be the subject of this discourse. The words read have been selected, as affording a theme suitable to that purpose. By the name of God, as the phrase is used in the sacred scriptures, we are to understand any thing whatsoever, whereby he makes himself known, or manifests himself to be truly God. His whole character, comprising his attributes and works, whether of nature, providence, or grace, may be considered as pertaining to his name. As the word of God is to be considered as the principal source from whence we derive the knowledge of the divine character and works, or in other words, as the word is the principal means whereby we attain to the knowledge of God, this word may be considered as constituting an essential part of his name. And as infinitely more knowledge of God is obtained from his word than from all other sources combined, he may be said to mag-

magnify his word above all his name. It is probable that David, in this Psalm, understands God's word in a restricted sense, not as extending to divine revelation in general, but with special reference to some particular great and precious promise or promises made to himself, which, notwithstanding the numerous obstacles that stood in the way of their accomplishment, had been magnified, not barely by an exact and circumstantial fulfillment, but by God's doing even more than he had promised. Having lately experienced a fresh instance of divine faithfulness, displayed in the fulfillment of a particular promise, he was from thence led to the contemplation of the same glorious perfections, as discovered in his word generally. Not that any one of God's attributes or perfections, either is, in reality, or can be made more glorious than an other: But because particular circumstances may bring one of God's perfections more immediately into our view, this may be more admired and celebrated by men than another, being at the present moment more clearly seen. This seems to have been the case in the present instance. God's gracious promise made to David, connected with its wonderful accomplishment, notwithstanding numerous obstacles which to men appeared insurmountable, was at this time, more observed and admired by him, than any other of the divine attributes, actions, or perfections. But although David may, in this instance, have some particular promise or promises more immediately in view, the observation in our text will pertinently apply to divine revelation generally. God has magnified and will magnify his whole character, all his name: But he magnifies his word above all his name, by making it the vehicle through which the knowledge of the various ways, in which his whole character is magnified, is communicated to his church. He has magnified his power, wisdom, and goodness, in the works of creation, and still continues to magnify them in the works of providence. In the works of redemption, he magnifies or exhibits, as glorious in the view of his intelligent creatures, his whole character. He has magnified his justice, by demanding and obtaining such complete satisfaction for the breaches of his law, as that not one iota or one tittle shall pass from

it: until all be fulfilled: He magnifies his mercy, by pardoning guilty rebels through an atonement: He has magnified his love to men, by the gift of his only begotten Son to a lost and perishing world: He has magnified his wisdom, by the discovery of a way in which all the attributes of Deity harmonize in the salvation of sinners; a way in which mercy and truth have met together, and righteousness and peace have kissed each other: He magnifies his truth and faithfulness, by the accomplishment of all his promises; and he magnifies his word, by making it the true and faithful vehicle by the means of which the knowledge of all these displays of the divine character is communicated to the children of men. He makes it a perfect transcript of his own character and perfections, whether he chooses to make a display of himself in acts of justice or of mercy, by making it a powerful mean for convincing and converting sinners, and by making it a lamp or a light to direct his people in every season of perplexity and distress. In all these respects, the word of God had been magnified to the Psalmist. He speaks, therefore, from his own experience, when he says, *The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple: The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes: The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever: The judgments of the word are true and righteous altogether.* But the design of this discourse is to confine our views of God's magnifying his word above all his name to one single point, the elucidation of which is required by its connexion with those which have preceded it, i. e. God has magnified his word by taking sufficient care that it should be preserved pure, and handed down to succeeding generations without any material alteration or corruption. In the sequel of this discourse, some illustration of this point will be attempted.

This cannot be considered as a subject of minor importance. An attention to it becomes the more necessary, as it is a quarter against which infidels direct some of their most furious attacks. This supposed corruption they are fond of representing as one of the most unanswerable argu-

ments against christianity. Their writings abound with accounts of forgeries, additions, corruptions, interpolations, and omissions every where in the sacred books. They tell us that if we should even admit that that miscellaneous collection of tracts which compose the book called the Bible was originally a revelation from God, no dependence can now be placed on these writings, because they have been transmitted to us, not barely through the hands of ignorant, weak and fallible, but of wicked and designing men; men who had the opportunity, and were not wanting in the inclination to corrupt and alter them to suit their own darling notions. If we add to the many opportunities for wilful corruption, the numerous unavoidable accidents to which they have been exposed, through the ignorance, carelessness, and negligence of transcribers, and that being written in dead languages, they must have suffered greatly through the unskilfulness, unfaithfulness, and dishonesty of translators; with many other equally bold and unfounded assertions, easier made than supported. On this account, if for no other reason, they tell us that they are entitled to no respect. Indeed, according to these, and similar representations, it would seem as if infidels believed themselves, and wished to impress the belief upon others, that scarcely a man of common sense, or common honesty, was ever engaged in either transcribing or translating the scriptures. Now, could all these bold assertions be proved, the sacred writings would be rendered in a great measure useless, at least, they would not answer the purpose originally designed, of being a perfect rule of faith and manners. But if it can, on the other hand, be made to appear that the sacred writings have been faithfully handed down to us, then mere assertions to the contrary are little to be regarded. This is what I shall attempt in the present discourse.

Here let it be observed, that the evidence here required is of that species which is of all others the most difficult, i. e. the proof of a negative. Supposing one man to have the liberty of aspersing the character of another by mere assertions, and the person whose character was aspersed had no way to clear himself from the alleged imputations

only to take particular calumnies, one after another, and prove them to be false, while his accuser had the unlimited privilege of aspersing without being obliged to produce any proof, it would be a difficult, uneasable, and, many times, an impracticable task. But this ground is taken, and this liberty assumed by the enemies of revelation, and, in its defence it is many times necessary, not barely to show that their assertions are unsupported by proof, but to bring counter testimony to prove their allegations to be false.

In order to prove that the Bible, as we have it, has not suffered any essential alteration or corruption, it is not my intention to go into a laboured investigation of historical testimony: Not that sufficient materials for such a mode of proof do not exist,* but it would require more leisure than I at this time possess, and probably a more extensive access to books than is at present within my reach. This moreover is not that kind of proof to which the great body of christians can at all times have access, nor are these the arguments which will carry the clearest and strongest conviction to the mind. Testimony might easily be produced to prove that both Jews and Christians have taken sufficient care on this head. But if internal evidence is not

* "That the Jews are a people more jealously scrupulous of their religious principles, and of the facts on which they are founded, than any other people upon earth, even to the numbering of the lines, words, and letters of the copies of their sacred writings, we have sufficient evidence: When corruptions of worship and manners, and many superstitious usages grew up among the Jews, they were obliged to devise an oral law, to be handed down by oral tradition, to countenance those corruptions and innovations, which law they afterwards collected into a body and committed to writing. But the Mishna had been needless and superfluous, durst they have incorporated their traditions with the scriptures. As they have not done this in a case where they were most tempted to do it, there is less room to fut-

to be found, no proof from testimony will be sufficient to convince the mind; and if the scriptures still carry their own evidences within themselves that they are pure and uncorrupted, then proof from testimony becomes the less necessary. I shall therefore only barely adduce a few arguments which cannot but be obvious to the reason and common sense of the unlearned hearer or reader. If the following things be attentively considered, they will, I think, leave but little doubt upon the minds of the candid and impartial, that the scriptures have been, in the main, faithfully transmitted.

1. The first reason which I shall mention may rather be considered as an argument a priori. If God has really given a revelation to mankind, accompanied with sufficient marks and attestations of its original, at the same time designing it for general use, not merely in the age in which it was given, but in every succeeding generation to the end of the world, there is, at least, a very strong presumption that he would, by his providence, take special care so to preserve that revelation, that the important ends, for which it was given, might be answered. Had he suffered it to be essentially corrupted, this purpose would be defeated. It is therefore highly irrational, as well as derogatory to the wisdom and goodness of God, to suppose that he would

“ peft that they have wilfully corrupted them in other ref-
 “ pects. So scrupulously vigilant were the Jews in pre-
 “ serving the scriptures, that the Maforites numbered not
 “ only the sections, but even the words and letters, that
 “ no fraud or inadvertancy might corrupt the least iota of
 “ what they deemed sacred. If a word happened to be
 “ altered in any copy, it was laid aside as ufeless, or given
 “ to a poor man to teach his children by, on condition it
 “ was not brought into the fynagogue. The prince was
 “ obliged to copy the original exemplar of the law laid
 “ up in the sanctuary, with his own hand, and every Jew
 “ was to make it his constant difcourse and meditation, to
 “ teach it to his children, and to wear part of it on his
 “ hands and forehead.”—*Age of Revelation, page 256.*

suffer either the weakness or wickedness of men to defeat the purpose which he intended to accomplish by giving a revelation of his will to mankind. To do this, there was no necessity for a departure from the ordinary methods of providence, or for any miraculous interposition so as to render the transcribers or translators immediately inspired. That ordinary superintendance of providence, whereby God controuls the actions and volitions of his intelligent creatures in relation to other things, without in the least infringing on either their liberty or moral agency, would be sufficient here. That fallible men may make mistakes, is readily admitted. But that fallible men may so correct their mistakes in relation to the transmitting of a record, that it may pass through their hands, and yet be a faithful transcript, must also be allowed, otherwise there is no dependence on any record whatsoever. Such is the nature and structure of the sacred volume, that it is not the escape of a letter or a word, or a various reading, or different punctuation; or even the omission of a single verse, which can render the sacred pages essentially corrupt. The ordinary operations of providence are, no doubt, sufficient to preserve their purity. If the object is of sufficient magnitude for such an interposition of providence, and such interposition is necessary for the accomplishment of the plan which infinite wisdom had in view when a revelation was given, then such an interposition may be reasonably expected. But, in order that the sacred writings might answer the important purposes providence had in view, this was of the utmost consequence. That God's worship should be kept pure, is a matter of great importance. But that this should be, in every instance, kept free from corruption, is far from being of equal consequence, to the world at large, with the purity of the word. It is evident that corruptions have been sometimes introduced into the worship of God. This was the case with the Jewish worship. It was under idolatrous princes, occasionally mingled with the superstitious customs of the heathen. But whenever a spirit of reformation revived among the Jews, reforming princes, magistrates, and priests, had the standard of God's law, to which they could ap-

peal. Whenever they brought the worship of God to this standard, a reformation was effected. Divine worship has also been sometimes corrupted in the christian church; and by palming false glosses and spurious meanings upon the sacred text, doctrines, not contained in the Bible, have been imposed upon the world as parts of the system of divine truth. Much injury has been thereby done to the souls of men. Yet so long as the sacred scriptures remain pure, the church is furnished with the means of reformation. Both abuses in worship, and errors in doctrine, oftentimes have been, as they at any time may be, corrected by an appeal to this standard. This could not be done if the standard itself was corrupted. There would, in that case, be nothing left to which an appeal could be made, and the purpose of God, in giving a revelation, would be frustrated. The purity of the word is, therefore, of more importance than even purity of worship. The latter can be but local and temporary, but the former must be universal and ir retrievable without a new revelation. From this argument a priori, therefore, we may, I think, derive strong presumptive evidence, that God has and will take sufficient care of the purity of his word, in order that it may answer the purposes for which it was given. Not, however, to rest solely on this argument, I observe,

2. That the holy scriptures, as they stand in our English Bibles, still appear to possess all the characters of genuineness, simplicity and purity, and do not exhibit so much as one single trait of a general corruption or alteration. If we examine our present sacred books by those internal marks and characters of a revelation laid down in our second discourse, we will find them to contain a revelation every way worthy of God. The sacred history exhibits all the characters of genuineness, simplicity, impartiality and truth; the devotional parts breathe the most exalted strains of piety and resignation; scripture doctrines are rational, and not only of vast importance in themselves, but of such a nature that it is impossible the knowledge of them could ever be derived from any other source than from revelation. A divine majesty and purity also appears

in these writings; the most sublime and exalted morality is taught in its just extent, and there is still the most wonderful harmony and consistency between all its parts, as between scripture histories and scripture doctrines, between types and things typified, between predictions and their accomplishment, and between the Old and New Testaments. The scope of the whole is to give all glory to God, and when effectually applied to the soul by the Holy Ghost, they possess sufficient light and power to convince and convert sinners. It has been formerly observed that these are not the characteristics of a cunningly devised fable. But these marks all appear in the scriptures as they are contained in our common English Bibles. Now, is it not, in the highest degree irrational and absurd, to suppose a general corruption of these sacred oracles to have taken place, and yet all the essential and distinguishing characteristics of a revelation from God be permitted to remain. None but the worst of men, men totally void of every virtuous principle and sentiment, could be capable of such wickedness as a designed corruption of the sacred scriptures. But, that wicked men should really effect this corruption, in such an artful way as not to impress a single trait of their own characters on their impious forgeries, but leave all the marks of authenticity, simplicity and truth impressed upon the face of these writings, is one of that unaccountable kind of suppositions which destroys itself.

3. The manner in which the sacred scriptures are written is such as to render the execution of a design to corrupt them extremely difficult, if not wholly impracticable, without betraying such indisputable evidences of the forgery as to render it easily detected; and if the omission or alteration was accidental, and not of such a nature as to be harmless, must render it liable to immediate discovery. In a former discourse I observed, that the manner in which the sacred scriptures were written furnishes one very strong proof of their divine original. Notwithstanding they were written in periods very remote from each other, and by persons of very different gifts and qualifications, as well as of different passions and prejudices, and occupying various

situations in life, from the Prince upon the throne down to the poor Prophet or Apostle, still a unity of design and a harmony of sentiment is observable throughout the whole. It can hardly be presumed as possible, much less to come within the compass of probability, that any collection of writings merely human, penned by so many different authors, and in the same detached manner with the holy scriptures, and containing such a variety of matter as is to be found in this sacred volume, could exhibit that uniformity of design and that harmony between its several parts, which is to be found in the sacred pages. Should such a thing as a general corruption be attempted, this method of writing would render the execution of any such design extremely difficult if not wholly impracticable, without giving the utmost facility to the means of detection. Did the sacred scriptures consist of set discourses, all digested into a systematic form; did they treat of the several doctrines of religion in course, one after another, and when a particular subject was introduced, set it in a proper point of light by explaining it fully, and saying all that was to be said upon it at once, and afterwards make no farther mention of it, a general corruption of the doctrines of revelation would then be, comparatively, an easy task. But this is not the case. The same points of doctrine are frequently introduced, and again and again considered, and set in various points of light, both by different writers and by the same writer in different places. Different circumstances relating to particular doctrines are brought into view and considered in various parts both of the Old and New Testament. The same observations are applicable to the various historical narratives of facts, which are interspersed, here and there, throughout the sacred pages. Now in order to effect a general corruption, there must not only be an alteration in every particular doctrine, which either the inclination or the caprice of the person attempting the innovation wished to have altered, but this corruption or alteration must be carried into every page of the Bible in which there is mention or even an allusion to the particular point to be corrupted, in order that some degree of apparent consistency at least might be maintained. Now

this is a work for which but few, whatever may be their inclination, possess sufficient talents. Fewer still would have sufficient boldness to dare to make the attempt, and still fewer who, had they even talents and inclination to succeed in making the proposed alterations, would be found to possess sufficient authority to palm their innovations upon the world in such an artful manner as to induce the generality of mankind to believe that these spurious or corrupted books were the genuine scriptures of truth.

4. If a general corruption of the scriptures has ever taken place, it must have been the effect of either accident or design. But to believe that it has been accomplished in either of these ways, almost surpasses the utmost limits of credulity. We cannot, on any plausible grounds, suppose a corruption to have taken place by accident. In addition to the security against such a corruption, arising from the miscellaneous manner in which the scriptures were written, it may be farther observed, that if such an accidental corruption had ever taken place, it must have been either early, when the first copies of the scriptures were taken from the originals, or it must have been more lately. As it respects the scriptures of the Old Testament, if we consider that the copies were comparatively few, and confined pretty much to one nation; if we consider also how long the succession of inspired men continued in the Jewish church, we cannot under these circumstances suppose any general corruption or alteration to have taken place by accident, without supposing a greater degree of carelessness to exist among the Jews, about this matter, confessedly of the last moment, than would be ordinarily manifested about the most unimportant public record. A spirit of inspiration did not continue so long in the christian church, and copies of the scriptures became much more numerous, and their circulation far more extensive. But the Apostles and other inspired men lived so long, and the originals of the several parts of the New Testament were so long known and preserved in the church, as to afford sufficient security against any accidental corruption in that early day. Even admitting that some errors and mistakes might have escaped the vigilance of p

ticular transcribers, these might be easily rectified by comparing them with the originals then in the hands of the primitive churches. Considering the known zeal, integrity, faithfulness, and disinterestedness of christians in those early days, when there was no worldly inducement whatsoever to embrace christianity, it cannot be supposed that they would be negligent in a matter of such vast importance. Can it be supposed that men of this character would be more negligent, or less critical, in a matter which so nearly concerned their eternal welfare, than common clerks in public offices, in copying records? Equal care would answer every purpose contemplated. As to the probability, or even possibility, that such an event might have happened, some two or three centuries after the apostolic age, let it be observed that, even during the lives of the Apostles, copies of the scriptures were greatly multiplied, and became much more numerous within a very short time afterwards. Should we even admit that material errors might have crept into particular copies, this would be far from an evidence of a general corruption, and by comparing several copies together, mistakes would be rectified. We can hardly suppose it possible that copies would be permitted to circulate in the churches, without examination and comparison with the originals.—Where it was the custom to make such examinations, any important mistake which had crept in by accident could not circulate far without detection. But to place the matter out of dispute, so far as respects accidental corruption, both the nature of the sacred writings, and the manner in which they were written, combined to render any thing like a general corruption by accident impossible. Particular doctrines and facts are so often introduced, and considered in so many different points of light, that, admitting the escape of a letter, a word, or even of a sentence in one place might occasion some obscurity, either in the relation of a fact or the illustration of a doctrine, sufficient light will be found cast upon the same point, in other places, to answer every purpose; and it is simply impossible that the same omission or alteration in the illustration of a doctrine should happen accidentally, in every place where it

is introduced. For instance, the Apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Gallatians, discusses some of the same subjects on which he had previously treated, in his epistle to the Romans. Supposing that, by either an alteration or omission, a mistake should have happened in transcribing the epistle to the Gallatians, which tended, not barely to render a particular doctrine obscure, but to give it a sense different from that which the sacred penman meant to convey, can we suppose that, on the very same point of doctrine, a similar mistake would happen in transcribing the epistle to the Romans, so as to make the sentiment correspond with that of the corrupt passage in the epistle to the Gallatians? Surely not. So that, supposing an accidental mistake, amounting to a corruption of the text, to have happened in one place, it would not defeat the design of revelation or render it generally corrupt. Indeed it cannot but be viewed as a singular display of the wisdom and goodness of God to mankind, that in communicating to them a revelation of his will, he has chosen a method, perhaps less liable to corruption of this kind, than any other which could possibly be devised, because that even many slips and omissions could not defeat the design for which the scriptures were given, or render revelation generally corrupt. If the sacred scriptures, therefore, have ever been corrupted, it must have been by design. Let us examine this a moment.

This, as well as an accidental corruption, if it has ever been effected, must have been accomplished either early or in times more modern. It is a sufficient vindication of the ancient Jews, from the charge of a designed corruption of the Old Testament, to observe that, had they corrupted these sacred books with a view to make them congenial to their own sentiments and wishes, they would have rendered their appearance very different from what it is.—But enough has been said upon this in our third discourse, to which I refer. If we proceed to the age of the New Testament—To suppose a general corruption of the scriptures to have been planned and executed in the apostolic age, is the same as to suppose, either that the corruption was the work of the Apostles themselves, or that the in-

inspiration itself, by which the scriptures were indited, was not a sufficient guard against corruption. When the spirit of christianity was lively, and such striking displays of divine power accompanied the ministrations of the word, as every where appeared in the apostolic age, it can hardly be supposed that any such thing as a general corruption would be designed, or if any one of the false teachers of that day could have been found hardy enough to have formed such a design, nothing can be more improbable than that it could have been carried into effect, and have escaped the vigilance of the Apostles and other inspired men. The zeal and faithfulness of the apostolic age, but above all, the inspiration with which it was favoured, would have instantly prevented the accomplishment of any such purpose. Supposing such a design to have been formed in after ages, or one, two, three, four, or more centuries, after the Apostles, by what possible means could it have been carried into effect? What man, or what society of individuals, supposing their inclinations to be ever so corrupt, possessed at any time the power of getting all the copies of the scriptures so completely into their hands, as in the first place to effect this general corruption, and afterwards in such an artful manner emit their spurious corrupted copies as to escape detection? Could they administer such copious draughts of the waters of lethe, to every man acquainted with revelation, as would so far metamorphose the powers of their minds, that all recollection of the original scriptures should be completely erased from their memories? Could they make mankind universally believe that these spurious or adulterated copies of the sacred writings were the same original scriptures which they had always had in their hands? Is it possible that not so much as one man should be found, who should be able to detect the fraud, and possess sufficient courage or honesty to expose it to the world? The supposition is inadmissible. It is simply impossible that such an event should happen. During or very soon after the apostolic age, copies of the sacred writings, almost innumerable, were taken; they were translated into many different languages, and actually dispersed over a great part of the world. No man, or

body of men could possibly, after this time, get all the copies of the scriptures into their hands, much less could they have sufficient authority to impose their spurious adulterated copies upon the world, for the genuine scriptures. No body of men ever possessed such a favourable opportunity to effect a general corruption as the church of Rome. Their doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope was calculated to give peculiar facility to the circulation and reception of such alterations. From their known perversions of scripture it may be inferred that many in that communion were not entirely free from the inclination. But so general was the dispersion of the sacred scriptures, so numerous the copies which had been transcribed, so great the variety of languages into which they were translated, and so many spies which would have been ready to detect and expose such conduct, that, had the attempt been made, it must have been rendered completely unsuccessful.

5. The many sects and parties which always have existed, and which do still exist among those who profess a veneration for the sacred books, have served for mutual checks and guards upon each other, to prevent the execution of any such design as a corruption of the sacred scriptures by either of them. As almost all the sects and parties, into which the christian world has been divided, have professed a veneration for the sacred scriptures, and as these different sects have, frequently, exercised a most unchristian spirit of enmity and bitterness against each other, this good has, undoubtedly, grown out of the violence of their opposition. It has operated as a check to prevent all successful attempts at corrupting the fountain of divine truth, either by the one or the other. Besides Jews and Christians who have been mutual guards upon each other, to prevent corruptions of the Old Testament, the different sects among Christians have been very numerous. There were many divisions in the primitive church, even as early as the apostolic age, of which, particularly in the churches of Corinth and Gallatia, we have a melancholly account in Paul's epistles to these churches. Soon after the Apostles' days heresies and schisms were greatly multiplied. Merely to recount the names of the authors of particular

heretical opinions, and to add a description of the tenets which they propagated and endeavoured to defend, would be only to lengthen out our discourse with a long list of hard names and obscure phrases, which would neither give pleasure nor contribute to edification. We have a conspicuous display of the singular goodness of God to his church, in his so overruling matters as to bring this good out of so great an evil, that these various sects, while they have been frequently endeavouring to destroy one another, have been such mutual checks and guards upon each other, as to deprive them all of the opportunity of either planning or executing any such purpose as a designed corruption of the sacred scriptures. Had any one sect or party formed the design of effecting such an impracticable project, it could not have been transacted in a corner, so as to prevent it from coming to the knowledge of other sects in opposition. Had the members of a different sect from the one engaged in the project come to the knowledge of such a design, they would not have failed to have proclaimed it to the world. By such a discovery the cause which the authors and abettors of the project designed to support would have been ruined. We have accounts in history of some heretical sects who denied the inspiration of either the whole, or of parts of the New Testament; of others who turned the whole into an allegory, and of a feeble attempt made by Marcion and his followers to alter some parts of the four gospels. Of this attempt, as well as of the facility with which it was frustrated, information has been faithfully handed down in history. If any more general attempt at corruption, which had been even partially successful, had been made, some account, either of the attempt itself, of its being frustrated, or of some opposition that was made to it, or of the manner of its detection, would have been published. If such a publication had ever been made, there is the greatest probability that some traces of it would have been handed down to our time. Seeing therefore that we have no account of such a discovery extant, nor any reference to a former publication containing the history of such a discovery now supposed to be lost, the inference is irresistible that nothing of the kind

has ever been published. If no such narrative has been ever published, the evidence is equally clear and convincing, either that such corruption was never seriously attempted, or, if an individual was ever found hardy enough to make the attempt, it has not succeeded; it has attracted but little notice, and such corrupted scriptures have never been, either palmed upon the world, or received by the church, as the genuine oracles of God.

6. It may farther tend to confirm the truth that the scriptures are handed down to our time in their genuine purity and simplicity, to observe that these records are not in fact corrupted, so as to be, in any degree accommodated to the false systems of either of those sects or parties, of whom we might reasonably entertain the strongest suspicions of forming a design to corrupt them. There is nothing in the sacred oracles, as we have them at this day, favourable to the corrupt notions and opinions of those who formerly deviated from the simplicity of the gospel. The christian church derives the possession of the scriptures of the Old Testament from the Jews. It affords conclusive evidence that these scriptures are faithfully transmitted, that they give no countenance to their long continued rejection of the Messiah. Had the Jews undertaken to corrupt the sacred books of the Old Testament, that part in which we would be naturally led to look for such corruption would be in those prophecies which point to the coming of the Messiah; and which so clearly describe both the time and manner of his appearing, the place of his birth, the particular tribe and family out of which he was to arise, the great work which he was to do, and all the consequences of his coming, as, by comparing them with the history of their accomplishment in the New Testament, shows so fully their agreement to, and exact fulfilment in Jesus of Nazareth whom they still continue to reject, that they can possibly be accommodated to no one else. Or we might, perhaps, look for the corruption of such prophecies as relate to their own calamities and dispersions, which were threatened as a punishment for their rejection of the promised Messiah; prophecies which have been so long fulfilled, and which are, at this day, fulfilling

before our eyes. But, although the Jews continue, to this day, to reject the Messiah, and to be deluded with the vain expectation of another, they still own the divine authority of those prophecies which so clearly point him out as the mercy promised to the fathers. And to acquit Christians of the charge of corrupting these ancient writings, by inserting passages in the prophecies favourable to christianity and its founder, it is sufficient to observe that, had they been disposed to make such an attempt, the Jews who still had these scriptures in their hands must have known it, and knowing it, neither inclination nor opportunity would have been wanting to have proclaimed it to the world. Could they have made this charge against Christians, it would have furnished a much more plausible pretext for their early persecutions than any thing which they have been able to urge. It is, therefore, a sufficient vindication of Christians against the charge of corrupting the scriptures of the Old Testament, by inserting passages favourable to christianity, to observe that no such accusation has ever been alledged against them by the Jews. One of the most extensive and powerful heresies which ever prevailed in the primitive church was the Arian. They denied the divinity of Christ, and, as a necessary consequence, denied that his death was a proper satisfaction for sin. The Arian opinions spread so extensively in the latter part of Constantine's reign, and during that of his immediate successors, that it became a common expression, that the world was become Arian. Indeed, the number of those who adhered to what was called the Orthodox faith was very small; and no man who is but tolerably acquainted with the Ecclesiastical history of that period but will be sensible that there was then but little scruple about the means of defending a favourite theory. Had the Arians not only attempted, but effected an alteration of the scriptures, we must, naturally, suppose that they would have done it in such a way as to favour their own particular tenets, and that those passages, both of the Old and New Testaments, which speak so clearly about Christ's divinity and satisfaction, would have been expunged. This it does not appear that they have attempted, and, with the

exception of one single text,* the authenticity of which they are known to contest, I know not but they own all the other passages relating to that subject, however they may be supposed to pervert them from their legitimate meaning. Whatever corrupt glosses they put upon scripture expressions, they did not pretend to corrupt or alter the sacred text. Or, if any of them were so hardy as to make the attempt, their corruptions were so soon detected that no traces of them have been handed down to our day. The same observations will apply to that part of the christian community which has so long arrogated to itself the name and style of the catholic church. As the Catholics possessed the most favorable opportunity, so none were more likely to entertain the design of corrupting the sacred text; as they had incorporated into their system of religion, a great variety of superstitious notions, both in relation to doctrine and worship, which had no foundation in the scriptures of truth, and which it was incumbent on them, some way or other, to attempt the defence. But it is evident that they have not so corrupted the sacred text, as to accommodate it to their own superstitions. Did we find in our Bibles an account of the supremacy of the Apostle Peter over the rest of the Apostles, or of his being actually Bishop of Rome, and assuming the style and title of Universal Bishop; did we find an account of his fixing the seat of his supremacy in the Romish See, and bequeathing it to the Bishops of Rome as his successors, connected with a long list of the Hierarchy, in subjection to the Pope; or did we find the Bible to contain a warrant for Angel, Saint, or Image worship, prayers for the dead, purgatory, penance, and the other spurious sacraments, or for masses, consecrations of churches, baptizing of bells, exorcisms, or the pretended holiness of times and places, and other numerous fanciful and superstitious rites of that church, there would then be good reason to suspect that the scriptures had been corrupted by Papists. Certainly the presumption is strong, that if they had ventured to alter

* 1 John, v. 7.

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exception of one single text,* the agreement of which they are known to consist, I know not but they rest on the other passages relating to the same subject. However they may be supposed to prevent them from their original meaning. Whatever corrupt copies they are that they are expressions, they did not intend to alter the sacred text. Or, if any of them were intended to make the attempt, their circumstances were such as would not leave any traces of their having been intended to do so. The same observations will apply to that part of the canon in conformity which has its own examples in the same line and style of the canon itself. The canon itself defied the most atrocious innovations. It was not only to exterminate the things it concerning, but also they had incorporated into their canon a great variety of superstitious notions, such as fasting, abstinence and works, which had no foundation in the figures of truth, and which were intended to be done, the way or other, to strengthen the belief. It is evident that they have not in circumventing the canon, but a compromise to their own superstitions. See in our Bibles an account of the invention of the canon of Peter over the rest of the Church, it is not only called the Bishop of Rome, and allowing the Bishop of Rome to be the universal Bishop: but we find in several of the most ancient treatises of his supremacy in the Church, and in several of them to the Bishop of Rome as the chief of the Church with a long list of the Hierarchical in relation to the Pope; or did we find the Pope in person a superior to Angel, Saint, or Image, working prayers for the souls in purgatory, penance, and the other things of superstition, or for exiles, censures, or excommunications, or for exorcisms, or the pretended business of witch and magic, and other numerous superstitious and superstitious uses of the Church, there would then be good reason to suspect that the scriptures had been corrupted by Paganism. Certainly the presumption is strong, that if they had intended to alter

* 1 John, v. 7.

the sacred text, it would have been in favour of some one or other, or of all these superstitions. It is, however, plain that no traces of these corrupt sentiments are to be found in the New Testament, consequently, they have neither effected or attempted any general corruption of the sacred writings. They took another method to establish their favourite tenets. Finding the New Testament unable to bear the load of their Hierarchy, they prudently annexed tradition, and an infallible power in the church, independent of scripture authority, not only to expound the sacred text, but to establish rites and ceremonies, and to determine controversies relating to articles of faith. Thus it is, I think, evident, that the scriptures have not been altered in fact, so as to be accommodated to the peculiar notions and opinions of any sect who may be supposed to have an interest in corrupting or altering them. The inference is then, I think, forcible, that they are handed down to us in their native purity and simplicity.

7. To these reasons we may add, that the admirable harmony which still subsists between the various copies of the sacred scriptures which are extant, however widely they are dispersed, and into whatever variety of languages they have been translated, and whatever has been the date of transcribing them, is an evidence that no general corruption of the inspired books has ever been effected.* Here

* The following remarks, from a man eminent both for his literary attainments and his piety, who had made a most accurate and laborious search into the evidences of christianity for his own satisfaction, being long harrassed with doubts on the subject of the inspiration of the scriptures, deserve a place in a note.

“ The sacred writings have been transmitted down to our times sufficiently pure and uncorrupted. No writings of antiquity have come down to the times of printing, with so much evidence of their genuineness, as the scriptures. The various readings are trifling, and of no moment in the general evidence. For notwithstanding, by superstitious criticism on a multitude of copies, and various translations of the New Testament in particular,

it is not meant to assert that there are no variations whatsoever between the different ancient copies, or none of what

“ and the voluminous fathers of five centuries, they have
 “ been augmented to a great number, most of which consist
 “ of different orthography and punctuation only ; yet the
 “ sense, at least the important sense, is *entire* in any of the
 “ copies, especially in the more correct ones. From the
 “ few copies of Terence, which is said to be in the best
 “ state of any of the classic writers, with a less scrupulous
 “ exactness, have been collated 20,000 various readings :
 “ nor is it to be doubted if the same number of copies could
 “ be collated for him, that have been for the New Testa-
 “ ment, double that number might be found for that little
 “ volume, when yet the sense of each scene and act re-
 “ mains entire. The like observation might, no doubt, be
 “ made for the more ancient prophane writings, as those of
 “ Homer, Thucydides, and others. No one acquainted with
 “ Jewish antiquity will doubt but that the Hebrew scrip-
 “ tures were in being, in their present form, about the time
 “ of the captivity, and in the time of our Saviour ; since
 “ which the mutual jealousy of Jews and Christians o-
 “ ver the holy books, has continued their absolute security
 “ and defence against material interpolation. The multi-
 “ tude of copies, in distant churches, synagogues, and ages,
 “ the sameness of the Hebrew copies among Jews and
 “ Christians, and the general correspondence of all, even
 “ in the oriental translations ; and, lastly, the agreement
 “ of the LXX. and New Testament copies of later ages
 “ with the Alexandrian manuscript, evidently of the fourth
 “ century, conspire in securing to us the genuine writings
 “ of sacred antiquity, with a united evidence superior to
 “ what can be adduced for the authenticity of any other
 “ ancient writings. We have much clearer evidence that
 “ the sacred oracles are transmitted to us entire, than
 “ we have for the works of Hippocrates, Herodotus, Pla-
 “ to, or Philo, in the present copies of which last, howev-
 “ er, we do not doubt ourselves to have the genuine writ-
 “ ings of those authors.”—*Dr. Holmes' life of President*
Stiles, page 56, 57.

are called various readings, between different manuscripts. This would not be true in fact. The learned, by diligently comparing a great number of copies, have found several variations of this kind. Considering that the scriptures have been more widely dispersed, have passed through more hands, and the copies of them been more numerous than those of any other writings whatsoever, they have, for that reason, been more exposed to variations and mistakes than other books. Yet the variations between different copies are less numerous, and far less important than those between different copies of the works of other ancient authors. No one questions the genuineness of the ancient Greek or Roman classics, or supposes them to be essentially corrupted. But the variations between different copies of these are much more important than any that are found between different copies of the holy scriptures. The principal ancient copies of the scriptures of the Old Testament are three. The ancient Hebrew, the Septuagint, and the Samaritan. The ancient Hebrew copies are derived from that which * Ezra collected and published, after the re-

* “ There can be no doubt but the canon of the Old Testament was the same in the days of our Saviour as it is now ; nor could it be corrupted materially after the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, on account of the sect of Samaritans which took its rise about that time ; for these people professed the same regard to the sacred books with the Jews themselves, and were always at variance with them about the interpretation of the scriptures. The Samaritan copy of the Pentateuch is now in our hands, and excepting some numbers, in which the different copies and translations of all ancient writings are peculiarly subject to vary, and a single text in which mount Gerizzim and mount Ebal are interchanged, it is the very same with the Jewish copy. Not long after this, the books of the Old Testament, beginning with the Pentateuch, were translated into Greek, and dispersed, by means of the Jews, into almost every part of the known world. If we go farther back into

turn of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity. From the Hebrew copies I suppose our English translations to be derived. The Samaritan copies, so called, were found among that assemblage of different nations, who were placed in the land of Israel by Shalmanezzer, king of Assyria, after the expulsion and captivity of the ten tribes. This assemblage of people was afterwards known by the name of Samaritans. These, in some sort, embraced the Jewish religion, and had the books of the Old Testament among them. The Septuagint, so called, is a Greek version of the Old Testament, translated from the Hebrew by some learned Jews of Alexandria, at the command of Ptolemy, king of Egypt, more than two hundred years before the christian era. With respect to the books of the New Testament, particularly the four gospels, it is an undoubted fact, that at a very early date, during the apostolic age, or very soon after, they were translated into the Syriac,

“ the Jewish history, we shall be unable to pitch upon a
 “ time in which any material change in the sacred books
 “ could have been attempted with the least prospect of
 “ success. It was one of the most earnest instructions of
 “ Moses himself, that the book of the law, a copy of
 “ which was lodged in the ark, should be the subject of
 “ constant reading and meditation, in every Israelitish
 “ family ; and it was expressly appointed that it should be
 “ read publicly every seven years at the feast of taberna-
 “ cles, and the Levites, who were dispersed throughout
 “ all the twelve tribes, were particularly appointed to study
 “ and explain it to the rest of the nation. And, notwith-
 “ standing the times of defection and idolatry, they were
 “ never entirely without Prophets, and even many thou-
 “ sands of others, who continued firm in the worship of
 “ the true God, and therefore must have retained their
 “ regard for the sacred books of the law. On the whole,
 “ the Jews have no doubt acted the part of faithful, and
 “ ever scrupulous guardians of their sacred books, for the
 “ use of all the world in the times of christianity.”—*Age*
of Revelation, page 275, 276.

Arabic, and Latin languages; which translations, or copies derived from them, are still extant and vary but very little from the Greek originals. Now, although some variations and different readings are observed by learned men, and some small differences, particularly in chronology, yet there is an admirable harmony observable, both in the relation of facts and illustration of doctrines. Notwithstanding all the noisy cavils about different readings, as destroying the authority of the whole, it is observable that among the numerous copies of the scriptures, whether ancient or modern, in all the variety of languages into which they have been translated, such a wonderful harmony prevails, that from all the different readings, not so much as one new article of faith, one new moral duty, or one new religious rite can be collected. The small variations which exist are so far from proving any general system of corruption, that they clearly establish the contrary; for if all these copies had been corrupted by design, the probability is that they would have been corrupted alike. Consequently the scriptures have been transmitted with sufficient purity, and no general system of corruption has taken place, and, in the main, the sense of the original is faithfully rendered in our English translations. An appeal might be made to historical testimony to prove the critical, and almost superstitious exactness of the Jews, in preserving and handing down the scriptures of the Old Testament to posterity, and that Christians also have proceeded with sufficient exactness and caution. But I think enough has been said on this head to satisfy the impartial enquirer after truth. In addition to all the other ways in which God has magnified his word, he has thus magnified it by causing it to be handed down, pure and uncorrupted to posterity.

Two or three reflections will close this discourse.

I. The first reflection which offers itself to our view is on the unreasonableness of infidels, in requiring that kind of evidence, for the genuineness and authenticity of the sacred books, which they do not require in any other case, and which they know it to be impossible to obtain on any subject. They are constantly calling for more evidence,

for more proof of the divine authority of the scriptures, while, at the same time, they, at least many of them, publicly declare no evidence whatsoever, which could possibly be obtained, would be sufficient; that neither miracles nor inspiration are capable of proof from testimony. Indeed it would seem as if no kind of evidence of the divine authority and inspiration of the scriptures would satisfy them, unless they had seen the inspired penmen write them, and been themselves also inspired with the knowledge of their inspiration. No one scruples the genuineness of the works of Homer, Virgil, Terence, Cicero, Tacitus, or any of the celebrated poets or historians of antiquity. No one pretends that they are so essentially altered by interpolations or corruptions, as to be no longer the same, or not to be justly considered as the works of the authors whose names they bear. An insinuation that the Greek or Roman classics were neither written by the men whose names they bear, nor in the age nor country to which they have been always assigned, would be scouted by the whole learned world. But much more unreasonable, if possible, is the opinion advanced, and strenuously advocated, by some, that the New Testament did not exist, until two or three hundred years after the christian era. Certainly the internal characters of genuineness and authenticity are much stronger in the books of the Old and New Testament, than in the works of the authors abovenamed. Neither has there been half the pains taken to transmit them pure and unaltered, which has been bestowed in handing down the sacred scriptures. And, although there are greater variations between different copies of these books than there is between those of the Bible, no insinuations whatsoever are made against either the integrity or capacity of the transcribers of these works, nor any doubts of their genuineness suggested. How unreasonable is it, therefore, to be constantly calling for a kind and degree of evidence which can, in no instance be obtained, and which is, in no other case, required? How easy is it to raise objections, to urge unfounded conjectures, or to suggest doubts, and throw out insinuations against that which a man is

predetermined not to believe? Alas it seems as if men were given up to strong delusions to believe a lie.

2. Hence learn what a tender care and concern God has always exercised over his church. However vicious men may be, and whatever corruptions they may, from time to time, have introduced into his worship, and however opposite the lives of many who wear the christian profession may be to the holy doctrines and precepts of the word, God has graciously restrained them from corrupting the word itself, whatever may have been their inclinations. He has promised that the gates of hell shall neither totally nor finally prevail against his church, let their attacks be never so violent. Should we however admit that the enemy either had in time past or might in future so far prevail as to corrupt the fountain of divine truth, it would seem as if there would be nothing left to prevent the final and universal prevalence of error and irreligion. But so long as the fountain remains pure, the streams may be purified. The means of reformation remain. God has, hitherto, guarded this treasure, and we trust he will always so guard it, that, in all seasons of doubt and uncertainty, amidst all the entanglements of error and vice, we may constantly have a sure word of prophecy to which we may have recourse, as to a light shining in a dark place.

3. Hence learn what an infinitely precious treasure we have, in possessing the sacred scriptures pure and uncorrupted. The Psalmist, speaking of the Jews, who had only the Old Testament scriptures, and these, at that time, only in part, says, *God hath not so dealt with any nation; praise ye the Lord.* The Apostle also alludes to their singular advantages. *What advantage hath the Jew? What profit is there in circumcision? Much every way, chiefly because unto them were committed the oracles of God.* The additional light which we have in the New Testament renders the treasure doubly precious. O what a dark wilderness, in a moral and religious point of view, would this world be, if it was destitute of the light of revelation? It would be far from containing all that light which shines in the writings of infidels themselves. They shine in borrowed plumes. Deprive them of the light which they

have, either in one way or another, borrowed from revelation, and their writings would be stripped of every just moral or religious sentiment, and nothing would be left but the most melancholly evidence of the truth of that maxim of holy writ, which was the theme of the first of these discourses, that *The world by wisdom knew not God*. The Psalmist had a different view of God's word from many of the pretended wise men of the present day. He chose it for a light unto his feet and a lamp unto his path. He esteemed God's statute as more precious than gold, yea, than much fine gold; yea, as sweeter than the honey comb. Let us never be found either despising or neglecting this treasure, but let us be conversant with it all the days of our lives.

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DISCOURSE VIII.

ISAIAH, xli. 21.

Produce your cause, saith the Lord; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the king of Jacob.

IT is an important observation of a writer of the last century, on the subject of revelation, that if the christian religion is true, it is tremendously true. There are many points of mere speculation, relating to ancient history, philosophy, and the several arts and sciences, which are controverted, in relation to which it is a matter of very little importance which side of the question we espouse. A man is nothing better if he happens to embrace the truth, nor any thing the worse for a mistake. His error can endanger neither his present peace and comfort, nor his future hope. But with respect to the religion of the Bible, it is far otherwise. If God has given to man a revelation of *his* will, it is of the utmost importance to believe the truths it contains, and practise the duties it enjoins. If we have sufficient evidence that the Bible itself is a system of truth, then we must, of course, admit the truth of such maxims as these, which are contained in its pages.—*He that believeth shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned. He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God. If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin.* And many other passages of the same import. The Christian ought, it is true, to have good grounds and reasons for his faith. He ought to be always ready to render a reason of the hope that is in him, with

meekness and fear. But should he even prove to be in an error, he errs on the safe side. If it should turn out that there is nothing in religion, and the scriptures should prove to be only a cunningly devised fable, as the infidel wishes to represent them, nothing would be gained by infidelity. But should the christian religion prove to be true, i. e. should the Bible be found to contain a collection of writings divinely inspired, it is far otherwise with the infidel. The rejection of revelation must then be attended with the most awfully serious consequences. Nothing short of absolute demonstration, that the whole is a fiction, can justify its rejection. The reasons for discarding revelation ought to be infinitely stronger than those which would justify a prudent man in believing and receiving it. But is any thing like demonstration so much as pretended? Where shall the man be found who even pretends to be able to prove, beyond the possibility of a doubt, either that there is no God, or no providence, or no future state, or that if there is a God he has never given to men a revelation of his will; or that in giving a revelation he either did not or could not so attest that revelation, as to render it reasonable, or even a duty indispensable, to believe and receive it? Doubts and cavils without number are proposed, and a multitude of objections raised. But notwithstanding all these, for aught that the objectors themselves know to the contrary, the scriptures may be true. Yet nothing short of absolute demonstration, that the Bible is a forgery, can justify a person in rejecting christianity. To such as are disposed to reject revelation, therefore, the challenge in our text may with propriety be applied. *Produce your cause, saith the Lord; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the king of Jacob.* The cause of the ancient infidels was idolatry. They did not absolutely deny the existence of all religion. The point in controversy was, whether Jehovah was to be worshipped agreeable to the platform laid down in the Jewish scriptures? or whether the idolatrous worship of the surrounding nations was the true worship? God challenges the votaries of idols to produce their strong reasons in defence of idol worship, and try whether they were of equal weight with those which could be brought

in favor of the worship of the true God. The controversy between the christian and the infidel is not a controversy between christianity and another religion laying claim to a divine original ; nor even between christianity and a digested system of natural religion. It is evident that the infidels of the present day have no such system. They wish to strip us of christianity without substituting any thing in its place. The controversy is, therefore, whether christianity or absolute irreligion is most eligible. In favour of the latter, infidels may be considered as challenged by Jehovah to produce their strong reasons. Taking this discourse in connexion with those which have preceded it, what I shall attempt will be to state and distinctly consider a few of the principal objections which are urged against the scriptures. Several difficulties have been obviated, and objections answered, in the preceding discourses, and it is not my intention in this to notice or reply to every cavil which is urged, especially, against particular detached passages of scripture : As the task would be endless, so it would reward the trouble of neither the writer nor the reader. If it can be made to appear that the positive evidences in favour of revelation are clear, convincing and conclusive, and the principal objections unfounded, it will be sufficient. The former has, I trust, been done in the preceding discourses, the latter I shall attempt in the present.

1. It is objected that many parts of scripture are obscure and unintelligible, and that to suppose God to offer unintelligible propositions to his creatures, under the name of a revelation of his will to men, is to suppose him a mere trifler. This is an objection much insisted upon by the enemies of revelation. It is said that, as certain as a being of perfect rectitude gave a revelation to his creatures, it must be found equally true that no proposition contained in that revelation can be said to be unrevealed. Hence the idea of unrevealed propositions in a revelation has become the theme of very copious ridicule.

Before I proceed directly to answer this objection, it may not be amiss briefly to notice some of the extraordinary methods of reasoning to which unbelievers resort,

with a view to discard revelation. If any truth in the Bible is plain and obvious, and, at the same time, corresponds with that conception of things which they call rational, this must pass for a common notice inscribed on the mind of man by the beneficent creator; but it is one which is discoverable by the mere light of nature, one for the knowledge of which men are not at all indebted to divine revelation. On the other hand, should any thing be found to be so obscure or hard to be understood as not to be immediately comprehensible by their reason, it must pass for an unintelligible notion, an unrevealed proposition, sufficient to invalidate the authority of the whole.

But I believe it will be found, on a candid examination of the subject, that, supposing the obscurities in scripture were greater, or more numerous than we find them, it would be no sufficient cause for questioning their divine authority. Revelation is addressed unto man as a rational creature, and calls for the exercise of the rational powers. We may therefore reasonably expect it to be given in such a manner as to require the application and exercise of those rational faculties which are also God's gift. Can we therefore suppose it probable that, in giving a revelation to his creatures which was to be the express image of himself, God would unfold nothing but what could be instantly comprehended by poor shortsighted worms of the dust, while there are so many mysteries in the works of nature and of providence, that man, so far from being able to take a comprehensive view of the whole works and ways of God, cannot comprehend his own existence, or the existence of the meanest creature, and scarcely the principle of vegetation in a single ear of corn or blade of grass? That revelation contains the deep things of God, so far from being an argument against its authority, is one of the strongest and clearest evidences of its original. Seeing there are so many deep and mysterious things in God's works, it would be wonderful indeed should there be none in his word, especially, as it gives us a view of himself the greatest of all mysteries. The Bible contains plain truths, truths adapted to the capacity of the weakest, and deep things sufficient to engage the attention of the strongest.

We may be constantly growing wiser by the perusal of the sacred pages, and yet never be able to comprehend the full extent of the meaning of what they contain. There is milk for babes, as well as strong meat for those who have their senses more fully exercised about spiritual things. Many things, and those allowed on all hands to be of the greatest importance, are so plainly revealed in the Bible, that he who runs may read, and those things which are of the most general use are commonly the plainest. The doctrines and morals of the Bible will be universally acknowledged to be among the most important parts of holy writ. Nothing can be plainer than the great principles of morality and religion there inculcated. What can be plainer than the scriptural account of the being, attributes, and universal providence of God; the nature of sin, and the difference between that and duty; the precepts of the moral law, which point out our duty to God and man, and the terms of a sinner's acceptance with God, through the all atoning blood of a Saviour? The decalogue contains a very plain system of morality, and, in various other parts of scripture, particularly in the discourses of Christ and his Apostles, the just extent of these commands, as not only prescribing a rule for our external conduct, but also extending to the heart, is more fully explained.

If there are other things in scripture which are found to be obscure, their obscurity may be accounted for by the following considerations. 1. The great and unfathomable depth of the things themselves, being things which the Angels desire to look into.—2. Purity of heart and uprightness of intention are requisites for the understanding of many things in scripture. These are things which the natural man receiveth not, neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned, although plain and easy to him who hath a spiritually enlightened understanding. Even godliness itself is a great mystery which it requires a moral or spiritual taste to understand. Some things, also, may be considered as revealed, rather as matters of faith than as matters of knowledge, which, although not contrary to reason, are above its comprehension. It is not to be expected that man can, by searching, find out

God, so as fully to comprehend the Almighty. The work of redemption, in particular, contains such a display of the mysteries of the divine character, as to exhibit wonders which the Angels desire to look into. Can it, therefore, be thought wonderful that many things should be revealed, concerning that glorious work, incomprehensible by short sighted man? As to other obscurities, they are, for the most part, in the prophetic parts of scripture. These are, it is true, for our learning, and, by a diligent attention, may undoubtedly become more and more intelligible. But predictions of future events are, usually, involved in some obscurity, until they are explained by their accomplishment. And, even prophecies which have been fulfilled may be obscure to us, because we are unacquainted with particular portions of history by which their fulfillment is illustrated. Frequent allusions to particular customs well known at the time and in the place where the scriptures were first published, but now little understood, with the common use of figures of speech, which, though plain and significant in the language in which the scriptures were written, yet become less intelligible when translated into modern languages, may also account for the obscurity of many passages. These allusions are perhaps more common in the prophetic, than in any other parts of scripture. If we add to these considerations, the unwearied endeavours of men of corrupt minds to obscure and perplex even the plainest passages, a practice eminently characteristic of the men who make the obscurities of scripture a pretence for rejecting revelation, these very obscurities may be farther accounted for. And surely it is with but a bad grace, that persons complain of obscurity in dark places of scripture, after using the most unremitting endeavours to darken the plainest. To these considerations we may add, that many passages are obscure, either on account of a neglect, or a careless inattentive perusal, which, with proper attention, especially if that attention was accompanied with constant assiduous application to the father of lights, for light and direction, by the gracious aids of the holy spirit opening our understandings that we may understand the scriptures, would be sufficiently plain.

I shall barely make one remark further in reply to this objection, and that is that the scriptures were given not merely for the benefit of any particular age or nation, but to be a standing revelation of the divine will to mankind in every age and nation to the end of the world. Some parts of revelation are of more immediate use in one age than another. These, although sufficiently plain in the age and under the dispensation for which they were more immediately designed, yet, in other places, at different and remote periods, and under a different economy, they become obscure. This is an observation particularly applicable to the genealogies of the Old Testament, which, by many at this day, are looked upon so obscure, jejune and useless. Yet even these were very plain and intelligible to the Jews, and of great use, as they tended to shew the exact accomplishment of the promises of the Messiah which were made to their nation, so that they need not be at a loss in what particular stock, tribe, or family to look for his appearing in the fullness of time. It is also reasonable to suppose that many things in revelation are much more plain and intelligible to the church now, than they were in the age in which the revelation was made. We may instance the Types, which are become much more intelligible now they are accomplished in the antitype. We may instance also the prophetic parts of scripture. Of the prophecies, those which were the most important to the Jewish church were the promises which related to the coming and work of the Messiah. Old Testament saints had such an understanding of these promises that they were persuaded of their truth and embraced them, dying in the faith. But it cannot be supposed that the Jewish church understood these prophecies so well as the Christian church does now when aided by their accomplishment. As the several prophecies have a gradual accomplishment and as many predictions have been actually fulfilled, so without doubt many passages in revelation are better understood now, than they were by the primitive church. And, as in the latter day, many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall increase, so many things which are now obscure will then be sufficiently plain. Still such is the fullness of scripture that it will

contain a sufficiency for the learning and improvement of the church in every age. Thus the obscurities in the Bible are so far from militating against the divine authority and inspiration of the scriptures, that, as the case is circumstanced, they rather afford so many striking evidences of the wisdom and goodness of God, in that he hath so adapted revelation to the necessities and capacities of his creatures, as to be equally applicable to the circumstances of all persons, whether strong or weak in knowledge, as well as to the peculiar situation of the church in every age.

Ob. 2. To suppose that revelation is either necessary or expedient for the use of mankind, will imply that it is equally necessary for all men in all ages and places, and that it therefore ought to have been universal; consequently, that if ever God had seen fit to give a revelation to the human race, he would, of course, have given it to all men. But the christian revelation has been enjoyed only by a part; many ages elapsed before there was any written revelation in existence; it was long shut up in a corner by being confined to one obscure nation, and although it has been farther extended during the christian era, great part of the world is, to this day, ignorant of the existence of such a book as the Bible. It therefore cannot be supposed to be a revelation from God.

This objection confounds the dispensation of favours with the distribution of justice, thereby assuming as a principle what is contrary to the plainest matters of fact, viz. that God is obliged to bestow his favours, special and common, equally upon all. But do we not find many things in the dispensations of providence which can be resolved into nothing else than the divine adorable sovereignty? Is it not plain that common favours are not bestowed equally upon all? Is it not a matter of fact that God has created various orders of beings, from the highest Angel down to the lowest grade, and that these differ widely in their capacities and enjoyments? Is it not a fact that God dispenses his favours in very different proportions, on creatures of the same species, particularly on individuals of the human race? God has made of one blood all nations,

yet how highly do we find one nation favoured in comparison of others? Some nations are blessed with a fruitful soil, a pleasant salubrious climate, and an abundance of all the necessaries and conveniences of life, while other countries suffer all the extremes of penury and want, having their lands smitten with barrenness, and their persons either pinched with piercing cold, or scorched beneath a vertical sun. In one place vegetation is burnt up for lack of moisture, while, in another, the land is deluged with almost incessant rains. The advantages, as well for rational, as for religious and moral improvement, which some enjoy in preference to others, are very great. Some have privileges of a peculiar kind, while others appear to be consigned, almost without remedy, to the dominion of ignorance and barbarism. As it respects individuals, there is, also, an obvious difference both in their outward circumstances and in their intellectual endowments. Some are poor, others are in circumstances of ease and affluence. Some enjoy almost uninterrupted health and prosperity, while others are frequently confined to beds of languishing, and suffer all the extremes of adversity. Now all these differences take place, under the superintendency of a wise and good being, and it may with as great propriety be urged, that there should be a universal equality in all these particulars, as that the extent of revelation must be universal. Whenever either particular persons or nations are distinguished by any or all these advantages, he or they ought to enjoy them in the exercise of thankfulness to the giver. Yet they ought neither to deny that they possess these distinguishing advantages, nor claim the enjoyment independent of the sovereign giver. Certainly few are disposed to cast away temporal favours because others are not equally privileged. If the reasoning in the objection is considered as conclusive, will it not equally prove that all beings ought to have been created with the rank and capacity of the Angel Gabriel, and that all divine favours whatever, whether they relate to outward advantages, intellectual endowments, or an opportunity for moral and religious improvement, ought to be equal? Since then it is not inconsistent with the universal benignity of the great

parent of the universe, to distinguish either nations or individuals by peculiar advantages above the rest of mankind, it can never be proved to be inconsistent with the same benignity, to grant a revelation to a part of mankind, altho' others should not be favoured with so great a privilege. If we ask a reason why the favours which have been mentioned have been bestowed in such unequal proportions, both on nations and individuals, we can assign no other than the divine sovereignty. *Even so father for so it hath seemed good in thy sight.* And if God sees fit to exercise the same sovereignty in giving a revelation to mankind, who can say unto him what sayest or what doest thou? Let it be observed, that at the time when revelation was given, such were the circumstances of mankind, that if so much as one was privileged with such an unspeakable blessing from heaven it was one more than had any just claim. If therefore God has been graciously pleased to afford a revelation to so large a portion of mankind, when all were undeserving of the favour, so far from attempting to impeach the divine conduct for not granting it to all, we ought to be thankful that it is bestowed upon so many.

But the objector will still urge, that if a revelation was ever to have been given to mankind, it ought to have been given at an earlier period.

In answer to this, I would observe that we may, with just as much propriety, ask a reason why God did not create the world sooner, as why he did not give a revelation at an earlier period. The truth is, neither can be resolved into any thing else than the divine sovereignty. Not however to rest altogether on this answer, it may be observed that revelation was actually given as soon as there was any need of it. Soon after man became a sinner, and as such stood in need of a Saviour, one was revealed in that first promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head; Christ being promised to Adam in the Garden. Christianity is therefore, in fact, nearly as old as the creation. And if the truths revealed were, at that time, but few in number, the faith of believers was confined within proportionably narrow bounds, having but few objects on which it was to be exercised.

Before I dismiss this objection, I shall make a farther remark, in relation to the universality of revelation, i. e. that the christian revelation is in its nature calculated for general use, and universal extent. If it has not been in fact universal, this must be owing to other causes than a limitation of the divine goodness. The first revelation was given to all men who were then in the world, and if it was afterwards corrupted and lost by the major part, this is not to be charged upon the original communication. After revelation had become generally and greatly corrupted, and was again to be revived, and rendered somewhat more extensive, as was the case in the days of Noah, the communication was made to his whole family. When this revelation became afterwards blended with a corrupt mixture, if God saw fit to make special communications to a particular family and nation, as he did afterwards to Abraham, and continued to do more extensively to the Israelites, although this dispensation had a peculiar respect to that people, yet it had a general relation to the nations of the world. The miraculous works, wherēby that revelation was attested, were of a public nature, and many of them, particularly those wrought in Egypt, known to other nations besides the Jews. It is also evident that the Jews were ready to receive any into their communion, who owned the God of Israel, and renounced idolatry, and, that they had standing laws for that purpose. If the bulk of those who came to the knowledge of the facts, instead of owning the finger of God in these divine attestations, ascribed the effects, either to the powers of magic or to the influence of evil spirits, and consequently rejected the revelation attested by these miraculous works, the divine conduct is not impeachable for this. As it respects the gospel revelation, this is certainly calculated for the general use, and universal benefit of mankind. Its Apostles and ministers were authorized, and even commanded to preach the gospel to every creature, and it lies upon infidels to prove that it has not been actually published to every nation under heaven. It has most certainly been published in all the four great quarters of the world, Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. Nor do I believe that there is so much

as one kingdom or nation in the present known world, in which attempts have not been made, either at one time or another, to propagate it. And, if its progress has been obstructed by persecution, prejudice, and obstinacy, and its simplicity corrupted by ambition, craft, and mercenary motives, or its propagation neglected by those who were favoured with power and means to forward it, then the cause, why it has not been in fact universal, must be charged to the negligence and vices of men, and not to any want of goodness in God.

3. It is objected that if the scriptures were really a revelation from God, and christianity a divine institution, then there would be the greatest union and harmony among professors, both in sentiment and affection. It is urged, that instead of this, divisions are endless, and the most contradictory systems of faith are pretended to be built upon and are plausibly defended from the same text.

The advocates for the sufficiency of natural religion lay great stress on this objection. Shew us, say they, what denomination of Christians is right, and we will be Christians. Whether shall we be Catholics or Protestants? if that controversy is to be considered as decided, and the protestant faith is to be preferred, to what denomination of Protestants shall we connect ourselves? As it respects a system of doctrine, whether shall we be Lutherans, Calvinists, Arminians, Socinians, Arians, Universalists, or Quakers? As it respects church order, shall we be Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists, Methodists, &c. But to urge the differences of opinion among professors, as an argument against the truth of christianity, is to reason on a mistaken hypothesis. If diversity of opinion on any subject is an argument of its uncertainty, then it will follow, that because the opinions of mankind are various about every thing, it is therefore impossible to be certain about any thing. What subject is there, whether it relates to religion or morals, or to philosophy, law, medicine, arts and sciences, agriculture, &c. &c. about which there does not exist a diversity of opinions? The argument, that whatever is controverted is uncertain, is therefore evidently fallacious.

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There are none against whom this argument can be resorted with more force, than against deists and free-thinkers. They tell us to follow nature and reason, as an unerring guide. But nature and reason may as well be denied to be the gifts of God, because they do not unite deists in sentiment, as revelation, on the charge of its not uniting professed Christians. It can be demonstrated that deists differ more widely from one another, in their opinions of God and religion, than Christians. Until, therefore, there is a greater harmony of sentiment among the opposers of revelation, it is with rather a bad grace that this objection is urged against christianity. Some wholly deny the existence of a Supreme Being. Some believe that there is a God, but deny a providence. Some hold matter to be God. Some believe both a God and a providence.— Some believe in the immortality of the soul, and in a future state of rewards and punishments; others deny both, believing that their souls perish with their bodies, and that death is an eternal sleep. Some believe virtue to be its own reward, and vice its own punishment; others believe that virtue and vice are rewarded and punished in a future life; others go still further in absurdity, and deny all distinction between virtue and vice, only what is merely arbitrary, and that all our ideas on that subject are nothing more than the mere prejudices of education. Some believe that the world has been created; others argue that it has existed from eternity. Some believe in the existence of angels and devils; others deny both. Some consider prayer as a duty of natural religion; others laugh at it, &c. &c. These all reject revelation, and make their appeal to reason as their only guide. Under that clear light of nature, of the sufficiency of which we hear so much, all these and many more differences of opinion have arisen. These differences, therefore, furnish as powerful an argument for the discarding of reason, as is furnished by the different opinions among Christians for the rejection of revelation.

If we examine the objection a little more particularly, we will find it evident that there are no writings whatsoever so clear that they cannot be misunderstood or mis-

construed. So far is it from being any argument against the perspicuity of the sacred text, that men differ about its meaning, it appears that, if we consider the different measures both of natural and acquired abilities, the different advantages of education and instruction, the different views and motives, the different passions and prejudices with which mankind read them, and the different degrees of diligence and attention with which they are perused, nothing else was to be expected but that the scriptures would be differently understood. Some read the word of God with a view to obtain a knowledge of the divine will there revealed, as well as of their duty; others read it with a view to furnish themselves with weapons to maintain a favourite preconceived hypothesis. Some read the word with care and attention; others carelessly. Now, can it be reasonably expected that, under all that variety of circumstances in which mankind peruse the scriptures, there should be a universal agreement about the sense and meaning of every particular passage, unless God should miraculously interpose by an irresistible energy, to cause all men to think alike, by giving to every one the same precise ideas of things, the same measure of natural abilities, the same means for acquired improvement, the same sagacity, leisure, and diligence; and should also exert his divine power in an extraordinary manner, to place all in the same situation and circumstances, as well as to destroy all that influence which either their passions, prejudices, attachments, humours, corrupt inclinations, or interests, have in fixing their opinions. This, it is evident, would be, by no means consistent with, either the nature of mankind, the wisdom of the divine government, or the usual methods of providence. Nor is there any necessity for such a procedure; for it would be to the last degree absurd, to suppose that the scriptures could be of no use to any man, unless all men were agreed about them; or that they are not sufficiently clear to answer the purpose for which they were given, as long as there are any who pervert and abuse them; or that persons of honest hearts may not have sufficient understanding of the scriptures to make them wise to salvation, unless they agree about the sense of every particular passage.

It may not be amiss to observe farther, that notwithstanding all the differences among Christians, there are many things, and those of the greatest importance, in which there is a general agreement: As, that there is one God, the maker and preserver of the universe, who created the world and all things therein by his power, and upholds by his providence that world which he has created: that there is one mediator between God and man, the Lord Jesus Christ, who came into the world to save sinners—who came to instruct mankind by his doctrine, influence them by his example, and to make an atonement by his sufferings and death: that he died for us to obtain eternal redemption, and rose again from the dead, and ascended up into heaven, where he is now crowned with glory and honour, and ever liveth to make intercession for his people: that through him there is a general tender of pardon to every believing penitent, with a hope of the gracious acceptance of our persons and services: that there shall be a future state of existence beyond this life: that to be made meet for future happiness, we must live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; and that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, and a future judgment. These are points of the utmost importance, but with regard to these there has been a general agreement among professed Christians. If there has been, sometimes, controversies about the most weighty matters, as well as many furious contentions about things of small moment, this is no argument against either the divine authority, or general usefulness of the sacred scriptures.—Those who wrest the scriptures must be accountable, for their perversion and abuse, to him who gave them; but this is far from affording any proof, either that they answer no valuable purpose, or that they are not of divine original.

4. It is objected that if God had actually given a revelation of his will to mankind, and instituted a religion founded on that revelation, the same divine goodness which disposed him at first to give that revelation would have induced him to prevent the corruption of the religion therein revealed. But it is a fact that christianity has been greatly corrupted by the subtilty of men. The plain in-

ference then is, either that christianity cannot justly claim a divine original, or that God has not been sufficiently careful of his own institutions.

In answer to this objection, I shall barely observe that it has, I trust, been already proved, that the christian religion, as contained in the sacred records, has actually been preserved free from corruption, and transmitted pure through ever age unto this day. It is nevertheless, a melancholy truth, that many corrupt additions, both as it respects principle and practice, additions clearly and evidently unworthy of God, have been, from time to time, superadded to the religion of the Bible by men of corrupt minds. These corruptions are not, however, chargeable on the scriptures; for in that sacred book, they are neither owned nor patronized, but condemned. If God has permitted such corruptions to take place, i. e. if he did not interpose to hinder them by his almighty power, this was only to govern man as a rational creature, a proper subject of moral government, in a way conformable to his nature.

It may be farther observed, that many of the most remarkable corrupt additions, which have ever been superadded to christianity, are so far from being any argument against it, that they afford some of the most convincing proofs of its truth, because they have been precisely such as were foretold. The system of popery, particularly the Pope setting himself up in the temple of God, and assuming to himself the character of vicar of Christ upon earth, with the consequent train of additions to the faith once delivered to the saints, contains some of the most remarkable corrupt additions which have ever been superadded to christianity. These, long before they took place, were plainly foretold in the sacred oracles. Every one who reads the New Testament, particularly the book of Revelations and Paul's epistles to the Thessalonians and to Timothy, may see the rise, reign, and duration of that apostate church, and all the other essential features of popery, clearly delineated by the spirit of prophecy. The taking place of these corruptions, agreeably to what had been foretold, is so far from militating against the divine authority and inspiration of the scriptures, that it tends to strengthen the ar-

gument for the truth of christianity, derived from prophecy, which has already been considered as conclusive.

5. It is objected that if Christ was really a teacher sent from God, and his religion divine, it would make the professors of it holy. But christianity has not had this effect upon those who have embraced it. They are as vicious as others. The christian religion has been an engine of corruption, fraud and oppression, and has done more harm than good in the world.

In considering this objection, it is in the first place admitted to be an indisputable fact, and one which cannot be sufficiently lamented, that multitudes who profess the christian religion live in a manner very unworthy of their profession. If they who are Christians in name, did, universally, or even in general, walk worthy of the holy calling wherewith they are called, it would, probably, have a more powerful tendency to reclaim infidels, than any reasoning whatsoever. Both a single eye to the glory of God and a regard to our own present and future happiness ought to be most powerful motives to stimulate us to a holy walk and conversation, that we may thereby adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour. But how numerous soever may be the vices and follies of professors (and they are alas too numerous) christianity, as revealed in the scriptures, is very unjustly charged with the enormities it condemns. Such disorders may prove that many professors are hypocrites, or that they neither believe nor obey the gospel, yet they furnish no argument against the gospel itself. So long as the principles, doctrines, and precepts of christianity are, in themselves, calculated to promote holiness, it is unjust to charge it with the wickedness of professors.

Farther, however enormous the vices of particular professors may have been, christianity has, in fact, had that effect in reforming men's lives which no other dispensation ever had. Though the first propagation of christianity was effected by means apparently weak and contemptible, yet the heathen superstition fell before it, although it was upheld by all the power, policy, learning, craft, and prejudices in the world. Men turned from dumb idols to

to serve the living and the true God, and even their heathen enemies and persecutors gave an honourable testimony to the innocency of their lives. The principles and doctrines of christianity still continue to have a happy effect on the lives of many; and, if multitudes continue grossly vicious, these vices prevail most among those who pay the least regard to christian institutions.* Many who have been of this class and have afterwards seriously and heartily embraced the christian religion have become reformed

* It is a testimony in favour of the purity of christianity itself, that in every country where christianity has been the religion generally professed, that men have almost universally agreed in reckoning a true Christian and an amiable, open, modest, chaste, conscientious, and benevolent character as the same thing; and to say of a man that he rejects the Bible, is nearly of the same import, in the view of people in general, as to say that he is a man of a dissolute life. If there were not a general connexion between these things, public opinion would not so generally associate them. Individuals, and even parties may be governed by prejudice, but public opinion of character is seldom far from the truth. Besides, the prejudices of merely nominal Christians, so far as my observation extends, are equally strong, if not stronger against those Christians who are distinguished by their devout and serious regard to the scriptures, than against professed infidels. How is it then to be accounted for, that, although they will call them fanatics, enthusiasts, and other unpleasant names, yet it is very rare that they reckon them immoral? If, as is sometimes the case, they accuse them of unworthy motives, and insinuate that in secret they are as wicked as others, either such insinuations are not seriously believed, or if they be, the person is considered as insincere in his profession. No man thinks that genuine christianity consists with a wicked life, either open or secret. But the ideas of infidelity and immorality are associated in the public mind; and the association is so clear and strong as to become a ground for action.—*Gospel its own witness, page 72.*

in their lives, and have obtained a comfortable hope in death. Instances of such reformatiions are taking place every day. But infidels may be challenged to produce a single instance of a man who has either become reformed in his life, or rendered comfortable in death, by rejecting christianity, and becoming an infidel.

It has been a topic of much popular declamation with infidels of late, to charge upon christianity all the calamities which have come upon the world by wars, violence and oppression; and mankind have been promised ages of uninterrupted peace, happiness and prosperity, if the shackles of superstition were but once broken, and christianity discarded. An attempt has been made to carry this fatal theory into practice: with what success, the blood of slaughtered millions, which has been shed within a few years, can testify. Christianity, from its nature, cannot be the cause; but if it has been sometimes the innocent occasion of much trouble, confusion and discord in the world, this is no more than what Christ hath foretold. Matt. x. 34, 35, 36. *I am come, not to send peace on the earth but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.* This prediction appears the more remarkable, as the natural tendency of the religion he came to establish was so different. To say, therefore, that the christian religion itself has been the proper efficient cause of these troubles, is a most injurious falsehood.* It

* Among other enormities with which christianity has been charged, it has been reproached with being the cause of all the persecutions which have taken place in the world.

Although it be allowed that individual persecution, with the exception of a few instances, commenced with christianity, yet who began the practice? Was it Jesus of Nazareth who persecuted Herod, Pontius Pilate, and the Scribes and Pharisees, or they him? Did Peter, James, John, and Paul, set up for inquisitors and persecute the

is evident to every one who knows any thing about the nature and genius of the gospel, that its precepts and principles are in direct hostility to all cruelty, inhumanity, violence, oppression, and blood shed. Christians are exhorted to give tribute to whom tribute, and honour to whom honour is due : To love their neighbour as themselves, and to forgive and love their enemies ; to bless those who curse them, and to do good to those who hate and despitefully use them. They are exhorted, if their enemy hunger, to feed him ; if he thirst, to give him drink ; to forgive injuries, and to be patient under sufferings ; to do good to all, and if it be possible, as much as lieth in them, to live peaceably with all men. Can it, with any appearance of reason, be suggested, that such a religion as this, a religion which breathes nothing but charity, meekness and forbearance, should inspire men with unjust, inhuman, and persecuting principles ? The truth is, that the cruelty, violence, rapine, and bloodshed, which have been injuriously charged upon christianity, have been owing to the corruptions and vices of wicked men who were destitute of its spirit. If, therefore, men who pretend to be Christians and are not, make use of religion as a pretext to gratify their lusts, and perpetrate their villanies, it is a pity that the christian religion should be blamed for the cruelty and hypocrisy of those who are its greatest enemies. Thus I think the objection, taken from the corruptions and disor-

Jews and Romans, or the Jews and Romans them ? Did the primitive Christians discover any disposition to persecute ? By whom was Europe deluged in blood in ten successive persecutions, during the three first centuries ? Were Christians the authors of this ? When the church had so far degenerated as to imbibe many of the principles and superstitions of the heathen, then indeed it began to imitate their persecuting spirit, but not before. When Christ's kingdom was changed into a kingdom of this world, the weapons of its warfare might be expected to become carnal, and to be no longer, as formerly, mighty through God.—*Ibidem*, page 63.

ders, too prevalent among Christians, admits of an easy solution.

6. It is objected that many of the laws of Moses are trifling, superstitious, burthensome, and unnecessary, and altogether unworthy of God.

My proposed limits will not permit me to enter into a particular consideration of the laws of Moses. This has been often done at large by those who had both abilities and leisure for such a work. Some observations on the laws of Moses have also been already made in our third discourse. To these I shall at present add but little. It is evident that under the Mosaic economy, we have a view of religion, particularly of the great scheme of christianity, only in its infancy; and that life and immortality, which were there more obscurely revealed, being covered with the veil of the types and shadows of that dispensation, are brought to light by the gospel. Now if it can be made appear that the Mosaic constitution, not excluding those parts of the ceremonial law which have been represented as the most trifling, was well calculated for such a state of the church, then these institutions have, doubtless, answered a valuable purpose, and were worthy of God. But it is evident that these laws did answer valuable purposes. Hereby a people was preserved, among whom the knowledge and worship of the true God was maintained, at a time when all the rest of the world was overrun with superstition and idolatry. By these laws an expectation of the coming of a glorious personage, who was to introduce a new and more perfect dispensation, was kept up. Of the coming of the Messiah and the introduction of that new dispensation, many of these institutions were but types and shadows. Whatever laws, therefore, had a tendency to keep the Jews separate from the idolatrous customs of other nations, or to cherish in their minds an expectation of a Messiah to come, cannot be said to be unworthy of God. If the laws of Moses be candidly examined by this criterion, nothing unworthy of the wisdom and goodness of him who gave them will be found in them. Considering the native darkness of the human mind, and that it had been found by the experience of all nations, how prone man-

kind were to the grossest error, superstition and idolatry, in matters of divine worship, it was certainly fit that when God was about to separate a peculiar people from the other idolatrous nations, not even the most minute circumstance relating to divine worship should be left to human contrivance. No law, therefore, tending to mark this line of separation, can be justly termed trifling.

But supposing we can see no reason at all for a law, it will hardly be disputed but God may give positive commands to his creatures if he sees fit, without assigning any other reason to bind them to obedience than barely his authority. If, therefore, some of the laws of Moses, which were binding on the Jews, were such that no other reason could be given why they ought to be obeyed than the bare authority commanding them, this would by no means prove them to be so trifling as to be unworthy of God. It may be farther observed that, had Moses been disposed to forge a body of laws, those particular statutes, against which infidels urge their strongest objections as being in their view trifling and unworthy of God, are such as he never would have imposed on the Israelites without a special warrant. Such are these mentioned in our third discourse, to which I refer.

7. It is objected that the law of nature is the law of God, but that there are particular laws in scripture which contradict both the law of nature and other written laws; and as God cannot contradict himself, or do any thing inconsistent with or contrary to his own glorious perfections, these laws cannot proceed from God. God is a God of love and mercy, as well as a God of justice; but some of the scripture laws breathe cruelty, injustice, rapine, and revenge, and inflict punishments vastly disproportionate to the offence. Among the particular laws which are said to be of this kind we may note the following, viz.—The command given to Abraham to offer up his son Isaac, which is said to encourage human sacrifices—The command given to the Israelites to borrow of the Egyptians, which is said to encourage fraud and larceny—The commands given to the children of Israel to extirpate the Canaanites, and to Saul to destroy the Amalekites, which

are said to authorise cruelty and a sanguinary disposition—The act of Phinehas in putting Zimri and Cozbi to death for their transgression in the matter of Peor, and the command given to the Levites to slay every man his fellow who had been transgressors in the affair of the golden calf, which are said not only to encourage arbitrary and unauthorised punishments, but even private revenge and assassination—And the law of Deut. xiii. to punish idolaters with death, and even to destroy the idolatrous city, which, contrary to all rules of justice and equity, involves the innocent in the same punishment with the guilty ; with some others of a similar nature.

The following considerations will, I think, be sufficient to show that these and similar allegations are wholly groundless. With respect to the assertion that the law of nature is the law of God, it may be observed that it is not admitted that there is any such thing as a law of nature by which God has tied himself down to any particular mode of proceeding, which is either prior to or independent of his own will and command ; and God's written laws are not for the purpose of binding himself, but his creatures ; and when we speak of creatures being bound by the law of nature, this is not to be understood as respecting any law or rule prior to the command of God, but as resulting from it. By the law of nature, therefore, we are to understand nothing more than that general course of conduct, which mankind, as accountable creatures, ought to observe in conformity with the will of God, and the relation in which they stand to him as their creator, preserver, and sovereign. Mankind can, of themselves, possess no right to violate this law. This will not, however, prove that God may not, on special occasions, give particular commands to individuals, of a different nature from this general law, and these not contradict the law of nature in reality, because the great and fundamental principle of this law is to obey every command of God. If the particular laws, to which objections are made, are considered in this point of light, we will find nothing in them contradictory to the law of nature.

With respect to the command given to Abraham to of-

ffer up Isaac, which is represented to be an express violation of the law of nature—a command which it was impossible for God to give or for Abraham to know that it came from him, I observe that it will be readily granted that the fact was of an extraordinary nature, and that it is not proposed for our imitation. No other person, whosoever, can have a right to do as Abraham did, without the same express warrant that he had. It does not, however, follow from thence, that God may not, in any case, give special commands which may vary from the general tenor of his laws; the latter being to be considered as the manifestation of his will, in relation to that line of conduct which his creatures ought in ordinary cases to pursue; the former, what he may command either an individual or a number of individuals to do on a special occasion, for reasons known to himself. God having, as the supreme ruler, given rules (as has been observed) to regulate the conduct of his creatures, but not to bind himself, has no where so tied himself down by his own law, as to prevent him from giving particular commands to any of his creatures, enjoining them, as the great sovereign of the universe, to do those things which, without such a special command, would be unlawful and criminal. Of this kind was the command given to Abraham to offer up Isaac. Although it would have been not barely unlawful, but very unnatural and wicked, for Abraham to have proceeded so far in an attempt to sacrifice his son, without a special command from heaven for that purpose; yet, having once received the command, his ready compliance was a remarkable proof of his faith and obedience. He never stopped to inquire what was God's secret intention. And taking into view all the circumstances of the case, as connected with the end which was answered, it is evident that it was a command which was worthy of God to give, and which it was Abraham's indispensable duty to obey.

With respect to the command given to the children of Israel when they came up out of the land of Egypt, to borrow of the Egyptians, and to spoil them, which is said to authorize fraud and theft, to be a violation of the eighth commandment, and so to be contrary to the law of nature,

let it be observed that the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. And as he raiseth up one and putteth down another, so he hath a right to transfer property, from and to what persons and by what means he sees fit. If therefore he saw fit to take property from the Egyptians and transfer it to the Israelites, who has a right to say unto him what doest thou? This neither does nor can authorize private persons, without any divine warrant, and even against the express command of God, to seize upon the property of others. It is farther worthy of our observation that the Egyptians had, for a great number of years, held the children of Israel in a state of servitude. Some compensation was undoubtedly their due for their long and painful services. There was not the least prospect that this could be obtained by any common or ordinary method. When the ordinary methods of obtaining justice fail, especially where the point in dispute is between nations (and the children of Israel were at this time a nation) it is contrary neither to the law of nature nor of nations, to have recourse to such means as are extraordinary. This becomes still more indisputably warrantable, when it is authorized by an express command of God. This was therefore no more than an act of strict justice. The Israelites received no more, probably much less, than was their just due. If there was in the mode in which they obtained this compensation a deviation from the usual method, this was by an express command of God; therefore no violation of the law of nature.

With respect to the history of the Israelites taking possession of the land of Canaan under Joshua, a transaction with which the most odious comparisons are made by infidels, likening it to Cortez's invasion and conquest of Mexico, only exceeding it in cruelty, I shall make the following brief observations. 1. It is evident that killing is not in all cases to be considered as murder, as in the case of lawful war, necessary self defence, or when a lawful magistrate cuts off a capital offender, because God commands it, and the welfare of the community requires it. 2. As God the supreme governor has an unlimited authority over the lives of individuals, so he has over kingdoms and nations,

to pluck up and to pull down, as well as to build and to plant. None will pretend to deny but God may, consistent with his moral perfections, lay nations waste, as a just punishment for their sins, by the immediate stroke of his own hand, without using the intervention of any human agency, as by famines, pestilences, inundations, earthquakes, fiery eruptions from burning mountains, and the like. Now if God possesses the right of exterminating a nation by the immediate stroke of his own hand, he has a right to commission another nation to do it, and, provided a nation possesses sufficient credentials of this commission, the nation so commissioned has a right to act under that authority. Such credentials the children of Israel, who took possession of the land of Canaan under Joshua, undoubtedly possessed, if credit is to be given to the accounts recorded in the books of Moses, the authenticity of which has already been illustrated. Now, as the Canaanites were a wicked, abominable race, justly deserving extermination from the face of the earth, supposing God to have previously determined to punish them in an exemplary manner, even by their utter destruction and final extinction as a nation, he might have consumed them with fire and brimstone from heaven, as he did the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, or have overwhelmed them with a deluge as he did the old world, or have caused the earth to open her mouth and swallow them up, as it did Korah, Dathan and Abiram; without affording the least pretence for arraigning the justice of his proceedings. In either of these ways he would have utterly destroyed old and young, male and female. But then it would not be so apparent that these calamities were inflicted on them for their detestable wickedness. The destruction might and without doubt would have been attributed to some natural cause, or regarded as a fortuitous event. On the other hand, when they were ordered, by the express command of God, to be exterminated for their abominable wickedness, and the appointed execution committed to another nation; a nation set apart, by the peculiar constitution of their government, for the worship of the true God and of him only; a people to whom God had given a system of holy and excellent

laws, which threatened them with a similar punishment if they fell into the like crimes, the reason of their extermination became as apparent as when a malefactor is put to death by an officer of justice, pursuant to the sentence of a competent court. One end to be answered by the punishment of malefactors is to deter others from the commission of similar crimes. Certainly no mode of punishment, which could be devised, could have been calculated so effectually to deter the Israelites from the commission of crimes, similar to those which had brought destruction upon the Canaanites, as this, which made them the immediate instruments of their punishment. Nor can such a mode of proceeding be proved to be inconsistent with, either the wisdom, goodness or righteousness of the Supreme Being, or in any wise contrary to his laws. There can, in the nature of things, be no law of God superior to his supreme will, which can debar him from executing judgments, even to extermination, upon either guilty persons or nations, or from employing, if he thinks proper, one or more nations in the execution. Consequently, whatever invidious comparisons may have been made, there was nothing in Joshua's invasion of the Canaanites contrary to the law of nature, which is, as has been observed, always subservient to the divine will. Nor can it be justly charged with cruelty, because it was done by an express commission from him who, in the most absolute and unlimited manner, possesses the uncontrouled power of life and death, and the right to appoint what instruments he pleases for the destruction of lives justly forfeited. Nor is there any thing in it tending, in the most remote degree, to invalidate the authority of the sacred canon.

The command given to Saul to destroy the Amalekites was pretty much of the same nature, and to this the observations already made are equally applicable, and will, I trust, be found sufficient to obviate all objections on that head.

Concerning the act of Phineas in putting Zimri and Cozbi to death in the matter of Peor, and of the Levite's slaying every man his fellow, at the command of Moses, in the affair of the golden calf, which are said to be ac-

tions tending to encourage arbitrary punishments without trial, and even private assassinations, let it be observed, that the act of Zimri and Cozbi, in particular, was an open avowed act of idolatry, a crime which was capital by the Jewish laws, and under the peculiar circumstances in which it was committed, a most insolent defiance of all laws, human and divine. It was the most aggravated crime which could possibly be committed. It was committed openly in the face of the whole congregation, at a time when the plague from the Lord was gone out among the people for that very crime. Phineas, who inflicted this exemplary punishment, was not a private person, but a magistrate, one in high authority in the congregation; the fact needed no proof, being committed openly in the face of day; the infliction of the punishment admitted of no delay, it being in consequence of an order which Moses had given to the judges of Israel, to slay the men who had joined themselves to Peor; and being, as has been observed, at a time when the plague, which had been inflicted for that very crime, was raging among the people. Phineas had therefore, without doubt, complete legal authority for what he did, and as such God testified his approbation of his conduct. This act therefore gives no countenance to private assassinations. If, as appears from history, such enormities have been sometimes practised among the Jews, particularly by blinded zealots in more modern times, the law was not chargeable with the crime; nor did the example of Phineas warrant the practice.

With respect to the other instance alledged, viz. the action of the Levites in killing three thousand men, when they were commanded by Moses to gird on their swords, and slay every man his neighbor and his fellow; this must be owned to be an instance of extraordinary punishment, and the occasion for it was equally extraordinary. The great body of the people had been guilty of a most inexcusable and aggravated revolt. It happened at a time when the law had been just promulgated with an amazing solemnity, and a constitution established to which they had given their most solemn and explicit consent. By this act of rebellion they had exposed themselves to utter destruc-

tion. Had even this whole congregation been consumed in a moment, the throne of the divine justice and holiness would have been free from all imputation, for it was no more than they justly deserved. It was highly necessary that a revolt, attended with so many aggravating circumstances should, especially at such a time, be punished in an exemplary manner. The great numbers concerned in the revolt rendered a regular trial impracticable, and the persons who suffered were, undoubtedly, among those who were known to be the most guilty and active in promoting the rebellion. The immediate punishment of these was the most speedy way to bring the whole congregation to a sense of their guilt, and cause them to return to their duty.

With respect to the laws recorded, Deut. xiii. directing the crime of idolatry to be punished with death, and even in certain cases, ordering an idolatrous city to be destroyed, which is said to involve the innocent in the same punishment with the guilty, and is represented to be a law of such cruelty and severity as could not have found a place, even in the sanguinary code of Draco himself, let the following things be observed. 1. It is evident that idolatry is one of the greatest and most aggravated crimes against God which can be committed. If there is but one God, to whom, and to whom alone, all worship is due, then to worship creatures, instead of the creator, must be highly criminal and justly deserving of the severest punishment. Although God has not seen fit to give a general law obligatory on all mankind, directing the indiscriminate punishment of idolaters with death, as he has done with respect to him who sheddeth the blood of man, yet when he, for wise ends, erected a peculiar people into a sacred polity, and ordained the adoration of the one living and true God as a fundamental article of their religion, and not only made it an article of religion, but incorporated it into their civil constitution and law of their state, making it the condition on which not only their national prosperity was suspended, but that on which all their civil privileges, their national property, and even their right to their country depended, there was good reason why idolatry should be punished with death, not only as a breach of the

first commandment, a crime against God of the deepest dye, but as an act of high treason against the state. And considering the peculiar ends of that dispensation, as well as the prevailing propensity, of the Israelites to imitate the idolatrous customs of the surrounding nations, there was great need that the worship of the true God should be guarded by the severest penalties.

With respect to the law for destroying an Israelitish city, which appeared to be wholly devoted to idolatry, it is evident from the law itself, that great deliberation was to be used. They were to enquire, make accurate search, and ask diligently, so as to be assured that it was a truth; and unless it appeared that the whole city was given to idolatry, and a disposition manifested to persist in it, they were not to proceed to extremities. And, considering the peculiar nature of their constitution, the law for extirminating a city among themselves, which should revolt to the worship of a false God, was as necessary in order to preserve the whole free from infection, as the amputation of a gangrened limb, for the preservation of the body. If God had seen fit to effect this destruction, in every case of obstinate idolatry, by some extraordinary immediate judgment, it could not be pretended that this would have been unjust, although children as well as adults should be involved in the ruin: We cannot suppose it to be any more contrary to the divine perfections to order this to be done judicially, by the authority of the whole nation, pursuant to a law made for that purpose. It could not be said that such a law would have been unjust in itself, according to the observations which have been already made, and such a judicial method of proceeding would probably have a greater tendency than any other mode of punishment to inspire the whole nation with an abhorrence of the crime.

8. It is objected that the mediatorial scheme, as revealed in the scriptures, is highly absurd, derogating from the infinite mercy of God, and is a symbolizing with the heathen, who worshipped a great variety of demons, as mediators between them and the supreme God.

No doubt the mediatorial scheme constitutes a most ef-

sential part of the religion of the Bible, and it may be added, that it is one main part of the glory of revealed religion. It is readily acknowledged that the love and goodness of God, displayed to worthless guilty men, in the gift and mission of his son Jesus Christ, for the redemption of a sinful world, is a great deep, a wonder which the angels desire to look into. It is not strange, therefore, that man should find himself lost in the contemplation of a subject which passeth knowledge. The springs and motives of this wondrous love are to be found only in God himself, and are among the deepest mysteries of our holy religion. But however deep and inexplicable the subject may be, there is nothing in it which can be shown to be contrary to sound reason, inconsistent with the attributes of the Deity, or tending in the most remote degree to countenance the substitution of numbers of subordinate inferior deities or demons, as mediators between man and the supreme God.

As it respects that part of the objection which alledges that the mediatorial scheme derogates from the infinite mercy of God, and that it would be much more worthy of the divine character and perfections, to forgive the penitent freely without a satisfaction, let it be observed, that God is to be considered, in his transactions with mankind, as the moral governor of the world. How far the principles of his moral government required, either that the guilty should be punished, or that satisfaction should be rendered by a surety, or what other possible methods, for the restoration of fallen man to the favour and enjoyment of his God, infinite wisdom could have discovered, are points which lay with the supreme ruler of the universe to determine, and are not for us either to know or decide. Certain it is, that if we consider mankind as a race of intelligent beings, who had offended their creator (and that they have offended him, is what no intelligent Deist who believes in a God and a providence will deny) the light of nature could not point out, much less demonstrate, any other way. It could not prove repentance alone to be sufficient. If the crimes of men deserve punishment, the

remission of that punishment must be an act of sovereignty. Are we so well acquainted with what the Supreme Being owes to himself, and to the honour of his government, or with what the greatest good of the moral system may require, as to authorize us to determine positively on a subject in which the divine authority and prerogatives are so nearly concerned? Upon what kind of evidence, therefore, can we come to a decision, that it would perfectly comport with the character and attributes of the Supreme Being, to pardon an offending creature at all times, merely upon his repentance? Should such a principle as the indiscriminate pardon of all offenders who appeared to be penitent, be adopted and reduced to practice by civil rulers, it would introduce all manner of confusion into society, and would go very near to dissolve all order and subordination in government. By what standard then can we determine that a principle, which would be ruinous to all human institutions, would be orderly and wise in the divine government, and more worthy of the character and perfections of God, than the way of salvation by a mediator. If we cannot prove repentance alone to be sufficient, it must be the height of presumption in us to undertake to decide what kind of satisfaction would be the most suitable to repair the honour of a broken law. This therefore appears to be a proper subject on which revelation is necessary to furnish the requisite information. And if we attentively consider the view which the scripture gives us of the sacrifice of Christ, nothing can give us a more exalted, or a more amiable discovery of the character of the Supreme Being, or have a more powerful tendency to strengthen our faith and hope in him, than to consider him as reconciling sinners to himself, through the merits of his beloved Son. So far is this scheme from derogating from the infinite mercy of God, that it rather exhibits that attribute as glorified in the highest possible manner, while it, at the same time, gives the most striking views of the evil of sin, and furnishes the most powerful motives to holiness. It exhibits the salvation of sinful man as a wonderful building of mercy, while it, at the same time, makes the most

glorious display of justice and judgment, as the habitation of God's throne.*

An attempt, however, will probably be still made to reduce the believer in revelation to the following dilemma. It will be urged that if God appointed the mediator, he must have been reconciled before the appointment was made, or he never would have made it, but, if he was reconciled previous to the appointment, then the appointment itself was unnecessary. So that the mediatorial scheme is, in every view of it, irrational and absurd, and the scriptures which hold up such a scheme to view can be no better than a cunningly devised fable.

However pinching this dilemma may be in the view of the objector, it admits of an easy solution. If the objection has any force at all, it is equally strong against the no-

* "That pardon is bestowed through a mediator, in a vast variety of instances among men, cannot be denied; and that it is proper it should be so, is evident to every thinking mind. All who are acquainted with the common affairs of life must be aware of the necessity of such proceedings, and the good effects of them upon society.

"It is far less humbling for an offender to be pardoned at his own request, than through the interposition of a third person: for in the one case he may be led to think that it was his virtue and penitence which influenced the decision; whereas on the other he is compelled to feel his own unworthiness; and this may be one reason why the mediation of Christ is so offensive. It is no wonder indeed that those who deny humility to be a virtue should be disgusted with a doctrine the professed object of which is to abase the pride of man.

"As forgiveness without a mediator is less humbling to the offender, so it provides less for the honour of the offended than a contrary proceeding. Many a compassionate heart has longed to go forth like David towards Absalom, but from a just sense of wounded authority could not tell how to effect it, and has greatly desired that some common friend would interpose and save his

tion of suspending a pardon on the condition of repentance. It may, with the same propriety, be alledged that, if God had determined on repentance as the condition on which he would pardon, he must have pardoned previous to that repentance, therefore the repentance itself was unnecessary. The following observations will, I trust, be sufficient to show that the objection itself is of no force. That God should appoint a mediator indeed supposes that he entertained some thoughts of love to mankind, or that he was not absolutely irreconcilable. Yet it no more proves an actual reconciliation, than the circumstance of a man's selling, or bargaining away his inheritance for a stipulated price, to be paid at different periods mentioned in the agreement, will prove that no future payment is necessary. Important ends of the divine government may still remain

“ honour. He has wished to remit the sentence but has
 “ felt the want of a mediator, at the instance of whom he
 “ might give effect to his desires, and exercise mercy with-
 “ out seeming to be regardless of justice. An offender
 “ who should object to a mediator would be justly consid-
 “ ered as hardened in impenitence, and regardless of the
 “ honour of the offended: and it is difficult to say what
 “ other construction can be put upon the objection of sin-
 “ ners to the mediation of Christ.

“ Again—To exercise pardon without a mediator,
 “ would be fixing no such stigma upon the evil of the of-
 “ fence, as is done by a contrary mode of proceeding.
 “ Every man feels that those faults which may be over-
 “ looked on a mere acknowledgment, are not of a very
 “ heinous nature: they are such as arise from inadvertence
 “ rather than from ill design; and include little more than
 “ an error of the judgment. On the other hand, every
 “ man feels that the calling in of a third person is making
 “ much of the offence, treating it as a serious affair,
 “ a breach that is not lightly to be passed over. This
 “ may be another reason why the mediation of Christ is so
 “ offensive to the adversaries of the gospel. It is no won-
 “ der that men who are continually speaking of moral e-

to be answered, which could not so well be obtained in any other way, but which, it was convenient, should be thus brought about. Supposing a number of subjects to have forfeited their lives by rebelling against their rightful sovereign; and the prince, instead of determining to inflict capital punishment upon them, as their crimes deserved, should form a design to pardon them, but, in order to maintain his sovereignty over them, and to impress them more fully with a just sense of the enormity of their offences, should choose to do it through the mediation of his son; the father and son mutually agreeing on terms of accommodation: the disposition manifested by the father to accept of the son's mediation would be an evidence that he was reconcilable. But it would be the actual mediation of the son for them, and the father's acceptance of their

“vil under the palliating names of *error, frailty, imperfection*, and the like, should spurn at a doctrine, the implication of which condemns it to everlasting infamy.

“The amount is this: If it be, indeed, improper for a guilty creature to lie low before his creator; if it be unfit that any regard should be paid to the honours of his character; if the offence committed against him be of so small account that it is unnecessary for him to express any displeasure against it; and if it has been so private, and insulated in its operations, as in no way to affect the well being of the moral system, the doctrine of forgiveness through a mediator is unreasonable. But if the contrary be true; if it be proper for a guilty creature to lie in the dust before his offended creator; if the honor of the divine character deserve the first and highest regard; if moral evil be the greatest of all evils, and require, even where it is forgiven, a strong expression of the divine displeasure against it; and if its pernicious influence be such, that if suffered to operate according to its native tendency, it would dethrone the Almighty, and desolate the universe, the doctrine in question must accord with the plainest dictates of reason.”—*Gospel its own witness*, page 179, 180, 181.

returning allegiance through that mediation, which would form the basis of a complete reconciliation. In this, neither the appointment of the mediator, nor the acceptance of the mediation, nor the actual fulfillment of the conditions stipulated by the son, would be needless. So it is with the mediatorial scheme, as exhibited in the Bible. God is represented as disposed to have mercy upon sinful man who had offended him. His wisdom fixed upon this as the most proper method for the exercise of his mercy, and for dispensing the effects of his goodness. Of this he was surely the best judge. And whoever duly considers the idea which the gospel gives us of the mediator, and of the work he came to accomplish, cannot but observe in it such proofs of divine goodness and love, such a concern for the glory of God and regard for the happiness of man, as certainly ought to command our approbation, and, if our tempers are right, cannot fail to recommend it to our affectionate acceptance.

If we consider the objection as stated above in another point of view, it supposes the grossest absurdity. It supposes that, because God entertained thoughts of mercy towards and of reconciliation with the sinful children of men, there was no necessity that that reconciliation should be brought about in the only way in which it appears that the Supreme Being had ever entertained any thoughts of it. Revelation gives us not even the remotest hint that reconciliation was ever either intended or contemplated, in any other way than through a mediator; nor can the light of nature make the discovery as has been shown above. There is an important distinction to be observed between being perfectly irreconcilable and being, at present, unreconciled. Had God been wholly irreconcilable, then, it is true, no mediator would have been appointed. Had he been actually reconciled, then such an appointment would have been unnecessary. Still as the affair was circumstanced, man being an offender, and God having formed the design of restoring his offending creature to his favor, it was fit that this should be effected in such a manner as the supreme ruler of the universe should choose, i. e. through a mediator of his own appointment, which was

none other than his dearly beloved Son in whom he is ever well pleased.

It is still urged that it is unjust and cruel, that the innocent should suffer and be put to death for the guilty. It is inconsistent with every idea of justice and equity, that the innocent should be miserable.

The truth however is, that if Christ had not been innocent, his sufferings could have been of no avail. Had he not been perfectly holy, he never could have expiated the sins of men. More particularly, had the punishment due to the guilty been inflicted on the innocent without his consent, it would have been contrary to all the rules of justice and equity. This, however, was not the case. The sufferings of Christ were not, in an arbitrary manner, imposed upon him. He took them upon himself. He consented to suffer the penalty due to sin for the most valuable end, i. e. to advance the glory of God, and procure the happiness of man. To admit his sufferings on our behalf was not to do him any injustice, but to give him the opportunity of performing the most wonderful act of obedience, and to exhibit the greatest love for perishing sinners, from which act the greatest benefits were to accrue to the human race; and, as a reward of his obedience and sufferings, he was to be recompensed with the highest glory, in that nature which he had assumed.

It appears, however, that we have not yet done with this objection. The question is still asked with an air of triumph, what idea could we form of either the justice or policy of a prince, who, from a fond desire to spare a number of his rebellious subjects, whom he had both the right and power to punish, should order his well beloved son to be put to the most cruel death, to expiate their offences and satisfy his royal vengeance?

But this is by no means a parallel case. For in the first place, the king would have no right to put his son to death for the crimes of rebels, and, should he attempt to do it against his consent, it would be the height of injustice and cruelty. Should the son even consent, not being the proprietor of his own life, it would be more than he had a right to do. Besides, the public might suffer an irre-

parable loss in the death of a hopeful prince; and the spared rebels might prove much more injurious than beneficial to the community; while at the same time time, no valuable end of government would be answered. This was not the case with the death of Christ. For he was the Lord proprietor of his own life, having a power to lay it down and a power to take it again. He was entirely a volunteer in the work; the greatest benefits to the human race were to be procured by his sufferings, and the pardoned rebels were to be brought back to their allegiance; and, as his sufferings and death were but temporary, there was no fear that any loss would be sustained. The Redeemer who was dead is now alive, and behold, he lives forevermore. Thus, I think, it appears that the mediatorial scheme, although only discoverable by revelation, yet when discovered, contains in it nothing contrary to reason. Much less does it furnish an argument for the rejection of revelation.

Other objections are alledged against certain scripture doctrines, particularly the doctrine of future punishments. There are also cavils almost innumerable against particular passages of scripture; a reply to these did not come within the design of this discourse. But these are considered as some of the most popular and weighty objections, and others admit of as easy, or even an easier solution.

The important enquiry now is, do these objections amount to a demonstration that the Bible is untrue, and christianity a cunningly devised fable? Are we, can we be sure that this is the case? Surely nothing short of the most absolute demonstration of its falsehood can justify a rejection. Infidels will hardly pretend that they are possessed of this demonstration. However powerful they may view their objections against its truth, they will hardly pretend that they are able to demonstrate its falsehood. Consequently, even on the infidel theory, the rejection of the gospel is both unsafe and imprudent. But so far are these objections from amounting to that demonstration, which could alone render the rejection of christianity either safe or prudent, that there is no one principle, either in philosophy, mathematics, or in the whole circle of the arts and

sciences, however well it may be considered to be established, but what is liable to stronger objections than the gospel. If the principle is once admitted to be correct, that nothing is to be received for truth against which objections and arguments can be raised, or against which captious men may cavil, it will reduce not only every principle of religion and morality, but of science, politics and philosophy, to the utmost uncertainty, and set every thing afloat. I shall close this discourse with a single reflection, in which I shall endeavour briefly to bring into view and sum up some of the principal evidences in favour of revelation, which have been detailed, more at large, in the preceding discourses.

From a reflection on the truth of revelation, and on the evidences of christianity, as contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which has been exhibited in the preceding discourses, this inference must, I think, forcibly strike the mind, that, surrounded as we are with the clear beams of gospel light, it can be no easy thing to be an infidel. However the subtilty of man may frame objections, and advance quibbles and sophisms against revealed religion, which cannot be easily answered by every one, yet, so clear and convincing are the evidences of christianity, and of the inspiration of the holy scriptures, that they must impress upon the mind, even of an infidel, in the moments of cool reflection, a peradventure, that the scriptures may be true. If there can be any such thing as satisfaction derived from the cold, uncomfortable, heart chilling system of irreligion, the mere suggestion of a doubt that, after all, the Bible may be true for aught we know, will spoil all the satisfaction to be derived from infidelity: for, as has been observed, nothing short of absolute demonstration of its falsehood can furnish an argument sufficiently strong to justify its rejection. The words spoken in a vision to Paul, while on his journey from Jerusalem to Damascus, *It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks*, and the observation of the wise man, that the way of transgressors is hard, may with propriety be applied to unbelievers of the present age. Whatever high pretences such men make to reason and free enquiry, yet their schemes of

sometimes have been, and all easily may be shewn to be, in the highest degree, irrational and absurd. As they are continually calling upon Christians to bring Moses and the Prophets to the bar of reason, and to pay no regard to their writings, only so far as they appear rational, it is highly proper to bring their own systems to the same touchstone. In treating on the obscurities in scripture, it was observed that some things are revealed, rather as matters of faith, than as matters of knowledge, it being highly reasonable to expect, in a revelation from heaven, many things above our comprehension. Here a well attested revelation is sufficient to authorize our belief. On this head infidels are constantly accusing Christians of superstition, credulity, and implicit faith, for assenting to what they are pleased to call irrational, absurd and incomprehensible doctrines. Yet if we examine the deistical creed, or take a view of what a person must believe, in order to renounce the scriptures and become an infidel, and compare it with the creed of Christians, it will be readily seen who goes farthest in assenting to irrational, absurd, and incomprehensible propositions; and that it requires a much stronger faith, or rather a much greater degree of credulity, to assent to the dogmas of deism, than is necessary for the cordial reception of all the pretended absurdities of the christian system.

Before a person can be established in the belief that the Old Testament is a fiction, he must believe, either that a vast congregation, of upwards of six hundred thousand men, besides women and children, believed that a series of stupendous miracles, for the reality of which an appeal was made to their senses, were wrought before their eyes, while no such miracles were wrought; or he must believe that every one of that great congregation combined with Moses to impose the belief of them on posterity, although the works themselves were not calculated to advance their national honour, and the laws they received, said to be sanctioned by these miraculous works, were peculiarly contrary to their inclinations, as they prohibited, by the sanction of the severest penalties, practices to which they had

the strongest propensity. If, on the other hand, he admits the reality of these works, but supposes them to be performed by the intervention or agency of evil spirits, this will involve him in as great, if not in a greater absurdity. It will suppose that Satan, the great upholder of pagan idolatry, who had for a long time wrought, and still continued to work so many strange feats among the heathen nations, with a view to confirm them in their superstitions, was, in this instance, so far divided against himself, as to work a series of stupendous miracles, for the express purpose of establishing a law to destroy that idolatry and superstition it was so much his intent to uphold; and all this while it can scarcely comport with their boasted reason, to believe in the existence of such a being as Satan. Or he must believe that a body of laws, pretending to be sanctioned by a series of miraculous facts of a most public nature, and many of them expressly founded upon and deriving their authority from these facts, were introduced into, and imposed upon the nation, on the credit of these facts, while the people who received the laws knew that no such works were done. He must also believe that the most ignorant, vicious, and superstitious of all people, as the Jews have been invariably represented, by the modern patrons of infidelity, invented and adopted the best constitution in the world, without the aid of any supernatural revelation, at a time when all other nations were sunk into the grossest idolatry and superstition; and that this same ignorant and superstitious people, did, even contrary to their own inclinations, establish a law enjoining the worship of one God and of him only, in opposition to the idolatrous customs universally prevalent, at a time when all the world besides was sunk into the grossest polytheism. He must believe that the most ambitious, tricking, intriguing man in the world, as Moses must be if an impostor, framed and introduced the most excellent, the most impartial, and the most disinterested system of laws which ever appeared in the world. Or, if he rather chooses to espouse the opinion that these are not the genuine laws of Moses, but the forgery of later times, he must

believe that, at a certain time, the whole nation was so totally deprived of all recollection of past events, as to receive a new system of laws and customs, and believe them to be their ancient laws and customs, by which they had been governed ever since they became a nation. To persuade even an individual of common sagacity and penetration, much more a whole nation, of a thing so evidently absurd, would be a task, the accomplishment of which would surpass the powers of either the wisdom of Solomon, or of the intriguing, tricking policy of Machiavel.

As many, and, if possible, greater absurdities must be admitted, before we can believe the New Testament to be a cunningly devised fable. We must believe that a character might be pointed out several hundred years before he was born, as a glorious personage who was to come into the world; and that the time and place of his birth, the particular stock and family from which he was to descend, the manner of his appearing, the reception he was to meet with in the world, together with all the principal actions of his life, as well as his sufferings, death, resurrection, and glorious ascension up into heaven, should be distinctly foretold, and that this personage actually did appear at the appointed time, and in every particular answer to what had been foretold of him in these ancient prophecies, and yet these predictions be nothing more than the common tricks of fortunetellers, and the person so foretold and described an impostor. Or we must believe that, notwithstanding all the vigilance of the most eagle eyed adversaries to prevent it, these pretended predictions have been all forged in later ages, and that so much ingenuity and address has been displayed in effecting these forgeries, that enemies who had the originals in their hands, and who both possessed every desirable opportunity and advantage for detecting a fraud, and had the strongest inclination to make such a discovery, have been so completely deceived as to believe them to be genuine. We must also believe that, on an appeal made to their senses, multitudes believed that a series of extraordinary facts, attesting Christ's divine mission, were publicly done before their eyes, while no such works were done,

and that a few illiterate fishermen so effectually imposed the belief of these falsehoods upon mankind, that all the art and learning of the world was not found to be able to disprove them. We must believe that the Apostles, jointly agreed to bear witness to a falsehood, knowing it to be such, not only without any worldly motive and inducement, but in direct opposition to their own prejudices, passions, and worldly interests, and although they hereby exposed themselves to the most grievous sufferings and cruel deaths, they continued to persevere in this their testimony, knowing, at the same time, that he to whom they bore witness was an impostor, by whom they themselves had been first duped, before they attempted to deceive others. In addition to this, we must believe that, without any divine aid, and with no more powerful means than the labours of a few illiterate fishermen, armed with no other weapons than those of persuasion, this imposture, under the name of christianity, prevailed in a short time, to an astonishing degree, although it had to encounter all the vulgar prejudices and corrupt passions of Jews and Gentiles, as well as to meet all the opposition which could be made to it, either by the wit, malice, craft, or cruelty of the world, or from the religious prejudices of Jews or Gentiles, or the pretended miracles to which an appeal was made to uphold the pagan superstition. A person must have a very implicit faith indeed, to swallow such a heap of absurdities. So clear and convincing are the evidences of our holy religion, that it must be inclination rather than the want of proper means of conviction which must make a man an infidel. The humbling tendency of christian doctrines, and the purity of christian precepts, are first disrelished, and, in order that all uneasy remonstrances of conscience may be avoided, its evidences are called in question. If all the objections against christianity were examined to the bottom, they would be found principally to originate from this source. People find it difficult to believe christianity and gratify their inclinations at the same time, without feeling some uneasy qualms of

conscience. They therefore labour hard to become unbelievers.

I shall conclude this discourse with the maxim by which it was begun. That if the christian religion be true, it is tremendously true. So it will be found at last by those who despise and deride its doctrines and trample on its precepts.

DISCOURSE IX.

JOHN V. 39.

Search the Scriptures.

MY intention in discoursing from this text is not to add any arguments in favour of the divine authority and inspiration of the scriptures, to those contained in the preceding discourses, but rather to make some general improvement of the whole subject. It has, I trust, been already fully proved, that the book called the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, is, in reality, a revelation from God; that this revelation is, by way of eminence, the source of all true light, on subjects of a moral and religious nature, which is in the world; and that it is from this source alone that the knowledge of a way of salvation for sinful man is derived. If these things are true, then it is of the highest importance for every individual to be acquainted with the doctrines revealed, and to practice the duties enjoined in this sacred book. The duty enjoined in the text therefore follows as a necessary consequence. Our blessed Lord, under the name of scriptures, in this place, only includes the sacred books of the Old Testament. No other inspired writings were then in existence. The New Testament was not penned until some years after Christ's ascension. But, had it even been in existence, it would have been of no authority in a dispute with the Jews, because they neither did at first, nor do they to this day, own it as an inspired book. The books of the Old Testament they however acknowledge as a revelation from God. To their authority our Lord, therefore, with propriety appeals, in order to decide

the point in controversy between himself and the Jews.—
 The subject of the present as well as of many other disputes, was whether he, Jesus of Nazareth, was the Messiah promised to the fathers and expected by the Jewish nation. To this character our blessed Lord laid claim, and supported his pretensions by the most incontestible proofs. In some of these disputes, he appeals to his works, which were such as no other man ever did. These were so illustrious, so godlike, as even, at some times, to extort an unwilling confession from his adversaries, that Christ himself could not be expected to do more miracles than this man did. Clear as this testimony was, the Jews attempted to evade it, by attributing his miraculous works to Beelzebub the prince of the devils. In this instance, he appeals to the scriptures, an authority which they themselves owned. The passage may be read either imperatively, as in our translation, or indicatively—*Ye do search the scriptures*, i. e. you have the sacred books of the Old Testament and you peruse them, Moses being read in your synagogues every sabbath day, you are therefore acquainted with the contents of these sacred books; you are well versed in what is contained in the law and the prophets, and you agree that the only way to everlasting life is revealed in these inspired writings. But these testify of me, and establish, in an incontestible manner, my claim to be the true Messiah. It is not, however, my present intention to consider the latter part of the verse. As the compass of divine revelation is now enlarged by the addition of the New Testament, the sphere of our search is extended so as to include the writings of Christ and his Apostles, as well as those of Moses and the Prophets. Taking the words indicatively, they point out what will, in some measure, be the practice of every real Christian. He will imitate the sweet singer of Israel, who had such a love to God's law as to meditate therein day and night. He will take God's statutes as the men of his counsel at all times. If we understand the words imperatively, as we read them in our translation, they enjoin a great and important duty, incumbent upon all, but a duty which, it is to be feared, is very much neglected by many. Doubtless the want of an

intimate acquaintance with the sacred oracles is one cause why so many have been induced to despise and reject them. Perhaps there is no better antidote against infidelity, than an intimate acquaintance with the sacred volume.

I shall,

I. Briefly explain the duty enjoined—*Search the scriptures.*

II. The manner in which we are to search them.

III. Take notice of several purposes for which we ought to search them.

IV. Urge some arguments and motives to induce people to search the scriptures with diligence and attention.

V. Improve the subject.

I. I am briefly to explain the import of the duty enjoined.

The great duty of searching the scriptures is opposed to that neglect and even contempt of the sacred oracles which is, alas, but too common. In what point of view are we to consider the practice of those who rarely take a Bible in their hands so much as to read a single chapter or examine a solitary text. Instances of such neglect are far from uncommon in this christian land, where we enjoy such a profusion of the means of grace. Nor need we go to those who are open and avowed infidels to find them. I fear we may find many proofs of such inattention among those who would be offended to be called by any other name than that of Christians. Although there is no other source from whence we can obtain information about the things which belong to our peace, yet how many are ignorant of its contents, and use no means to increase their knowledge. This is not the situation of the grossly ignorant and illiterate alone. May not we find many who have had the privilege of a competent education, and who have sufficient knowledge and sagacity on almost every subject which concerns the present life, who know but little more about the contents of the sacred volume than they do about those of the Koran? In many houses we will not so much as find a Bible. I speak not merely of those who are depressed by extreme poverty. For such there may be some excuse; and to remedy the defect may

be a fit subject for the exercise of the benevolence of their charitable neighbours. May we not find many who have the means of procuring, not only the bare necessaries, but the conveniences, and even many of the luxuries of life, who, so unaccountable is their inattention, take no pains to examine whether a way to eternal life is or is not revealed in the Bible. These are far from equalling the practice of the Jews in our Saviour's time. Are such persons to be denominated Christians, although living in a christian land? When weighed in the balance I fear they will be found wanting.

The duty enjoined in the text is also opposed to a careless superficial reading of the holy scriptures, without any particular attention to their import and meaning. This is but too common, and, with many, is all the attention they bestow upon them. The Bible is, it may be, occasionally taken up, and a chapter read in a careless, hasty manner, without either the desire or expectation of any intellectual, moral, or religious improvement. When the chapter is read, the task is done, the book is laid aside, and not a single reflection afterwards made upon the import of its contents, nor any inquiry whether they do or do not understand its meaning, or whether what has been read is, or is not applicable to their particular circumstances. It is to be feared that many who read the word, occasionally, have but little more understanding of its contents, than others who do not read at all.

But searching implies a diligent, careful examination, not only of letters and words, but an enquiry into their spirit and meaning. The end for which the scriptures were given to man, undoubtedly was, that they might be understood. They are addressed to him as a rational being, and require the application and exercise of his rational powers. To be understood, their contents must be perused. They ought to be examined with the same scrupulous attention with which we would search for a hid treasure. They contain an inexhaustible fund of wisdom and knowledge, and we are directed to seek after wisdom, to cry after understanding, and to dig for it more than for hid treasures. Such a diligent and careful examination of the

holy scriptures, with a view to understand their meaning, is included in the precept search the scriptures. As the import of the duty will be more fully explained under the two following heads, I shall not anticipate any thing which it might become necessary to repeat. I therefore proceed

II. To consider the manner in which we ought to search the scriptures.

1. We ought to search the scriptures with a suitable regard to their divine authority and inspiration, or with a deep impression upon our minds that they are the word of God. *I will hear what God the Lord will speak ; for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints ; but let them not turn again to folly.* It is to be expected that the weight and importance of the matter contained in any writings, will, in some measure, correspond with the dignity, talents, and virtue of the writer. Writings which come recommended to our notice, sanctioned by the name of an author celebrated for his talents or virtues, or famed for his profound wisdom and deep research, more especially if the subject matter of the work is of the last importance to us, will not be examined in that light and careless manner in which we would peruse a novel or a romance. Writings which have on them a royal stamp, especially if they come in the shape of edicts which we are bound to obey, or of charters establishing certain privileges and immunities by royal authority, which are considered as of great importance, will be perused with an uncommon degree of attention. With what assiduity and perseverance ; with what reverence and attention therefore ought we to peruse the word of him who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords ? The scriptures are presented to us, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but in those which the Holy Ghost teacheth. The doctrines, instructions, reproofs, commands, promises and threatenings of the word, are to be considered as God himself speaking to us in particular. Could we but realize, when perusing the sacred pages, that it is God himself speaking to us in his word, with what solemnity would we listen ? With this impression upon our minds we could not peruse them with inattention.

2. We ought to search the scriptures frequently. One,

two, or three examinations are by no means sufficient. The duty is not to be considered as the work of a day, but one deserving frequent attention during our whole lives. The Kings of Israel were directed each to write out a copy of the law in a book, which they were carefully to keep, and to read therein all the days of their lives; the Royal Psalmist had such a love to God's law that it was his meditation all the day; the Bereans are commended for their diligence and attention in searching the scriptures daily, and Christians are exhorted to let the word of Christ dwell in them richly in all wisdom. The sacred scriptures contain a source of instruction to which the ignorant ought to have frequent recourse that he may make proficiency in knowledge. In compassion to our weakness, God has favoured us with *line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little*. The same doctrines are again and again unfolded and explained, and the same duties repeatedly enjoined. As mankind are so dull of apprehension that little can be learnt at once, we have the more need frequently to repair to this fountain for instruction. The doubting and wavering need frequently to search the scriptures, that they may have their doubts resolved, be established in the truth, and confirmed in the path of duty; and those who are forgetful need to have their minds frequently stirred up by way of remembrance. Even where the clearest Gospel light is enjoyed, many are doctrinally ignorant about that way of salvation which is there pointed out. Nothing has such a tendency to clear up difficulties and render the way of salvation plain, as that intimate acquaintance with the sacred oracles which is to be acquired only by a frequent perusal. That the scriptures may prove, in reality, a light unto our feet and a lamp unto our path; that the directions and instructions we receive from God's word may be equal to our wants which are many, our acquaintance with it should be intimate and our recourse frequent.

3. We ought to search the scriptures with reverence, care and attention. We may peruse the sacred pages frequently, yet if we read in a manner careless, irreverent, and inattentive, we will reap but little profit. The free-

man, having a just value for his civil rights, will not give a mere inattentive perusal to the charter by which he holds them; the man, who entertains any doubts relating to the security of his property, will diligently examine the laws of his country, and the validity of his title to his estate, and will have recourse to the best legal advice he can obtain; and the condemned malefactor will attend minutely to every circumstance in his case which can afford even the most distant prospect of a pardon. More than our civil rights, more than an earthly inheritance, and even more than life itself is at stake, to invite our care and attention, in perusing the sacred volume. As it respects profiting, there is a resemblance between reading the Bible and the perusal of books of human composition. More than the mere reading of books is necessary, if we would wish for instruction, and to obtain an accurate knowledge of their contents. Books of the greatest worth, conveying the most valuable information, and imparting lessons of the profoundest wisdom, may be perused in a hasty, careless manner, and the reader be never the wiser. To understand and profit by them there must be care and attention. It may be of little consequence with regard to some books which we read, whether we do or do not correctly understand their meaning. The subject may be but little interesting; to understand the author's meaning may be but little to our advantage, and to mistake it productive of but little harm. With the sacred oracles it is otherwise. If any book deserves to be perused with reverence, care and attention, it is the Bible. Although the penmen were no more than mortal men, men of like passions with others, the author was no less than God himself, who addresses mankind in the twofold character of a sovereign and a father. In both these characters he claims reverence and exacts obedience. The subject matter of the sacred oracles is of the last importance, the immediate personal concern of every individual, and a misunderstanding, I do not say of a particular text, but of the main scope and intent of revelation, may be fatal. *When Ezra read the law to all the people, it is said, the ears of the people were attentive to*

the book of the law, and, in token of reverence, they bowed their heads and worshipped.

4. We ought to search the scriptures with impartiality, i. e. with a disposition to receive, as truth, whatever is found to be contained in these sacred records, and to practise, as duty, whatever is commanded. We ought, in the first instance, impartially to weigh the evidences which are alledged as proofs that what the scriptures contain is a system of truth. It is but too common with many, to examine the scriptures, merely for the purpose of collecting particular passages, against which they suppose that they can raise objections or cavils. They are sufficiently expert in turning to those places, against which infidels are in the habit of raising objections, for the purpose of discrediting the whole, and here their Bible knowledge ends. Of the scope and contents of the other parts of revelation, or indeed of revelation generally, they are as ignorant as if the supposed objectionable passages contained the whole of the sacred canon. Can such examiners be said to be impartial in their search of the holy scriptures? The same impartiality ought to be exercised in the examination and adoption of our religious sentiments; in our attempts to regulate our practice by scripture precepts as a rule of duty, and in bringing both our tempers and practices to that sacred touchstone for examination. But of this more under another head.

5. We ought to search the scriptures with deep humility, i. e. we ought not to set up our own understandings in opposition to scripture, but to subject our reason, as well as our inclination and practice, to the authority of what God has revealed in his word. There is much said about rational christianity. Man is a rational creature; the Bible is addressed to the understanding, and reason is to be used both in understanding and explaining the doctrines of revelation. As scripture is the best interpreter of scripture, and as there is scarcely an obscure text in the Bible, but is explained and illustrated by one more easily understood, which either unfolds the same truth or inculcates the same duty, so our reason and best judgment is to be exercised in comparing spiritual things with spiritual. Principles

and practices, founded on such a view of scripture, constitute the only true rational christianity. But by rational christianity, in the modern acceptation of the term, we are to understand quite a different thing, namely, a scheme which makes reason, rather than revelation, the standard of religious belief. When reason, however, pretends to judge, not of the meaning only, but of the propriety of such propositions as God has been pleased to reveal; and instead of receiving them in their most obvious sense, either rejects the plainest principles of revelation, or consents to receive them only in a sense agreeable to preconceived, supposed rational, notions of things, however opposite it may be to their true import, then it steps out of its proper sphere, and, instead of keeping the place of an handmaid, as it ought, usurps that of a mistress. For creatures, in our sphere, to claim such a high prerogative for their reason, as to examine and judge, not only of the evidences and of the meaning, but of the propriety of what God has been pleased to reveal, is pretty much like an attempt to examine and judge of the rays of the sun by the light of a candle. Whatever God reveals is to be received in its plain and obvious meaning; and if we search the scriptures with minds duly humble, instead of either wishing or attempting to subject revelation to the authority of our reason, we will be willing, in all matters of religious belief, to subject reason to the decisions of scripture. We ought, in attending to the voice of scripture, to sit humbly at the feet of Jesus, and should we find any thing to be above our comprehension, or even contrary to the first conceptions of our reason, we ought to receive every word as true in its plain obvious meaning, trusting in the Lord and not leaning to our own understanding. Our business is to learn of the divine teacher, and not to dictate to him what is proper to be taught. *It is written in the Prophets, and they shall be all taught of God. Every man, therefore, that hath heard and hath learned of the Father cometh unto me.*

6. We ought to search the scriptures with particular application to ourselves. It is but too common to do by the scriptures as men frequently do by a preached word, i. e. be very liberal in applying reproofs and corrections, and even threat-

enings, to others, but too sparing in self application. But as we are to view the scriptures as God himself speaking to his creatures, so while we peruse them, we are to consider the word, not as spoken to others, but rather to ourselves. When we read descriptions, either of the human heart or of human conduct, whether virtuous or vicious, we are to apply such descriptions to ourselves, by a serious enquiry how far they agree to our own hearts or our own conduct. When we take a view of the strictness and spirituality of the divine law, especially as armed with the curse, or as threatening eternal death as the punishment of sin, we ought to apply these threatenings, so as to enquire with seriousness whether they are not directed against us. This is the situation of all who have not fled for refuge to him who is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. In like manner we ought to make application to ourselves of the commands, corrections, reproofs, and promises of the word, by comparing our religious practice with that unerring standard, with a disposition to bewail our imperfections, and labour after a more complete conformity both in heart and life; by examining how far we stand reprov'd, either for those vicious practices or corruptions of the heart which the scripture condemns, and by examining whether we believe and receive those great and precious promises which in Christ Jesus are yea and amen to them that believe.

7. In our search of the scriptures, we ought to be assiduous, and persevering in our addresses at the throne of grace, by serious fervent prayer, both that we may be enabled rightly to understand them, and that our hearts may be inclined to believe and obey them. *We ought to seek after wisdom, and cry after understanding*, i. e. cry to God to impart to us heavenly wisdom, by teaching us himself. We ought to dig for that kind of wisdom more than for hid treasures, i. e. be constant in our endeavours to obtain it. Knowledge of the scriptures is the best kind of wisdom; but if any man lack wisdom, particularly that kind of wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not. The royal Psalmist was well acquainted with God's word. He had arrived at a degree

of knowledge in it, above all his teachers. Yet he still feels the necessity of more instruction in it, therefore prays—*Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. Make me to understand the way of thy precepts. Teach me the way of thy precepts.* Our blessed Lord also opened the understandings of the disciples as they were travelling to Emmaus, that they might understand the scriptures. From these instances it appears that, as we are to apply to a throne of grace for that heavenly wisdom whereby we may understand the scriptures, so the aids of the holy spirit are necessary to make us wise to salvation. In this period of the church, when the canon of scripture is complete, no new revelation is to be expected. The business of the holy spirit, therefore, is not to impart new truths, but to remove darkness from the mind, and to open and apply the truths contained in the word, either for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness, for correction, or for consolation. This assistance is to be asked by prayer, and God has graciously promised his holy spirit to those who ask him. He wills us to ask for those things which he is previously determined to bestow. *Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them.* There are two particular benefits which, as it respects our understanding of the scriptures, will be derived from serious fervent prayer. 1. Our search will be rendered more assiduous, and our desires to obtain light and direction more ardent. 2. We will thereby obtain a more teachable disposition, being influenced by a desire to receive the truth, not merely in a manner free from prejudice, but in the love of it. *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God or whether I speak of myself.*

III. I am to take notice of some of the purposes for which we are to search the scriptures.

1. We are to search the scriptures that we may become more and more acquainted with the evidences, and confirmed in the belief of their divine authority and inspiration. However clear and indisputable the external proofs of the divine authority and inspiration of the scriptures may be, still one of the most convincing, and one which comes

more immediately within the view of common readers, is, that they carry the most complete evidence within themselves that they are a revelation from God. They have stood, and they will stand the test of the most rigid inquiry, the most critical examination. Like pure gold which has passed the furnace, the more these evidences are tried, the clearer, the more convincing they will appear. Should a person entertain any doubts of their authority, nothing will have a more powerful tendency to remove them, than an intimate acquaintance with the scriptures themselves.— The clear evidences of a divine original, apparent in almost every page of the Bible, furnish weapons in abundance to repel all the fiery darts thrown against it by assailants. Nothing has had a greater tendency to facilitate the growth of infidelity, than the want of an intimate acquaintance with the scriptures themselves. Persons who have never become familiar with the system of Bible truth, are, in their progress through life, assailed with the sophisms and cavils of infidels. To these, being unacquainted with the Bible, and consequently strangers to its excellency, they have no answer ready. Infidelity offers relief from those restraints which are disagreeable to the feelings of the carnal heart, the bait is greedily swallowed, and the thoughtless and unwary get entangled in the snare. Indeed, it is wonderful to what a degree ignorance of their subject prevails among the opposers of christianity. However learned and acute many of that class of men may be, as philosophers, statesmen, politicians, &c. yet when they come to reason on the principles of christianity, they are grossly ignorant of their subject. They know very little, either of that religion which they attempt to vilify and turn into ridicule, or of those sacred writings which contain the record of its doctrines, any farther than is necessary to collect passages against which they think they can raise objections. Now an intimate acquaintance with the principles of christianity, as revealed in the Bible, would place even the unlearned in a situation not to be shaken with objections, although it might not at all times furnish them with a ready answer to every cavil. Apply this observation to the principal scriptural topics which furnish internal evidence of

the divine inspiration of the scriptures. We may instance the argument from prophecy. The more intimate the acquaintance which we have with the sacred pages, the more clear and convincing will we find the evidences of the fulfillment of prophecy. Particularly, we find, in the Old Testament, a great variety of prophecies relating to the character and appearance of the Messiah, which have had their accomplishment. The more critically we search the scriptures—the more diligently we compare the Old and New Testaments together, the more clear and indisputable will we find the evidences of the fulfillment of these predictions. The same effect will follow the examination of the prophecies concerning other great and important events, which have had their accomplishment in times past; and he must be a very inattentive observer of passing events, who does not perceive the clearest evidences of a rapid fulfillment of prophecy at the present day. The more intimate also our acquaintance is with scripture doctrines, and the mutual connexion and dependence of one truth upon another, with the holiness and purity of scripture precepts and morals compared with the immoral system of infidelity, as well as with those parts of the Bible which are more eminently devotional and experimental, we will find the evidences more clear and convincing to our minds, that the Bible is no cunningly devised fable, but really a revelation from God.

2. We are to search the scriptures for the purpose of drawing our religious sentiments from that source, and regulating our religious belief and practice by that standard: i. e. we are to believe and receive every thing as truth, which is sanctioned by a *thus saith the Lord*. It is but too common with many to adopt a theory, or imbibe a particular set of opinions, either from tradition, because they have been the opinions of their forefathers; from an attachment to, or connexion with a particular man, sect or party, or from the mere deductions of their own reason, independent of any particular attention to the Bible, and then bring their preconceived opinions to the Bible in pursuit of something plausible to support them, instead of deriving their religious sentiments, in the first instance, from revelation.

When the mind becomes once strongly prejudiced in favour of a particular theory, however contrary it may be in its leading features to the general scope of revelation, it will not be found difficult to discover some detached passages in the Bible, which, at first view, may seem to favour it. Indeed, by collecting particular passages in this way, detached from their connexions, and without attending to the general scope of revelation, it is not found difficult to support, with some degree of plausibility, different and even opposite theories. But if, instead of treating scripture in this unfair way, by bringing a preconceived theory to the Bible, and torturing the sacred text in order to support it, the principles of our religious belief were drawn impartially from the scriptures themselves, there would not be so many disputes about the sense of scripture, and so many opposite and contradictory systems would not be palmed upon the Bible. Here I might descend to particulars. Were such plain and direct texts as these, *Before Abraham was, I am—I and my father are one—Glorify me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was*, with a multitude of others, equally full and express, to the same purpose, received in their plain, obvious, grammatical meaning, could any person, who owned revelation, believe that the Lord Jesus Christ was no more than a mere man, who had no existence previous to his conception in the virgin's womb? And were such plain passages as these, *He that believeth shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned—These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal—The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God—There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked*, with a multitude of others of the same decisive and unequivocal meaning, received as the basis of our faith in their natural and obvious sense, unsophisticated by the torturing of a preconceived theory, we should never have heard of the dream about universal salvation. There is another scheme which is become extremely popular of late, and which, although I am extremely loth to deal in hard names, I can give no more gentle epithet than that of infidelity in disguise. Indeed, in many instances, the veil is so thin that

it is easily penetrated. I mean the popular scheme of professing great veneration for revelation in general, yet, at the same time, opposing the affixing of any precise meaning to it, or even so much as agreeing that it does in fact mean any thing. According to this theory, if it deserves the name of a theory, the Bible is one of the most unmeaning books that was ever written. So long as our observations extend no farther than to general eulogies upon revelation, believers of this stamp will appear cordially to agree to them. But no sooner is any specific proposition presented to view, as a truth demanding our religious belief, because founded upon revelation; or, in other words, no sooner does a person insist that revelation does in fact mean something which it is of importance for us to know and believe, than the proposition is arraigned before the bar of reason, and if not found precisely agreeable to their particular preconceived notions of things, however clearly it may be deducible from revelation, it is strange if it is not pronounced to be either *false, irrational and absurd, unintelligible,* or something so *indifferent* in itself that our belief or disbelief is an object of little or no consequence. Indeed it will hardly be allowed that any religious belief whatsoever is necessary. All the concern that we have with religion is to maintain some outward decency in practice. Morality is all. Thus under the cover of a regard for revelation, all the important doctrines it contains are either openly opposed or industriously kept out of sight. But although we ought by no means to disparage christian morality, nor substitute religious belief in the place of practice, yet, if it true that the Bible contains a system of doctrine as well as a rule of duty, faith is of equal importance with practice. Nor can it be expected that christian practice will ever be supported, for any length of time, with any good degree of consistency, unless it is connected with, and founded upon christian principles. The building being without a foundation will soon tumble into ruins. Indeed I know of no way in which we can assent to the Bible as true, only by believing the particular propositions of truth it contains. If, for instance, the doctrines of the divinity and atonement of Christ, of a state of uni-

versal moral depravity which renders salvation by the merits of a Saviour necessary; of justification by faith in Christ's righteousness; of regeneration by the influences of the spirit, and of a future state of punishment as well as rewards beyond this life, be really the doctrines of the Bible, parts of the faith once delivered to the saints, they cannot be ranked with the lesser matters of the law, the belief or disbelief of which is but of little or no consequence. The belief of these truths, admitting them to be truths, must be of the utmost importance, both as it respects their influence upon the temper of the heart, and their connexion with christian practice. So long as the leading doctrines of revelation are denied, or at least not believed (and if they are considered as of no consequence they cannot be believed) I see not how we can be said to believe in revelation. I know of no way in which we can assent to the Bible as true in general, only by assenting to the particular propositions of truth which it contains. We are therefore to search the scriptures as the source and fountain from whence our religious principles are to be drawn, as the foundation of our faith, as well as a rule to regulate our practice.

3. We are to search the scriptures for the purpose of making progress in religious knowledge. It was, even in the apostolic age, a subject of complaint that Christians did not make progress in religious knowledge, so fast as they ought. Heb. v. 12. *For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.* Among God's ancient people a want of knowledge was complained of as a great evil. *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.* And as they were favoured with means by which knowledge might be obtained, it is plainly intimated that this deficiency of knowledge was owing to their own criminal neglect. *It is a people of no understanding, therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour.* It is a matter of notoriety that, in this enlightened age in which we are favoured with such a profusion of the means of knowledge as was

never enjoyed either by Jews or primitive Christians; a profusion greatly aided by the art of printing, whereby copies both of the sacred scriptures and of other books tending to their illustration may be multiplied so as to equal any demand with a facility heretofore unknown, and by such a general diffusion of the rudiments of education among all classes as to enable almost every person to read for himself, and notwithstanding the progress which has been made, and is daily making, in almost every other kind of knowledge, religious knowledge, particularly the knowledge of the scriptures, has been, in many, if not in most places, rather retrograde than progressive. At least it has by no means progressed in proportion to our religious advantages. What is the cause of this? One plain and obvious reason is that people are less conversant with the holy scriptures. Here is the fountain of religious knowledge, the only true light of the world from whence we can obtain the knowledge of God and our duty. But when men neglect this sure word of prophecy, and follow some *ignus fatuus* of their own fancy, what is it but to forsake *the fountain of living waters, and hew out unto themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.* To profit by this fountain of light we must come to the light. The sun is a glorious fountain of light in the natural world. But the person who is either deprived of the powers of vision, who is shut up in a dungeon, or who obstinately shuts his eyes against the light, will not be illuminated by his rays. Here we may be making progress in the knowledge of that God (of whom, although we may be constantly gaining more and more knowledge, yet will still remain incomprehensible by all created beings;) as well as of the glorious work of redemption, the mystery of which is a wonder into which even angels desire to look. In a word, on every subject relating to God or ourselves, to our sins or duties, to faith or practice, to the things of time or of eternity, God's word is, by way of eminence, a light unto our feet and a lamp unto our path. The Bible is a source of knowledge to all classes. The ignorant may find instruction, and the wise may grow in knowledge. The mere babe in intellect may find many things adapted to his capacity,

things easy to be understood ; and the most learned man, the man endued by nature with the most penetrating genius, cultivated by the best education, and improved by the most assiduous application, may find things which will give full scope to the exercise of his mental powers. We may study the scriptures during our whole lives, and be constantly making progress in the knowledge of divine truth, and yet still find many things beyond our depth. Still as it respects progress in knowledge, *The path of the just is as a shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.* It is not to be doubted that when the prophet speaks of the latter day as a season of the increase of knowledge, that the knowledge more immediately intended is the knowledge of the scriptures, and that this will, in part at least, be acquired by a more general and more diligent search.

4. We ought to search the scriptures as the great mean and ordinance of God, for the conviction and conversion of sinners, as well as for the advancement of holiness and comfort among God's people ; and in particular, in the humble expectation, that, by the blessing of heaven, they may have some of these effects upon ourselves. That the scriptures are a powerful mean in the hand of the spirit of God, for the conviction and conversion of sinners, is evident from the scriptures themselves. *The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth forever. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* Not that the word alone, independent of the influences of the spirit, will be sufficient to convert the soul. It is however the principal mean. It is the rule by which we are to try the spirits. We are directed not to believe every spirit, but to try the spirits whether they are of God, and the scriptures are the rule by which the trial is to be made. If there are any operations, especially upon our own minds, which are supposed to be the operations of the spirit, we are to compare the fruits of these operations with what the scriptures declare to be the genuine fruits of the spirit's work, and so to decide. Here we are to learn the nature of sin and duty; the extent and spirituality of the divine law and its

use under the gospel; the nature and necessity of gospel grace, and the true nature of christian experience, producing as its natural and necessary fruit that temper, as well as practice, which, in our progress through life, is the best evidence of a change of heart. We are not merely to study the nature of that temper so as to be able to describe it. We are rather to labour to possess it. The scriptures are the means of increasing, enlivening, and invigorating a spirit of true piety among God's people, and not merely of shewing the difference between what is true and false in matters of religion. That they may prove efficacious in producing any or all these effects, they must be carefully examined.

5. We are to search the scriptures as the rule or standard whereby we are to examine ourselves. No species of knowledge can be of equal importance to man with the knowledge of himself. To be easy or contented, while it is a matter of awful uncertainty whether we are in a gracious or pardoned state, or in a state of wrath and condemnation, betrays a great degree of stupidity. The characters of the righteous and wicked are of a nature so opposite to each other that it would be strange indeed, were there no means whereby the distinction could be known. The Bible contains a complete analysis of the human heart; a faithful picture, applicable to the hearts of all the children of men, whether good or bad, as well as a complete delineation of the nature, springs and motives of human conduct. The reasons, therefore, that persons do not know themselves, or are unable to determine to what particular class they belong, do not arise from any want of plainness and precision in the rule for trial and examination, but either from darkness in their own minds; from an entire neglect of examination; from the adoption of an imperfect and erring rule, or from a want of impartiality in the application of the rules of God's word to our particular circumstances. There are many, who, if they would but indulge a moment's reflection, might have every doubt removed with regard to themselves. This is, in a special manner, the case of those who live without God in the world, or those who indulge themselves, with approbation

and delight, in any known species of wickedness, secret or open. A very superficial attention indeed, if it was only impartial, might be sufficient to convince them that their spot was not the spot of God's children. Persons of this description, and even sinners in Zion, such as wear the mask of a profession but are strangers to the power of godliness, might find abundant light in scripture, to inform them to what class they belong, did they not flatter themselves in their own blinded eyes. And, with respect to those who are in some measure acquainted with the power as well as the form of godliness, so full and clear are the views which scripture gives of their characters; their trials and triumphs; their desires and aversions; their joys and sorrows; their comforts and afflictions, that nothing but remaining darkness in their own minds, or the want of precision in the application of the rules laid down in God's word, can be the reason why they experience such frequent and long seasons of darkness, doubt, and uncertainty. But to attempt an elucidation of the particular marks or evidences of grace, is foreign to the design of the present discourse, which is only to refer the enquirer to the scriptures. In order to the impartial application of these rules, we have need to search the scriptures daily. Our comparison of ourselves with that standard must be frequent and serious.

6. We are to search the scriptures as a rule to regulate our practice, in order that we may be, on all occasions, acquainted with the path of duty. The path of the just is said to be as a shining light. What are we to understand by this, only that, by a constant attention to the rule of duty, the Christian, as he makes progress in the christian life, finds the path in which he walks to grow more and more plain, and his advancement therein to grow more easy and uninterrupted. That any particular action may be acceptable, as a matter of duty, it is necessary that it be conformable to some divine law or rule. In a religious sense, no measure of sincerity, whatsoever, in our obedience; no degree of zeal or strictness, and no constancy or perseverance in the performance, can cause that to become a duty which God has never commanded. However.

conscientious such persons may be, they expose themselves to a solemn question—*Who hath required this at your hands?* The scriptures, as a rule of duty, have a twofold respect to human conduct. Some things are commanded and others are forbidden. To consider the rule impartially we must take this twofold view of it, and before we pronounce positively on the innocence or harmlessness of an action which has been considered as doubtful, we ought to examine the scriptures, and if we find it condemned, stand reprov'd and corrected. Christian practice consists, not barely in ceasing to do evil, but in learning to do well. It sometimes happens that Christians, although not much at a loss about the great system of moral and religious duties laid down in the Bible, may be still in the dark about what is duty on some particular occasions, where the matter is to be determined by prudential considerations. In such cases as this, if we diligently search the scriptures, attentively observe the workings of providence, and sincerely ask of God to open our eyes, so as to make the path of duty plain, I believe that Christians in general need not be long at a loss about the course to be pursued on particular occasions. But whatever momentary difficulty there may be in making the discovery, yet the scriptures are the best light unto our feet and lamp unto our path.

7. We ought to search the scriptures for the purpose of becoming acquainted with a true source of rest and happiness. If we do not find comfort upon scripture grounds, it must be because we are strangers to that kind of consolation which is calculated to afford complete satisfaction to an immortal soul. The scriptures invariably represent the Supreme Being as the only permanent source of rest and happiness, and the only chosen portion of the Christian. *Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in him. This God is our God forever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death.*—When, at one time, the Psalmist had, in some measure, lost his realizing views of this everlasting portion, he calls upon his wandering affections to return. *Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.*

The scriptures also represent Jesus Christ as a refuge, and consequently, as a door of hope and a source of comfort for the guilty and miserable. He tenderly invites persons of this character to come unto him, saying, *Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* Temporal afflictions are also numerous. *Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble.* But in all his troubles, a covenant God is the righteous man's refuge. For the discovery of light in darkness, this only source of comfort in affliction, the scriptures alone afford light. They open up a pleasant view of present support in afflictions, and, as an additional and permanent source of consolation, unveil a glorious prospect beyond the grave. Independent of that view of life and immortality which the gospel presents to the mind, nothing but a state of awful gloom and uncertainty is discoverable beyond the grave. The most comfortable prospect of futurity, with which infidelity can present its patrons, while it rejects the gospel, is, that death is a leap in the dark. But in the sacred scriptures there is a cluster of great and precious promises—promises not merely of pardon and peace, but that God will be the father of his people, and they shall be his sons and daughters; that he will be with them in all their troubles, and will never leave nor forsake them.

But I come

IV. To add some arguments and motives to excite to such a diligent search of the holy scriptures.

What has been already advanced, on the foregoing heads, supercedes the necessity of enlarging upon this. If the consideration of the various purposes for which we ought to search the scriptures does not furnish motives sufficiently powerful to engage our attention to the sacred volume, I shall despair of adding any thing more persuasive. The following things I shall, however, state briefly:

1. The superior excellency of the scriptures themselves is one of the most powerful arguments why we ought to search them with care and attention. They contain a treasure not to be obtained from any other source and not to be purchased with gold. The superior excellence of scripture has been several times brought into view in the

preceding discourses; there is therefore the less need to insist upon it here. The scriptures are an inestimable treasure in themselves, and their value becomes the more enhanced by the effects which they have on the hearts and lives of the children of men. *The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether: More to be desired than gold, yea than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb.* An attention to God's word made the Psalmist wiser than all his teachers; and makes many, in the obscure and humble walks of life, much wiser in the things of God, than the profoundest philosopher or the most learned statesman who neglects this most precious source of information.

2. The perfection and fullness of scripture also furnishes the most powerful inducements to search them. There is nothing which relates either to the knowledge of God or our duty, nothing which concerns either the things of time or eternity, in relation to which we cannot obtain satisfactory information in the lively oracles. This source of instruction is inexhaustible. We can never say that we are complete masters of all the light and information which may be obtained from the Bible. On this argument I shall not insist, because it has been already considered in the course of this work.

3. The nature of that knowledge or information which is to be obtained from the scriptures, as well as our absolute need of such information as can be derived from this source alone, is a powerful motive to induce mankind to search the scriptures. The knowledge to be derived from the Bible relates to the most necessary things. What branch of knowledge can be more necessary than the knowledge of God? It is from this source alone, that we become acquainted with the attributes and perfections of Jehovah; the unity of the Supreme Being, or that there is but one God; the relation in which we stand to him as creatures; the duty which we owe him, and the way in which the sinful, guilty children of men may approach unto him, with the comfortable hope of finding acceptance with him as a reconciled God and Father. Besides this all-important

branch of knowledge, we have a satisfactory account of the origin of all things, including a discovery of the way in which moral evil, which has had such extensive and ruinous effects upon the human race as to render the gospel salvation absolutely necessary and the only expedient to save from the ruins of the apostacy, was introduced into the system. For information on these all-important subjects every other source may be explored in vain. What a mass of the crudest absurdities have been written about the origin of this world, both by those who had no other guide than the light of nature, and by those who have chosen to forsake the fountain of living waters and hew out for themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water. Although heathens have been at some times compelled to acknowledge the existence of moral evil, as has been observed in the first of these discourses, they were utterly at a loss both about the manner of its introduction and a method of expiation. They might enquire—*Wherewith shall I come before God?* but they never could answer the question. To solve all difficulties on this subject, the Bible steps in and declares that *The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin*—that *God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.* Independent of the light derived from revelation, we can have no assurance of the forgiveness of so much as one sin. To learn that there is forgiveness with God, that he may be feared, is a discovery of the utmost importance to sinful men, who have all gone out of the way and stand in perishing need of an atonement. The consideration, that the Bible gives us the most clear and satisfactory information on the most necessary and important of all subjects, ought to be a powerful inducement to search the scriptures.

4. The pleasure and profit to be derived from perusing the scriptures is an argument why we ought to search them with diligence. Here I shall not confine myself merely to the pleasure which the perusal of the word of God gives to the pious mind. The man of science and literary curiosity may find his labour in studying the scriptures abundantly rewarded. Are any fond of antiquity? The scriptures are the most ancient monuments now in ex-

istence. There are no heathen writings now extant which can make any well grounded pretensions to either genuineness or authenticity, which are not, at least, a thousand years later than Moses. The mutilated accounts given by some of these writers are so blended with fable that it is almost impossible to discover any thing like truth in the midst of heaps of rubbish, and any small portions of truth which are to be found consist only in such imperfect traditions as are ultimately derived from the sacred scriptures, as might easily be made appear. These, so far as they communicate any light, all go to corroborate the accounts contained in the scripture history. But the facts which are, in our Bibles, related in a manner clear and distinct, simple and unvarnished, pure and unmixed with fable, are all, more or less, disguised by other writers. Does the person fond of subjects of antiquity wish for information about the origin of nations, or the distribution of the various tribes and families of which the human race consisted in the early ages, or does he want to be informed about the ancient geography of the world, and to compare it with modern discoveries, he will find more satisfactory information in the Bible than in all other authors combined; and that modern discoveries go to confirm the accounts contained in the scriptures, and to ascertain the geographical accuracy of the sacred writers. In no other writer, nor indeed in all other writers, will he find so large a collection of ancient history as in the Bible. The very existence of many nations, who once made a great figure in the world, but have long since vanished, would now be wholly unknown, were it not for such monuments of their former existence as are preserved by the sacred historians. Or has the person a disposition to be charmed with boldness of conception, with the beauties of composition, or with sublimity of language; although the Bible is a book remarkable for its simplicity, yet, perhaps he will find more truly sublime passages in the Psalms and Prophets than in all other ancient writings combined. A few passages have been noticed in our second discourse. But it is to the sincere enquirer about the things of God that the sacred scriptures will afford the greatest pleasure and profit, and nothing but a highly vivat-

ed moral taste can prevent a person from receiving both delight and edification from the perusal. How profitable as well as pleasant is it to contemplate the character of Jehovah, a being infinitely perfect and infinitely amiable, the fountain and source of all being, *of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things?* With what raptures of astonishment and admiration may we contemplate the wonders of redeeming love, *God manifest in the flesh.* This being a wonder into which even angels desire to look, is a subject which we never can either fully comprehend, or sufficiently admire. Now if we follow on to know the Lord, we have a promise that we shall know; we may be constantly making progress in knowledge. The pleasure, however, is not all. It is no less useful than pleasant. It tends to promote holiness here, and to meeten for the enjoyment of God in the kingdom of glory hereafter. *Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the spirit of the Lord.* Of what happiness do the thoughtless and inconsiderate part of mankind deprive themselves, by living without God in the world.

5. The guilt and danger attending the neglect and contempt of the sacred oracles, is a reason why we ought to search and examine them with care and attention. We have the command of God enjoining the duty, and the neglect of it will expose to an aggravated condemnation. Persons and nations, who have never been favoured with such a precious treasure as the Bible, can never be chargeable with the guilt of either neglecting, despising, or rejecting it. They are, no doubt, guilty of many violations of the law of nature, and they have naturally the same criminal moral propensities with the rest of mankind. They are not, however, guilty of rejecting a light which they never enjoyed. On this account, if on no other, their condemnation will be comparatively light. He who knew not his master's will, although he did things worthy of stripes, was to be beaten with few stripes, but he who knew it, and did it not, was to be beaten with many stripes. A consideration which will greatly enhance the guilt of many of the children of men is, that a price is

put into their hands to get wisdom and they have no heart to it. Infidelity itself hath its seat, rather in the heart than the head. At least there is usually its beginning; and because men do not like to retain God in their knowledge, he gives them up to strong delusions that they may believe a lie. *And this (saith our blessed Lord) is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.* What opinion would we entertain of a rebel, who, when a pardon was tendered to him, would refuse so much as to read or to look at it, but, to show his still greater contempt, would tear it to pieces and trample it under his feet? Yet thus do men trample under foot the Son of God, and count the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing; thereby, as it were, crucifying the Son of God afresh. As there are no obstacles in the way of our searching the scriptures, only such as arise from the native perverseness of our dispositions, or from a want of relish for their contents, the gospel, which is therein presented to our view, if not unto us the favour of life unto life, will be the favour of death unto death. What contempt do we thereby show, and what ingratitude do we manifest to that God who inspired holy men to pen them?

V. It was proposed to make some improvement.

And here I shall make several reflections and remarks, applicable not only to this discourse, but to the general subject of which an illustration has been attempted in this work.

1. Hence we see the wonderful goodness as well as the gracious condescension of God, manifested by giving unto man a revelation of his will. God could be under no obligation to bestow, even upon an innocent creature, all those favours which man would have enjoyed, either in that state in which he was placed at his creation, or in that higher state of felicity to which, had he never fell, it is probable he would in due time have been exalted in the heavenly world, when once his state of trial upon earth had been ended. There was, therefore, a singular display of the goodness of God, even in that first constitution under which

man was placed at his creation. How much greater the display of mercy and grace to man, when he had once, by his apostacy, both forfeited the favour and lost the image of God, and become justly obnoxious to the penalty incurred by a breach of the first covenant? It must depend upon the sovereign good pleasure of Jehovah whether any mode of relief from that penalty should be provided. And if he made any manifestation of himself, or revelation of his will to his creature who had thus offended, unless it was to exclude him from his favour, it must be an act of mere grace. God's manifestation of himself by giving a revelation of his will to fallen man, was, therefore, in a peculiar manner a time of love. This appears from the nature of the revelation itself, which was not merely a simple revelation of his will, but such a display of his character as represented him to be clothed in the amiable, and to man in his present situation, absolutely necessary attribute of mercy. Although the first communication which was made by God to man, after the apostacy, was accompanied with such a manifestation of the curse due to disobedience as was necessary to show the divine displeasure against sin, yet it discovered a remedy in that promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. Every succeeding addition made to revelation has made a farther display of grace.

2. Hence we see the distinguishing grace of God in favouring us in particular with the knowledge and enjoyment of this revelation of his will, which, for wise reasons, known only to himself, he hath seen fit to withhold from others who have the same right to claim the privilege with ourselves, and whose necessities are the same with our own. It is an indisputable fact that the advantages of revelation are neither universal nor equal. All do not alike participate of the privileges derived from the scriptures. When men were but few in number, and revelation comprised within a narrow compass, it was communicated to all who were then in the world. This was the case twice (viz.) in the family of our first father Adam, and, afterwards, in that of our second father Noah, subsequent to the deluge. But when men began to multiply on the

earth, and to lose the sense and knowledge of the true religion, God saw fit to communicate a special revelation to a particular family. This he did to Abraham, and afterwards continued the favour to the nation of the Jews, among whom it was committed to writing. The Apostle, in estimating the privileges and advantages of the Jewish nation, resolves them principally into their possession of these lively oracles from which they derived the knowledge of a Saviour to come. *What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there in circumcision? Much every way, chiefly because unto them were committed the oracles of God.* These distinguishing privileges were not bestowed on the Jews on account of any superior virtue or worthiness of that nation, entitling them, in preference to other nations, to such a peculiar favour. It was not on account of their numbers, for they were the fewest of all people. Neither was it on account of their virtues, for they were prone to disobedience, a stiff-necked, refractory, and rebellious people, as is sufficiently apparent from their history. Under the gospel dispensation, the compass of revelation is enlarged, and the knowledge of it extended, as well as the church greatly increased by the accession of the Gentiles. Still the knowledge and enjoyment of the holy scriptures is limited. Perhaps nearly three fourths of the inhabitants on the habitable globe are ignorant even of the existence of such a book as the Bible. And as it respects other nations who are called Christian, and among whom the Bible exists, yet, on account of the scanty insufficient number of copies in the language generally understood, and on account of the narrow bounds within which the privilege of a competent education, as well as other means of instruction, are circumscribed, the knowledge of the Bible is very much limited. God undoubtedly deals neither hardly nor injuriously with those nations who are so completely enveloped in pagan darkness as to perceive scarcely a ray of light (for shall not the judge of all the earth do right?) They possess no good qualification on account of which they can lay claim to so rich a blessing as a revelation of God's will. Nor do those nations whose situation may be considered as something resembling a midway be-

tween pagan darknes and gospel light, deserve to have their privileges enlarged. When knowledge so increases as to dispel either the comparative darknes of the one, or the gross midnight darknes of the other, the change must be effected by grace. But is there any superior virtue or merit in those nations which enjoy the privilege to the full? Is it because, in christian countries, the natural dispositions of men are more docile, or because they are more inclined to be obedient, that they are thus favoured? This will hardly be asserted. In those nations called Christian, the inhabitants are naturally as uncircumcised in heart and ears, and as prone to be rebellious and disobedient as people in other nations. No other reason, than the good pleasure of God, can be given why we, and other christian nations, are thus favoured; and, in this particular, he is influenced, wholly, by motives and reasons originating with himself. For this distinction we can assign no other reason than this, *Even so father for so it hath seemed good in thine eyes.* While we direct the tender eye and extend the succouring hand of pity and compassion to those who sit in darknes, and in the region of the shadow of death, let us thankfully receive and diligently improve the privileges with which we are favoured. Let us not cavil at revelation, because it is not universal; nor deny that it comes from God, because some still walk in darknes. As well may we deny the utility of the natural sun, because the inhabitants of the frozen zones are so scantily warmed with his beams. Let us not therefore depreciate the goodness of God, by denying revelation to be a benefit, or saying that nations who enjoy the favour possess no peculiar advantage, enjoy no distinguishing privileges, nor have any more causes of thankfulness to the great author and parent of the universe, than those who are enveloped in the grossest pagan darknes. That revelation is not universal is a popular topic with the cavillers of the present day. Because the privilege, if it is one, is not universal, they will not so much as own it to be a privilege, but cast it behind their backs. But do we find any disposed to act in this manner with respect to the things of this life? Is any one found to repine at his own enjoyment of health, be-

cause a neighbor, every way as deserving as he, languishes upon a sick bed? Or will any one who is favoured with a profusion of the necessaries and conveniences of life cast them away, because others are indigent? Or are men prone to be displeas'd with the exuberant fertility of their own soil, because that of other countries is barren and destitute of many of the advantages which we enjoy? Are not men, on the contrary, frequently prone to cherish too high an opinion of themselves, and oftentimes indulge too great a degree of contempt for others, because they are favoured with some distinguishing privileges, although both the possession and the enjoyment of these advantages is entirely independent of any virtuous exertions of their own? Why therefore will we cast away a still more distinguishing evidence of God's goodness? Let us remember that as we are favoured with peculiar privileges, so additional duties are required of us. Let us beware lest, on account of our ingratitude for and misimprovement of the privileges we enjoy, they should be taken from us and given to others.

3. Hence see a reason why revelation is despis'd and neglected. That it is openly despis'd and villified by some, and neglected by others who would not wish to be thought opposers, is a fact which will hardly be disputed. The grounds of this opposition and neglect do not arise from any want of fullness or clearness in the evidences of the divine authority and inspiration of the scriptures, but either from the want of a careful and candid examination, or because the soul humbling doctrines of christianity are disrelis'd and its holy precepts disliked, or because a righteous and holy God, to punish the past misimprovement of his favours, sometimes gives up men to strong delusions to believe a lie. It is on this account that unbelief is criminal, and an unbelieving heart justly termed an evil heart. Although a proposition may be true in fact, yet, if we have no sufficient evidence of its truth, to suspend our belief is not criminal. But when unbelief arises, not from any want of evidence, but from a dislike to the truth, and a disposition to take pleasure in unrighteousness, it then becomes criminal. It is usually an easy thing to believe those things we wish to find true. But when men have no relish for the

truth, and their opposition arises principally from the depravity of the heart, the clearest evidence is many times found insufficient to convince. Unbelief is not then, in a moral view, that harmless indifferent thing which many wish to persuade themselves that it is. Whenever there is a disposition to do God's will, then the evidences of the truth of his word will be seen to be clear and convincing. *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God or whether I speak of myself.*

4. Is revelation a blessing of such inestimable value? what happy times will it be in the world when the knowledge of it shall become universal; when all the nations of the earth come to be fully enlightened by rays derived from the sun of righteousness, and the knowledge of the Lord fill the earth as the waters do the sea. That the knowledge of revelation is destined to become one day universal, is clear from revelation itself; and the council of the Lord will stand. The providence of God usually operates by general fixed laws. In bringing about great and important events, particularly in the moral world, it is common to use the instrumentality of men. Infinite wisdom took this method in the first propagation of the gospel, and probably, means of the same kind will be used to effect the universal spread of knowledge in the latter day. To accomplish a work so vast and important as the universal diffusion of the knowledge of revelation, probably considerable time will be necessary. But does it not appear as if the way was now preparing for that event? The missionary spirit, which has of late been so remarkably stirred up, both in Europe and America, and more especially the disposition manifested and the exertions used to spread the knowledge of the scriptures, both by a multiplication and more general dispersion of copies of the Bible in countries bearing the name of Christian, and by translating the sacred books into the languages of heathen nations, thereby preparing the way for their dispersion, is undoubtedly from God. He never would have excited such a spirit in the christian world, unless he had destined it to answer some great and important purpose. Whether the time is or is not nearly come, when the knowledge of revelation and

the gospel is to have this extensive spread, the way is undoubtedly preparing for that event. Although none of the present generation should be so happy as to see the accomplishment, yet any tokens of the near approach of an event so glorious should be received with joy. In the midst of the unusual and almost unheard of calamities of the present day, in the midst of the wreck of empires and destruction of nations, it is a matter of satisfaction to the pious mind, to see the Lord carrying on his own work and the borders of Zion extending.

5. Is the enjoyment of a revelation of God's will a privilege of such inestimable value? hence follows the indispensable obligation we are under to make a suitable improvement of such a distinguishing favour. This is all-important in many respects. Without such an improvement, the blessing itself would be converted into a curse; and there is scarcely a more tremendous curse in God's book than this—*I will curse their blessings*. In addition to arguments and motives already urged, permit me to observe, that the practice of improving the scriptures by a diligent search is commanded. The words of our blessed Lord, prefixed to this discourse, carry in them the nature of a command; and *let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom* is Paul's direction to the Colossians. The practice of searching and improving the scriptures is also commended. It is said in commendation of Timothy, that he knew the scriptures from a child; and the Bereans are commended for searching the scriptures daily. We have also the examples of holy men, who esteemed God's statutes above gold. But as I shall take the liberty of enlarging a little more on this remark than I have done on those which have preceded it, I shall, with a view more particularly to urge its importance, address a few observations to different classes of hearers and readers. In this attempt, I shall not merely distinguish them into the two great classes of saints and sinners—real Christians, on the one hand, and open despisers, such as do not so much as name the name of Christ unless it be to blaspheme it, together with those who have little more of christianity than the name, on the other. These classes undoubtedly in-

clude all ; but mankind are commonly in the habit of putting such general addresses away from themselves. Few or none apply them. There are, however, various subordinate classes which come under one or other of these general classes mentioned. I shall, therefore, at the close of this work, take the liberty of addressing a few observations—

I. To those who have entertained or do still entertain some doubts about the authenticity and inspiration of the scriptures.

II. To Christians, or such as believe the Bible.

III. To a young and rising generation.

IV. To heads of families.

I shall endeavour to urge some considerations, upon persons of each of these classes, tending to show the importance of making a right use and improvement of revelation.

I. I shall endeavour to address a few serious considerations to those who may entertain some doubts about the authenticity of the scriptures. I do not here address myself to avowed unbelievers. I know not that there are any such among my hearers. I hope there are none. Nor do I know that any persons of that description will take the trouble to peruse these pages. Should there be any who might think it worth while to indulge them with a reading, and remain unconvinced by the arguments and reasonings in the preceding discourses, it is not probable that they would receive conviction from a particular closing address. But there are many in the christian world who do not go so far as openly to avow the principles of infidelity, who are, still, very far from being settled in their belief of the sacred scriptures, or of the principles of christianity. Their faith in the christian system is clouded with so much doubt and uncertainty that it has but a small degree of the influence which a thorough conviction would have on their minds. Peradventure all religion is a fable, why should I therefore perplex and disturb myself about it? is a suggestion which but too naturally presents itself to the minds of many, at a time when nearly their whole attention is absorbed in either the business or amusements of

life. Religion is a subject about which mankind have been in all ages divided, and it is one on which, says the doubter, I feel incompetent to decide. The consideration of it, at least a decision, may, without any hazard, be, for the present at least, suspended. These are the reasonings of many, and it is probable there may be some of this class both among my hearers and readers. To persons of this description, I shall take the liberty to address the following queries.

1. You probably will not allow that your doubts have arisen altogether from the want of examination. But have you examined the evidences of the authenticity of the scriptures with all that accuracy, impartiality and candor, which the importance of the subject demands? Or have you not rather merely listened to doubts and suggestions against the Bible, without taking any rational method to have them removed? Such an examination is certainly an indispensable duty, before a decision is made against the Bible. This is required both by the importance of the subject itself and the deep interest we have in it. This is not one of the subjects on which it is either safe or prudent to remain undecided, and a decision ought to be made at this moment, with all that solemnity with which we would make it on a dying bed. But so long as doubts are entertained which have arisen either merely from the suggestion of others, or from our own reflections, and we have not as strictly attended to the evidences of revelation which arise either from its intrinsic excellence, or from external proofs, as we have to objections and cavils raised against it, we may be certain that we have not given to the subject all that impartial examination which its importance demands. In how different a point of light will it be viewed in the serious and solemn hour of death?

2. Has not inclination rather than conviction been the principal source from which our doubts have arisen? The restraints of religious belief are, many times, disagreeable to the carnal heart; to the man who either feels a strong propensity to vice, or is impelled by the impetuosity of his passions. Men wish for the uncontrolled indulgence of their desires and inclinations, and would be glad to break

through every barrier calculated to impose restraint. It is, therefore, a subject which ought to engage your most serious attention, whether your doubts do not arise, rather from a wish that the principles of religion (so far as they hold up to view man as accountable to his creator for all his conduct, or that he must appear before the judgement seat of Christ to give an account of the deeds done in the body) may be found not to be true, than from a conviction that its evidences are not sufficiently clear. When a person, not merely indulges a transient wish of this kind, but this is the prevailing bias of his mind, he is not in a situation to decide impartially on the subject. By asking and answering to yourselves a plain question or two, it may be easily determined whether it is inclination or conviction which is the source of your doubts. Are you not rather pleased than otherwise when you meet with an objection against revelation, which, to your mind, appears plausible, or when you can raise an objection against revelation to a professed believer in christianity, which he is unable to answer? In your examination of the scriptures are you not rather in pursuit of objections which tend to invalidate their authority, than influenced by a desire to discover their importance, excellence, and use? These questions will, if answered in the affirmative, afford at least very strong presumptive evidence, that inclination has a much greater share in your doubts than conviction. It is easy to persuade ourselves of the truth of any proposition which inclination prompts us to embrace. But it may be you had scarcely ever bestowed a serious thought, on an enquiry whether the Bible was true or false, before you began to entertain your doubts. Persons of this description are proper subjects for infidels to assail with their objections, with the fairest prospect of success. When the first serious reflection upon the authenticity of the Bible is occasioned by listening to objections tending to invalidate its authority, the person assailed, while in this situation, is in peculiar danger of being confounded at least, if not seduced. Having never previously attended to the subject, old objections long ago answered, and arguments many times confuted, but now again artfully dressed up and pre-

presented to view in a pleasing form, will have the same effect as if they were new. It has long been one of the disingenuous artifices of infidels to repeat old objections, and arguments often answered and confuted, with an air of triumph as if they were unanswerable, without taking any notice of the replies which have been made to them. These artifices have been often found sufficient to entrap the unwary, especially where inclination in some measure favours the deception. If, however, after all these arts, and notwithstanding this prevailing bias of the inclination, the objections against revelation have no more effect upon your minds than merely to create a doubt, a mere suggestion, something like a *may be* that the Bible is nothing but a fable, this of itself affords strong presumptive proof that the preponderance of evidence is on the other side.

3. Has or has not the authority of names, men conspicuous for their rank in society, and eminent for their literary attainments, who have not barely doubted, but actually disbelieved, had some influence in either suggesting or strengthening your doubts? An attempt to impose the authority of names, in opposition to the clearest evidences of divine truth, is an invention of no modern date. It was an argument urged against our blessed Lord, with a view to invalidate his claim to the character of the promised Messiah. *Have any of the Rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed.* Modern infidels have, with more assurance than modesty, of late arrogated to themselves, without a blush, nearly all the wisdom and learning in the world, while Christians have been represented as composed only of the ignorant, illiterate, superstitious vulgar, fit to be kept in awe only by religious terror. And, as if all this was insufficient to answer their purpose, it has been one of their disingenuous artifices to press names of persons, who, through life, were firm believers in christianity, into their service, as patronizing infidelity. This has been usually done after the person so slandered, was, by death, rendered unable to refute the calumny. But, if learned and wise men were more generally on the side of irreligion than we find them, this would, by no means, tend to invalidate the evidences.

of revelation, because it might be considered as no more than an accomplishment of the words of inspiration. *Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound things which are mighty.* It was a peculiar characteristic of our Saviour's ministry that he came to preach the gospel to the poor. If, therefore, the principal part of those who either do now or have heretofore composed the christian church, has been made up of persons from the humble and middle walks of life, this is no objection against the Bible. It ought to be remembered that, in the view of him who gave himself a ransom for sin, the soul of the beggar on the dunghill is equally precious with either that of the prince on the throne, the renowned philosopher or the able statesman; and the former will not, ordinarily, have so much pride of opinion as the latter, or be possessed of so much of that kind of selfsufficiency which is an obstacle in the way of embracing the self-denying doctrines of the cross. But although the greatest number of believers have been usually composed of persons from the humbler walks of life, yet, in many instances, wise men, philosophers, statesmen, and even kings and princes have not been ashamed to own a crucified Saviour. Even in this respect infidelity can gain nothing by comparison. If they can boast of a Voltaire, a Hume, a Bolingbroke, a Rousseau and others; a Newton, a Locke, a Littleton, a Boyle, a West, a Jones, and an host of others, equally famed for learning and deep research, have had the clearest conviction of the truth of christianity, and have died in the faith. Names however are not the test.

4. What can you expect to gain by the rejection of christianity, and what can be substituted in its place which can, in any degree, repay its loss? Infidels have endeavoured to strip us of the religion of the Bible without substituting any thing in its place. It is true many fine things have been said about a certain undefined, unknowable something called the light and law of nature; about following nature and reason, and a great deal of unmeaning jargon of that sort. Modern infidels are however striving to

deprive us of this boasted natural religion, whatever it may be, and to leave us nothing but absolute atheism. Can any man suppose that such a prostration of principle, as is attempted by the enemies of religion, would be preferable to the beneficent influence of christianity? What advantage could it be either to the public or to individuals? Would it tend to promote temperance, sobriety, and industry? Would it render magistrates more able, faithful and upright, or citizens more orderly and peaceable? Would it sweeten the social bonds by making husbands more tender and wives more constant, kind and affectionate? Would it make better parents or more dutiful children, more constant friends, or more kind obliging neighbors? Would it render man more benevolent to man, or more disposed to supply the wants, or alleviate the distresses of a fellow creature? Or would it tend to promote either individual or social happiness in any respect? No such effect is to be expected. It is true that, as it respects the amelioration of civil society, infidels have promised much. As an inducement to swallow their pernicious principles, we have been told that if superstition, the name they choose to bestow upon christianity, was only discarded, this world would be turned into a terrestrial paradise; wars would be forever banished from the earth, and all nations would be united as a band of brothers. The experiment has been made, but has it verified any one of these dreams? The world, at least the European world, has been turned into an Aceldama or field of blood, or rather into an immense slaughter house, in which some of the infidel chiefs have acted as the principal butchers. Is any better fruit ever to be expected from such a bitter root? Scarcely any one will venture to answer in the affirmative. On account of the corruptions of men, and the limited influence which the principles of the gospel have had upon the human mind, christianity has not, as yet, had all that effect in banishing feuds and contentions from the world which the benevolence of the system is calculated to produce. It has, however, had some. Let us compare the situation of those nations over which christianity has had but an imperfect influence, with that of others who are destitute of

the light of revelation, and we are struck with the difference between them, whether we make the comparison with respect to their civil and social enjoyments, to the arts and sciences, or to the general diffusion of public and private happiness. Do we, can we wish for the exchange? Should all the nations of the earth unite in renouncing the christian religion, they have nothing to gain. Nations are composed of individuals: The frequent repetition of individual renunciations of christianity will lead to such as are national. What advantage will it be either to the nation or individual, and what have infidels to propose in exchange? Should we be again referred back to the religion of nature, to that sense of right and wrong impressed upon the minds of men by the beneficent creator, the world has had abundant experience how feeble that bond is without the aid of christianity, as has already been made appear. Besides, we are already in the possession of this religion of nature, with the principles of revelation superadded. These natural impressions, whatever they are, are not obliterated, but invigorated by christianity. But what is this religion of nature of which we hear so much? Some infidels have held to a future state; but that doctrine, being found to be unfavourable to a life of licentiousness, has been pretty generally discarded; and to follow nature, in the modern acceptation of the term, is, for a man to resign himself up to the uncontrouled dominion of his passions, under the impression that death is an eternal sleep; thus depriving the Christian of his best hope, and substituting nothing in its place but the dreary, uncomfortable prospect of annihilation. Some will perhaps still say, that, by renouncing christianity, we shall be, at least, relieved from the shackles of superstition; we shall be delivered from those uneasy sensations about a certain something after death, which is found to have such a powerful tendency to check our pursuits and interrupt our enjoyments. Miserable as this consolation is, you are by no means certain that it can be obtained. If you only doubt (and who has been able to demonstrate, even to his own satisfaction, that the scriptures are a fable and christianity a dream?) this very uncertainty may prove a powerful instrument of torment. Your doubts may all disappear, and a full conviction of the

truth of christianity may rush upon the mind, at a time, when that conviction can only fill the soul with the terrors, without administering the smallest portion of the comforts to be derived from religious belief. If there is a may be that the Bible is a fiction, there is also a may be that it is true. In the moments of cool reflection, when reason is uninfluenced by passion, particularly on the near approach of the serious, solemn hour of death, the latter *may be*, is usually found to preponderate. The evidences of christianity will probably then appear clear and full, and deprive you of all the comfort, gloomy and wretched as it is, to be derived from the cheerless prospect of annihilation. You have therefore nothing to gain by renouncing christianity.

5. What have you to hazard by dismissing your doubts, by ceasing to halt any longer between two opinions, and becoming Christians in earnest? Do you hazard the loss of any solid and substantial enjoyment, even in this life? Should christianity prove to be untrue, and death be found, in the end, to be an eternal sleep, may you not live as happy in this world, and, after death, sleep as sweetly as others who left the world with no other or better prospect? What satisfactory enjoyment can you expect, even in this life, as a fruit of the rejection of christianity, which may not be enjoyed with equal relish, in connexion with the performance of the duties and the enjoyment of the comforts of religion? So far from suffering any diminution, your present earthly comforts would probable be increased by becoming Christians in earnest. Do you then suppose that you will run any risk by becoming Christians, and admitting the full force of the evidences in favour of the Bible, or that you will be in any danger of repenting such a choice when you come to die? Can you recollect a single instance of one who repented upon a death bed, that he had been a Christian? That solemn hour, which is rapidly hastening on, is a season when eternal things will be contemplated in their true light, unsophisticated by the deceitful mirror through which they are now viewed. Although such a prospect never induced a single individual to repent that he had been a Christian, yet thousands, in that serious and solemn hour, have bitterly bewailed their unbelief, probably some of them when it was too late. You do

not therefore run the risk of so much as being subjected to a late repentance by adhering to the gospel.

6. How solemn and awful is the risk, which you, on the other hand, run, by rejecting the religion of the Bible ! *Godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come.* That man has been but little conversant with human life, who has not become sensible that this world is a world of trouble. Our sufferings while in this world, if they do not, in the first instance, originate from, are greatly enhanced by the strength of our passions, and a spirit of insubordination to the allotments of providence. Christianity has a powerful tendency to calm the passions, reconcile mankind to the will of heaven, and fill their hearts with love and benevolence to one another. It ministers support under the pressure of public calamities, by holding up to view the superintending providence of God, as in such a manner controuling the course of events that all things are made to work together for good to those who love God. Christianity also administers support to the Christian under those private afflictions and calamities which are common to all, by leading him to consider them as fatherly chastisements which are meant for his good ; and that *our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, are working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* The greatest and most important difference, however, is in our future prospects. When the Psalmist compared the relative situations of the righteous and wicked in this life, he was, for a time, *envious at the foolish, when he saw the prosperity of the wicked.* But when he repaired to the sanctuary, and there beheld their dreadful end, his envy was cured and turned into pity. While a person is in health and prosperity, and able to put the evil day far away from him, he may possibly amuse himself with the thought that death is an eternal sleep, or with taking a leap in the dark. But when the solemn hour comes, in which the soul, thoroughly awakened to a sense of his present situation, and feeling the fullest conviction of its immortality, is about to leave the body, and wing its way, either into the regions of eternal darkness or eternal day, the prospect which infidelity presents to view is truly awful. The religion exhibited in the Bible, that

blessed book about the authenticity of which you entertain doubts, and it may be despise its contents, when felt in the power of it, brings life and immortality to light, disarms death of its sting, and opens up a glorious prospect beyond the grave. The risk however does not end here. You must be sensible that the Bible lays the highest claim to authenticity, and ranks unbelief among those moral evils which subject to the severest punishment. Nothing less than death, eternal death, is the penalty threatened against those who disbelieve God's word. The Old Testament comes to you with the sanction of a *Thus saith the Lord—Thus hath the Lord spoken—Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the holy place.* Believing is also in the New Testament enjoined on our peril. *He that believeth shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. If ye believe not that I am he ye shall die in your sins. But if our gospel is hid it is hid to them that are lost. In whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not. The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty Angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.* These are, it must be acknowledged, high pretensions, and if you do no more than doubt you certainly know not but they may be all well founded. The subject is of the last importance, and certainly not one of those in relation to which it is either prudent or safe to halt between two opinions. The evidence must be sufficiently clear either on the one side or the other. Whatever complaints we may be disposed to make now, for the want of evidence, the period is fast approaching when every mouth must be stopped. Then it will appear in the clearest light, that doubts have been occasioned, not by any deficiency of evidence, but by a wilful shutting of our eyes against the truth. It is now time to come to a decision, and it is not a cold unanimated assent which the gospel demands. As it is a duty to confess with the mouth the Lord Jesus Christ, it is equally important to believe with

the heart that God raised him from the dead. While therefore you have the light, walk in the light, that ye may be the children of the light. But it is time to proceed,

II. To address a few observations to Christians, or to such as believe the Bible to be a revelation from God. This part of the contemplated general exhortation I shall endeavour to comprize in a few words. When I address myself to Christians, I mean to take the term in its most extensive sense. I do not mean to be understood as limiting it either to those who are practical and experimental Christians, or to those who have evidenced the visibility of their christianity, by connecting themselves, in a special covenant, in full communion with some regular organized church. There are, without doubt, many practical and experimental Christians in the world, who, either for one cause or another, have never joined in visible communion with any church, and happy would it be for every organized church, if all their members exhibited evidence in their lives and conversations, that they possessed the spirit and temper of real Christians. But to believe that all visible professors are real Christians, would be a great extension of charity indeed, and would be, in many instances, to believe without evidence. I mean in this address, to consider all who are not infidels, or all who profess to believe the Bible to be the word of God, whatever may be the particular articles of their creed, to whatever denomination of professing Christians they may attach themselves, and whatever may be the effect which their religious belief has either upon their hearts or lives, as Christians in a large sense. Infinite mischief has, I believe, been, many times, done to the souls of men, by imbibing the impressio upon their minds, that because they did not make a special profession of religion, and were not what has been usually denominated church members, they were, therefore, neither under any particular obligations to live like Christians, nor bound by any peculiar ties to the discharge of christian obligations. This is, without doubt, a very dangerous mistake; one which tends to stifle conviction, and harden people in vice and error. There is only one particular set of rules or commands for the children of men, and these are equally binding upon all; there is but one description of

duties, and these all ought to perform ; and one and the same christian temper which every one ought to possess ; and one judgment seat of Christ before which we must all appear to give an account of the deeds done in the body. The Bible does not say, if any visible professor of christianity, or member of a particular church, love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be *Anathema Maranatha*, but if any man love not, &c. Wherever God, in the course of his providence, sees fit to send a revelation of his will, it carries with it a command to believe and receive it. Wherever the gospel comes it comes with authority enjoining us to embrace it. Those, therefore, who profess to believe that the Bible is true, must admit, as a natural and necessary consequence of that belief, that its contents are of immediate personal concern to them in particular ; that all its doctrines, reproofs, instructions, corrections, commands, promises and threatenings, are addressed immediately to them, and that they are bound by the most indispensable obligations, both to profess religion and to adorn their profession by a gospel walk and conversation. In the great and solemn day of trial, therefore, the consideration that you make no special profession of christianity will not be admitted as an excuse for neglecting to discharge christian obligations. - Merely the circumstance that providence has placed you within the reach of the gospel call renders the obligation indispensable, and your professing to believe that the Bible is true is a virtual acknowledgment that you are bound by these obligations. Those who are Christians, in this large sense, will permit me to address to them the two or three considerations following, which are believed to have a natural relation to and connection with the subject of the preceding discourses.

1. Do not rest satisfied, merely in a wavering assent to the Bible, accompanied with doubt and uncertainty, but particularly weigh the evidences of christianity ; consider them in their proper force, and in their relation to each other. Make yourselves, in a special manner, acquainted with the internal evidence, i. e. with the intrinsic excellence of the scriptures themselves, with the seal of their author, which is stamped on almost every page. This is that species of evidence which is, probably, most within the reach of a large proportion of mankind ; of all who

have but little opportunity for laborious research. It is in its nature the most satisfactory, and it is to be acquired only by a serious, diligent, and frequent perusal of the sacred volume.

2. Let none satisfy themselves, merely with a general assent to the Bible as true, but consider it as a duty, equally indispensable, to believe and embrace the particular truths which it contains. This is an observation which has been heretofore brought into view, but such is its importance that it deserves to be again considered. Many think that they are sufficiently explicit in the profession of their belief in revelation if they merely acknowledge that the Bible is true in gross, although they neither take any particular pains to make themselves acquainted with its contents, nor enquire whether they do or do not assent to its leading doctrines. This modern fashionable assent to the Bible as true, is but a cold, heartless, unoperative assent at best. Some, and probably their number is not small, do not hesitate to profess such a general assent as this, who deny nearly all the distinguishing doctrines of revelation. Others will profess the same belief who consider all the most important Bible truths as mere matters of indifference; disputed points which are of no consequence, either one way or another. What is this more than a mere hollow profession of assenting to the Bible in gross, while we deny it in detail. Propose to such believers the Bible itself and they will readily profess their belief of the whole. But propose any specific proposition, although one of the most important, and as clearly revealed as any in the Bible, and it will not be strange if some such epithet as *false, irrational, absurd, doubtful, unintelligible* or of *little or no importance*, should be bestowed upon it. I however know of no way in which we can manifest a real assent to the Bible, only by believing and receiving as true the particular propositions of truth which it contains. What would we say to a testimony of this sort, given to the character of a man of veracity, which should pass the highest encomiums on his character generally as a man of the strictest veracity and honour, but should, at the same time, treat every thing he might relate on his own responsibility as either *false, uncertain, frivolous*, or as a *matter of no consequence*? Whatever pretended deference we might pay to

his character for veracity, this would be to treat him as a person whose word was entirely undeserving of credit. Yet, in this way, many do not hesitate to treat the sacred scriptures, notwithstanding all their pretensions of regard to them as the word of that God who cannot lie. Such a compliment paid to revelation is only, Judas like, to betray the son of man with a kiss. If, therefore, we profess a belief of the christian system in general, let us believe the peculiar doctrines of that system. A general belief in a system, to be sincere, can only be formed from a belief of the several particulars of which that general system is composed. If we can be believers in revelation, and disbelieve Christ's divinity, atonement, &c. may we not be equally believers without admitting, as an incontestible truth, that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah, or acknowledging the unity of the divine essence? These are all equally the doctrines of revelation. If a part is to be considered as either false or indifferent, where are we to stop? May we not, on this principle, be believers and disbelieve the Bible itself; and thus all distinction between christianity and infidelity be destroyed? But the doctrines of the Bible are not represented as such matters of indifference in the Bible itself. Christians, particularly christian ministers, are directed to *Hold fast the faithful word as they have been taught; that they may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers, and to speak the things which become sound doctrine.* Paul accordingly directs Timothy saying, *The things which thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.* We are also cautioned against *divers and strange doctrines; giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men; being carried about with every wind of doctrine by the slight of men, and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive; and we are warned against men who privily bring in damnable heresies, denying the Lord who bought them.* Are we to suppose that these doctrines cautioned against consisted in merely denying the very words of scripture? I believe not. These cautions had not respect to a mere denial of the words, but to a departure from the doctrines of scripture. Here let it be observed that when once a defection of the doctrines

of the Bible is begun, a descent to infidelity itself becomes easy. A person imbibes a particular set of opinions, not from scripture but in some of the ways mentioned, and goes to the Bible in search of something plausible to prove them. This is, in the first instance, found difficult. But in order to effect it, first one scripture and then another is made to bend to their theory, and the Bible must speak no language but what is agreeable to those previous conceptions of things which they deem rational. Even this liberty has, in many instances, been found to be insufficient, and the scriptures are, in the next place, stript of their inspiration and represented merely as a complement made by honest, well meaning, but fallible men, who were subject to mistakes as well as others. To this length do many go who still wish to retain the name of Christians. Some of the principal and most popular Socinian or Unitarian writers go thus far, and pretend to have discovered a number of mistakes, both with regard to doctrines and facts, and much false and inconclusive reasoning, in the sacred oracles. And to this length it is necessary to go, before a person can believe that Jesus Christ was no more than a mere man, the offspring of Joseph and Mary, a sentiment which has many abettors at the present day. From this step the descent to infidelity is easy and indeed very small. It is not to be wondered if Christians of this stamp should express much greater charity for infidels than for those whose aim it is to confine their religious belief, strictly to the doctrines of the Bible, and whose wish it is to explain and understand them in their true meaning. There is a much greater resemblance between them. Infidelity dressed up in the garb of all the crude and vulgar blasphemies of Thomas Paine is now got a little out of countenance. But to keep its ground, and to render it more palatable to many who would shrink from its naked features, as much as possible of its poison must be retained, covered over, and conveyed under the plausible name of rational christianity. But if we believe the Bible, let us assent to, and embrace the very doctrines which the Bible teaches. Let us submit our reason and judgment to the standard of revelation, and draw our religious system from the sacred records. If a proposition is acknowledged to be

clearly founded upon the Bible, let us not, before we receive it, take time to examine whether it is or is not agreeable to our reason. Reason is an excellent hand maid to religion. To explain and understand what God has revealed is its particular province, and in this it never can be too much exercised. But it never ought to be mistress, nor presume to judge of the propriety of what God has revealed. Instead therefore of lowering down revelation to the standard of our reason, let reason itself bow before what God reveals.

3. Let us consider it to be a matter of the utmost importance to be practical as well as speculative Christians. Bible christianity is a practical system. To be a Christian is to be holy both in heart and life. Nothing has a more powerful tendency to create and foster doubts in the minds of the unwary, or to confirm the doubting in the principles of infidelity, than to see men, who profess faith in Christ, living as if they disbelieved the gospel—living without God in the world. What an inconsistent character does it exhibit, nay what a palpable contradiction in terms is it to say, *a Christian drunkard—a Christian fornicator, adulterer, or profane curser and swearer—a Christian cheat, liar, and oppressor.* Many years ago I met with an observation, in the course of my reading, to the following effect, which I can now only relate from memory. It related to a conversation between a professed believer in christianity and an atheist. The former, in a conversation with the latter, observed, that seeing the evidences of a deity were so manifest in every thing around us, he wondered how he could believe and live as he did. Says the atheist, in reply, I rather wonder that you can believe and live as you do: If I believed that there is such a God, or such a heaven or hell, as you profess to believe in, I could by no means live as you do. By such inconsistencies between the faith and practice of professed believers in revelation, it frequently comes to pass that christianity is wounded in the house of its ostensible friends. Yet, are not such inconsistent practices too common among those who profess to believe the gospel? The experience of every day bears witness to the melancholly truth. However such persons may profess to believe christianity is true, they act as if they had

not barely reason to doubt of its truth, but as if they had found demonstration that it was false. It is an observation of the wisest of men that the way of transgressors is hard. The way of no other species of transgressors is equally hard with that of those who believe the gospel.

But we have still a personal concern with christianity which is more intimate and more interesting to us than merely that which relates to the honour of religion in the world. Those, and those only who possess the temper of the gospel, and practice the duties of christianity, will be found meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. *Without holiness no man shall see the Lord. It is not every one that saith unto Christ, Lord, Lord, who shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who doeth the will of his father who is in heaven. Know ye not (saith the Apostle) that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor extortioners, nor revilers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.* However common such practices may be in the christian world, it is no less true that for these doings cometh the wrath of God on the children of disobedience. That people have been distinguished by the favour of a revelation of God's will, will, in this case, aggravate guilt. *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, but here lies the emphasis, it is more especially against those who hold the truth in unrighteousness.* We ought therefore not to be, mere believers in revelation, but to improve the light which we enjoy, remembering that not the mere hearers of God's word, but the doers of his will are justified. Let us search the scriptures daily, that we may, in that way, be more fully impressed with the force of the evidences of their divine authority and inspiration, and that, by the motives to holy living, there set before us, we may be excited to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. Jesus Christ declares himself to be the light of the world. He is, in a peculiar manner, the light which shines in divine revelation, the glorious sun who illuminates every page. In this sacred volume he is held up to view, as the great Prophet to whom we are to listen. *As our king and lawgiver, whom we are under indispensible ob-*

bligations to obey. As our great propitiatory sacrifice, our law fulfiller, in whose merits we are to trust, and as our pattern whom we are to imitate. In these several respects we must view him if we would enjoy the comforts of religion. Let us therefore, in a particular manner, believe in him as our Prophet, trust in him as the Lord our righteousness, obey him as our king and lawgiver, and imitate him as our pattern, who hath, in all things, set us an example that we should follow his steps. In a particular manner, let us resemble him in his holiness and self denial. Let this mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus. Let your light so shine before men, that others, also, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven.

III. I proposed to urge the importance of making a right improvement of revelation, in a brief address to a young and rising generation. The youth of every country compose, in many respects, the most important part of society. They are the hope of the nation, the hope of the church, and the hope of their parents. As it is a season of great hopes, so it is a period in which people are exposed to peculiar temptations and dangers. As it is calculated to be the making, so there is danger that it may prove the undoing time. It is the most important season for fixing principles and habits, and for forming a character, ultimately extending, not merely to the transitory scenes of time, but to eternal duration. In youth the apprehension is quick and lively, and the imagination brilliant; but that solidity of judgment, more usually expected in riper years, is frequently wanting; there is a fondness for novelty; new opinions are frequently adopted with precipitation, and entertained with much positive assurance, which, in riper years, would be examined with deliberation and received with caution. The importance of youth, and the facility with which persons of that description are frequently caught in the snare, renders young persons a very peculiar object of the attention of infidels, especially where they are possessed of talents in any degree promising, and have been favoured with an education above the common level. It is but too common for persons, while in the heat of youthful blood, to feel uneasy under religious restraints—to view them as inimical to their present happiness, and to consider religion itself as a gloomy, melancholy thing, fit-

ted rather for the cloister, or for those who are so far dead to the things of this world as to be incapable of any other enjoyment, rather than for persons in their situation, or indeed for any who are under the necessity of mingling with the world. Although this sentiment proceeds from an entirely wrong view of the nature of religion, yet, in youth, it commonly originates, in the first instance, rather from a levity of disposition, and the warmth of the passions, than from a corruption of religious sentiment. Religion is still believed to be important in itself, and they shudder at the thoughts of proceeding great lengths in a course of profligacy. In this situation, infidelity comes in, and offers relief from any remaining uneasy qualms of conscience, occasioned by what is termed the remaining prejudices of a religious education, and gives free scope to the indulgence of the passions without restraint, by suggesting the atheistical maxim — *Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die.* Should it shew itself in all its deformity at first, to the mind unprepared for its reception, the object would many times be defeated. The attack is therefore usually made in a more successful manner, by sapping and undermining by degrees. Perhaps nothing more is done at first, than barely to suggest that there have been many men, eminent for their talents and deep research, who have disbelieved the Bible. The bare knowledge of this fact, taken in connexion with the plausibility of some of the objections against the Bible, has a tendency to weaken the force of religious belief, and to cause those indulgencies, for which inclination and the passions so powerfully plead, but which had before been considered as doubtful at least, if not absolutely criminal, to appear harmless. Perhaps the indulgence at first pleaded for, may be no more than something which, in the view of the world, is considered as harmless or very venial at least. But when the power of religious principle is once weakened, and the voice of conscience stifled, the circle of what is esteemed harmless indulgence will rapidly extend, so as, in time, to exclude, in a manner, all distinction between virtue and vice. At length the person is obliged to resort to infidelity as a refuge against the clamours of conscience, and by degrees, arrives at a pitch of dissoluteness, both in principle and practice, at the

thought of which he would have shuddered during the early stages of defection. No doubt but many promising youths are, in this way, driven on, step by step, to destruction.

I have here, my young friends, given you a brief but faithful picture of your danger. You stand on the brink of a precipice, to escape which needs your utmost vigilance and attention, aided by the care and protection of heaven. I still, however, address myself to youth with confidence, because persons of that age usually possess a degree of tenderness of conscience, which disposes them to hesitate before they go all the lengths of profligacy to which men generally arrive only by degrees, and because it is rare to find an instance of one who has enjoyed the privilege of any thing like a religious education, but will be struck with a degree of horror on the first presenting of a sentiment, tending to atheism, to the mind. This impression can only be worn off by time, and before it is entirely obliterated there is great hopes of a reformation. To contribute a mite towards guarding against the snares to which you may be exposed, permit me, before I close this address, to propose two or three queries. Religious restraints, many suppose, are inimical to present happiness. This is a temptation which frequently assails youth. Can you believe that, if this indulgence, for which inclination so powerfully pleads, could be enjoyed without restraint, it would make you happy? The experience of every day may teach us that such an expectation would be visionary. The round of pleasure and vanity, or of dissipation if you please, which is nicknamed pleasure, may cloy, but it cannot satisfy the mind. Even when conscience does not interpose, scenes of dissipation leave a vacuum, a void in the mind, which places the persons, who have been engaged in them, at a greater distance from real happiness than before. But when this vacuum is accompanied with that painful remorse of conscience, which is the frequent attendant on guilt, it cannot fail to give a practical illustration of the truth of that observation of the wise man, that *the way of transgressors is hard*.

Can you believe it even probable that you would be more happy if all religious impressions were obliterated? Few will answer this question directly in the affirmative. Why

then strive to obliterate them? Why listen to such suggestions as may provoke a righteous God to withdraw the influences of his spirit, and give you up to hardness of heart and a reprobate mind? What virtuous and honourable pursuit is there in life, in which you cannot engage with as fair a prospect of success, and enjoy as much satisfaction in the prosecution, in connexion with the discharge of every moral and christian duty, as you could expect if all religion was discarded? What advantage then is to be expected from irreligion, either in this or the coming world? Do you believe that the man who despises religion is more happy in this life than the Christian? If any harbour this idea, it must be because they mistake the nature of religion. Few, perhaps, will venture to make the direct assertion. Is the man, who is the slave to his own boisterous passions, or is hurried on by a variety of unsatisfied desires, who is either pining with envy, burning with the desire of revenge for a supposed affront, or the victim of chagrin and disappointment, who is either tormented with avarice or stung with remorse, more happy than he whose passions are calmed, and his desires brought into a subordination to the will of God; who receives the good things of this life with thankfulness, and who views his momentary trials as working for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

But whatever may be your opinion of the comparative advantages and disadvantages of religion and irreligion in this life, which is the situation you would prefer in the hour of death? Would you exchange the cheering and animating views of the Christian, who has life and immortality brought to light by the gospel, and who has a comfortable hope in death, for the infidel's cheerless, gloomy prospect of annihilation, or for his leap in the dark? No. Your minds would revolt with horror from such a choice. *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his*, is the wish of multitudes besides Balaam, who have no more of a desire to live the life of the righteous than he had. Whether we do or do not wish to live the life of the righteous, the vote would be almost unanimous to prefer his peaceful death. If you wish to be either useful in life or happy in death, it is of the utmost importance to

make a right improvement of the season of youth. Improve it as the best and most hopeful time, both for the treasuring up of knowledge and contracting and confirming virtuous habits. But above all, improve it as the most precious season for obtaining fixed principles in religion. God's word imparts the choicest rules, both for the obtaining of this end, and for acquiring the best maxims for the regulation of our conduct in life. The answer to the question proposed by the Psalmist contains a maxim of eternal truth—*Wherewithall shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word.* Permit me to mention a few other passages of holy writ, peculiarly calculated to convey instruction to youth. *The fear of the lord is the beginning of wisdom. I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me. Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding. For I give you good doctrine; forsake ye not my law. Get wisdom, get understanding, forget it not, neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee; love her and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom, and with all thy gettings get understanding. Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge. My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways. Buy the truth and sell it not, also wisdom and instruction and understanding. Remember now thy creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say I have no pleasure in them.* I shall not farther multiply passages. To be acquainted with these and many others with which the sacred oracles abound, be familiar with your Bibles as the best of books. Improve youth as the best season to get knowledge; but with all your knowledge, mingle the knowledge of the scriptures. Search them daily, as an inexhaustible source of knowledge, as well as a rule of duty.

Before I close this address, I shall add the following caution. Be careful not to be ridiculed out of your religious impressions, or religious belief; particularly out of your belief of the scriptures. This is one of the favourite weapons which infidels have wielded against religion. Persons they have managed it with more success than any oth-

er. When baffled in the field of fair argument, this weapon is always ready, and it is one of their favourite maxims that ridicule is the test of truth. Youth are in peculiar danger of being seduced by this weapon. But it is not difficult so to disguise almost any thing as to make it appear ridiculous. Attack the infidel with this his favourite weapon and how would he appear? Ridicule is so far from being the test of truth, that nothing can give clearer evidence of a bad cause, than the resorting to such an unfair weapon. We do not suffer ourselves to be driven, by ridicule, from an undertaking in which we promise ourselves great temporal advantage. How dangerous it is, therefore, to suffer ourselves to be bantered, perhaps not only out of our principles but our souls, and hurried headlong into ruin? Search the scriptures that you may more clearly apprehend the evidences of their divine original, and to cultivate a taste for their excellency. Compare them and the prospects they hold out, with those offered by infidelity, and let wisdom decide. Search them with a view to form the heart and regulate the practice, and not merely in order to obtain speculative knowledge. Bear it in mind that true faith is an act of the heart as well as of the understanding. Be real Christians as the best mean to remove all doubts about the truth of religion. *He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.* Thus you may enjoy the best portion here, even God himself, and be meetened for the participation of eternal felicity hereafter.

A few observations, addressed to those who are heads of families, will close this discourse. And here you will permit me again to urge the importance of making a right improvement of that inestimable privilege which we enjoy, in the possession of a revelation of God's will. Providence has assigned a most important station to heads of families. They are not merely bound to be careful about their personal religion. A great trust also devolves upon them in relation to posterity. They are in a great measure accountable for the morals of the rising generation, to which we who are fast advancing into the decline of life, must soon give place. *Your fathers where are they, and the Prophets do they live forever.* We have taken the place of our fathers who are gone, and must soon give place to our

children. I shall take it for granted that I am addressing heads of families who believe in revelation, at least who do not profess to disbelieve it. If you, therefore, believe the Bible to be true, you must certainly admit that it is important, and that the duties it enjoins are the immediate concern of every individual. Among other duties, those which are enjoined upon heads of families, to a rising generation, are most weighty and solemn. *And these words which I command thee, this day, shall be in thine heart. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children. I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from our children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord. For I know him (viz. Abraham) that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord.* It was also pious Joshua's resolution. *As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.* If the duty is so plainly and abundantly taught in scripture, how aggravated must be the guilt of those parents who, not barely neglect to instill the principles of religion and virtue into the minds of their children, but, both by precept and example, inculcate those that are evil. But I am not now to make an address upon the importance of religious instruction in general. I shall merely make two or three observations on the cultivation of an acquaintance with the scripture, as one of the most important means of counteracting the baneful effects of a spirit of infidelity. It is not only your duty to search the scriptures daily, for the purpose of constantly adding to your own stock of Bible knowledge. You are under indispensable obligations to cultivate an acquaintance with them in your domestic circle, by putting Bibles into the hands of children and others under your particular care, and exciting them, both by example, exhortation, and the proper use of parental authority, to cultivate an acquaintance with them. I believe it is a fact, and it cannot be considered as a subject of too much regret, that while almost every other kind of knowledge is advancing, there is, in many places, a sensible decay of Bible knowledge, because that sacred book is not so attentively perused as formerly. No doubt we may, in part, discover the causes of this in families. You will permit me to mention two or three things, which have, I appre-

hend, contributed either in a greater or less degree, to this declension.

1. I shall mention the too general neglect of reading the Bible, as a part of religious service in families. Where the worship of God is regularly maintained, and the scriptures read in families, it has a tendency, although it may be almost imperceptibly, to cultivate an acquaintance with the scriptures in those families, by tending to encourage the younger branches to read for themselves, and making at least some impression upon their minds that the Bible is a sacred book. Where this religious service is neglected, it is but too common that the Bible is, in a great measure, forgotten in the family. When heads of families neither inculcate the reading of the Bible by example or parental authority, but on the other hand, suffer them to lie neglected, not only from day to day, but from year to year, it cannot be thought strange if Bible knowledge should decay; and if a rising generation should grow up in a situation liable to be ensnared by infidel sophisms; and even, if many should be taught to ridicule that revelation in mature age, to the neglect of which they have been trained up when young. The time has been, particularly in New England, when it was rare to find a family in which the worship of God was habitually neglected. But, alas! *How is the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed.* In many places it is now almost as rare to find a praying family, as it was to find one where the worship of God was neglected, in the days of our forefathers. The consequences are such as might be expected. Religion, in these places languishes, Bible knowledge decays, and people become suitable subjects either to be caught in the snares of infidelity, or entangled in the mazes of error.

Permit me to mention another subject, of which I speak with greater diffidence, yet under the fullest conviction that it has contributed to the decay of Bible knowledge. I mean the general exclusion of the Bible from our public schools. Perhaps school reading was formerly too much confined to the Bible. But do we not err as much, and even more, by excluding the scriptures altogether. Much has been said about the impropriety of using the Bible as a school book, and altho there can be no doubt that the exclusion has been advocated by men leavened with deist

cal notions, with a view to keep the Bible out of sight, and prepare the minds of the rising generation for embracing infidel principles, yet many have, without doubt, been strenuous for this exclusion, who have been influenced by motives very different from an impression that they were thereby contributing to the decrease of Bible knowledge. Many plausible arguments have been urged. It has been said that, on account of the peculiar style of the sacred scriptures, which is so different from that of books of human composition, it is not suitable for a school book, as it has a tendency to make children bad readers of other books. This is not all. A more plausible argument is still urged. It is said to have a tendency to lessen the reverence due to the holy scriptures in the minds of children, on account of the irreverent manner in which they usually read them, and, many times, to create sentiments of disgust against them ever afterwards. Children, it is said, are tasked in the Bible, and sometimes corrected for not performing their tasks, and this has frequently contributed to render the Bible a disagreeable book ever afterwards. Some of these reasonings appear, at first view, plausible, and although artfully urged by many, with a design unfriendly to revelation, they have been urged by others, who are friendly to the sacred volume, with the best intentions. I once considered this reasoning as plausible, and so far adopted the sentiment as to be willing that the experiment should be made. It has been made, and the Bible has been in a manner excluded from our public schools. In its stead we have a great variety of school books, some of greater and some of less merit, many of them useful in their places, and to read the Bible has been no longer considered as any part of school education. If the experiment has had the same effect upon the minds of others that it has had upon mine, they must be undoubtedly convinced of a mistake. It was formerly a complaint that, by confining school reading to the Bible, a book written in a style so very different from that of other books, children were rendered incapable of reading other authors with propriety. But has there not been of late as much or more reason for complaint that, notwithstanding the great improvement in the various branches of education, many children, after being taught to read all our common school books, are, because unac-

accustomed to the scriptures, incapable of reading a chapter in the Bible with propriety. I think also, that experience has sufficiently taught us that this exclusion of the scriptures from public schools has contributed to the decrease of Bible knowledge, and so far from promoting, or increasing a reverence for that sacred book, the effect has been directly the reverse. Plain fact and experience has taught us that this argument is fallacious. Even the argument itself, when carried to the length that it will naturally go, will, partially at least, if not entirely, justify both the reasonings and practice of that church, which from a pretended veneration for the holy scriptures, and lest the unlearned and ignorant should make an improper use of them, by interpreting them in a sense different from the decisions of the mother church, prohibit the common people from perusing them. In both cases I think experience has taught us that the theory is founded in error. Divert a child, when he is young, from reading the scriptures, or from forming any acquaintance with the Bible, and as he advances in life, the neglect becomes habitual. Neglect begets ignorance, and ignorance disgust, and the child grows up without having his mind stored with religious knowledge, and with his ears open to suggestions against the scriptures, while he is unfurnished with any weapon to repel the insinuation. And the parent will be but poorly furnished with arguments to urge the necessity of an attention to the Bible upon a grown youth, after having diverted him from it in childhood. But, on the other hand, *Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.* Reading the Bible at school has a tendency to render the scriptures familiar, and I believe that the person, so brought up in his childhood, will be much more apt to peruse them afterwards with both delight and profit, than one who has passed through the early stages of life without commencing such an acquaintance. But where there is no family reading, no school reading, and no incitement to private reading, by either parental advice, authority, or example, how is this acquaintance to be obtained? I hope the time is not far distant when the Bible will resume its place in our public schools, not to the entire exclusion of the books now in use, many of which

are valuable in their places, but that these, valuable as some of them are, will not much longer exclude the holy scriptures. I cannot, therefore, but feel a degree of satisfaction that, in some schools, the Bible is becoming rather more a subject of attention than it was several years ago. Should we see the practice of reading the scriptures generally revived, in private families and in places of public education, it would be one favourable symptom of the hopeful increase of Bible knowledge.

Another thing which has contributed not a little to the decrease of Bible knowledge in some places is a mistaken notion, which many have entertained, of christian liberty. So great is the jealousy which has prevailed, lest freedom of choice, particularly in matters of religion, should be, in any degree, impaired, and lest persons should become the dupes of tradition, that it has been represented as improper to instill any particular religious sentiments into the minds of children or youth, but to leave them entirely to their own freedom of choice, after they become so far advanced in years, as to be capable of exercising their own judgments. This, instead of lifting up a standard against the enemy when he cometh in like a flood, is to destroy every barrier calculated to retard his approach, and to suffer him to proceed without molestation. This is precisely what infidels have long wished for: Hence the clamours which they have incessantly raised about tradition, and the prejudices of education. These clamours have not been without cause. Early education in the principles of religion, has, perhaps, opposed a more effectual barrier against the dissemination of their poison, than almost any other cause whatsoever. It is therefore not to be wondered at, if they wish to throw down this barrier. The human mind would then be left like an uncultivated garden, with the hedges broken down, and exposed to the ravages of every destroyer. The enemy might then sow his seed unmolested, and find nothing either to counteract its influence or check its growth. Or, if any good seed should be occasionally sown, it would be in danger of being choked with weeds, or trodden under foot by some rude invader. We do not act in this manner in things of infinitely less moment. If a child is destined either to any scientific profession, or

to any particular mechanical art, we deem it necessary for him to obtain a proper education, by undergoing a regular course of instruction. We do not expect our young men to become farmers, artizans, merchants, lawyers, physicians, critics in languages, or scholars in any of the various branches of the arts and sciences, without being, in some measure, brought up to the business. Is it therefore likely that they will become Christians, or that they will choose right in religion, without the use of any means to direct their choice, placed as they are in an ensnaring world, where every artifice is use to mislead and destroy.

Having briefly noticed some of the causes of the decay of Bible knowledge, causes which, at least, retard its advancement, heads of families, at least christian heads of families, will unite with me in opinion that something ought to be done to remedy the evil, and render Bible knowledge more general. This work belongs to many. Every head of a family may contribute something. If he cannot counteract the dissemination of corrupt principles, if he cannot remedy the religious defects of school education, he can at least countenance and promote the reading of the scriptures in his own family. He can set the example, he can put Bibles into the hands of his children, and teach them to read them, and, it may be, direct them to some of those portions of holy writ, which may be read with the greatest profit and advantage. Let no one, therefore, say that because his influence is so limited, he can do nothing, or that it is needless for him to make the attempt. If all should reason in this way, nothing will be done. On the other hand, if heads of families in general, were to realize the importance of the dissemination of Bible knowledge, much might be effected. If we are ever so happy as to see a general revival of religion, it must revive in private families, and no doubt much may be done by heads of families to promote an end so important.

But it is time to draw to a conclusion. These observations have already been protracted to a greater length than was originally intended. I cannot however dismiss the present subject without the indulgence of one consoling reflection. While the decay of vital piety as well as the too obvious decrease of Bible knowledge, afford occasion for regret, there are some hopeful symptoms of a revival, or e-

ven more, symptoms that a revival is actually begun. There are more enquiries after the Bible, and greater exertions made and making to disperse the scriptures through various nations, and in different languages, probably than there has been at any one time, for many centuries past. In proportion as the circulation of the Bible extends, it is probable that the knowledge of it will increase. It was a maxim among the ancient Romans never to despair of the commonwealth. Much more ought it to be a maxim with the Christian, never to despair of the interests of Zion. As long as the church is founded upon a rock, and the line and plummet is in the hands of our gospel Zerubbabel, the gates of hell shall never prevail against it. The man whose name is *The Branch*, even he shall build the temple of the Lord, and bear all the glory. Infidelity has had an hour of triumph. Its votaries, not many years ago, exulted in the prospect that the day was their own. But when the enemy cometh in like a flood, then is the time for the spirit of the Lord to lift up a standard against him. We have seen, in several parts of the christian world, extensive revivals of religion, whereby great additions have been made to the church, of such, many of them at least, as shall be saved. The borders of Christ's kingdom have been enlarged, the number both of professing and real Christians increased, and infidelity has, in many places, received such a check as to cause it to adopt a tone much less bold and assuming than a few years ago. May we not indulge the pleasing hope that the check which the monster has received is of such a nature that the time is not far distant when he, as ashamed, will forever hide his head? As it is our duty, so it will be our happiness to contribute, each one in his proper sphere, to so desirable an event. Let each one, therefore, in his own place, endeavour to contribute to the increase of Bible knowledge. Let us imitate the noble Bereans by searching the scriptures daily, that so the word of God may dwell in us richly, and that we may both have the satisfaction within ourselves, and give evidence to others, that we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we make known the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Happy period when the whole earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

