THE WORKS
OF THE HONOURABLE
ROBERT BOYLE.
In SIX VOLUMES.
To which is prefixed
The LIFE of the AUTHOR.
VOLUME THE SECOND.
A NEW EDITION.

LONDON:
Printed for W. JOHNSTON, S. CROWDER, T. PAYNE, G. KEARSLEY, J. ROBSON,
B. WHITE, T. BECKET and P. A. DE HONDT, T. DAVIES, T. CADELL,
ROBINSON and ROBERTS, RICHARDSON and RICHARDSON, J. KNOX,
W. WOODFALL, J. JOHNSON, and T. EVANS.
M DCC LXXII.
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M DCC LXXII.
SOME

CONSIDERATIONS

TOUCHING THE

STYLE of the HOLY SCRIPTURES.

EXTRACTED

From several Parts of a DISCOURSE,
Concerning divers Particulars belonging to the BIBLE;
Written divers Years since to a FRIEND.

TO THE

EARL of ORRERY,
One of the LORDS JUSTICES of the KINGDOM of IRELAND,
LORD PRESIDENT of the PROVINCE of MUNSTER, &c.

MY DEAREST BROTHER,

THAT sacred book, which furnishes our preachers both with their texts and a great part of their discourses on them, being the subject, about which I am to entertain you, I presume it will not much surprize you, if what I shall say, in representing to you some considerations on that book, relish more of a sermon than of a letter of compliment. And indeed it would so little become a person, that writes of my subject, and with my design, to startle at the very beginning such readers, as he desires to find or make devout, with any thing written in the wonted strain of epistles dedicatory; and the nature of the treatise, to which this paper is premised, does allow so little of that, whereof custom, on such occasions, is wont to challenge so much; that I should let this book come forth undedicated, were it not that the motives, that induced me to address it to you, are of such a nature, that I hope, that merely by a plain representation of them I may comply with what makes me look upon this dedication as a duty, without departing from the serious design I propounded to myself in the dedicated book. Although then such readers, as having perused your writings, shall cast their eyes on mine, will, I fear, think it a bold presumption in me to address discourses, concerning a style, to a person so much and so justly applauded for his; yet as several reasons engage me to present you these thoughts, so the fear of paffing for presumptuous for so doing obliges me to mention some of those reasons. Whereof the first shall be, that your kindnep for, and your resemblance in many particulars to, Theophilus, makes me often fancy, that I am yet entertaining...
The Epistle Dedicatory.

entertaining that rare person, when I write on the behalf of the scripture unto you. Who may also, I presume, remember (which is my second reason) that when, seven or eight years ago, I ventured to shew you divers of these papers, with others (that I yet suppress) belonging to the same treatise, you were pleased to give me such a permission, that in case they should ever be made publick, I might address what I had written at your friend's desire particularly to you, as I took for an engagement, if not a command. So that how unlike for ever the following treatise is to that best of books it would recommend; yet since you have thus made the present address a duty, I must elect rather to betray to you my weaknesses, than not manifest my obedience. And to these I must subjoin this third consideration, (more prevalent perhaps with me than both the former) that (as a homely digger may shew a man a rich mine) whatever the book may be that I present you, that which I recommend to you is a matchless one; and will, if so discerning a reader shall bring as much affluence as capacity to discover its prerogatives, appear so worthy of what I have said of it, that I allow my self a hope, the following considerations will prove so happy, as either to endear the scripture to you, or (by not appearing such as so good a subject would suggest to a good pen) invite you to substitute better in their rooms. And in either of these cases I shall not have cause to repent of having written them; since they will prove serviceable either to the book or to the man, to whom I most desire to be so. And this hope I must again own to be the chief inducement of my venturing to present a fragment of an unpolished treatise to a person, that is wont to write such as are so eloquent and accomplished in their kind. For though severe, and not incompetent, judges of compositions of this nature have been pleased to give these papers no disapproving character; yet since I present them to you, the chief thing I dare pretend to in them is only (as the singing rare songs is wont, by an unheeded indignation, to engage the posseffors of rare voices to make them admired) by disclosing my zeal and insufficiencies, to invite you to recite so excellent a theme as the scripture from so dull a pen as mine, by employing your happy one in its defence and celebration: or, (if your partiality should make you place any value on so unfinished a piece) to convince you how capable of rare thoughts my subject is, by its being able to furnish so barren a brain as mine with acceptable ones. And certainly, your pen having no less served your fame than either your sword, or your employments (how high soever;) it could not but bring the scripture more than a few of the most witty and illustrious vortaries, if that eloquence were employed to enamour them of that divine book, that hath made them so generally in love with your celebrated PartHENIFFA. I will not represent to you so pious an exercise of your rhetoric and mufe as a duty, for fear of lessening the disinterestedness of the employment I recommend to you, by implying, that you cannot decline it without a fault. I shall rather invite your pen to prefer itself to, and grace religious subjects, by assuring you, that as there are none more worthy of your pen, so there are few pens more likely to succeed upon some of them than yours. Those handsome effays your mufe hath charmed me with upon some parts of the bible have given me longings equally great and just, to see her, by a devotedness to such heavenly themes, as happy in the choice of her subjects, as she is wont to be in the embellishing of them: and to have her make that her chief employment, wherein it is best to do, what she doth always, succeed well. And as with burning-glasses though we cannot make the sun shine, yet when he doth vouchsafe us his heavenly beams, we can, with those glasses, both increase light and heat, and carry and settle them here and there as we see cause: so though with wit and parts, their posseffors could never have been able to engage God to send forth his light and his truth: yet now that revelation hath disclosed them, and now he hath been pleased to make them radiate in his heavenly
heavenly word, men may, with knowledge and eloquence, happily recollect those scattered divine beams, and uniting them in particular subjects, and kindling with them the topicks proper to warm and work on our affections, may powerfully illustrate truths, and enflame zeal. Towards the latter end of the enuing papers you will find something said to persuade our Theophilus, that the choicest poetical and rhetorical ornaments may, without injury to their lustre, be employed about such subjects as may be chosen in the scripture: but more and better things, to the same purpose, have since been said by our ingenious friend Mr. Cowley, who not only has employed much eloquence to persuade that truth in his preface to his poems, but has in one of them given a noble example, and consequently a proof of it. I need not tell you, I mean his Davideis, a work and way of writing, which, since your mufe has already thought fit to celebrate, I hope she will hereafter think fit to imitate. And this I wish the more earnestly, because it hath been observed, that secular persons of quality (of whom I have elsewhere occasion to name divers) are generally much sucessfuller in writing of religion, (to gentlemen especially) than scholasticks or men in orders; not only because their style and way of writing is observed to have in it some pleasing Je ne sais quoi, something of easy, genuine and handfome, that's peculiar to it, (differing from regular eloquence, as a good men doth from beauty) and reliishes of the native gracefulness wont to attend on what they do or say; but because their writings attract more readers by the authors conspicuousness, and make deeper impressions in them, by being supposed more disinterested, and looked upon, not as suggested by their profession or self-ends, but as the sincere dictates of their unbridled souls. For my part, though I am not so happy as to be much concerned in all the precedent considerations, yet those, that you will find, towards the end of the longest digression in the following discourse, have been so prevalent with me, that though some very fair and very perulative persons (whom perhaps I need not name to you) did, when I was writing the annexed treatise, labour to divert my pen to some more youthful and more fashionable compositions, by flattering me with a persuasion, that in those attempts of that nature I had formerly occasion to make, I was not altogether unlucky; yet I, that would bring my self to prefer to a whole wood of bays the leaf sprig of the tree of life, am inclined to think, that a Christian may possibly find a higher satisfaction in persuading men to pay praises to the scripture, than in receiving them from all the world besides; and would think it more desirable, (were the choice his) to discountenance prophane wit, than live unrivalled in the glory of it. And though, for my own particular, such a temper be, I fear, more my aim than my attainment; yet when I write of sacred subjects, I had rather a book of mine should resemble the moon, which, though the be but small, les elevated, and full of imperfections, lends yet a useful light to men, and produces here and there a motion that obeys a heavenly influence, than a star of the first magnitude, which though more high, more vail, and more flawless, shines only bright enough to make it self conspicuous. Pardon me therefore, my dearest brother, if my concern for religion and you have made me importunate in appearing so eagerly solicitous to fee your applauded pen sanctified by, and adorn the belt of subjects: to engage you to which, if the enuing discourse may but be so fortunate as in any degree, or upon any score, to contribute any thing, I shall either not eclips it a trifle, or not regret the having written it. For it is not always so delpicable a piece of service as may be imagined, to endear, by particular considerations, an excellent book, (and how much more that incomparable book the scripture?) to a person capable of discovering and making use of the rare things it contains. To which purpose I might offer you divers more serious instances, but shall only at present (a little to divert you) take this occasion to tell you, that Ben. Johnson, passionately com-
The Epistle Dedicatory.

plaining to a learned acquaintance of mine, that a man of the long robe, whom his wit had raised to great dignities and power, had refused to grant him some very valuable thing he had begged of him, concluded with saying, with an upbraiding tone and gesture to my friend; Why, the ungrateful wretch knows very well, that before he came to preferment, I was the man, that made him relish Horace.

But to return to the following book, though I hope you do not think me so vain as to doubt, that it is suffered to come abroad with imperfection enough to need my excuses and your pardon; yet since the treatise itself is so unmeasurably prolix (for a part of an essay) it were unfit the address of it should be so too; and give your patience as great an exercise upon the score of its quantity, as upon that of its quality. And therefore, referring you for what I might say of apologetical to what I say to the reader, I shall only add, that though, in Epistles Dedicatory, custom hath made it a kind of rudeness not to expatiate in praises, and conclude with compliments; and though what you have acted, and what you have written, might supply a person less concerned than I with matter for a panegyrical address; yet since I told you, at the beginning of this letter, I should rather preach than compliment in it, and since praises fit to be ascribed to my Lord Orrery would be unfit to be ascribed him by his brother, and since alfo it were scarce more uneasy for me to make you any other than seeming complements, than it were presumptuous to address any at all to so great a matter in the art; I shall both decline praises, which not to seem flatteries, where you are not known, would perhaps be thought detractions where you are; and venture to conclude this letter, as I have begun and continued it, without compliment, upon the score of being without, if not above any.

My dearest Brother,

Your most Affectionate Brother,

and most Faithful Humble Servant,

ROBERT BOYLE.
To the READER.

The author having with the following discourse sent to the publisher a letter, which contains almost all the particulars that would be requisite to be taken notice of in a preface, it is thought fit to premise, instead of it, the letter itself, as it was addressed to Mr. P. P. A. G. F. I. (to favour whose modesty, he is not now more openly named).

SIR,

YOU will perhaps think it strange, that a person obsequious enough to those he loves should be able to hold out so long against the importunity of two such powerful solicitors, as my willingness to own a veneration for the scripture, and my unwillingness to deny you any thing. But if you will give me leave to acquaint you with the considerations, that have hitherto diffused me from the publication of the papers you press for, you will, I presume, rather marvel at my resolving at last to comply with your desires, than that I have been somewhat long contending, before I could take up so opposed a resolution. First then, the treatise, of which the papers you desire make a part, was written nine or ten years ago, when my green youth made me very unripe for a task of that nature; whose difficulty requires, as well as its worth deserves, that it should be handled by a person, in whom nature, education, and time have happily matched a senile maturity of judgment with a youthful vigour of fancy. Next, the discourse I have mentioned being written to a private friend, who put me upon that task, I not only had a theme of another's chooling imposed upon me, for which he was pleased to think me much more fit than I had reason to think myself; but was by the freedom allowable among friends tempted to vent and express my thoughts with more negligence, than were proper to be made use of in a solemn discourse intended for publick view. The contrary of which were yet very requisite for a person, who though he have, by I know not what unhappy fate, been cast upon the learning divers languages, has yet too great a concern for the knowledge of things to be a diligent or solicitous confiderer of words; and so was more fit to write almost of any thing, than of a style, or of matters rhetorical. Befides, that my Essay touching the Scripture having not been all written in one country, but partly in England, partly in another kingdom, and partly too on shipboard, it were strange, if in what I writ, there did not appear much of unevenness, and if it did not betray the unlearnedness, and relish of the unsettledness of the wandering author, who, by thus rambling, was reduced, for want of a library, to comply with the request of his friend, who was more defisious to receive from the author apples and pears growing in his own orchard, than oranges and lemons fetched from foreign parts: whereby I was condemned not to enrich my discourse with what I might have borrowed, of real and valuable, from the eloquent compositors of more happy pens. But these, Sir, are not all the deterrents, that opposed my obeying you; for besides these disadvantages, with which the discourse itself was written, that part of it you demand must appear with peculiar as well as great disadvantage: for in an intire and continued discourse, the several parts, that compose it, do mutually afford light and confirmation to each other. And therefore, though whatsoever I here present you, touching the style of the scripture, had been written altogether in some one place of the discourse, whereof it makes a part; yet I could not dismember it from the rest, without a great deal of injury, as well to it as to the rest of the treatise.

K k 2

But
To the Reader.

But this is not the worst of my case; for though I did, in one part of my essay of the scripture, more professedly apply myself to the consideration of its style; yet, because divers things were interwoven even in the distinct part, which were not so fit for public view; and because that in divers of the other parts of my essay I had here and there, frequently enough, occasion to say something of the same theme, I have been obliged, that I might obey you, not only to difmember, but to mangle the treatise you perused, cutting out with a pair of scissors here a whole side, there half, and in another place perhaps, a quarter of one; as I found, in the other parts of my discourse, longer or shorter passages, that appeared to relate to the style of the scripture, that I might give you at once all those parts of my essay, which seemed to concern that subject. And though I have, here and there, by dictating to an amanuensis, inserted some lines or words, to make the loose papers less incoherent, where I thought it easy to be done; yet in many others I have only prefixed a short black line to the incoherent passages, if I found they could not be connected with those, whereunto I have joined them, without such circumlocution, as either the narrowness of the paper would not permit, or my present distractions (which you know are not a few) and the weaknesses of my eyes, would not allow of. For to compleat my unfitness to obey you with any thing of accurateness, I must, to obey you at all, do it, both when I have other compositions in the press, and when the distemper in my eyes makes me so far from daring to transcribe the papers I send you, that I might alter them, according to the exigency of your design in them, that I durst not so much as read them over, but with another's eyes. To which I must add, that, besides all these disadvantages I have already mentioned, I cannot but foretell, that the following discourse may prove obnoxious to the censures of differing sort of readers, and particularly to those of courtiers, for too neglected, and those of critics, for too furtive a drefs. By all which, I presume, you will be easily induced to believe, with me, that I cannot expose the papers you desire so much to their disadvantage, and my own, without some exercise of self-denial; since, without needing much forethought, I may well apprehend, that I shall hereby hazard the loss of the most part of whatever little reputation, in this nature, any of my former moral or devout compositions may, among favourable readers, have procured me.

But, by this time, Sir, I suppose not only, that you have left wondering at my making some difficulty to put the annexed papers into your hands, but that I owe you, and my other friends, an account, why I now consent to a compliance with desires, which such powerful considerations would dissuade my assenting to.

My first inducement then to what I do, is the favourable character, that you and some other very competent judges have been pleased to give me of those papers; and especially your thereupon pressing their publication upon me as a duty, whereof I stand obliged, to those many readers, whom you would have me think likely to be benefited thereby. For in such cases, where knowing and sober persons think there is a great probability of a discourse's doing good, it is not impossible, but that an unwillingness to have it published may not proceed out of modesty, as from some secret pride, almost as unjustifiable, as if a physician should refuse to come abroad upon an urgent occasion, because he has not his best clothes on, or is not carefully dressed. And therefore, when I incline to make, with you, a case of conscience of the matter, I think myself obliged, whatever my private apprehensions may be of the success, to do my duty, and leave events to the wise and sovereign disposer of them. It is not, that I have the vanity to expect, that I should convert obstinate and resolved cavilers, nor much instruct the great clerks; but since I have not yet met with such a discourse, as I intended mine to be; and since the greater part of the things I have written in it will
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will not, perhaps, be elsewhere met with; I hope, that what I have said may not be useless to those, who have considered the subject, I treat of, less attentively than I have done, and may, if not procure a veneration for the scripture in those that are altogether indisposed to it, yet at least increase or confirm it in those, that have already entertained it; and furnish such devout persons with something to allege on the scripture's behalf, who are better furnished with affections than with arguments for it. And if the less scruple to allow myself a hope, because you have been pleased to make, not only to me, but to others, such a mention of the following papers, that after your preference of them to the other pieces of devotion, you have yet seen of mine (without excepting that discourse of Scrapbick Love, which yet has had the luck to be so favourably entertained by readers of all sorts) I shall confess to you, that as some of them do now appear very much dislocated and mangled, so others were penned with more care, than any other of my writings about matters theological. And indeed I conceived myself obliged, in point of gratitude as well as duty, to speak as advantageously as I could of the scripture; because, if I may without vanity make such an acknowledgement, I am sensible I have been benefited by it, and might have been much more so, if I had been as disposed to learn, as the matchless book is qualified to teach. And I confess to you also, that since the physiological writings I have been induced to publish of late, and the fort of studies, to which (for reasons to be told you at a fitter opportunity) I seem, at present, to be wholly addicted to, make many look upon me as a naturalist; and since some persons, as well philosophers as physicians, have either faultily, or at least indifferently, given many men occasion to think, that those, that being speculatively studious of nature's mysteries, depart, as I often do, from the vulgar peripatetic philosophy, and especially if they seem to favour that, which explicates the phenomena of nature by atoms, are inclined to atheism, or at least to an unconcernedness for any particular religion: Since, I say, these things are so, I was not unwilling to lay hold of this opportunity, to give a publick testimony, whereby such as do not know me may be satisfied, (for I presume, all that do know me, are so,) that, if I be a naturalist, it is possible to be so without being an atheist, or of kin to it; and that the study of the works of nature has not made me either disbelieve the author of them, or deny his providence, or so much as disesteem his word, which deserves our respect upon several accounts, and especially that of it being the grand instrument of conveying to us the truths and mysteries of the Christian religion; my embracing of which I know not why I should be ashamed to own, since I think I can, to a competent and unprepossessed judge, give a rational account of my so doing.

To all this, I might subjoin some apologists, which might perhaps serve to prevent, or withdraw, the censures of some sorts of readers.

For to critics and philologers I could represent, partly, that I have not a little impoverished my discourse, by making use of books, to shun the repetition of what I found obvious already; partly, that when I wrote the essay, of which the ensuing treatise is a piece, I had thoughts of annexing it to annotations, wherein I hoped to illustrate, and by particular instances to exemplify, divers of those things, which should appear to require it, or which else the readers might suspect I have slightly considered, because I seem to make but a transient mention of them; and partly, too, that I ignored not the stricter interpretations given by modern critics to divers texts by me alluded; but that (not having opportunity to criticize) I was content to use them in their received, or obvious sense; and have sometimes employed them but by way of allusion, or as arguments ad hominem (wherein some of my readers are like to acquiesce, though I do not) and sometimes rather used them to express, than
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than prove my thoughts. And, indeed, in these popular discourses, which are not written for, nor to be examined as regular disputations, men use not so much to look whether every thing be a strict truth, as whether it be proper to persuade, or impress the truths they would inculcate; and especially in composes of the nature of this of mine, men have been rarely censured for being sometimes even indulgent to the exigencies of their themes. Those, that require more of method than they will here find, may be advertised, that much of this scribble being designed to serve particular acquainances of mine, it was fit it should inflict on those points they were concerned in; and that (consequently) much of the seeming desultoriness of my method, and frequency of my rambling excursions, have been but intentional and charitable digressions out of my way, to bring some wandering friends into theirs, and may closely enough pursue my intentions, even when they seem most to deviate from my theme.

And as for the longer excursions, which either you, or other judicious friends, would needs have me leave here and there, I have, for the ease of my perusers, annexed to them some marks, whereby they may be taken notice of, to be digressions; that as I submit to their judgment, who think they may be useful to some readers, so I may comply with my own unwillingness to let them be troublesome to others; who by this means have an opportunity to pass by, if they please, such, as they shall not expect to find themselves, (either upon their own score, or that of their acquaintances) concerned in. To those of the wis, who happening to be disregarders of the scripture, may find themselves upon that account used here with any blush of flitting or asperity, I may add to what I have already said in the papers themselves, that it hath been, but as we pinch, and cast cold water on the faces of persons in a swoon, to bring them out of it to themselves again; I having done it with as harmless intentions, as those of the angel (mentioned in the Acts) when he struck Peter on the side, not to hurt him, but to awake him, lead him the way out of the prison he was bound in, and rescue from imminent death. And if that will not satisfy some of the least judicious, or the most desperate, (for others I expect to find better affected or more moderate) I am willing to leave the intelligent and pious to judge between us; assuring those, that are so much more jealous of their own honour than of God's, that as I writ to reclaim them, not to deprive them of the repute of wits, or share it with them, so I shall not overmuch deplore the being by them denied a title, to which I have as little pretension as right. And (to dispatch) I might add, that orators may not unjustly bear with some rudeness in the style of a person, that professest not rhetoric, and writes of a subject, that needs few of her ornaments, and rejects many as indecencies misbecoming its majesty: and that severer divines may safely pardon some smoothness in a discourse, written chiefly for gentlemen, who would scarce be fond of truth in every dress, by a gentleman, who feared it might misbecome a person of his youth and quality studiously to decline a fashionable style. And if any divine would confound me for intruding upon his profession, and handling my subject less skillfully than he would have done; I will not urge, that to write well on this subject is a task, which he that shall try, will perhaps find far less easy than one would imagine; but I shall rather tell him, that I hope I may obtain his pardon, by assuring him, that I shall be as little angry to be rectified in my mistakes, as to be shown the way when I am out of it, and as little troubled to have this discourse, that but skimmer, with laziness and prophaneness, surpassing by another on the same subject, as to see another embracer of the same quarrel come in with a fresh regiment, to affright me against a formidable enemy, in a conflict I were engaged in but with a troop, or bring cannon against a fortress I had but fakers to batter with. Yes, I shall be glad, if my dim short-lived match but serve to light another's
another's brighter torch; and shall think it a happiness to have contributed, though but thus occasionally, towards the elucidation, or splendour of the scripture. And consonantly to this temper, I would beseech any reader, that may so much want learning as to need such a request, not to measure what can be said in the defence and celebration of the scripture's style, by what hath in the following discourse been traced by the callow pen of a travelling layman. For I profess ingenuously, that there can as little be an unwelcomer as an unjuster compliment placed upon me, than to mistake any thing that I am able to say, and much less what I have said, for the belt that can be said upon such a subject. Nor is it my least encouragement to consent to the publication of such incompleat writings, that the considerations already intimated will probably keep my readers from doing the scripture and their own judgment so great an injury.

But I see I have so far transgressed the bounds of a letter, that if I add any thing more of apology, it must be for having been so prolix already. Wherefore there scarce remains any thing for me, but to mind you, that since your persuasions have much contributed to my exposing the following tract, incompleat as it is, your own credit is somewhat concerned in it as well as mine. And therefore I hope you will have a care, that there be no faults of the printer added to those of the author, which do so little need additional blemishes; and especially that there pass no mistakes of the punctuation. For in such comports as this, if the stops be omitted, or misplaced, it does not only lessen the gracefulness of what is said, but oftentimes quite spoil the sense. And if by this care of yours (which your affection, both for the subject, and the writer makes me confident of) and by the authority of your approbation, I find these imperfect considerations to be so favourably received as to deserve another edition; it will perhaps invite me to put them forth enlarged, and recruited with what I may meet with pertinent to this subject in such other papers of mine concerning the scripture, as I had not yet the conveniency to get into mine own hands and look over. However, though I pretend not here to answer all objections against the style of the scripture; yet as I hope, I have been so happy as to answer some of them, and weaken most of the rest; so if others, that are more able, will but employ themselves as earnestly in so useful a work, there is great hope, that some answering this objection, another that, and a third another, they may at length be all of them satisfactorily replied to. And in the mean time I shall think my labour richly recompensed, if they either procure or establish a veneration for the scripture in any of my readers; or do at least encourage those, that are qualified for a far more prosperous making such an attempt, to undertake it, by showing those of them that know me, what were easy for them to do, whilst they see what has been done even by me; whom sure they will not think to be half so much an orator, as I hope so uneasy a proof of his obedience will make you think him,

Sir, Your affectionate friend

and humble servant,

ROBERT BOTLE.
SOME
CONSIDERATIONS
TOUCHING THE
STYLE of the HOLY SCRIPTURES.

THESE things, dear Theophilus, being thus dispatched, I suppose we may now reasonably proceed to consider the style of the scripture: a subject, that will as well require as deserve some time and much attention; in regard that divers witty men, who freely acknowledge the authority of the scripture, take exceptions at its style, and by those and their own reputation divert many from studying, or so much as perusing, those sacred writings; thereby at once giving men injurious and irreverent thoughts of it, and diverting them from allowing the scripture the best way of justifying itself, and disabusing them. Than which scarce any thing can be more prejudicial to a book, that needs but to be sufficiently understood to be highly venerated; the writings these men mincinate, and would keep others from reading, being like that honey, which Saul’s rash adjuration with-held the Israelites from eating, which being tasted, not only gratified the taste, but enlightened the eyes.

Now these allegations against the scripture we are to examine being but too various, it will be requisite for us to consider the style of it, not in the strictest acceptation, wherein an author’s style is wont to signify the choice and disposition of his words, but in that larger sense, wherein the word style comprehends not only the phænology, the tropes and figures made use of by a writer, but his method, his lofty or humble character (as orators speak) his pathetic or languid, his close or incoherent way of writing; and in a word, almost all the whole manner of an author’s expressing himself.

Therefore, though the title of an essay prefixed to this treatise will I presume, invite you to expect from me rather some loose considerations than any full and methodical discourse concerning the style of the scripture; yet I hope you will not think it strange, if so comprehensive a theme make this part of the essay disproportionate to the others; especially since the nature of your commands, and that of my design, oblige me to interweave some other things with those that more directly regard the style of the scripture, and particularly to lay hold on all opportunities I can discreetly take, to invite you to study much, and highly to esteem a book, which there is no danger you can too much study, or esteem too highly.

It has been a common saying among the ancients, that even Jupiter could not please all. But by the objections I meet with against the scripture, I find, that the true God himself is not free from the imputation of his audacious creatures, who impiously presume to quarrel as well with his revelations as his providence, and express no more reverence to what he hath dictated than to what he doth. For not now to mention what is by atheists and antiscriturists alleged to overthrow the truth and authority of the scripture, (because it is not here, but elsewhere, that we are to deal with that sort of men) even by some of those, that acknowledge both,
Considerations on the Style of the Holy Scriptures.

(for with such only we have now to reason) there are I know not how many faults found with the style of the scripture. For some of them are pleaded to say, that book is too obscure; others, that it is immethodical; others, that it is contradictory to itself; others, that the neighbouring parts of it are incoherent; others, that it is unadorned; others, that it is flat and unaffecting; others, that it abounds with things, that are either trivial or impertinent, and also with useless repetitions. And indeed so many and so various are the faults and imperfections imputed by these men to the scripture, that my wonder at them would be almost as great as is my trouble, if I did not consider, how much it is the interest of the great adversary of mankind, and especially of (that choicest part of it) the church, to depreciate compotures, that if duly reverenced would prove so destructive to his kingdom and designs; and if I did not also remember, that (such is the querulous and exceptionable nature of men) it was Cicero himself that observed, Vitari non posse reprehensionem, nisi nihil scribendo. But as poets and astronomers have fancied, among the celestial lights, that adorn the firmament, bears, bulls, goats, dogs, scorpions, and other beasts; so our adversaries impute I know not what imaginary deformities to a book, ennobled by its author with many celestial lights, fit to instruct the world, and discover to them the ways of truth and blessedness. Although, I say, this be so, yet since the misrepresentation made by these men of the Bible is not inferior to that made by poets and cosmographers of the firmament; I hope you will be as little deterred by the most disparaging imputations from studying the scripture, as pilots are by the name of bear given to the most northern constellation, from having their eyes upon the pole-star, and steering their courses by it.

And since you will easily believe, that a person so averse from wrangling as I, is not like to make the disputing with these cenfures of the scripture-style, any further his design, than as the invalidating their objections conduces to the reputation of that sacred book; I presume you will not think it at all impertinent, if oftentimes I intermix with those things, that more directly regard such objections, other things, that seem to tend rather to celebrate than vindicate the scripture. For in so doing, I hope I shall not alone considerably, though not perhaps so directly, strengthen my answers, by shewing that we justly ascribe to the scripture qualities quite opposite to the imperfections imputed to it; but I shall perfectly comply with my main design, which I here declare, once for all, is but to engage you to study and value the scripture, and therefore obliges me to answer objections only so far forth, as they may look like arguments to dissuade you from pricing and studying it. And because I find not, that the objections to be considered have any great coherence with, or dependence on each other, I shall not scruple to mention them, and my reflections on them, in no other order, than that wherein they shall chance to occur to my thoughts whilst I am writing.

Of the considerations then, that I am to lay before you, there are three or four, which are of a more general nature; and therefore being such as may each of them be pertinently employed against several of the exceptions taken at the scripture's style, it will not be inconvenient to mention them before the rest.

And, in the first place, it should be considered, that those cavillers at the style of the scripture, that you, and I have hitherto met with, do (for want of skill in the original) especially in the Hebrew, judge of it by the translations, wherein alone they read it. Now scarce any but a linguist will imagine, how much a book may lose of its elegance, by being read in another tongue than that it was written in; especially if the languages, from which, and into which, the version is made, be so very differing, as are those of the eastern and these western parts of the world. But...
of this I foresee an occasion of saying something hereafter; yet at present I must
observe to you, that the style of the scripture is much more disadvahtaged, than
that of other books, by being judged of by translations. For the religious and just
veneration, that the interpreters of the Bible have had for that sacred book, has
made them, in most places, render the Hebrew and Greek passages so scrupulously
word for word, that for fear of not keeping close enough to the sense, they usually
care not how much they lose of the eloquence of the passages they translate. So
that, whereas in those versions of other books, that are made by good linguists, the
interpreters are wont to take the liberty to recede from the author's words, and also
substitute other phrases instead of his, that they may express his meaning, without
injuring his reputation; in translating the Old Testament, interpreters have not put
Hebrew phrases into Latin or English phrases, but only into Latin or English
words; and have too often besides, by not sufficiently understanding, or at least con-
idering, the various significations of words, particles, and tenses in the holy
tongue, made many things appear less coherent, or less rational, or less considerable,
which, by a more free and skilful rendering of the original, would not be blemished
by any appearance of such imperfection. And though this fault of interpreters
be pardonable enough in them, as carrying much of its excuse in its cause; yet it cannot but much derogate from the scripture, to appear with peculiar dis-
advantages, besides those many, that are common to almost all books, by
being translated.

For whereas the figures of rhetoric are wont, by orators, to be reduced to two
comprehensive sorts; and one of those does so depend upon the sound and placing
of the words (whence the Greek rhetoricians call such figures ὁμώμως ἐξεκτεῖναι) that,
if they be altered, though the sense be retained, the figure may vanish; this sort of
figures, I say, which comprises those that orators call Epanodos, Antanaclasis,
and a multitude of others, are wont to be lost in such literal translations as are
ours of the Bible, as I could easily show by many instances, if I thought
it requisite.

Besides, there are in Hebrew, as in other languages, certain appropriated graces,
and a peculiar emphasis belonging to some expressions, which must necessarily be
impaired by any translation, and are but too often quite lost in those, that adhere
too scrupulously to the words of the original. And, as in a lovely face, though a
painter may well enough express the cheeks, and the nose, and lips; yet there is
often something of splendour and vivacity in the eyes, which no pencil can reach to
equal: so, in some choice compoitures, though a skilful interpreter may happily
enough render into his own language a great part of what he translates, yet there
may well be some shining passages, some sparkling and emphatical expressions, that
he cannot possibly represent to the life. And this consideration is more applicable to
the Bible and its translations, than to other books, for two particular reasons.
For first, it is more difficult to translate the Hebrew of the Old Testament, than
if that book were written in Syriack, or Arabick, or some such other eastern
language. Not that the holy tongue is much more difficult to be learned than
others; but because in the other learned tongues, we know there are commonly
variety of books extant, whereby we may learn the various significations of the words
and phrases; whereas the pure Hebrew being unhappily lost, except so much of it
as remains in the Old Testament, out of whole books alone we can but very
imperfectly frame a dictionary and a language; there are many words, especially the
ἀπεθανόμενος, and those that occur but seldom, of which we know but that one
signification, or those few exceptions, wherein we find it used in those texts, that we
think.
think we clearly understand. Whereas, if we consider the nature of the primitive tongue, whose words being not numerous, are most of them equivocal enough, and do many of them abound with strangely different meanings; and if we consider too, how likely it is, that the numerous conquests of David, and the wisdom, prosperity, fleets, and various commerces of his son Solomon, did both enrich and spread the Hebrew language, it cannot but seem very probable, that the same word or phrase may have had divers other significations, than interpreters have taken notice of, or we are now aware of: since we find in the Chaldee, Syriack, Arabick, and other eastern tongues, that the Hebrew words and phrases (a little varied, according to the nature of those dialects) have other, and oftentimes, very different significations, besides those, that the modern interpreters of the Bible have ascribed to them. I say, the modern, because the ancient versions before, or not long after our Saviour’s time, and especially that which we vulgarly call the Septuagint’s, do frequently favour our conjecture, by rendering Hebrew words and phrases to sense very distant from those more received significations in our texts; when there appears no other so probable reason of their so rendering them, as their believing them capable of significations differing enough from those, to which our later interpreters have thought fit to confine themselves. The use, that I would make of this consideration, may easily be conjectured, namely, that it is probable, that many of those texts, those expressions, as they are read in our translations, seem flat, or improper, or incoherent with the context, would appear much otherwise, if we were acquainted with all the significations of words and phrases, that were known in the times, when the Hebrew language flourished, and the sacred books were written; it being very likely, that among those various significations, some one or other would afford a better sense, and a more significant and fine expression, than we meet with in our translations; and perhaps would make such passages, as seem flat or uncouth, appear eloquent and emphatical. Whilst I am writing this, our English tongue presents to my thoughts an example, which may seem to illustrate much of the foregoing consideration: and it is this: that though, as one would easily believe, there are but a few forms of speaking, which relate to the birth of infants, yet there are five or six expressions concerning that affair, wherein very peculiar and unwonted notions belong to the words and phrases: for, if I say, that such a woman has looked every hour these ten days; that yesterday she cried out; that she had a quick and easy labour; that last night she was brought-to-bed; that now she lies-in; and, that it is fit we should remember the lady in the straw: if, I say, I make use of any or all of these expressions, an Englishman would readily understand me; but if I should literally, and word for word, translate them, I say, not into Greek or Hebrew, but into the languages of our neighbour-nations, French or Italian, men would not understand what I mean. And if a discourse, wherein they were employed, were translated by an interpreter only acquainted with the genuine and more obvious significations of the English word, it would, in such passages, appear very dilatory, and perhaps be thought impertinent, or nonensical, to a French or Italian reader.

But this is not all; for I consider in the second place, that not only we have lost divers of the significations of many of the Hebrew words and phrases, but that we have also lost the means of acquainting ourselves with a multitude of particulars relating to the topography, history, rites, opinions, fashions, customs, &c. of the ancient Jews and neighbouring nations, without the knowledge of which we cannot, in the perusing of books of such antiquity, as those of the Old Testament, and written by and (principally) for Jews; we cannot, I say, but lose very much of that
that esteem, delight, and relish, with which we should read very many passages, if we discerned the references and allusions, that are made in them to those stories, proverbs, opinions, &c. to which such passages may well be supposed to relate. And this conjecture will not, I presume, appear irrational, if you but consider, how many of the handomest passages in Juvenal, Persius, Martial, and divers other Latin writers, (not to mention Hesiod, Musaeus, or other antienter Greeks) are lost to such readers, as are unacquainted with the Roman customs, government, and story; nay, or are not sufficiently informed of a great many particular circumstances, relating to the condition of those times, and of divers particular persons pointed at in those poems. And therefore it is, that the latter critics have been fain to write comments, or at least notes, upon every page, and in some pages upon almost every line of those books, to enable the reader to discern the eloquence, and relish the wit of the author. And if such dilucidations be necessary to make us value writings, that treat of familiar and secular affairs, and were written in an European language, and in times and countries much nearer to ours; how much do you think we must lose of the elegance of the book of Job, the Psalms of David, the Song of Solomon, and other sacred compositions, which not only treat oftentimes of sublime and supernatural mysteries, but were written in very remote regions so many ages ago, amidst circumstances, to most of which we cannot but be great strangers? And thus much for my first general consideration.

My second is this, That we should carefully distinguish betwixt what the scripture itself says, and what is only said in the scripture. For we must not look upon the Bible as an oration of God to men, or as a body of laws, like our English statute book, wherein it is the legislator, that all the way speaks to the people; but as a collection of compositions of very differing sorts, and written at very distant times; and of such compositions, that though the holy men of God (as St. Peter calls them) were actuated by the Holy Spirit, who both excited and afflicted them in penning the scripture, yet there are many others, besides the author and the penmen, introduced speaking there. For besides the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, the four evangelists, the Acts of the Apostles, and other parts of scripture that are evidently historical, and wont to be so called; there are, in the other books, many passages, that deserve the same name, and many others, wherein, though they be not mere narratives of things done, many sayings and expressions are recorded, that either belong not to the author of the scripture, or must be looked upon as such, wherein his secretaries perfonate others. So that, in a considerable part of the scripture, not only prophets, and kings, and priests being introduced speaking, but shepherds, and men, and such other sorts of persons, from whom witty or eloquent things are not (especially when they speak ex tempore) to be expected, it would be very injurious to impute to the scripture any want of eloquence, that may be noted in the expressions of others, than its author. For though, not only in romances, but in many of those that pass for true histories, the supposed speakers may be observed to talk as well as the historian; yet that is, but either because the men so introduced were ambassadors, orators, generals, or other eminent men for parts, as well as employments; or because the historian does, as it often happens, give himself the liberty to make speeches for them, and does not set down indeed what they said, but what he thought fit that such persons, on such occasions, should have said. Whereas the pen-men of the scripture, as one of them truly professed, having not followed cunningly devised fables in what they have written, have faithfully set down the sayings, as well as actions, they record, without making them rather congruous to the conditions of the speakers, than to the laws of truth.
Nor is it only the style of very many passages of scripture, that may be justified by our second consideration; but, with the same distinction well applied, we may silence some of their malicious cavils, who accuse the scripture of teaching vice by the ungodly sayings and examples, that are here and there to be met with in it. But, as the Apostle said, that they are not all Israel, that are of Israel; so we may say, that is not scripture, that is in the scripture: for many wicked persons, and their perverter Satan, are there introduced, whose sayings the Holy Ghost doth not adopt, but barely registers; nor does the scripture affirm, that what they said was true, but that it is true they said it. And if I had not reduced some of those cavilers to confess, that they never did themselves read those pieces of the Bible, at some of whole passages they cavil, I should much more admire than I do, to find them father, as confidently as they do all they hear cited from it, upon the enditer of it; as if the devil's speeches were not recorded there, and as if it were requisite to make a history divinely inspired, that all the blasphemies and crimes it registers should be so too. As for the ills recorded in the scripture, besides that wicked persons were necessary to exercise God's children, and illustrate his providence; and, besides the allegations commonly made on that subject, we may consider, that there being many things to be declined, as well as practiced, was fit we should be taught as well what to avoid, as what to imitate; and the known rocks and shelves do as well guide the seamen, as the pole-star. Now, as we could not be armed against the tempter's methods, if we ignored them, so could we never safer nor better learn them, than in his book, who can alone discover the wiles, and fathom the depths of Satan, and track him through all his windings, and (otherwise untraceable) labyrinths; and in that book, where the antidote is exhibited with the poison, and either men's defeat or victory may teach us, at others costs, and without our hazard, the true art of what warfare we are all so highly concerned in. And, as chymists observe in the book of nature, that those simples, that wear the figure or resemblance (by them termed signature) of a distempered part, are medicinal for that part of that infirmity, whose signature they bear; so, in God's other book, the vicious persons there mentioned still prove, under some notion, or upon some score or other, antidotal against the vices notorious in them, being (to prevent it you also in a scripture simile) like the brazen serpent in the wilderness, set up to cure the poison infused by those they resemble. Whatsoever things were written afore-time, says the Apostle, were written for our instruction. And, to make further use of our former comparison, those, to whom the scripture gives the names of lions, wolves, foxes, and other brutes, by God's assistance, prove to his fants as instructive beasts, as doth the northern bear unto the wandering pilot. And, as antiently God fed his servant Elias, sometimes by an angel, sometimes by a woman, and sometimes too by ravens, so doth he make all persons in the Bible, whether good, or bad, or indifferent, supply his servants with that instruction, which is the alimnet of virtue, and of souls, and makes them and their examples contribute to the verification of that passage of St. Paul, wherein he says, that all things co-operate for good to them that love God.

My third consideration is this: That the several books of the Bible were written chief, and primarily to those, to whom they were first addressed, and to their contemporaries; and that yet the Bible not being written for one age of people only, but for the whole people of God, consisting of persons of all ages, nations, sexes, conditions, it was fit it should be written in such a way, as that none of those might be quite excluded from the advantages designed them in it. Therefore those sacred books so wisely, as well as graciously, tempered, that their comprehends the several abilities and dispositions of men, that (as some
pictures seem to have their eyes directly fixed on every one that looks on them, from what part ever of the room he eyes them) there is scarce any frame of spirit a man can be of, or any condition he can be in, to which some passage of scripture is not as patly applicable, as if it were meant for him, or said to him as Nathan once did to David, Thou art the man. What has been thus observed touching God's design in the contrivance of the scripture, may affit us to defend the style of a great multitude of its texts, and particularly of divers of those, which belong to the five following kinds.

And first, the several books, that make up the canon of the Scripture, being primarily designed for their use, that lived in the times wherein they were divulged, it need be no wonder, if each of them contain many things, that principally concern the persons that then lived, and be accordingly written in such a way that many of its passages allude, and otherwise relate to particular times, places, persons, customs, opinions, stories, &c. which, by our formerly-mentioned want of a good account of such remote ages and regions, cannot afford us that instruction and satisfaction, that those, to whom such books were immediately addressed, might easily derive from the perusal of them.

Next, as some portions of scripture were principally designed for ages very long since past, so some other parts of it, especially those that are yet prophetick, may probably respect future times, much more than ours: and our posterity may admire what we cannot now relish, because we do not yet understand it. Moreover, there being many portions of scripture, as almost the whole four first books of Moses, wherein God is introduced as either immediately, or mediatly giving laws to his people, or his worshippers, I suppose it will not be thought necessary, that such parts of scripture should be eloquently written, and that the supreme legislator of the world, who reckons the greatest kings amongst his subjects, should, in giving laws, be himself to those of rhetoric; the scrupulous observation of which would much derogate from those two qualities, so considerable in laws, clearness and majesty.

Besides, there being a sort of men, of which I hope the number will daily increase, who have such a desire, as St. Peter tells us the angels themselves cherish, to look into the mysteries of religion, and are qualified with elevated and comprehensive intellects, to apprehend them in some measure; it is not unfit, that to exercise such mens abilities, and to reward their industry, there should be some abstruse texts of scripture fitted to the capacities of such speculative wits, and above the reach of vulgar apprehensions.

And, on the other side, the omnicient Author of the scripture foreseeing, that it would follow from the condition of mankind, that the greatest part of the members of the church would be no great clerks, and many of them very weak or illiterate, it was but suitable to his goodness, that a great many other passages of the books designed for them, as well as others, should be written in such a plain and familiar way, as may befit such readers, and let them see, that they were not forgotten or overlooked by him, who truly says, by the prophet, that all souls are bis. And yet in many, even of these texts, which seem chiefly to have been designed to teach the simple, scholars themselves may find much to learn. For not only there are some passages, that contain milk for babes, and others, that exhibit strong meat for riper stomachs, but oftentimes (as cows afford both milk and beef) the same texts, that babes may suck milk from, strong men may find strong meat in: the scripture itself in some sense fulfilling the promise made us in it, that Hab. xiii. 1 (to him that bath shall be given) and being like a fire, that serves most men but to warm, and dry
the Style of the Holy Scriptures.

dry themselves, and dress their meat, but serves the skilful chymist to draw quint
ences and make extracts.

I doubt not but you are acquainted as well as I with divers querulous readers, who
very boldly find fault with this variety, wherein God hath thought fit to exhibit his
truth, and declare his will in holy writ, and presume to cenfure some texts as too
mysterious, very many as too plain. But these exceptions at the oeconomy of the
scripture do commonly proceed from their pride, that make them; for that vice, in-
clining them to fancy, that the Bible either was or ought to have been written pur-
purposely for them, prompts them to make exceptions suitable to such a presumption;
and, whilst they look upon their own abilities as the measure of all discourses, to call
all that transcends their apprehensions, dark, and all that equals it not, trivial.
They will be always finding fault with the Holy Ghost’s expressions, both where his
condescensions make them clear, and where the sublimity of the matter leaves them
obscurer; like bats, whose tender eyes love neither day nor night, and are only pleased
with (what is alone proportioned to their weak sight) a twilight, that is both or
neither. But as a skilful fowler (and the comparison will be excused by those, that
remember that God in scripture is said to be pressed as a cart is pressed that is full of
sheaves, and the son of man to be as a thief in the night) according to the differing
natures of his game, so contrives and appropriates his stratagems, that some he
catches with light, (as larks with day-nets) some with baits, (as pigeons with peas)
some with frights, (as black-birds with a sparrow-hawk or low-bell) and some he
drives in with company (as ducks and such like social birds with decoy-fowl): so God
knowing that some persons must be wrought upon by reason, others allured by interest;
some driven in by terror, and others again brought in by imitation, hath by a rare and
merciful (if I may so call it) suppleeness of wisdom so varied the heavenly doctrine into
ratioincations, mysteries, promises, threats and examples, that there is not any sort of
people, that in the scripture may not find religion represented in that form they are
most disposed to receive impressions from; God therein graciously dealing with his
children not unlike the prophet, that shrunk himself into the proportion of the child
he meant to revive. The genius’s, the capacities and the dispositions of men are so
distinct, and oftentimes so extravagant, that there is scarce a passage of scripture, that
is not suitable or appropriate to some of those numberless differences of humour the
Bible was designed for; and in that unimaginable variety of occurrences shared
amongst such vast multitudes, finds not a proper object. And therefore God, who
(having created them) best knows the frame of mens spirits, having been pleased to
match them with proper texts; I shall not quarrel with his vouchsafing to lip myste-
ries to those, that would be deterred by any other way of expressing them, and to
qualify his instruments according to the natures he designs them to work upon, lest he
should say to me with the house-holder in the gospel, Is thine eye evil, because I am
good? And sure it must extremely misbecome us to repine at the greatness of God’s
condescensions, only upon the score of a knowledge or attainments that we owe to it.

By reflecting upon the three foregoing general considerations, you will, I presume;
easily perceive, what it is that is pretended to in what I represent to you in the behalf
of the scripture. For you will easily guess, by what I have hitherto told you; I pre-
tend not to prove or assert, that every text of scripture, especially in translations, is
embellished with the ornaments of rhetoric, but only to shew these two things; the
one, that as there may be drawn from divers things in the scripture it self (without
excluding the style) considerable arguments of its having been written or approved
by men peculiarly afflicted by the spirit of God; so if a man be persuaded either by
these intrinsic arguments, (which I may in another paper evince to be no slight ones)
Some Considerations touching

or by any others, of the heavenly origination of the scripture; if, I say, a man be persuaded of this, he ought not in reason by the style of these books to be kept from diligently studying of them, and highly valuing them. The other (which I add as one evincement of the former) is, that not only the scripture is every where written with as much eloquence as the chief author (whose omniscience qualified him to judge best in the case) thought fit and expedient, as we now have the sacred books, especially in their originals, very many passages of them are so far from being destitute of what even our western nations count eloquence, that they deserve to be admired for it. And, Theophrastus, if you please to keep in your eye what I have now told you concerning my scope in writing, and to bear in your memory the three general considerations I have premised, I shall need hereafter, as often as I have occasion to mention them, only to point at them; and thereby shall excuse you and myself from the unwelcome trouble of many times repeating the same things.

To proceed then to the more particular objections against the scripture, the first I shall consider is, that it is obscure. And this I find alleged by two sorts of men to two differing purposes; some endeavouring by it to disgrace the Bible, and others only making the pretended darkness of many of its passages an excuse for their not studying it.

To the first sort of objectors I answer, that it is little less than inevitable, that many passages of the scripture should seem obscure to us, and that it is but fit, that divers others should be so too.

For first, the objectors, as I formerly observed, reading the Bible but in translations, are destitute of those helps to understand the sense of many passages, that may be afforded by skill in the original languages. Besides, that even to those, that have taken pains to understand the original tongues, the genuine sense of divers words and phrases is denied by the injudicious time, through which (as was already noted) a great part of the Hebrew and Chaldee tongues have been lost.

2dly, Many texts appear obscure to those, that live in these latter times, only because that by reason of the perishing of those writings and other monuments of antiquity, that were contemporary to the books of the old testament, we cannot be sufficiently acquainted with the history, the laws and customs of the Jews, and other nations mentioned in the scripture; so that it need be no wonder if divers passages of the books of Genesis, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, the Kings, Heber, and other historical books of the scripture, as also of the four last books of Moses, are obscure to us; and yet might be very intelligible to those, in whose times they were written, and for whose use they were principally designed. As although Lucius Florus would in many places appear very obscure to such readers, as know nothing of the Roman affairs, but by the account given of them in his writing, (whence divers late critics have been invited to illustrate him out of other Latin authors) yet questionless to the Roman readers, that lived in his time, or not very long after, his book was easy enough to be understood. How much the want of other historians, contemporary to the penmen of the old testament, may make things seem obscure, that might by such stories be easily cleared up, we may observe from divers passages of the new testament, which can scarce be well understood without an account of Herod’s family, and the changes that happened about our Saviour’s time in Judaea, which was sometimes all of it governed by Herod the Great, that massacred the children of Bethlehem, and sometimes was governed by Pilate and other Roman magistrates; and sometimes was so divided, that it was as to some parts only governed by Herod’s descendants under various titles; the want of the knowledge of which, and of the several princes that bore the name of Herod, does much puzzle many readers, that are strangers to Josephus.

And
And it seems somewhat strange to many, that Christ should in St. Luke admonish his hearers to fly out of Jerusalem and Judea, and not resort thither from the neighbouring countries, when they should see Jerusalem encompassed with armies, since those armies would probably hinder the counselled retirement (at least as to the city). Whereas he that finds in the story, that the Roman forces under Gratus did on a sudden, and (as good authors tell us) without any manifest cause, withdraw from the siege of Jerusalem, and then return to it again, and (under Titus) carry the town by force; he that shall read also in Euseb. lib. 3. cap. 5. that the Christians of Jerusalem did (divinely admonished) make use of the opportunity pretented them to quit all of them the city, and retire to Pella on the other side of Jordan; he, I say, that shall read and take notice of all this, will not only clearly understand the reasonableness of our Saviour's warning, but admire the prophetical spirit by which he could give it. And as it is difficult to collect out of the old testament alone the history of those times, wherein it was written; so it is not to be expected, that out of those books we should be able to collect and comprehend, either complete ideas of the Israelitish government, civil and ecclesiastical, or the true state of their several facts, opinions and affairs in matters of religion: and yet without the knowledge of those it cannot be, that many texts will seem obscure to us, which were not at all so to them, that were coetaneous to the pen-men of those books. The labours of some modern critics, that have put themselves to the trouble of making a thorough search into the writings of those Jewish Rabbies, that lived about our Saviour's and his Apostles times, have, by the help of the rabbinical learning, already cleared up divers texts, which before were dark, because they related to particular facts, customs, sayings, or opinions amongst the then Jews, whose knowledge, the writers of the new testament do not teach, but suppose. And I doubt not, but higher and valuable attainments in that kind of learning (how worthless forever I should think it, if it were not conducive to the illustration of the scripture) will, ere it be very long, dispel that obscurity, which yet dwells upon divers other texts, and will shew the groundlessness of all our cavils at them, as well as that of many of our too fierce contentions about them. I shall add, that I dare almost presume to question, whether even our famousst critics have not left divers Mosical texts in the dark, if not clouded them by their comments, merely for want of knowing the religion of the ancient Zabians, in opposition of whose magical worship and superstitions, I am apt to think divers ceremonies of the ritual law of the Jews to have been instituted. And yet of those Zabefts (or דֵּשָא and מַשְׁאָא as the Hebrews and Arabians express the name) I find a deep and general silence in classic authors, except (the Rabbi's oracle) Mainonides, out of whom our great antiquary (Mr. Selden) both in familiar discourse, and in his excellent tract of the Syrian deities, gave me first a hint, which by lighting on another author of those parts, I have since had the luck to improve sufficiently, to make me fear, that they, who are strangers to the Zabians rites and creed, will scarce give us the clearest account the theme is capable of in divers passages of the Mosaeick law. As I am apt to think, that our ignorance or want of taking notice of the persuasions and practices of the Gnosticks, Carpocrations, and the facts allied to theirs, if it do not make us mistake and misinterpret, doth at least keep us from giving the clearest interpretations, whereof they are capable, to many passages of the New Testament, wherein they are either clearly pointed at, or closely related to.

3. We may reasonably suppose, that of the texts, that are now difficult unto us, there are divers that are so, but because they were principally intended for the use of those that shall live in after-times, by whom they will question let's be better understood. To the Jews, that lived in and along after Moses his time, many of those predictions, both verbal and typical, of the Messiah, seemed very dark, which to us

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M in Christians
Christians are abundantly illustrated by the rising of that sun of righteousness, who was aimed at in them. And though the mysterious temple and city described in Ezekiel, as also much of the Apocalypse, and divers other prophetick passages of holy writ, do yet seem abstruse to us; yet they will not appear so to those, to whom their completion (the best expositor of dark prophecies) shall have unfolded them. For I observe, that as some divine predictions are clearly expressed, to the intent that those, that are made acquainted with them, may before-hand know what will happen, so others are proposed, not so much that those, to whom they are first addressed, should know the fore-told events, before they do come to pass, as that, when they do come to pass, the same accomplishment, that expounds them, may evince, that the foreteller of them was able to foresee them, according to that of our Saviour to his disciples, to whom he prophesied the sufferings they should undergo: These things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them.

4. It was fit, that there should be some obscure passages left in the inspired volume, to keep those from the knowledge of some of those divine mysteries, that are both delightful and useful, though not absolutely necessary, who do not think such knowledge worth studying for. As it was also fit (which I partly noted above) that there should be some clouded and mysterious texts, to excite and recompense the industry and speculation of elevated wits and religious inquirers.

Lastly, there are divers obscure passages in scripture, wherein the difficulty lies in the thing itself that is expressed, not in the scripture's manner of expressing it. For not to mention that obscurity, that is wont to attend prophetick raptures, (of which there are many mentioned in the scripture) there are divers things, that we agree to be knowable by the bare light of nature without revelation, which yet are so uneasy to be satisfactorily understood by our imperfect intellects, that let them be delivered in the clearest expressions men can devise, the notions themselves will yet appear obscure. Thus in natural philosophy it self, the nature of place and time, the origin of motion, and the manner whereby the human soul performs her functions, are things, which no writers delivered so clearly, as not to leave the things somewhat obscure to inquisitive and examining readers. And shall we then wonder, that those texts of scripture, that treat of the nature and decrees of God, and of such sublime mysteries as the trinity, the incarnation, the influence of the spirit upon the soul of man, and such other abstruse things, which it cannot be reasonably expected that human words should keep from being hard to be comprehended by human understanding, should be obscure to us; especially if we suffer our not understanding their full meaning at first to deter us from endeavouring to find it out by further study. I am sorry I can add on this occasion, that divers texts are made to appear more dark, than otherways they would, by the glosses and interpretations of some, that pretend to expound them. For there are divers subtle men, who being persuaded, upon certain metaphysical notions they are fond of, or by the authority of such either churches or persons as they highly reverence, that such or such niceties are either requisite to the explication of this, or that doctrine delivered in scripture, or, at least, deducible from it, will make bold to interpret dark texts, (and sometimes even clear ones) that they shall seem to hold forth, not only their own sense, but the nice speculations, or deductions of him that quotes them: so that divers texts, which, to a rational and unpreposessed peruser, would appear plain enough, seem to contain inextricable difficulties to those unwary or prejudiced who are not careful to distinguish betwixt the plain sense of the text itself, and those metaphysical subtleties, which witty and interested persons would father upon it; though oftentimes those niceties are either so groundles, that though there needs much wit to devise them, there needs but a little reason to despise them; or
or so unintelligible, as to tempt a considering man to suspect, that the proposers either mean not what they speak, or understand not what they say. And I could with their metaphysical quirks, with which several, not only school-men, but other writers, have perplexed the doctrine of predestination, of the trinity, of the operation of the spirit of God upon the will of man, and some other mysteries of Christian religion, did not give advantages against those doctrines to the opposers of them, and perhaps make some men opposers, who otherwise would not have been so. And I fear, that too great an opportunity has been afforded to atheistical wits, by unintelligible fancies, which many have made bold to add to what the scripture has revealed, concerning the eternity and infiniteness of God. For whilst men indifferently and unskilfully twist together, as integral parts of the same doctrine, a revealed truth with their own metaphysical speculations about it, though these be too often such as cannot be proved, or perhaps so much as understood; they tempt such examining readers, as are rational enough to discern the groundlessness of one part of the doctrine, to reject the whole for its sake. But I fear I have digressed, for my intention was only to intimate, that it is not oftentimes so much what the scripture fays, as what some men persuade others it fays, that makes it seem obscure: and that as to some other passages, that are so indeed, since it is the abstruseness of what is taught in them that makes them almost inevitably so, it is little left of any, upon such a score, to find fault with the style of the scripture, than to do so with the author for making us but men.

Thus much being said, by way of answer, to the first sort of objectors of darkness against the scripture, it is easy to foresee, that the second sort of them may endeavour to pervert what has been delivered to apologize for their neglect of the scripture, by alledging, that albeit what has been represented may serve to shew, that obscurity of the scripture is justifiable; yet the very proving it needful or fit, that it should be obscure, is a plain confession that it is so. Wherefore it is requisite, that I now say something to this sort of objectors also, who are so unfavourable to the scripture and themselves, as that, because they cannot understand all of it, they will not endeavour to learn anything from it. I have already acknowledged it, and shall not now deny, that (as heaven it self is not all stars) there may be parts of scripture, whole clear explications shall ennoble and bless the remotest of succeeding ages, that perhaps some mysteries are so obscure, that they are referred to the illumination and blazes of the last and universal fire.

But here it would be considered in the first place, that those texts, that are so difficult to be understood, are not necessary to be so. In points fundamental and indispensible necessary, the darkness of scripture is no less partial, than that of Egypt, which benighted only the enemies, but involved not the people of God: in such articles as these, if the gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds. At least in relation to such truths as these, we may justly apply that of Moses, where he tells Israel, This commandment, which I command thee this day, is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. But the word is very near unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it. And surely the Bible’s being appropriate (as it itself tells us) to enlighten the eyes, and to make wise the simple; and it being written for the use of the whole people of God, whereof the greater number are no clerks, things are there expressed with an evidence proportionable to the degree of assent that they exact, and are as far forth intelligible to pious and industrious readers, as they are necessary to be understood by them; and we may not unfitly lay of the understanding of those cloudy passages of scripture, what I remember a father laid of the sacrament, That not the wanting of it, but the fighting it shall condemn men. It is our duty to study them, but it is not (always) to understand them.
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Some Considerations touching

And as the knowledge of those texts that are obscure, is not necessary, so that others, whose sense is necessary to be understood, are easy enough to be so. And those are as much more numerous than the others, as more clear. Yes, there are rifting passages enough in scripture, to light us the way to heaven, though some unobvious stars of that bright sphere cannot be discerned without the help of a telescope. Since God, then, has been pleased to provide sufficiently for our instruction, what reason have we to repine, if he have in a book, not designed for us alone, provided also for thoes, that are fitted for higher attainments? Especially since, if we be not wanting to ourselves, those passages, that are so obscure as to teach us nothing else, may at least teach us humility.

Nor does it misbecome God’s goodness, any more than his wisdom, to have so tempered the canonical books, as therein to leave all sorts of readers an exercize for their industry, and give even the greatest doctors continual inducements to implore his instructions, and depend on him for his irradiations, by leaving, amongst many passages, that stoop unto our weakness, some that may make us sensible of it. It should, methinks, be looked upon as the prerogative, not the disparagement, of the scriptures, that the revelation of his truth, vouchsafed us by God in them, is like a river, wherein a lamb may quench his thirst; and which an elephant cannot exhaust. I should think him but an ill-natured child, who should be angry to see strong meat provided for his elder brothers, because he himself can yet digest nothing but milk: and as the same child, being grown up to riper years, would be then troubled, that, according to his first envious wish, there were no stronger aliments provided in the family than milk; so when, by the attentive and repeated perusal of the scriptures, a child in knowledge shall attain to some higher measure of skill in the scriptures, he will then be well pleased to have his understanding exercised by those most mysterious texts, of which he formerly complained that they perplexed it. However, since there are so many plain passages of scripture, that clearly hold forth, not only all that is necessary for us to know, but, I fear, much more than we are careful to learn and practice, the zealous Christian would no more decline feeding on this heavenly food, though all the hard places should still remain such to him, than the Jews would forbear to eat the paschal lamb, though not a bone of it were broken. And, in earnest, would not he merit unrelieved beggary, that should refuse the profit of a rich mine, because all those of the world are not yet discovered, nor those of the Indies exhausted?

Moreover, the pretended obscurities of the Bible is a mistaken discouragement from reading it: for the frequency of reading it still lessens that obscurity; which, like a mist, seems thicker at a distance, than when one enters it, and attempts a passage through it; which, in our case, many pious students have done so prosperously, as to find, by welcome experience, that what, at a distance, deterred them, was not intended to frustrate industry, but punish lazines.

Besides that, the scripture being avowedly the best expositor of itself, our ignorance of those places, whose sense we seek for, makes us often occasionally much knowinger, and more perfect in the meaning of all the rest; and makes us too much more ready in the uzes of them, that I cannot but apply to this subject the fable of that dying husbandman, who, by telling his sons of a hidden mafs of wealth he had buried in a nameless place of his vineyard, occasioned their so sedulous delving all the ground, and turning up the earth about the roots of the vines, that they found indeed a treasure, though not in gold, in wine: for thus out of hope, by the light of understood scriptures, to penetrate the sense of the obscurer ones, we occasionally so improve our knowledge and readiness in the clearer passages, that our by-acquits do richly recompence our frustrated (or rather unsuccessing) pains; since our particular
disappointments hinder not the promotion of our general design, which is a greater proficiency in spiritual knowledge, and therefore ought not to deter us from the duty of those searchs, in which not only to discover is happy, but even the unsuccesful attempts are gainful, whatever the event be; the pains being seldom fruitless, but reaching either their end or recompence. And this prompts me to reprehend you further, that not only the scripture is instructive upon the same account with other theological writings, but that we may hope to improve our understandings by it upon this score, that it is also the instituted means, as well of knowledge, as of grace, and appointed for our instruction by him, who, as sin came into the world by man’s listening to the words of the devil, is pleased to make restoring-grace operate chiefly by our listening to the word of God, whether heard or read. Wherefore those, whom the intimation of this encouragement invites to be diligent perusers of the scripture, do to their unfirm understandings, as the inhabitants of Gennazareth did to their sick and weak countrymen, lay them in Jesus his way, and consequently in that of recovery. It is of (at least one of) the darkest books of the scripture, that it is said, Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy. The eunuch in the Acts would (though upon the highway) needs read the Prophet Isaiah, and though (as appears by his question to Philip) as then he understood not what he read, yet did the Spirit take thence (perhaps a rife, as well as) opportunity to reveal Christ unto him, and both satisfy him of the meaning of that prediction, and acquaint him with the fresh and happy accomplishment of it. And surely this consideration of the Bible being one of the conduit-pipes, through which God hath appointed to convey his truths, as well as graces, to his children, should, methinks, both hugely animate to the searching of the scriptures, and equally refresh us in it. For as no instrument is weak in an omnipotent hand, so ought no means to be looked upon as more promising, than that which is like to be prospered by grace, as it is devised by omniscience. We may confidently expect God’s blessing upon his own institutions, since we know, that whatsoever we ask according to the will of God, he will give it us; and we can scarce ask any thing more agreeable to the will of God, than the competent understanding of that book, wherein his will is contained.

The difficulty ought not to deter us from the duty of searching the scriptures, the difficultest commands of God being a warrant to a believer’s confidence of being enabled acceptably (though not exactly) to obey them; which St. Peter seems to have known well in the theory, though he failed in the practice, when to be enabled to walk upon the sea, he desired only, that our Saviour would please to command him to come to him upon the water. The Bible is indeed, amongst books, what the diamond is amongst stones, the precious, and the sparkling, the most apt to scatter light, and yet the solifect, and the most proper to make impressions. But were it as unsuitable to its end, as it is the contrary, I should remember, that our Saviour could successively employ even clay and spittle to illuminate blind eyes: and though I thought the Bible to be, on other accounts, no more than equal to other books of morality and devotion, God’s designation would make me study it more hopefully, by minding me of that of the Syrian leper, when he would needs have Jetha and Parbar, rivers of Damascus, likely to be as medicinal for his distemper as Jordan; and vainly fancied, that God’s appointment could not put a difference between things that knew no other.

I know, that because of the intermixture of some obscure texts of scripture with the clear ones, there are divers well-meaning, and even devout persons, that leave the study of it for that of other books of religion, which, by leaving out all such difficult matter, seem to promise more of instruction. But, notwithstanding this, I shall:
shall not much scruple to affirm, that as the moon, for all those darker parts we call her spots, gives us a much greater light than the stars, that seem all luminous; so will the scripture, for all its obscure passages, afford the Christian and Divine more light than the brightest human authors.

To dispatch, since the scripture is both a naturally proper, and an instituted instrument, to convey revealed knowledge to the studiers of it; and, in it, many clear passages may instruct ordinary capacities; and its darker ones may either recompense more inquisitive wits, or humble them: I see not, why the obscurities of a small part of it should deter any sort of pious persons from the perusal of the whole. And, as the word of God is termed a light, so hath it this property of what it is called, that both the plainest rusticks may, if they will not wilfully shut their eyes, by the benefit of its light, direct their steps, and the deepsest philosophers may be exercised, if not posed and dazzled, with its abstruer mysteries. For, thus, in the scripture, the ignorant may learn all requisite knowledge, and the most knowing may learn to discern their ignorance.

The second Objection.

To proceed now to the second objection against the style of scripture: the seemingly disjointed method of that book is by many much cavilled at; to which, were the supposal a truth, I might reply, that the book of grace doth but therein resemble the book of nature; wherein the stars (however astronomers have been pleased to form their constellations) are not more nicely or methodically placed, than the passages of scripture, that where there's nothing but choice flowers, in what order soever you find them, they will make a good poly: that it became not the majesty of God to suffer himself to be fettered to human laws of method, which, devised only for your own narrow and low conceptions, would sometimes be improper for, and injurious to his, who may well say (as he doth in the Prophet) that his thoughts are so far from being ours, that, As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his thoughts higher than our thoughts; that, as a mixture of amber-grease and musk is more redolent than the single ingredients; and as, in compound medicines, (as mithridate and treacle) the mixture gives the elecuayr a higher virtue than the fevered drugs posessed; so, oftentimes in morality and divinity, a complication of precept and example, of rhetoric and mystery, may operate better than their distinction would. And sure we should judge that man a very captious creature, that should take exception at a proffered fum, only because the half-crowns, shillings, and sixpences, were not forset in distinct heaps, but huddled into one. This, I say, with much more, might be represented, were the scripture-series as destitute of method, as pretended. But the truth is, that the method, though it be not pedantically nice, is proper and excellent: (if the goodness of a method be to be judged less by the order of the sections, than its being in order to the author's end) and never (wrefed from, but upon sufficient ground, or for some mysterious purpose; the laws of order in the scripture being rarely declined, but, as the laws of nature are in the world, for man's instruction. The historical dilocations have their particular reasons, and, for the most part, are accounted for by judicious expounders: and as for the frequent (and sometimes long) digressions, excepted against in the epistles of St. Paul, were he a bare human writer, I should possibly attribute his frequent excursions to his fulness upon all subjects, not his want of skill to prosecute any one; and compare his pen to those generous horses, who, though never so well managed, will ever be getting out on this or that side of the path, not out of undisciplineneds, but purely out of mettle. But, looking upon St. Paul under another notion, I shall rather choose to tell you, that
that as rivers are said to run to the sea, though often-times the interposition of hard, or rising grounds, or other obstacles, force them to such winding meanders, that they seem to retreat from the ocean they tend to; which nevertheless, with increased streams, they afterwards bend again their intermittent course to, having watered and fertilized, by their passage, the grounds, through which they seemed to wander; so our Apostle, though he direct his course to his main scope, may not only without declining it, but in order to it, (for in some cases the wisdom of the proverb will inform us, that the longest way about, is the nearest way home) seem for a while to abandon it, by fetching a compass to answer some obvious, or anticipate some tacit objection; and afterwards more prosperously resume his former considerations, now strengthened by the defeat of the interfering scruples, having by the happily illustrated and enriched those subjects, which his incidental excursions led him occasionally to handle. I must add, that in St. Paul's, as in the rest of the inspired writings, the mere want of heeding the Holy Ghost's way of writing makes the method appear to us at a very great disadvantage. For in the historical parts of scripture, when the order of time is interrupted, those προβάτευμα προβατικοί and ἐπάνωδοι, and such dislocations, are used oftentimes only to comply with the connexion of the matter; and either dispatch all that belongs to the same long narrative at once, or else to join passages allied in some other circumstance, though severed in that of time; and sometimes too things are interposed, which do not readily seem pertinent to the series of the discourse, but are extremely so to some scope of the author, and afford much light and excellent hints to the reader. Sometimes the coherence, where it appears defective, may be very well made out, by rendering Hebrew verbs (and some Greek aorists) in a preterimperfect tense instead of a perfect; or by some such other grammatical variation of the words, as all, that understand Hebrew well, know to be allowed by the propriety of that tongue, which ignores divers moods and tenses, &c. of our western languages. Sometimes that, which seems incoherent to a discourse, serves really to prevent a foreseen (though perhaps not always obvious) probability of the misapplication of it; and so must not be judged impertinent to a doctrine, which it hinders from being either scrupled at, or abused. Sometimes the prophets in the midst of the mention of particular mercies promised to, or judgments denounced against the people of God, fall out into pathetical excursions relating to the Melechias, which seem extremely abrupt and incoherent with the rest to them, that consider not how reasonable the mention of Christ may be, both in that of the mercies of God, of which he is the foundation and pinnacle, the ground and conclusion, (and the promise made of him, taught the faithful to reason thus with his Apostle, He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not, with him also freely give us all things?) and with the threats of the judgments of God, in which he was his people's grand consolation. Sometimes ὁ διδάσκοντας, the teacher, that bishop of our souls, who was in the supreme degree of perfection, which St. Paul required of a bishop, διδασκόντα, both fit and forward to teach, takes a rite from any invitation, either of a word, expression, or theme, though belonging to his own first subject, to give further instructions, by digressing a little to that occasional and intervening theme; which, however it related to his matter, suited very well with his merciful inclinations to instruct dim mortals. Sometimes, nay oftentimes, the inspired discoursers seem to say things, not only incoherent, but contradictory; (as is very remarkable in divers of St. Paul's epistles, where he seems to praise and dispraise the same persons) whereas addressing themselves to meet assemblies, wherein (as Noah and Ham in the ark, and the tares and the wheat in agro Dominico) they were both good and bad men, heretics, especially Gnosticks, and orthodox Christians; they only
only so wisely dispensed and tempered their discourse, that both these sorts of persons might find something, in what was in general terms delivered, to appropriate to themselves in particular; which application was necessarily left to their own consciences to make. Sometimes the order is in scripture much disturbed, or injured, by the omission or misplacing of a parenthesis. For there not being any in the Hebrew copies, nor (as it is thought) in the original Greek ones, the publishers of the several editions of the Bible have placed parentheses as they have judged most convenient; some including in them what others leave out of them; and some making long ones, where others make none at all; and perhaps none of them having been so happy, as to leave no room for alterations, that may defer the title of corrections and amendments. And sometimes too, the seeming inmethodicalness of the new testament (not to determine any thing of the antiquity, which is certainly great, and the authority of the accents, and partition of the old testament, because amongst very able critics a d b c s u b j u d e s l i t s o f t is due to the inconvenient distinction of chapters and verses now in use: which though it be a very great help to the memory, and be some other ways serviceable; yet being of no greater antiquity than its contriver Stephanus, and being (though now of general use) but of private authority, and by him drawn up in haste; it will be perhaps no flander to that industrious promoter of heavenly learning, to lay, he hath sometimes fevered matters, that should have been left united, and united others, which more conveniently he might have fevered; and that his lucky attempt ought not to lay any restraint upon the other learned men, from making use of the same liberty he took in altering the former partitions, (for of them I speak, not of the punctuation) of the new testament, in altering his alterations, to the best advantage of the sense or method. The analytical works of some (I wish I could say many) judicious expostors and divines upon the scripture may sufficiently manifest its being generally reducible enough to a perspicuous order; and that it conforms to the known laws of method, where its diviner one doth not transcend them. And it were not impossible for me to give divers instances to manifest, that as the north-star, though it be less luminous than many others, yet, by reason of its position, doth better guide the pilot, than even the moon herself: so there are some texts in scripture, which, though less conspicuous in themselves, are, by reason of their relation to a context, more instructive than other more radiant passages; to which these would be much inferior, if they were not as well considerable for their being there, as such.

The third Objection.

Allied to their objection, who find fault with the scripture for being inmethodical, is theirs, who would fain persuade us, that it is seldom coherent, and scarce any where discursive. And I have observed, with trouble, that even some pious readers are easily tempted to look upon the Bible as barely a repository of sentences and clauses, where divine truths lie huddled, and not ranged, and are too ready to apply to its texts the title Nero gave Seneca’s style, of arena sine calce. Whereas an intelligent and attentive peruser may clearly enough discern, both that the prophets and apostles do make frequent deductions and inferences, and that their arguments, though not cast into mood and figure, are oftentimes as cogent as theirs, that use to make syllogisms in Barbara. I frequently entertain my self with both those authors, and yet methinks, St. Paul reasons as solidly, and as acutely, as Aristotle: and certainly according to David’s logic, (He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that framed the eye, shall he not see? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?) the first and grand author of reason should as well know how to manage and disclose
the Style of the Holy Scriptures.

1. That some ratiocinations of scriptures remain undiscovered or misunderstood, because of our unacquaintedness with the figurative, and (oftentimes) abrupt way of arguing, usual among the Eastern people, who in their arguments used to leave much to the discretion and collection of those they dealt with; and discovered at a wide distance from the logical forms of our European schools, as to persons versed in their writings cannot but be notorious.

2. That the seeming incoherency of many ratiocinations proceeds purely from the misrendering of the original particles, especially of the Hebrew conjunction copulative Vau, or Vaf, (as it is diversely pronounced by the Jews, of whom I shall here advert you once for all, that they have confess to me, they differ in pronouncing Hebrew, not only from the Christians, but exceedingly from one another) for there is hardly any of those particles, that hath not, besides the obvious various significations, of which, if that were skillfully and freely in every text taken up, that would there afford the best sense, the scripture would, I am confident, appear more coherent and argumentative than translations or expositors are wont to make it: and though I did but consider, how many thousand times the particle Vaf, is used in the scripture, and that it doth not only (though it do primarily) signify AND, but hath also (I speak within compass) four or five and twenty other significations (as that, but, or, fo, when, therefore, yet, then, because, now, as, though, &c.) and that the sense only gives it this great diversity of acceptions; I cannot but think, that if we always allowed our selves an equal freedom in rendering it, where the motive (which is the exigency or conveniency of the sense) is the same; the dextrous use and rendering of that one particle would make no small number of texts both better understood, and more esteemed.

3. That sometimes (especially in Solomon's and St. Paul's writings) in many passages so penned as to contain (like Seneca's) a tacit kind of dialogue, that is unskilfully by readers, and even interpreters, taken for an argument or an affectation, which is indeed an objection: and that such a mistake must mightily discomfit the contexture of a discourse, even a raw logician need not to be told.

4. That the omission or misplaced of parentheses (which the Hebrew text altogether wanting, interpreters have supplied and used at their own discretion) makes the scripture oftentimes appear less discursive, as well as (what we elsewhere complain of) less methodical. And the like may be said of the points of interrogation. For whether it be true or no what the critics esteem, that in the original Greek copies of the new testament there were no such points, (as indeed I have found them wanting in the ancient manuscripts I have seen) it is certain, that in our modern copies, both Greek and translated, the authors of several editions have variously placed them, as themselves thought fit: and though, instead of the interrogative point, the Hebrews make use of their interrogative He; yet that the sense of the words, and a certain suppos'd modulation, do oftentimes make an interrogation, where that He is wanting, an Hebrician can scarcely ignore, no more than a logician, that the interrogation is not always supplied to the best advantage of the scripture's logick.

5. That the apostles and other inspired discoursers in the Bible divers times use arguments, not to convince opposers, but to confirm believers. For the persons they reason with, being such, oftentimes, as esteem them teachers sent from God, upon Vol. II.

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Some Considerations touching whose score all they teach exacts belief, they may without irrationality use arguments to confirm in their doctrine men already acquiescing in the principles of it, and persuaded of their integrity, sufficiency, and authority, that it would be improper to urge against a refractory dibeliever, that is convinced of none of these. And as matters often use, in instructing their scholars, arguments, they would forbear to insist on against a professed antagonist; so the apostles dealing with those, that thought them inspired teachers, and fully instructed in the mysteries of scripture, and the designed dispensations of God, might justly draw inferences, not to be urged against an infidel, from a doctrine first delivered by themselves, or from a text or passage, wherein those, they reasoned with, justly supposed they might know more of the mind and counsel of God than other men; and would teach nothing as such, that was not so.

6. That arguments exquisitely, and (as artists term them) apodictical, had been oftentimes less proper in discourses, which being addrest to popular audiitories, required rather popular arguments; which the inspired discoursers employ, but as likely to be better understood, and more prevalent than those, which are so logical, that they require logicians to relish them. Where teaching and persuading is the design, not only the native cogency of a ratiocination is to be considered, but its proportion to their spirits it is addrest to, and its aptitude to work upon them. For as a spider will catch flies better than a hawk can; as a cat is more fit to destroy mice than a grey-hound, though this be stronger and swifter; and as the crowing of a cock will (according to famous naturalists) sooner fright a lion than the bellowing of a bull, though the latter be much more terrifying noise, and proceed from the more formidable animal: so oftentimes weaker and popular arguments succeed better with a resembling auditory, than the irrefragable syllogisms.

7. That divers scripture-arguments do not logically and cogently prove the thing they would persuade, merely because they were meant only for what logicians call argumenta ad hominem; (reasonings design'd not so properly to demonstrate the opinion they contend for, irresolutely and abstractedly considered, as to convince, of the truth of that opinion, the persons they are addrest to) and consequently the inspired discoursers arguing ë conceps, from principles conceded and confessed by those they reason with, though the principles should be unsolid, the ratiocination is not. Thus there are divers texts of the old testament applied to Christ in the new, which though they did not now inevitably conclude against the present Jews, were without any illogicalnefs employed against their ancestors; because then the relation of those passages to the Messiah was so acknowledged, that there needed but the pertinent applications made of them in the new testament; whereas the refractorines of the succeeding Jews hath taught them to devise so many sophistical evasions to elude the texts we speak of, that they now dispute, not only the application of them, but the explanation too. St. Jude argues with the rodomons of his time, out of the story of the arch-angels and the devil's contest about the body of Moses: and though perhaps that story be (like the Jewish book, whence it seems not improbable it was taken) somewhat apocryphal; yet as long as they reverenced it, it was not irrational in him to urge them, with it, and employ it to the redarguation of their insolence. And, although as there be nothing less solid and more fickle than the wind, yet the skilful pilot diligently observes it, and makes it drive on his ship more forcibly, than the powerfuller and best contrived engines in the world could; so though there be scarce any thing more groundless and unstable than popular opinions and persuasions, yet a wise teacher neglects them not, and may sometimes make such use of them, as to draw thence arguments more operative than the accuratest syllogisms logick could.
could devise. And indeed the most convincing proofs of assertions being ever afforded by the mediums, wherein both parties agree, not only Socrates in Plato's dialogues; but dextrous discoursers generally, have often elected the drawing of inferences from the opinions and concessions of those they dealt with, as the most persuasive and successful way of arguing; to all which I shall add,

8. That another thing, which very generally keeps men from discerning the reasonings (and consequently oftentimes the reasonableness and true sense) of scripture texts, is, the shiness of divines to let the context and the speaker's scope regulate their choice, amongst all the various, though not equally obvious, significations of ambiguous words and phrases. It is not, that (as far as I have observed) men almost of all religions are not wont to make bold with (and perhaps for a need to strain or wrest) phrases and words of scripture, when the giving them lefts usual notions may fit them to serve their turns; but the mischief is, that they decline the commonest acceptances, but to make the texts they quit them in, symphonize with their tenents, not with their neighbouring texts. It was methinks impartially, if the frequent sense of an expression were to be waved (as oftentimes it must) for one lefts current, to do this to make the scripture coherent, or discursive: and then, for our opinions, rather to conform them to the sense of the scripture, than wrest the words of scripture to them. But perhaps this impartiality would silence too many of our clamorous controversies (by shewing some to be groundless, and others undeterminable) to be likely to take place in the heated spirits of men; some of whom, I fear, whilst their feuds and fierceness last, would be willing to have the texts of scripture loose stones, which they may more easily throw at their adversaries, than built up into a structure, wherein they must lose that convenience, (it being difficult to pluck stones out of a building) though reason herself were the architect.

But to leave these eager disputants to their animosities, we shall again repeat, that the Bible loses much by not being considered as a system. For though many other books are comparable to cloth, in which by a small pattern we may safely judge of the whole piece; yet the Bible is like a fair suit of arras, of which, though a thread may suffice you of the fineness of the colours, and richness of the stuff, yet the hangings never appear to their true advantage, but when they are displayed to their full dimensions, and seen together.

These things, Theophilus, among many others, may be represented on the behalf of the scripture, against those, who will needs censure it as a collection, not to say a heap of immethodical and incoherent passages. But lest you should suspect me of partiality, I should ingenuously confess to you, that there are some things in the economy of scripture, that do somewhat distress my reason to find a satisfactory account of; and that there are very few things, wherein my curiosity is more concerned, and would more welcome a resolution in. But when I remember, how many things I once thought incoherent, in which I now think I discern a close (though myfick) connection; when I reflect on the author and the ends of the scripture; and when I allow myself to imagine how exquisite a symmetry (though as yet undiscerned by me) omnipotence doth, and after-ages (probably) will discover in the scripture's method, in spite of those seeming discompositions that now puzzle me; when I think upon all this, I say, I think it just to check my forward thoughts, that would either presume to know all the recluse ends of omnipotence, or peremptorily judge of the fitness of means to ends unknown; and am reduced to think that economy the wisest, that is chosen by a wisdom so boundless, that it can at once survey all expedients, and so unbiased, that it hath no interest to chuse any, but for its
its being fitted. I shall annex, that I think those must derogate hugely from the scripture, who only consider the sense of the particular sections, or even books of it: for I conceive, that (as in a lovely face, though the eye, the nose, the lips, and the other parts singly looked on may beget delight and delver praise, yet the whole face must necessarily lose much by not being seen all together;) so though the severed leaves and portions of scripture do irrelatively, and in themselves, sufficiently betray and evidence their own heavenly extraction; yet he, that shall attentively survey the whole body of canonical writings we now call the Bible, and shall judiciously in their system compare and confer them to each other, may discern, upon the whole matter, so admirable a contexture and disposition, as may manifest that book to be the work of the same wisdom, that so accurately composed the book of nature, and so divinely contrived this vast fabric of the world. The books of scripture illustrate and expound each other; Genes and the Apocalypse are in some things reciprocal commentaries; (as in trigonometry the distantest side and angle use best to help us to the knowledge one of the other;) and as in the mariners compass, the needle's extremity, though it seem to point purposely but at the north, doth yet at the same time discover both east and west, as distant as they are from it, and from each other; so do some texts of scripture guide us to the intelligence of others, from which they are widely distant in the Bible, and seem so in the sense. It is as high as pious a satisfaction to observe, how the sacred pen-men supply each other's omissions, (as is very observable in the four Evangelists mention of the genealogy of Christ) according to God's degrees and seasons in deepening the knowledge of his truths and mysteries in the several ages of the church; (to which he at first vouchsafed but a light shining in a dark place until the day dawned,) and to which these mutual irradiations and secret references persuade, that all these reputed authors had their pens guided by an omnicient hand, and were but the several secretaries of the same enditer) and to find in writers severer by so many ages, and regions, a harmony, whose dissonances serve but to manifest the sincerity and unconspiringness of the writers. And truly for my part, I am professedly enough an impartialist, not to stick to confess to you, Theophilus, that I read the Bible and the learnedest expositors on it, with somewhat particular aims and dispositions. For besides, that I come not to them with a crowd of articles, which I am there resolved to find or make arguments to defend, with the overthrow of all antagonists, esteeming it less safe to carry my opinions to the scriptures than to take them up there: besides this, I say, though I neglect not those clear passages or arguments, that may establish the doctrine of that church I most adhere to; yet I am much less biased, and concerned to collect those subtle glosses or inferences, that can but enable me to serve one subdivision of Christians against another, than needfully to make such observations, as may solidly justify to my own thoughts, and improve in them, a reverence for the scripture it self, and Christiand in general; such observations as may disclose to me in the Bible, and the grand articles clearly delivered in it, a majesty and an excellency becoming God himself, and transcending any other author; and such observations (to dispatch) as may unveil to me in the scripture, and what it treats of, that θεος νομοθετησαν, the manifold wisdom of God, which even the angels learn by the church. These are, I confess, the things (as to speculative divinity) that I gladliest meet with, and take the heedfullest notice of, in the writings of divines, of whatsoever religion, that owns the scripture; (for in this I am almost equally gratified by the ablest expositors of all dissenting sects:) for I can scarce think any pains milpens, that brings me in solid evidences of that great truth, that the scripture is the word of God, which is indeed the grand fundamental, all other articles generally thought so being, if truths, better deducible.
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The fourth Objection.

The apostle of the Gentiles teaching us, that the whole scripture (for so I should rather English the Πάσα γραφή, because there follows) is δεύτερεος divinely inspired, and is profitable for doctrine, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works: and the Apostle of the circumcision assuring us, that, 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; we are not to believe, that so divine an inditer, by secretaries, most of them conspicuous by the gifts of prophecy or miracles, would so solemnly publish to the world, and for his church, any thing, that ought indeed to be accounted impertinent or useless. And yet of these qualities, some persons, more bold than learned and considerate, are pleased to impeach many passages of scripture. But truly that God, who was so precisely exact, in the dimensions, proportions, and all other circumstances of the ancient tabernacle, though it were but a typical and temporary structure, ought to be supposed at least as careful to let nothing superfluous intrude into those volumes: which being confin'd to the church, for the perpetual use and instruction of it, must contain nothing uncondusive to those designs; the least text in it being as contributory to the compleating of the Bible, as every loop or pin was to the perfection of the tabernacle. God, by so great a condensation to the weakness of our capacities and memories, as the with-holding from the canon so many writings of Solomon, and so many of the oracles and miracles of our Saviour; and by so strangely preferring the whole scripture, (for the books pretended to be lost, though written by never so holy men,) are either in our Bibles extant under other names, or cannot be demonstrated to have ever been canonical, that is, entrusted with the church as the infallible rule of faith and life) does, methinks, abundantly evince his design of in-chasing nothing there, that hath no tendency to his people's instruction. Were not my discourse confined by my occasions, and the fear of distressing your patience to somewhat narrow limits, I could easily by several instances of texts, seemingly useless, shew, how much men have been mistaken in imagining them such. Many passages, that at the first or second reading I could find nor guess no ues of, at the third or fourth I have discover'd so pregnant in them, that I almost equally admired the richness of those texts, and my not discover ing it sooner. A superficial and cursory perusal presents us many things as trivial or superfluous, which a peripatetic reflection discloses to be mysterious. And of so precious a quality is the knowledge of scripture, that no one part of it ought to be esteemed useless, if it may but felicitate or improve the understanding of any other; divine truths being of that worth, that the knowledge and acquisition of a few of them as much out-values a greater knowledge of other things, as a jeweller's skill and stock is preferred before a mason's. And I consider here, that as the Bible was not written for any other particular time or people, but for the whole church militant diffused through all nations and ages; as many passages (as those opposed to the Zabians magical rites) have at first been necessary for the Jews, which lose the degree (at least) of that quality for us. For there are many, others very useful, which will not perhaps be found so these many ages;
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Some Considerations touching

ages; being possibly referred, by the prophetick spirit that indited them, (and whose omniscience comprizes and unites in one prospect all times, and all events) to quell some future foreseen hereby, which will not perhaps be born till we be dead; or resolve some yet unformed doubt, or confound some error, that hath not yet a name: so that all the parts of the scripture are useful in some ages, and some in all. We read in the gospel, that at the first institution of the eucharist, it was expressly said to the disciples concerning the sacramental wine, Drink ye all of it, whereas upon the exhibition of the bread the particle all is omitted. This difference, it is like, the primitive Christians marvelled at, and discerning no reason for it, might be tempted to think the passage useles or superfluous: but we that live in an age, wherein the cup is denied to much the greater part of the communicants, are invited not only to absolve the recording of this particularity, but to admire it. The ceremonial law, with all its mystick rites (which, like the manger of the shepherds, holds forth wrapped in his swathing-cloaths the infant Jesus) to many, that bestow the reading on it, seems scarce worth it: yet what use the Apostles made of it with the Jews; and how necessary the knowledge of it is yet to us, in our controversies with them, he, that is any thing veried in them, cannot ignore. And let me tell you, Theophilus, that those fundamental controversies are both more necessary and more worthy a wise man’s study, than most of those comparatively trifling ones, that at present so miserably (not to say so caustically) distract Christendom. How many passages of the prophets by lazy readers are thought to have no use, which, as the star did the wise men, lead the attentive considerers to Christ; and so loudly and harmoniously, together with Moses’s typick shades, utter those words of the Baptist’s, Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world! that I meet with numerous passages in the new testament, to which I cannot but apply what St. Matthew notes upon his narrative of our Saviour’s apprehension: All this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled; or rather now all this was so done, that they were fulfilled; for so oftentimes the context commands us to render the use in these citations, and which recall to my mind the history of the transfiguration; for as there the Apostles at first saw Moses and Elias talking with Jesus, but at the second view (when the cloud was with-drawn, and he had spoken to them) saw none but Jesus only; so such passages, as I am speaking of, in the law, the prophets, and the gospel, at first survey appear very distinct things, but upon a second inspection, and the access of more light from an attentive collection of things, they do all, as it were, vanish into Christ; of whom (to use an Apostle’s terms) Moses in the law and the prophets did write: and at whom those types, and those predictions pointed. Those instances of the old testament, of the confused or dislocated mention of known pedigrees and stories, were possibly useless, and even troublesome to the ancient Jews; but serve us extremely to silence the cavils of the modern ones, when they would invalidate the new testament’s authority; because in St. Stephen’s narrative, and some of the Evangelist’s genealogies, the Holy Ghost is pleased to employ, in the new testament, that obscure strain he had oftener used in the old: (and sure as insuitingly as the Jews urge against us objections of that nature, I could readily retaliate, and repay them in the same coin, were there no common enemy, that might be advantaged by our quarrel, and employ either’s arguments against both.) And as there are divers prophetic passages in the Revelation, which we know as little the use, as meaning of, which yet doubtlesly our posterity will not find barren, when once the accomplishment shall have proved the expeditor of those predictions, whose event will (if it do nothing else) attain the omniscience of their inspirer: so possibly, of many Mosaic constitutions, whereof we Christians find excellent uses, most of the old Jews scarce knew
knew any; at least my conversation with our modern Rabbies shows me, that they, whilst they obstinately decline referring them to the Messiah, can scarce make any more of the inspired and mysterious laws of Moses, (except those that relate to the Zabian superstition, with which too most of their doctors are as unacquainted as ours) than the Egyptians, or Gymnosophists, could of their sacrifices and other ritual devotions.

It is not, that I think all the books, that constitute the Bible, of equal necessity or equal usefulness, because they are of equal extraction; or that I esteem the church would lose as much in the prophecy of Nahum, as that of Isaiah; or in the book of Ruth, as in the epistle to the Romans, or the gospel of John, (as the fixed stars themselves, though of the same heaven, are not all of the same magnitude and lustre). But I esteem all the constituent books of scripture necessary to the canon of it, as two eyes, two ears, and the rest of the members are all necessary to the body; without divers of which it may be, but not be so perfect; and which are all of great, though not of equal usefulness. And perhaps it might too without hyperbole be said further, that as among the stars, that shine in the firmament, though there be a disparity of greatness compared one to another, yet they are all of them lucid and celestial bodies, and the least of them far vaster than any thing on earth; so of the two testaments, that compose the Bible, though there may be some disparity in relation to themselves, yet are they both heavenly and instructive volumes, and insensibly out-valuing any the earth affords, or human pens ever traced. And I must add, that as mineralists observe, that rich mines are wont to lie hid in those grounds, whose surface bears no fruit-trees, (too much maligned by the arfencull and resembling fumes) nor is well stored with useful plants or verdure; (as if God would endear those ill-favoured lands by giving them great portions) so divers passages of holy writ, which appear barren and unpromising to our first survey, and hold not obviously forth instructions or promises, being by a sedulous artist searched into, (and the original word ΕΤΩΝ used in that text of Search the Scriptures does properly enough signify the searching for hid treasure) afford, out of their penetrated bowels, rich and precious mysteries of divinity.

The fifth Object.ion.

The next thing imputed to the scripture is, that it contains many things trivial or impertinent; and it is not impossible, but that some things may seem so, though they are not: of this sort are disjointed speeches, and abrupt transitions observed in many of our Saviour’s discourses; in which also we sometimes read him to have answered, without being asked the question, (though that be otherwise salvable by a critic) and sometimes to have answered to a quite other question than that he was asked. But this is not to be thought an absurdity, but an excellency in the replies of Christ; who possesting the prerogative of discerning hearts, did preach after that rate: his oratory took a shorter way than ours can follow it in: he prosecuted his design by altering his discourses; and wisely measured the fitness of his heavenly sermons, by their relation to his end, not his theme. For as he knew his hearers thoughts, he address himself to them; and reaching them in their earliest formation, and, as it were, their first cradles before they had leisure to pass into the tongue, he not more convinced his auditory by answering their thoughts, than by thus manifesting that he knew them. Of his so much undervalued parables, some, if not most, do (like those oysters that besides the meat they afford us, contain pearls) not only include excellent moralities, but comprise important prophecies. The parable of the pregnant grain of mustard seed, that so suddenly grew to so large a plant, was a (now fulfilled) prediction of the admirably
mirably swift progress of the gospel; which from despicable beginnings, soon prospered to a height, that rendered it almost as fit an object for wonder as for faith. That other parable of the treacherous husband-men clearly foretold Christ's death by the Jews malice, and their destruction for it. And I despair not to see unheeded prophecies disclosed in others of them, especially being informed that there is a critic (Monsieur A. B.) now at work upon a design of manifesting many otherwise interpreted passages of the new testament to be prophecies; of whom no less than the famous of the modern Rabbies, Menasse Ben-Israel, (one time I made him a visit at his own house in Amsterdam) gave me this character, that he took him for the ablest person of the Christians. These historical circumstances quarrelled with, in Christ's parables, are like the feathers, that wing our arrows, which though they pierce not like the head, but seem flight things, and of a differing matter from the rest, are yet requisite to make the shaft to pierce; and do both convey it to, and penetrate the mark. But nothing is thought more impertinent in the scripture than the frequent repetitions. But the learned need not to be told, that many things seem to the ignorant, bare repetitions, which yet ever bring along with them some light, or some accession; in that comparable to the stars, which, as like as they seem to vulgar gazers, are by the skilful astrologer taught to contain, under that colour and figure common to them all, very peculiar and distinct influences. I here also consider, that in all languages there are some customary gaminations and explications, which, though to strangers they appear superfluous, if not absurd, to the natives, and in the propriety of that speech, are not only current, but oftentimes emphatical. I find withal, that there is scarce any of these seeming impertinencies, of which a learned and judicious expositor cannot assign a pertinent cause or reason; and I consider too, that the books of scripture being indited, not all at once, but at very several and distant times, (according to the known saying, that Nunquam satis docetur, quod nunquam satis dicitur) the repetition of the same sins and errors required that of the same menaces and difflations; whose frequent enforcing, serving both to attest and convince the sinner's obstinacy, was not a bare repeating, but such a redoubling as we are fain to use, to drive in a nail to the head; (and the words of the wise are, in the wife man's words, As nais fastened by the masters of assemblies) where though in all the renewed strokes the busy hammer gives, the act be still the same, yet is no blow superfluous; the number of them serving to compleat their operation. They that in perusing books have the learning and skill to strip them, of what oratory or stealth hath crepted and disguised them in, will easily discern most of them to be but varied repetitions: which for my part I find differing from those of scripture, but in that the latter do in the same words generally comprize new matters, whereas the former usually present us stale matter in new words. And I consider further, that our own fad experience shewing us, that there is no single text of scripture, that subtler heretics sophistry cannot plausibly enough elude; the Holy Ghost foreseeing this from the beginning, hath mercifully and wisely provided, that the fundamental truths of faith and manners should be held forth in so many places, and in so much variety of explications, that one or other of them must unavoidably intercept those evasions, and escape those misconstructions, that sophistry may put upon the rest. Which providence alone hath preferred many articles from the attempts of heretics; making them both bluff to question, and despair to disprove a truth attested by more than two or three witnesses; and giving orthodox believers the satisfaction of having their anchor tied to a threefold cord, which is not easily broken. Most of the Bible's repetitions (or inculcation rather) teach us something or othe: untaught before; and, as in Pharaoh's vision, though both the ears and the kine signified the same thing, yet Joseph's interpretation shows, that neither was superfluous; even these few, that teach
us nothing else, teach us at least the importance (or some other attribute) of those repeated points we were taught before. And I scruple not to compare the expressions of the scripture to a rose, where though so many leaves nearly resemble each other, there’s not one of them, but contributes to the beauty and perfection of the flower.

The sixth Objection.

I am not unacquainted with the Keri, and the Cetlib; nor the Tikkum Sopherim in the old testament: nor yet with the Varia Lectiones (especially those of the Eastern and Western Jews, as they are called) taken notice of by modern critics in the Hebrew text of the old, as well as in the Greek of the new testament. I am not neither altogether a stranger to the difficulties to be met with, in making good the citations we find made of divers texts of the former of those sacred instruments in the latter: in which they seem not unfrequently to differ much from what we find extant in the ancient testament, as to the words, and sometimes too as to the sense. These things, I say, though by some much urged against the scripture, I am not ignorant of. But I think it not fit to consider them in this place; not only, because those that are much better qualified for such a work than I, have done it already; but because these objections relating rather to the truth or the authority, than to the style of the scripture, the nature of my present task does not oblige me to examine them. Especially, since I have already said something of them, and may say more, in what I write on the behalf of the Christian religion. And it is upon these grounds, Theophilus, that I also decline at present the consideration of what is wont to be objected, as if there were a great many self-contradictions to be met with in the scripture. Only I shall in the mean time invite you to take notice with me, that it is not oftentimes so much the various aspects of the texts, as the divers prepossessions and interests of the expounders, that make books seem replenished with interfering passages and contradictions. For if once the theme treated of do highly concern men’s interests, let the book be as clear as it can, subtle and engaged persons on both sides, perusing it with foretasted judgments of biased passions, will be sure to wrest many passages to countenance their prejudices, and serve their ends, though they make the texts never so fiercely fall out with one another, to reconcile them to their partial glosses. Of this I might produce an eminent instance in Aristotle’s physical writings, alleged by so many dissenting sects of school-men to countenance their jarring opinions; the injured Stagyrite (employed as second by every one that quotes him) being by every sect brought to fight with his antagonists, and by them all to give battle to himself. Thus do the dissenting sects of Mahometans quarrel as well about the sense of their Alcoran, as we do about that of our Bible; and make the one as much a nove of wax, as the Romish catholicks say we make the other. Which brings unto my mind, that not only the διάνωτα των, the same things hard to be understood in St. Paul’s epistles, but also the λοιπα γράφα, the other scriptures are by St. Peter said to be by the unlearned and untaught wrested to their own destruction. When a sober author finds an impartial reader, who takes his words in their genuinely obvious acception, wherever the context doth not manifestly force another on them, (in which then the reader acquiesces) the writer is easily understood. But when nimble and foretasted wits peruse an author, not to sit down with his sense, but to make him speak theirs, (whether it be his own or no) and giving themselves the pains and leasure of considering all the possible acceptions of a word or phrase, and the liberty of pitching upon that which best serves their present turn, allow themselves to conclude, that because it may signify so and so elsewhere, therefore it does so here: an author must be much warier than Homer and Virgil, whom Eudocia and Alexander Ross have made evengelists, to keep his
his words from being tortured into a confession of what was never in his thoughts. And a very pregnant instance of this truth we may observe in the law of our land, whose very end being to prevent or abolish strife; and which being written so punctually and expressly, and in so peculiar and barbarous a style (clogged with super-numerary repetitions) that nothing but their been conducive to so good an end could make it supportable; is yet by means concerned wits so misconstrued and perverted, that not only in private mens cafes, we see the judges so puzzled, that suits oftentimes out-lift suits; but the prince's party and the subject's kill, and execute one another; and (as charity tempts me to presume) think they may do so by the law, and do so for the law. In this belief, that we often impugne to the scripture our own faults and defects, the instances of those anti-scripturists, I have conversed with, have very much confirmed me: though I have still esteemed, that the best as well as the shortest way, is not to wrangle with them about every nicety, where the defeat of their objections gives us no victory over incredulity, and by but evidencing the scripture's not being either false or absurd, can serve but to justify our reverence to them, not to impart it; but by solidly asserting the divine origination of the scripture, reduce men to ascribe their scruples to the true cause; and persuade us to the temper of the Apostles, who, when Christ had uttered a hard saying, which so unsettled many of his disciples, that they deflected him upon it; though (their gross misapprehensions of numerous other much less obscure passages will easily persuade us) they relished it not aright, yet would by no means forfake him for their matter, because, says their spokeman, Peter, thou hast the words of eternal life, and we believe, and are sure, that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God: teaching us, with one grand and comprehensive truth, to silence particular scruples. And one thing would not be unworthy our objectors considering; that the truth and authority of the scriptures, and consequently their not being contradictory to themselves, hath (as we may elsewhere have occasion to manifest more at large) been immemorially believed by the learnedest men in the world; many of whom may be very reasonably supposed to have examined opinions without any other concern in their inquiries than that of not being deceived; or any other end than that of finding out the truth; and most of whom, though by their seduloueness and their erudition they discovered difficulties in the Bible; that our questionists could never have dreamed of; yet did they all conclude the belief of the scriptures grounded on as much reason, as is consistent with a due latitude for the exercise of faith: which possibly needs some dimness or relucrance in the understanding, to be an acceptable virtue of the will; (faith and the twilight seeming to agree in this property, that a mixture of darkness is requisite to both; with too refugent a light, the one vanishing into knowledge, as the other into day). And now faith thus casually presents her self in my way, it will, perhaps, not be impertinent to observe, that Christ often deals with new believers, as he is recorded to have done with Nathaniel; for as when that guileless Israelite had acknowledged him the Messiah, upon the bare evidence of his having been discerned by him under the fig-tree, our blessed Saviour tells him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these; (which in the next verse he proceeds to mention) so when men once have embraced the persuasion of the scripture's being divinely inspired, that faith, is a thing so acceptable to God, that he often discovers to them, to confirm them in their belief, arguments much clearer than those that induced them to it; and convinces them of the reasonableness of having submitted their reason to him that gave it them. And (as if there were mysteries, in which faith doth, more prosperously make way for understanding, than that is set afoot: 10
to introduce faith) it happens to them, as it did to the two blind men mentioned in the gospel, in whom our Saviour first required faith, and (having found that, he) then opened their eyes.

The seventh Objection.

From the (not long since mentioned) frequent repetitions to be met with in the scripture, and from the unusual method, wherein the author of it has thought fit, that the divine truths and precepts should be extant there, divers have been pleased to take occasion to criminate the Bible, as if, its bulk considered, it were but a barren book; wherein instructions are but sparingly scattered, in comparison of what is to be met with in divers other writings, where repetitions are avoided, and more of useful matter is delivered in fewer words. And hence it is (say these objectors) that many persons unquestionably religious chafe rather to study other books of devotion and morality, as containing more full and instructive precepts of good life.

I might answer this allegation by representing, that the several particulars, whereon the accamation is grounded, having been already examined by me, I need not say any thing distinctly to this accumulative charge. But because I would not only defend my veneration for the scripture, but persuade it, I shall on this occasion offer two or three things to consideration.

Although then the scripture were less replenished with excellent doctrines, and were but, as well as the best of other books, like mines, in the richest of which the golden ore is mingled with store of precious materials, (and needs a laborious separation from them) yet sure it would, like those mines, deserve to be carefully digged in: and it will become the grateful Christian's zeal to imitate him in the parable, who having found a treasure hid in a field, stuck at no price within his power, to purchase the whole field for the treasure's fake.

But, God be praised, this is not the case; for it is only our ignorance, our lazines, or our indolence, that keeps us from discovering, that the scripture is so far from being, as the objectors would have it, a wilderness or a barren soil, that it may be much more fitly compared to that blessed land of promise, which is so often said in scripture to be flowing with milk and honey, things useful and delightful; if not to paradise itself, of which, it is said, that there the Lord God made to grow every tree, that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden.

And indeed, as the author of it was omniscient, so experience has taught, that he has so much expressed himself to be so in the scripture, that the more knowing its pious students have been, the greater store of excellent truths they have met with in it; the scripture being indeed like heaven, where the better our eyes and telescopes are, the more lights we discover. And that this may not appear to be said gratis, let us consider, that a book may be instructive as well by teaching its readers speculative truths as practical ones, and that Christians ought as well to know what God would have us think of him and his works, as what he would have them do. Now as it is past question, that there are no speculative truths, of so noble and elevated a nature, as those that have God himself for their object; so there is no book, from whence there is so much to be learned, as there is from the Bible, of the nature, and even the thoughts of God, and of those deep mysteries, into which, as I formerly noted from St. Peter, the angels themselves are greedy of prying. Nay, there is no other book whatsoever, that teaches us any thing at all, concerning divers of these sublime subjects, that may be safely relied on, save in what it is beholden to the scripture for. So that we cannot without an extreme injury look upon that book as barren, which alone contains all those revealed truths, which are of so noble and precious a nature, that we justly prize the
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the composures of heathen philosophers, and other authors, for being enriched with
gueffes at some few of them, though much embezzled by the alloy, were the truths,
conjecturally delivered, are made liable to the imperfections of writers,
always fallible, and, for the most part, in some degree or other, actually erroneous.
But of this more perchance elsewhere. Wherefore I shall now add, that whereas those
we reason with, are pleased to prefer other books of morality and devotion before the
scripture, in reference to good life; they would probably be of another mind, if they
duly considered, that to engage men to live well and holy, there is much more
requisite, than barely to tell them, that they ought to do so, and how they should do it.
For since to lead a life truly virtuous requires in many cases, that we deny and overcome
our natural appetites and inclinations, and requires also constancy in a course, that is
confessedly wont to be attended with many hardships and dangers; it is not sufficient,
to engage a man to a good life, to give him precepts of it; which do not so much
(what is yet the main thing in this case) make men willing to conform to such precepts,
as supposing them to. And he, that can do no more, does far less than him, who, be-
sides the rules of good life, presents men the highest, and the most prevalent motives
to embrace piety and virtue, and the most powerful diffusives from all that is wicked;
by proposing to us such rewards and punishments, and satisfying us, that we ought, ac-
cording as we behave ourselves, to expect either the one or the other; as to convince us,
that we cannot be either wise or happy, but by being good, nor avoid the greatest of
miseries, but by avoiding vice. Now, as we shall see anon, that as to the precepts of
good life, the Bible is not unfurnished with them; so as to that most operative part of
the way of teaching good life, the proposing of the most prevalent motives to good,
and the most powerful diffusives from evil; not only no other book does, but no
book not inspired, can perform, in that kind, any thing near so much as the scripture
alone. Since we have not the same reason to believe any mere man, as we have to
believe God, touching those rewards and punishments, which he reserves after death
for those, that conform to, or disobey his laws; these being matters, which (whatever
philosophers and other learned men may have thought to the contrary) depend upon
his free will, and consequently are not to be explicitly known but by his revelation;
which he has not, that appears, vouchsafed us in any other book than the scripture.
And therefore it is not to be wondered at, that St. Paul should ascribe it to our Saviour
Christ, That he had brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And where-

2 Tim. 1. 10.

as hope is that spur, without which men do scarce ever cheerfully undertake, and re-
solutely go through things, much less difficult and dangerous than those, which a
virtuous course of life is wont to expose men to, St. Peter makes a Christian's highest
hope to depend upon a revealed truth, where he gives thanks to God for having,
according to his abundant mercy, begot us to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus
Christ from the dead. And what influence such a knowledge of God and Christ, as
if we have it at all, we must owe to the scripture, and such hopes and promises, as none
but God himself, or those he sends, can give a wary and intelligent person, may have
upon good life, you may guess by that other passage of the same Apostle, where not
only he mentions God's having, according to his divine power (or efficacy) given unto us
all things, that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him, that hath
called us to glory and virtue, but also immediately after speaks of our being made
partakers of the divine nature, and escaping the corruption, that is in the world through
lust; by those exceeding great and precious promises, that are given of God unto us.
So that although the scripture did not expressly give us such moral documents as ethical
writers do, and taught us good life, but by acquainting us with what God has revealed
in those writings concerning himself, and by convincingly proposing to us those highest
inducements to embrace a good, and shun an evil life, which (though reason may

1 Pet. 1. 3.

2 Pet. 1. 5.
perchance make some weak and confused guesses at them) revelation only can make examining men confidently depend upon: if, I say, the scripture did no more than thus engage us to resolve upon a good life, leaving us to derive the particular precepts of virtue from the inward dictates of the law of nature, and the exercise of our own reason, (which two together may well teach us almost as much as ethical books are wont to teach, of really and considerably useful) the scripture ought yet to be esteemed a most instructive book in reference to good life. As in effect we see, that the writings of no philosopher or orator ever made anything near so many persons so virtuous, as the new testament, though but a pocket book, has been able to do; especially in those primitive ages of the church, when those that received that book were less diverted from it, than since they have been by the reading of others. The moon may in clear weather lend a gardener light enough to dig, and manure his orchard, and perhaps to prune his trees; but none will say, that the moon does as much contribute to his labouring to produce fruit as the sun; since this nobler planet not only affords him light to work by, and a comfortable warmth whilst he is working, but animates him by the hopes he cherishes upon the sun's account, that in due season his diligence and toils shall be rewarded. The application is too obvious to need to be insinuated on.

But though upon the fore-mentioned accounts alone, the scripture would deserve to be looked upon as highly conducive to the practice of piety and virtue; yet it is far from being true, that it is destitute of such moral documents, which it needs not, to deserve to be looked upon as a book very instructive in reference to good life. For there being two sorts of virtues requisite to an embracer of the gospel, which have been conveniently enough called, for distinction sake, the one Christian, and the other moral or ethical; I suppose it will not be doubted, but that the rules of those virtues, that are properly Christian, must be sought for in the scripture, that being acknowledged by protestants, to have such a sufficiency as to matters of mere revelation, (which restriction too many do inconsiderately enough leave out) that in matters of that nature, divines often do, and in many cases may, argue negatively, as well as affirmatively from the scripture; which eases us of many things obtruded as duties, merely by its not, either expressly, or by consequence, imposing them upon us. So that as to things of this nature, there is such a fulness in that book, that oftentimes it says much by saying nothing, and not only its expressions but its silences are teaching, like a dial, in which the shadow as well as the light informs us. Nor must we think, that the Bible is destitute of the best sort of such precepts, exhortations, and diffusives, as we prize in ethical books; because they are not expressed and ranged in the Bible, as they are wont to be in systematical compositions; for not only there is extant in the scripture, to them that know how to constellate those lights, a very excellent body of moral precepts; but there are likewise scattered the forciblest motives to the several duties, and the most retractor diffusives from the contrary vices. And truly, it hath long lessened my esteem of our heathen morals, that ethicks being but the doctrine of regulating our passions, and directing our faculties, in order to the attainment of felicity, they have been hitherto handled by those, to whom the nature of the faculties and passions of the mind was but very little known: whereas to the author of the scripture morals, the frame and springs, and faculties of our souls, being intuitively and most perfectly known, the most proper and powerful ways of working on them, cannot be unknown to him: and then certainly, one unacquainted with the trade will be much less likely to mend a watch, that is out of order, than a watch-maker. And indeed, even in reference to that other sort of virtues, which are wont in the more confined sense of the word to be called moral, there
are I know not how many excellent notions and directions, relating to them, dispersed up and down in the scripture; though by reason of their not being drawn up by themselves, and of their being mingled with other matters, they are not so readily taken notice of by ordinary readers. Whereas, those studious perusers, that search the scriptures with a due diligence and attention, are not only wont easily enough to defray the moral counsels and precepts over-looked by the other readers; but take notice of many excellent documents, that are plainly enough intimated or hinted there to knowing and diligent perusers, though not clearly and expressly enough to be found of those, that think them not worth seeing.

Wherefore, as to those religious persons mentioned in the last proposed objection, I cannot but think, that by neglecting the scripture for ethical compositions, or even books of devotion, they as well wrong themselves as the scripture: and therefore I shall take leave to think the worse, rather of the practice of the men, than of the book of God. Scarcely any thing has given me a favourabler character of Luther, than his wish, that all his books of devotion were burnt, when he once perceived, that the people’s fondness and over valuation of them produced a neglect of the study of the Bible; to which you shall find, Theophilus, that the best of that nature being compared, are but (not to draw to our present purpose that of Seneca to his mother; Paribus intervallis omnia divina ad omnibus humanis distant) like the stars compared to the sun, whose emanations confer on them their lustre, but whose presence drowns it. For though I deny not books of devotion a due degree of praise and usefulness, yet if I refuse them the superlative degree of either; and since the writers of the best of that kind of compositions, either steal their best things from, or acknowledge that they borrowed them of the Bible; I would not have Christians neglect the fountain for the streams, and unwisely, as well as unthankfully, elect to read God’s word, rather in any book than his own; in which, to encourage us to study the precepts of a virtuous and holy life, we have such peculiar and encouraging invitations.—Saint Paul seems to make it the (end and the) result of the several usefulnesses he attributes to the scripture, That it can make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works; and is able, (as he speaks a little higher) oophetos eli; oourpiau, to make us wise unto salvation. There are indeed many excellent instructions given to us in other books; but they giving us directions, only towards the attainment of the advantages, conveniences, and ornaments of life; the ignorance of those only makes us miss those particular ends, whereto they give addresses, or whereof they facilitate our pursuits; but the knowledge, whose acquiret, or neglect, imports endless joys or torments, we need seek only from the scripture: a Christian to understand the duty of his faith and life, needing to understand no other book than the Bible; though indeed to understand the Bible well, it is ordinarily requisite, that a pretty number of other books be understood. Christians then have reason to study most that book, which understood, all others are needless to salvation, and which ignored, they are insufficient. If Saint Peter’s vision had been a reality, he would scarce, hungry as he was, have ranged abroad to hunt in this desert or that forest for game, when he had a vessel let down to him from heaven, containing in it’s self all manner of four-footed beasts, and other objects of appetite, attended with a commanding invitation from heaven, Rize, Peter, kill, and Eat. So when God sends us from heaven in one volume, a, at least virtual, collection of all those divine truths and holy precepts, others scattering and sparingly glean out of human books; the Christians cannot but prize a book so comprehensive, which by making it safe for him to ignore others by so merited an Autonomia, wears the title of the book, (for so the Bible signifies in Greek, as the Hebrews call it Mikra, which by excellence signifies what’s to be read.)
There are precepts enough of virtue, and motives enough to conform to them, held forth in the Bible, if the contents of that divine book were believed and considered as they ought to be. It is a mistake to think, that a large system of ethicks, dissected according to the nice prescriptions of logick, and methodically replenished with definitions, divisions, distinctions, and syllogisms, is requisite or sufficient to make men virtuous. Too many of our moralists write, as if they thought virtue could be taught as easily, and much in the same way, as grammar; and leaving our rational motives to virtue, and deterrents from vice, with other things, that have a genuine influence on the minds and manners of men, they fall to wrangle about the titles and precedencies of the parts of ethical philosophy, and things extrinsical enough to vice and virtue; they spend more time in ascertaining their method, than the prerogatives of virtue above vice; they seem more solicitous, how to order their chapters than their readers actions; and are more inductious to impress their doctrine on our memories than our affections, and teach us better to dispute of our passions than with them. Whereas, as the condition of a monarch, who is possessed but of one kingdom or province, is preferable to that of a geographer, though he be able to discourse theoretically of the dimensions, situation, and motion, or stability of the whole terrestrial globe; to carve it into zones, climates and parallels, to enumerate the various names and etymologies of its various regions, and give an account of the extent, the confines, the figure, the divisions, &c. of all the dominions and provinces of it: so the actual possession of one virtue is preferable to the bare speculative knowledge of them all. Their master Aristotle hath herein been more plain, and less pedantic; who (by favour of his interpreters) hath not been nice in the method of his ethicks. And indeed, but little theory is essentially requisite to the being virtuous, provided it be duly understood, and cordially put in practice; reason and discretion sufficing, analogically, to extend and apply it to the particular occurrences of life; (which otherwise being so near infinite, as to be indefinite, are not so easily specifiable in rules:) as the view of the single pole-star directs the heedful pilot, in almost all the various courses of navigation. And the systems of moralists may (in this particular) not unfitly be compared to heaven, where there are luminaries and stars obvious to all eyes, that diffuse beams sufficient to light us in most ways; and as I, that, with modern astronomers, by an excellent telescope, have beheld perhaps near a hundred stars in the Pleiades, where common eyes fix but six; and have often discerned in the milky-way, and other pale parts of the firmament, numberless little stars generally unseen, receive yet from heaven no more light useful to travel by, than other men enjoy: so there are certain grand principles and maxims in the ethicks, which both are generally conspicuous, and generally afford men much light and much direction; but the numerous little notions, (admit them truths) suggested by scholarship to ethical writers, and by them to us, though the speculation be not unpleasant, afford us very little peculiar light to guide our actions by. When I remember those ancient heroes, that have ennobled secular, and are ennobled by sacred story, and whose examples suggested the precepts of virtue, before there were any written ones to conform to; I am tempted to say, that virtue was scarce ever better practised, than whilst men had not yet talked of the definition of it: (as many an alchymist begs with rare notions of the nature of gold, which fills the coffers of merchants, that never saw mine nor furnace.) The grand precepts of morality are fruitful seeds, which, industriously cultivated, will bring forth fruits still affording other seeds. And as for the motives to pious, and diffusions from sinful practices, though out of the many voluminous books of morality, there may be divers collected, not extant in the Bible; yet may a
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dextrous reader find in that heavenly book many more invitations to virtue, and
determents from vice, than moft men are aware of; and some of them of an import-
ance, that renders one of them as much more considerable than many ordinary ones,
as one fair pearl out of a jeweller's shop out-values a score of those little pearls, that
druggets fell by the ounce, or doth comprize many inferior inducements, (which
wife men judge not of by tale, but value) as a piece doth twenty shillings. And
though human authors do often in their penenral treatises allow themselves to be
lavish in ornaments, to expatiate into amplifications, and to drain common-places;
yet whilst they want an intimate admission, all these are too often unable to reform, I
say not those that read them, but even those that write them: whereas the experience
of the primitive and heroic ages of the church does gloriously manifest, that the
inducements and diffusives held forth in the Bible, though deftitute of those em-
bellishments and advantages, where they are confcionably entertained, and seriously
pondered, are fufficient to raise virtue to a pitch philosophy durft scarcely aim at.
Nor indeed is the number great of pertinent and rational incitements, or determents,
relating to virtue; and in discourses, that have them for theme, how far veryer the
bows may extend, yet generally the knot lies in a little compass: and the analyfer,
that shall crack many of those compofures, having severed the shells, shall find their
kernels to be much alike. What this writer compares to one thing, that writer likens
to another; those ungrateful persons to God, that one refembles to swine, who eat
the acorns without ever looking up to the tree they fall from, another compares to
cattle, that drink of the streams, without considering what fountain they flow from;
these but prefer us several drefses of virtue and vice, where though the novelty and
variety of habit serve to engage attention in all, and want not influence (at least)
upon easy and flexible natures, yet in considerate and discerning persons, they alter
not much the notion, under which the qualities themselves are entertained. Nor will
such be apt to quarrel with the author of the scripture; because the motives and dif-
susives extant there are many of them old and known, or frequently repeated; the
efficacy of them being so too. Were it not strange, a physician should decline ex-
hibiting of mithridate, because it was a known medicine, and famous for its cures
many ages since? Doth bread less nourish us, or is it less used, because it was (as
men suppose) contemporary to Adam, and the most common food of all nations in all
ages? And (as to the repetition of the same allegation and inducements, as often as
men's condition returned to need them) the paucity of ponderous considerations in
the ethics often neccessitating either (disguised perhaps, yet) repetitions of the fame,
or the substitution of those, that must be much inferior to be new; such persons as
little admire, that reiterated employment of the fame truths, as they would to fee
a soldier use a sword, though he, and legions many ages before him, have constantly
made most use of that weapon; or a general encourage his engaging soldiers by
reprefenting to them honour, duty, fpoil, neceffity, and thofe other known topics
used by himself at the head of his army, as often as he had occasion to lead it on to
fight. To all this I am invited by this occasion to subjoin, that upon the score of
God's being both an omnipotent spirit and the supreme law-giver to the whole
creation, the fame truths, counfels, exhortations, diffusions, &c. oftentimes have,
and always ought to have, another-gfuefs efficacy and prevalence on a Christian reader,
when he finds them in the scripture, than if he should meet with the fame in the
books of heathen moralists, though learned and eloquent. And certainly, thofe,
that with fuch reverence read the writings of thofe great wits of antiquity, that have
made the greatest discoveries of truth, because they believe them to have been
endowed with very illuminated intellectualls, ought to pay them, and a book published
by
by an omniscient enditer, a reverence somewhat proportionate to the disparity of their authors, since men (as Eliphaz speaks in Job) are but of yesterday, and know little or nothing. A wary person reads the wiser authors, with a reflection, that they may deceive him by being themselves deceived; and undergoes a double labour, the one in investigating the meaning, and the other in examining the truth of what they deliver: but in the Bible, we are caged of the latter of these troubles; for if we find the sense of a text of scripture, we cannot miss a truth, being never deceived by that book, but when we deceive ourselves by presuming we understand it, when indeed we do not. I am otherwise affected to find the vanity of the world proclaimed and depreciated by him, that enjoyed all the delights and glories of it, than when I meet with the same truth from some beggarly Cynick, that never was admitted to taste those luscious and bewitching pleasures, and needs no great philosophy to despise a world, he judges of by the scant share the narrowness of his condition allows him of the joys of it, and of which (consequently) his criminations should as little move, as a blindman’s of a black-moor; whom though he may (perchance) truly style ugly, yet he were of a somewhat easy faith, that should think her so, barely upon the testimony of so incompetent a witness. Thus when God himself is pleased to reveal, what is vice or virtue, sublime or depicable, truth or falsehood, happiness or misery, I have another-guise acquiescence in his decisions, than in the same met with in an human author, who having necessarily frailties and passions, is both obnoxious to mitake, and capable to deceive. And therefore it is no wonder, that the flighting of God’s dictates should receive an aggravation upon the score of their being his: as, our Saviour gave the preceedency of the Ninevites converted on Jonah to them, that repented not at his preaching, because he was a greater than Jonah. And therefore, though I have formerly been no very negligent peruser of books of morality; yet knowing, that they have a power but to persuade, not to command, and that the penalties of sin or death are not inseparably annexed to the disobedience of their precriptions, I confess, I often find my self but faintly wrought on by them. For I must acknowledge, that frequently assuming the liberty of questioning the reasonableness of what human writers (whether philosophers or fathers) are pleased to impose upon us; I find those specious and boasted allegations, the apothegms of the sages, the placits of the philosophers, the examples of eminent persons, the pretty families, quaint allegories, and quick sentences of wise wits; I find all these topicks, I say, such two-edged weapons, that they are as well applicable to the service of falsehood, as of truth, and may by ready wits be brought equally to countenance contrary assertions. And really, most moralists, except in those few duties, that nature herself hath foretaught us, to a man, whose restlesse curiosity leads his enquiries to all times and nations, will appear little other than fencers with wit, (I mean those that have any;) for each of these popular topicks is such an unfolid or uncertain foundation, that one man can build little on it, that an equally able antagonist may not with so specious probability overthrow; and I fear, most of us have but too often found our corruptions sophisters enough to elude any such thing, that prefixed that as a duty, which they had no mind we should perform. But when I find any thing enjoined in the scripture, my conscienceless to its being imposed by that father of spirits, (who has both right to enact laws, which must be therefore just, because he enacts them, and power to punish the transgression of them, with no les then eternal death;) I then leave roving, and see where to cast anchor. I think it my part without disputing them to obey his orders, and acquiesce more in that imperious ἐντὸς ἡμῖν, Thus faith the Lord, than in a whole dialogue of Plato, or an epistle of Seneca. I therefore love to build my ethics (as well as my creed) upon the rock, and esteeming nothing but
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the true, proper, and strict sense of the scripture, (and what is convincingly deducible from it) to be indispensably obligatory, either as (in matters of mere revelation) to faith or practice; it is no wonder, if I study God’s will most in that book, wherein alone I think it revealed; and, truly, finding in my self no motive more justly prevalent to obedience, than his right to exact it that requires it, few men are more ready than I, in distinguishing what indeed God says from what man would make him say. And if I allow my self such liberty to discern the text from the gloss, in the writings of our vulgar interpreters, (of most of whose comments, for reasons prosecuted into another paper, I am no great idolater) and even of the fathers of the church; I hope I shall not need to tell Theophilus, that in all other moralists I like the freedom to like or disapprove, as upon examination my impartial reason relieves them, or that I frequently fear their harangues will hardly pass for demonstrations, with those wary teetsters, that like not to be cheated, so much as into virtue, but chafe to act as rational or Christians, as well in relation to the inducements, as to the nature of what they do.

Amongst the thirteen articles of the Jewish creed, one acknowledges the very expressions of the law (or pentateuch) to have been inspired by God. That saying of the Rabbins is not altogether so hyperbolical, as a perfunctory reader would imagine, that upon each title of the law whole mountains (of doctrine) hang. I shall not mention, as any proof of this, the strange mysteries they fancy in the strange accenting of the ten commandments in the original, since their soberer doctors have in free discourse confessed to me, that it is as much a riddle to them as us. Nor shall I insist upon the Jews reducing the whole law to 613 precepts, affirmative and negative, according to the number of the letters of the decalogue; thereby infinuating that all the laws, that regulate man’s duty, are virtually or reducibly comprized there. Although this Rabbinical notion, (not to call it whimsey) be in such request among them; and so known to those, that are anything conversant in Jewish authors, that I have sometimes suspected, that the conceit entertained by so many Christian divines, that all the precepts, that relate to any part of the whole duty of man, are but just conclusions deducible from the decalogue, had its rise thence. But I shall not, as I said, ground my opinion of the pregnant instructiveness of the scripture, upon such questionable, not to say altogether proofless, conceits. That which may better persuade a considering man, is, that befores those more resplendent and obvious truths, wherewith the scriptures do evidently abound, there are many instructions exhibited, many truths affiicted, many errors confuted, and many mysteries hinted, in the very expressions of holy writ, to an inquisitive and concerned peruser, which a heedles vulgar reader is not wont to take notice of. God, who in the scripture is said to cover himself with light as with a garment, justifies that expression in the scripture, where (as the first words, that he is recorded to have ever spoken, were "

Yehi-or, Let there be light") the very words and phrases, that cloath the sense, are not alone emphatical, but oftentimes mysterious. The Apostle assures us, whatsoever things were written, even in the old testament, were written for our learning; but yet, befores those many particular sentences of the Bible, that are not destitute of instructions, there are some so pregnant with them, that we may easily find this difference between them and human writings, that those first mentioned contain more matter than words, and the other more words than matter. Nay, many of the very flowers of rhetoric growing there, have (like the marygold, that in hot countries points at the sun) a virtue of hinting the useful and the sublimest truths; the Bible being in this like the tree of life, (flourishing in the New Jerusalem) which not only afforded seasonable fruit, but of which the very leaves were for the healing of the nations. As for:
for those, who have in this and the last age made bold to depreciate the old testament, by pretending, that to Christians the new is sufficient; I am at present apt to think, that the doctrine of the gospel, together with the light of nature, (which it excludes not, but rather supposes) contains all those duties, which are absolutely necessary to be performed by all Christians, in order to salvation. And that consequently, many divines, both Catholicks and Reformed, do inconsiderately enough press many things enacted in the old testament, as laws properly so called, which are not now, upon the score of their being there enacted, obligatory to us Christians, nor perhaps ever were to any, but the Jews, and some kind of Jewish proselytes. But I think withal, that though it be hard to shew, that any thing is a necessary duty to Christians, in the sense above declared, if it cannot be shewn to be so, either by the new testament, or the light of nature; yet not only there are many particulars relating to such duties, of which the old testament may excellently assist us to give ourselves a more distinct and explicit instruction, than is easy to be collected from the new; but of the mysteries of our religion, there are many things delivered more expressly, or more fully, in some passages of the old testament, than in any of the gospel, as I could easily evidence, if I thought it requisite. So that the use of it is very great, as to the credenda in divinity, though not perhaps absolutely necessary as to the agenda. But I consider further, that both the matters and the expressions made use of in the old testament are so very frequently, and, almost upon all occasions, related to in the new, (as if the wisdom of God were like rivers and seas, that affect to flow in the same channels themselves had made before) that there is scarce a page of the latter, to the better understanding of which the study of the former is not either absolutely necessary, or at least highly useful. Should God be pleased to instruct us, as he did Jonah, by the shadow of a weed, it were our duty to acquiesce: how much more then, when he vouchsafes to speak to us in almost as glorious a manner as he did to Moses; in a scripture, that hath such resemblances to the sanctuary, which contained the law of God, exhibited the mercy-feat, (the type of Christ) and wherein the two golden cherubims, like the two precious and harmonious testaments, looked towards one another, and both towards that mercy-feat, that typified the Messiah? We should therefore, not only with acquiescence, but gratitude, look upon God’s having appointed the scripture to be the light, in which his spirit regularly shines upon his church; since the luminary is as well refulgent, as the choice of it is his, whose blessing can prosper any means of grace, as without his blessing no means of grace can prosper.

And, Theophilus, since among those, that are so far mistaken, as to postpone the study of the Bible to that of some applauded books of morality and devotion, there are not wanting divers persons, otherwise eminently religious; I hope you will easily excuse me, if, for fear their example should prove a temptation to you, and add to the discouragements you must expect from the darkness of some texts, and the opposition, that will be given you, especially at first, by the grand enemy to the author and design of the scripture; I venture to superadd to all that I have said already, concerning these mens practice, that it is not only a commendable, but a much more improving custom, than it is by many thought, to read daily and orderly some certain portion or chapters of the Bible; and, not to desist from that practice, though (as Naaman dipped himself six times in Jordan, without being cured) we should not perceive a sudden and sensible benefit accruing from it. For in clycles (bodily or spiritual) though the mouth be out of taste, and cannot relish what is taken in, yet wholesome aliments must be eaten, and do effectually nourish and strengthen, though they be then insipid, (perhaps bitter) to the daintier palate. We must, with the eunuch,
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eunuch, read divers texts we understand not, when we read them; and though, at
first, we be not able to penetrate the senses of some portions of God's word, we must
at least make our faculties as hospitable to it as we can; and make our memories
admit, and embrace it, till our understandings be grown up to do the like: it
becoming the disciples of our Saviour, herein to imitate his holy mother, of whom it
is written, that she (the blessed virgin and her husband) understood not the sayings,
which he spake unto them,— but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart;
and to think it may very well be, that, as our Saviour said to Peter, What I do,
though not now, but thou shalt know hereafter: so, by the welcome he dispenses
you to give his word into your memory, he says to you, What I say, thou knowest
though not now; but thou shalt know hereafter: and the apostle's motive to hospitality, Be not
forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares, will,
without being overfretted, take in the texts of scripture we are unacquainted with.

For we may easily in them, entertain with Abraham and Lot, greater guests than we
are aware of; and who, when their true condition appears, may recompense our
entertainment of them, by showering blessings on us, and receiving us from the
companionship and destitution of the wicked. And sure, if the Pagans laid up, with awful
reverence, those dark and squinting oracles, that came (at least many of them) from
the prince of darkness, and father of lies; we should blush to refuse attentive
perusals, and lodging in our memories, to these θεῖοι μνήμες, those lively oracles, those
θεῖοι μνήμες, oracles of God, who is the father of lights, and an essential truth that
cannot lie. And the most enigmatical texts we meet with, which seem meant pur-
purposely to poise us, we may make useful admonitors of our weaknesses, and take for
welcome opportunities, to evince how great a reverence we pay God's word, upon
the single score of its being so. Nor let those disturbances, with which the devil
defends itself to obstruct or discourage our first progress in a study so ruinous to his
malicious ends upon us, deter us; for these are commonly but the throws and strugg-
gles of Christ new-formed in us, or else like those horrid fits and outcries, which
preceded the ejection of that unclean spirit mentioned in the first of Mark; such
parting ceremonies being not unusual to the dislodging devil; who when he finds
himself upon the point of being expelled, hath great wrath, because he knoweth he
hath but a short time. And though the God of peace, however he will bruise Satan under
your feet shortly, should for a while try us even with deception in the study of the
scripture; let us not, for all that, desert so improving a study, but resolutely persevere
in the constant and faithful use of the means of grace: as the moon, when she suffers
an eclipse, forsoaks not her orb or motion, but, by continuing her unrewarded course,
regains the irradiations she was deprived of. We find the word of God compared to
seed, (that deathless seed, by which Saint Peter saith, we are born again) and that,
we know, may seem, for a long time, as well dead as buried in the ground, and yet
afterwards spring and grow up into a plentiful harvest. Nor must our proficiency
any more displease us with the being conversant with the scripture, than our
fallacies: I will never (faith the Psalmist) forget thy precepts, for with them thou hast
given me. And indeed, the word of God is not to be used like active phylactic,
taken once, that it may not be taken again; but it is, compared to food, which indeed
it is, of the soul, in which sense it may be literally enough said, That man liveth not
by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Now as our
having fed never so well and heartily on excellent and nutritive meats yesterday, will
not keep us from needing to eat again to-day, or to-morrow, and so daily, as long as
we continue in these ruinous cottages of clay; so in spiritual reflections with full,
without repeated meals, the soul will scarcely thrive. And as, generally, the more
healthy
healthy and luyty men are, the frequenter and stronger appetites they have; so the beft Christians, and (witnes David) the greatest proficients in scripture-knowledge, have the keenest stomachs to this food of souls; and the vigoroufet piety, by a defuetude and neglect of it, is subject to faint and pine away. Nor have we just care to repine at an engagement to affiduity in the scriptures; for there are not near fo many things, that will require, as there are that will deferve and recompence a serious study in a book, where both the strict fene and the circumstances, and expressions that cloath it, are richly instructive: like that aromatical fruit, of which, not only the kernel is a nutmeg, but the very involving skin is mace. This inexhausted fulness occasioned that panegyrical precept of the Rabbies concerning the law; מְלָכָה יִבְרָאִים נֶפֶרֶךְ נֶפֶרֶךְ נֶפֶרֶךְ נֶפֶרֶךְ נֶפֶרֶךְ נֶפֶרֶךְ נֶפֶרֶךְ. Turn it over, and again turn it over, for all is in it: concurrently to which, the Jew, that translates the Arabian apothegms into Hebrew, thus pronounces; These proceedeth not a true sentence out of the mouths of this world’s wise men, that is not intimated in our law.

The usefulness of divers texts is such, that we should not only have them in our possession, but in a readiness; and as David, distressed by his mortal enemies, took Goliab’s sword from near the ephod, to wear it whithersoever he went; so Christians, profecuted by ghastly enemies, should be diligent, not only to have an amnory well furnished with spiritual weapons, but to wear this sword of the spirit always by their sides, to ward and thrust with, upon all occasions; without needing to depend upon any such thing as concordances, which often cannot be come by, and oftner, not soon enough to keep us from being foiled by the father, or the champion of lyes. But now, to engage us to grow ready scripturists, it is not only true, that as the texts of the Bible interchange light with one another, and every new degree of scripture-knowledge is not only an acquit of so much, but an instrument to acquire more; so is that book a theme so comprehensive and so fertile, that the last hour of a Christian’s longest and induftriouset life will still leave undiscovered mysteries in it: this, I say, is not only true, but it is also true, that the doctrines of it are of that importance, and find that opposition in our depraved nature, that even those truths, that require but few perusals to be understood, require many to be duly impressed; our preposterously partial memories, being rarely like quick-silver, wherein nothing will sink but (that pretiouset of metals) gold; for that alone is heavier than the mercury. The word of Christ must not be as a passenger, or sparingly entertained in our minds, but must dwell there, and that richly: and the word, which St. James pronounces able to save our souls, he describes as a graff, which must not only be closely embraced by that, wherein it is to fructify, but must continue there, to bring the stock and graff to (if I may so speak) con corrupte. And indeed we are so indisposed to admit, and so obnoxious to deface, religious impressions, that we need, during our whole life, be conversant with the precepts of leading it piously. — But it is scarce more faulty in, than incident to, the froward nature of man, to be ever quarrelling with God’s method of profecuting his intentions; and (as if he were wiser than his Maker) to criminate his conduct in his dispensations. Even that excellent person, the glorious of virgins, and of mothers, whom all ages must defferedly call Blessed, incurred her divine son’s reprehension, for an intimated offer to alter his purposed method in dif closing himself. But God is too just to himself; and too merciful to us, to degrade (as it were) his omnificence so far, as to suffer himself to be swayed against the dictates of it, by such purblind and perverfe tutors as we; his goodness concerns him too much in our instruction, to suffer him to let our fancies indite his word. To attain his own ends, he makes choice of his own means and instruments, without needing our purblind eyes in the election; and what with unathomable widom he hath been pleased.
pleased to contrive for man's instruction with a gracious, though often mis-understood constancy, he perils in. He knows, that many, who are disposed to cavil at the present contrivance or style of scripture, would be apt to take exceptions at any other: for some thing or other it must necessarily be, and the unimaginable diversity of humours, judgments and prepossession is such, that as these now say, why thus, and not so? others would, in case of alteration, be as ready to ask, why so, and not thus? It is questionable, whether the Israelites were greater murmurers at Pharaoh in Egypt, or at Moses in the desert: and the children complained of by their companions in the market-place have had either posterity or predecessors in all ages; which have been still of the disposition of those Jews, who imputed the more than prophets rigidity of virtue to the great enemy of that lovely quality; and the greater than Solomon's censure confessions to the vices he designed them to destroy. But the great physician of mankind is too compassionate and wise, to let his distracted patients prescribe their own course of physic, or, to decline our fond and peevish cavils, shuffle or discom-pose those mysterious and profound contrivances; whose wisdom engages the attention, and exacts the wonders of those heavenly unclogged spirits, that are scarce more advantaged over us by their native abilities, than by the means they have of improving them. And therefore, our Saviour refused to defend from the crofs, though they, whose malice served to fix him there, (the chief priests and scribes themselves) declared, that on those terms they would believe on him. And though we are (but too) apt to fancy, that we should be won to our duty, if it were taught or pressed in such a way; yet we may be pleased to remember, that it was one in hell, that would needs have another means than the scripture, of having sinners preached to; and one in heaven, that referring them to the scripture, declared, That if men heard not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead, to preach to them.

If I address what I write, not to so intelligent a person as Theophilus, but to proscribed readers, I should add, to what I have said of the several exceptions against the scripture, a cordial advice to all, whose parts and leisure give them not a just hope of being able boldly to vindicate it either to themselves or others, to decline as much as they discretely can, the listening to objectors or objections, of what sort, or under what disguise forever, against that heavenly book; especially, if proposed by plausible and insinuating wits. For it not being necessary, (nor indeed possible) for every private Christian, to know the opinions and reasons of all dissenters about the scripture, (no more than for every traveller to be a geographer;) nor requisite to the knowledge of the way to heaven, to know all those, in which they that mis it, wander; (as to learn the way from Dover to London, I need not learn those that lead not thither:) it is not prudent to run a very probable hazard of disquieting one's faith, and a not improbable one of subverting it, only to gratify a needless curiosity; an itch, which we are delighted to have scratched, but which is exasperated by being so. And frequently, though your design seem innocent, (as only to hear without believing, and please your self with something of wit and novelty) yet those conversations rarely prove harmless; and (as too frequent and lad experience proclaims) generally either abate a degree of your faith, or qualify some ardor of your love, or lessen your reverence for that matchless book, or put some strange and disquieting scruples into your thoughts, which it is much easier to confute than to silence. Wherefore, as in infectious times, when the plague reigns, physicians use more strictly to forbid the smaller excesses and inordinacies of diet, and the use of meats of ill digestion, or apt to breed any distemper; because every petty fever becomes, through the malignity of the air, apt to turn into the plague: so now, that anti-
anti-scripturism grows so rise, and spreads so fast, I hope it will not appear unreason-
able to advise thofe, that tender the safety and ferenity of their faith, to be more than
ordinarily fhy of being too venturous of any books, or company, that may derogate
from their veneration of the scripture; because by the predominant and contagious
profaneness of the times, the leaff injurious opinions harboured of it, are prone to
degenerate into irreligion. But I fear, you will think I preach.

The eighth and lef Objection.

And now, Theophilius, I am arrived at that part of this discourse, wherein it will be
fit to examine the grand objection against the style of the scripture, which, though a
philosopher would not look upon it as the most considerable, is yet most urged by many
of its witty adversaries; especially such as are wont to exercise and gratify their fancy.
more than their reason: the objection itself is this: 'That the scripture is so un-
adorned with flowers of rhetorick, and so deftibute of eloquence, that it is flat, and
proves commonly ineffectual upon intelligent readers. Infomuch that divers great
wits and great perfons, especially statesmen, do either despife it, or neglect to study
it.' And truly, the story is famous of that cardinal, (who flourished in the last age)
that said, that once indeed he had read the Bible, but if he were to do fo again, it
would lofe him all his Latinity. And amongst those great orators, (as they thought
themselves) who lived in the fame age and country that he did, the complaint was
ordinary, that the reading of the Bible untaught them to the purity of the Roman
language, and corrupted their Ciceronian style. And I remember no obscure prince,
(though he shail here be nameless, because for other qualities I honour him) in no ob-
scure company, disputed with me one day an opinion about the style of the scripture,
to which the cardinal's scorn was a compliment. I with these fally expresions were
but outlandish, and could not cross those feas, that environ England; (which is not so
happily severed from the world's vices, as from its continent) this profane judging to
boldly that book, men fhall be judged by, being, if not a native, yet at leaff a free
denizon of England. For not only it was one, that I am sorry I can call our country-
man, who is recorded to have solemnly preferred one of the odes of Pindarus, before
all the psalms of David; but I could easily add divers refembling instances, that I
have my self been troubled to meet with, were it not that I somewhat doubt, whether
this kind of profane sayings be not as well fitter as worthier to be forgotten than re-
membered, and to be suppressed than divulged: for (not to mention, that the re-
cording of such enormities puts an ill compliment upon mankind) the satisfaction some
men's curiosities receive by fuch relations, will scarce account for the temptation it gives
others to imitate what they find some have dared. For there are some fins, whose grand
deterrent is a kind of persuasion, that they are too horrid to have been committed;
and some wise legislators thought it better against certain crimes, to use the silence of
the laws, than their threats. I shall therefore, without any further mention of scand-
alous particularities, take it for granted, that there have been, and are but too many
witty disrefectors of the scripture. But as for the accusation it self, which they are
alleged to countenance, many defences might be here made against it, if divers con-
iderations pertinent to that purpose, among others, did not belong to fome of those
enfuing parts of my discourse, wherein it is not the style of the scripture, but other
themes, that are principally and directly treated of. Yet that you may be affifted to
refer hither fuch parts of the following discourse, as are applicable to the matter under
consideration, I shall here take notice to you, that my answers to the objection above
proposed may for the moft part be reduced to these five heads of argument.
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First, That as to divers parts of the scripture, it was not requisite, that they should be adorned with rhetorical embellishments.

Next, That the Bible seems to have much less eloquence than indeed it has, to those that read it only in translations, especially the vulgar Latin version.

Thirdly, That by reason of the differing notions, several sorts of men, especially of distant nations and climates, have of eloquence; many passages, that are thought uneloquent by us, may appear excellently expressed to another part of mankind.

Fourthly, That there are in the scripture a multitude of those texts, wherein the author thought fit to employ the ornaments of language, conspicuously adorned with such as agree even with our notions of eloquence.

And lastly, That it is very far from being consonant to experience, that the style of the scripture does make it unoperative upon the generality of its readers, if they be not faultily indisposed to receive impressions from it.

As to the first of these, having already above declared, that there are many parts of scripture, wherein it would have been improper to affect eloquence; I am willing to suppose, that you have not yet forgot what has been formerly said; and therefore, I am unwilling to detain you on this first consideration. Yet I cannot but on this occasion take notice to you, that we allow all sorts of people expressions proper and fitted to their several professions and themes. How many of us can dwell on lawyers, physicians, and chymists books; though oftentimes written in terms as harsh and as uncourteous, as if those rudenesses were their design? And yet we can neglect and scorn the scripture, because in some passages we there find the mysteries, and other matters of religion, delivered in a proper and theological style. I remember Machiavel, in the dedication of his famous Prince, after he had (not caustically) acknowledged to Lorenzo de Medici, (to whom this book is addressed) that he had not stuffed it with lofty language, or big words, nor adorned it with any of those inveigling outward ornaments, usual to other authors in their writings; gives this account of the plainness of his style, [Perche to ho voluto, o che veruna cosa la honorì (la mia opera) o che solamente la verità della materia, & la gravità del soggetto la faccia grata] that he thought fit, either that nothing at all should recommend his work, or that only the truth of the discourse and the dignity of the subject should make it acceptable, and exact its welcome. If a mere statesman, writing to a prince, upon a more civil theme, could reasonably talk thus; with how much more reason may God expect a welcoming entertainment for the least adorned parts of a book, of which the truth is a direct emanation from the essential and supreme Truth, and of which the contents concern no less than man's eternal happiness or misery? And if our wise Italian critics themselves cannot, by the plainness of Machiavel's style, nor the forbidding of his writings by the inquisition, be deterred from as affluently as prohibited a study of his books; what excuse will they one day have, that now make the unaffected style of scripture the sole excuse of their despising, (or at least neglecting) that divine book?

Secondly, As to the disadvantage the scripture receives by its not being read by those I now reason with, in its originals; though I have said something to it already, yet I must now resume it into consideration, and reprove, that it is no wonder they reverence not the Bible's style, as they ought, whilst they judge of that of an Hebrew book by their vulgar translation; which (though sometimes caustically enough censured by divers protestant divines, that would find it no easy task to make a better, yet) certainly is in many places strangely harsh and barbarous; and by a partial and unlucky affectation of literacy, misleads the propriety both of the Hebrew speech, and of the Latin. And to adhere to the original words commonly injures its eloquence, and oftentimes offence; rendering excellent expressions in such ungraceful ones,
the Style of the Holy Scriptures.

as would probably fright readers from it, if it could not very well spare fine language. So that to our present theme we may not ill apply that notable saying of Mirandula; Hebrew bibunt fontes, Graeci rivos, Latinis paludes. The old French rhiming translation of Virgil makes not the Æneids much more eloquent than Hopkins and Sternhold have made the psalms: which sure being written by a person, who (letting aside his inspiration) was both a traveller, a courtier, and a poet, must at least be allowed to contain polished and fashionable expressions in their own language, how coarsely ever they have been mis-rendered in ours. What opinion the eastern world hath of the sweet-finger of Israel, may appear, both by other hyperbolical fictions they believe of him, (whom, with Moses, Jesus and Mahomet, they reckon amongst the four great prophets) and by what Kesslaus (the famed Mahometan writer of the lives of the fathers) relates concerning him; That when David sang the praises of God, the hills, and birds, and beasts therein accompanied him. Which gross literal interpretation of figurative expressions in the psalms, and of his pathetical invitations to the inanimate creatures to join with him in celebrating their common Creator, he seems to have borrowed from the Alcoran it self; where Mahomet brings God in saying, 'We reduced the mountains to comply with him, who should join with him in praises morning and evening; the birds also flock to him; and these are obsequious to him.' And though the new testament be not written in Hebrew, yet its writers being Hebrews have chiefly conformed themselves to the style of the translators of the old testament, (which whether or no it constitute what critics of late so dispute of under the name of Lingua, or Dialectus Hellenistica, I pretend not to define) and that of the apocryphal authors and other Jews writing in the same language; who (except perhaps Josephus and Philo) wrote rather, if I may so speak, an Hebrew than an Attic Greek; or at least, in a dialect, which (by reason of their frequent references to the septuagint's version) abounds, if not with Hebraisms, with expressions obvious in Hebrew writings, and unfrequent in Greek ones, and so relishes much of the Hebraick style: of which, as well in the new as the old testament, those we reason with, being strangers to that primitive tongue, must be incompetent judges; there being in the idiomisms of all languages peculiar graces, which (like those most subtle spirits, which exhale in pouring effusions out of one vessel into another) are lost in most (especially if literal) translations; and the holy tongue being that, which God himself made choice of to dignify with his expressions, having divers whose penetrancy is as little transmutable into any other as the sun's dazzling brightness, or the water of a diamond can be undetectably painted; and having divers words and phrases, whose pithiness and copiousness none in derived (or other) languages can match. Some of the Hebrew conjugations, as those called Hipil and Hiphael, give significations to verbs, which the want of anfwerable conjugations in western languages makes us unable to fill or equal without paraphrases, which are very rarely so comprehensive as the original words. And (to hint this upon the by) the ignorance, or not considering of this one grammatical truth, hath kept men from fully understanding divers passages of the new testament, wherein the Greek tongue's want of those conjugations hath made active, or intransitive verbs, be used in a transitive or reciprocal signification. How imprudently men's ignorance of its originals may make them censure the scripture, I had once occasion to take notice of, by finding a famous commentator accusing St. Paul of impropriety of speech, in the beginning of that, which is commonly thought to be his first epistle to the Thessalonians, but by the learned Grotius (in his paradoxes De Antichristo) not improbably esteemed to be his second: for whereas instead of the Greek words ἀπό ὑμῶν ἐξήκτησεν ὁ λόγος τοῦ Παπαί, which ours have rightly Englished, 1 Thes. 2, 6. from you founded out the words; he found in his translation, a vos diffamatus est sermo;
not knowing Paul to have written in Greek, he would needs correct him, for having
written Diffamatus est instead of Divulgatus est.

Thirdly, we may yet further consider, that as to many passages of scripture, ac-
culled of not appearing eloquent to European judges, it might be justly represented;
that the eastern eloquence differs widely from the western. In those purer climates,
where learning, that is here but a denizen, was a native, the most cherished and ad-
mired compoures of their wits, if judged by western rules of oratory, will be judged
defitute of it. Their dark and involved sentences; their figurative and parabolical
discourses; their abrupt and maimed way of expressing themselves, which often leaves
much place to guesses at the sense; and their neglect of connecting transitions, which
often leaves us at a loss for the method and coherency of what they write; are quali-
ties, that our rhetoricians do not more generally dislike, than their practice; yet be-
ing perhaps little less disparity in our opinions than in our ways of writing; for their
pens (as if it were a prelude of the different changes the Jews and Greeks have made
in point of religion) move from the right hand towards the left; ours (therein imi-
tated by those of the Ethiopians) from the left towards the right; so that we think
they write backwards, and they, that we do. Of this difference of the notions, that
the eastern and western colonies of the sons of Adam have harboured concerning elo-
quence, I shall need to mention but one instance, that one is so remarkable; and
that is the Alkoran. How much the Mahometan world boasts the eloquence of that
book, can scarce be unknown to those, that have (though but a little) busied their
curiosity in that sort of inquiries. The ablest Arabian expounders, and other authors,
tell us, that all the wit and art of men and demons would be unable to hinder that
book from being matchless. Mabomet himself was so proud of it, that in some
passages in it he defies its opposers to equal one surah or section of it, and seems to
make its peerlessness an argument of its not being barely of human authority. And
the Saracens, depressed with their religion’s being destitute of atteiting miracles,
will scruple to reply, that though there were no other miracle to manifest the excel-
leney of their religion above that taught by the prophets, yet the Alkoran it self were
sufficient, as being a lafting miracle that transcends all other miracles. How charm-
ing its eloquence may be in its original, I confess my self too unskilful in the Arabick
tongue, to be a competent judge; my other studies and distractions having made me
forget most of the little knowledge I had once acquired of that flourishing language.
But though the Alkoran have stolen too much from the Bible, not to contain divers
excellent things, (which is one inducement to me to cite it the oftener) yet certainly,
not only the ancient Latin version of it, made by order of the abbot Petrus Guis-
censis, and published in the last age, by the procurement of Bibliander, (and of which
this is the grand critick Scaliger’s exclamation, Deum immortalem, quam ineptá est vul-
garis illa, quam habemus, interpretatio!) would scarce by our European orators be
thought so much as of kin to eloquent: but the recent translations I have seen of it
in French, and (as to divers of it, in) Latin, elaborated by great scholars, and ac-
curate Arabiscans, by making it very conformable to its eastern original, have
not so rendered it, but that perfons, that judge of rhetoric by the rules of it current
in these western parts of the world, would, instead of extolling it for the superlatif,
not allow it the positive degree of eloquence; would think the style as destitute of
graces, as the theology of truth; and would possibly as much admire the Saracen
admiration, as they do the book. And not only what I have seen of the eminent

* Efi nihil praeter solum Alkoranum (adduxisset) satis hoc foret ad eximiam excellentiam supra
rarique, quae prophesia aducerat : nam ille miraculum est, quod in secula durat praets omnibus aliis miraculis.
H. Hüning, Hill. Orient, pagina circiter 300.
East-Indians, is strangely incongruous to our notions of eloquence; but what I have perused of the famous 

Literati (as they call the learned men) of China, though written with great care by the authors, and (as it seems) translated with no less by the knowing interpreters, would, to an ordinary European orator, appear rather ridiculous than eloquent. But to content ourselves with the examples we formerly selected out of the less remote parts of the East; since Mahomet, whose eloquence (almost as prosperous as his sword) was able to bring credit and proselytes even to such a religion as his; since Moses, that so celebrated legislator, bred up in the refining court, and all the famed wisdom of the Egyptians; since Solomon, who had such incomprehensible advantages to improve himself, and whose wisdom (esteemed capable to have governed more kingdoms than his had subjects) the western world hath for so many ages admired, and the eastern only not idolized; and since the prophet Daniel, whose promising youth was not only cultivated by the instructions of the Chaldean fages, but enjoyed the diviner tutorage of God's spirit, and whose matchless abilities preferred him, from a captive, to be the chief as well of the Chaldean wise men, as the Median princes: since these applauded writers, I say, whom the eastern nations so much and so justly admired, by many of our Latinists are not thought good writers, because of our differing notions of eloquence; nay, if amongst Europeans themselves, Cicero hath found many centurirs, and a book hath been published to prove, that Tully was not eloquent; may not we rationally enough suppose, that the Grecian and Roman style, amongst the Eastern writers, may not be much better relished than theirs is amongst us; and that consequently, in those parts of the scripture, whose eloquence is not obvious to us Europeans, the pretended want of eloquence may be but a differing and eastern kind of it? Specially, if we consider, that the ancientest writers in prose, now extant amongst us, were scarce contemporaneous to the latest writers of the old testament; and yet that eloquence, the drefs of our thoughts, like the drefs of our bodies, differs not only in several regions, but in several ages. And oftentimes in that, as in attire, what was lately fashionable, is now ridiculous; and what now makes a man look like a courtier, may within these few lustres make him look like an antick: though how purely it is the mode, that makes such things appear handsome or deformed, may be readily collected from the vicissitudes observable in modes; men by intervals relapsing into obsolete fashions. That there are great changes in that mode of writing men commonly mistake for eloquence, I shall produce no less illustrious witnesses than Seneca, who in his hundred and fourteenth epistle, (to omit other passages in his works) not only proves it at large, but shows, that in some ages, even the faulty ways of expression, conspire in by the wits of those times, have passed for eloquence. The scripture style then, though it were not eloquent now, may have excellently suited the genius of those times its several books were written in; and have been very proper for those people it was primarily designed to work upon. And if I would presume to be paradoxical in a thing I so little pretend skill in, as eloquence, I might further represent on this occasion, that rhetorick being but an instrumental art, in order chiefly to persuasion, or delight, its rules ought to be estimated by their tendency, and commendaturates to its rules; and consequently, are to be conformed to by a wise-man, but so far forth as he judgeth them seasonable and proper to please or to persuade: which when he sees, he can do better by declining them, than by praetising them, (as orators, like hunters, must oftentimes leave the most beaten paths, if they will not lose their game) he should not scruple to prefer the end to the means; the scope of the art, to what the schools are pleased to call the scope of the art; and to think it more eligible to speak powerfully, than to speak regularly. And we may hence consider, that it may be somewhat inconsiderate to judge

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judge of all eloquence, by the rules of it, that Cicero's admirers imp:se on us; and confound their systems of precepts with the art of rhetorick, as if they were equivalent, or of the same extent. For Cicero being reputed (and that defervently) an eloquent man, and very successful in persuading his thus and thus qualified hearers; divers, whose modesty and despair kept them from aspiring to more than imitation, observing, that Tully often made use of such and such a contrivance, and such and such figurative forms of speaking, took the pains to reduce those observations into rules, which being highly applauded by their successors, and by them recruited with some resembling rules drawn from the practice of a few other orators, were afterwards compiled into an art, which as I deny not to be a great help to the imitation of Tully and Demosthenes, or those others, from whose structure and fashions of speech such institutions have been drawn, so I shall no more take it for a complete system of rhetorick, than any instructions deducible from the journals of Solomon's Taffish fleets, and from the Grecian and Roman sea-voyages, for the true and entire art of navigation. For if other persons, either by an endowment or improvement of nature, can find others equally, or more happy and powerful, or moving, (though never so differing) ways of expressing themselves, they ought as little to be confined by the prescriptions acquisition before them, as Columbus thought himself obliged to be by the rules or practice of ancient navigators; whose methods and voyages had he not boldly ventured to vary from, and pass beyond, how vast and rich a portion of the world had his conformity left undiscovered! And on this occasion, Theophrasus, I must mention one thing, that I have observed, which perhaps you will not think either despicable or impertinent; and it is, that though the people of China be esteemed the most numerous, the most flourishing, and (very few, if any, excepted) the most civilized nation in the world; though amongst them the greatest part of preferments be attainable by verbal learning; and though they have books in their language (how well written, I know not, having never read any of them) of almost all kind of liberal arts and sciences; yet I find by the late traveller in China, that writ the Italian history of that kingdom, and by other authors, that mention their literature, that this populous and ingenious nation, that has been so long settled in a flourishing condition, and more than any other people allows encouragements and recompenes to learned men, has not cared to receive rhetoric into the number of their arts and sciences; presuming, as one may guess, that the confining men's expressions to established rules would not be so like to enable those to express themselves eloquently, that nature has indispersed to do so, as to hinder others from expressing themselves as well, as, were they left to their full liberty, they would do. I will not say, nevertheless, that our strict Ciceronian rules are crutches, that may be helps to weak or lame fancies, but are clogs or burdens to found and active ones; but this I observe, that these Utopian laws of oratory are seldom rigorously imposed by any, that publish other books, that may be examined by them; and that wise men, as well in the East, as in the West, will not easily lose good thoughts, or good expressions, because they are not reducible to them. And this I the rather pres, because I have found but too many so blindly servile, as to imitate without discretion or reserve in applauded authors, as well the bad as the good; create such artificers errors rules of art; and make one man's particular fancies, or perhaps failings, confining laws to others; and convey them as such to their successors, who are afterwards bold to mis-name all unobliguishfes to their incoginit thermal, presumption: as Seneca * tells us of divers im-

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But, Theophrastus, I fear I have detained you too long in a digression, whereinto I flit but occasionally, which is not so necessary to my present argument, but that I am content you should look upon the paradox as any thing rather than an opinion or reasoning, whereon I lay any great stress.

In the fourth place let me represent to you, that there are very few, if any books in the world, that are no more voluminous, in which there is greater plenty of figurative expressions, than in the Bible. Though this may seem strange, it is no more than may be made good by more than some hundreds of instances; there being few tropes or figures in rhetoric, of which numerous examples are not collectible out of the expressions of holy writ. I insist not upon this, because a bare catalogue of the rhetorical passages, I could enumerate, would too much swell an essay; and I am informed, that task hath been already prosperously undertaken by able pens. Wherefore I shall now only say, that the eloquence of the scripture hath been highly celebrated by no small number of persons, highly celebrated for eloquence; and that many, who thought themselves as intelligent in oratory, as those that censure the scripture, have suspected their own eloquence of insufficiency worthily to extol that of the prophet Esay; and some of them, (amongst whom I cannot but name that excellent prince of Mirandula, whom even the greatest rabbi of this age stylis the phoenix of his age) who after having unsatisfiedly travelled thorough all sorts of human volumes, have refted and acquiesced only in these divine ones: which will not a little recommend the scripture, since we may apply to books what an excellent poet says of mistresses;

"Tis not that which first we love,  
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Mr. Waller.

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more crooked or mis-shapen persons; so there are writings, whose matter and structure are fits, that the plainest language can scarce misbecome them so, as to hinder them from eclipsing a trifling or ill-matched subject with the sprucest and gaudiest expressions, that can be lavished on it. But the truth is, that this florid eloquence is great in many texts, where it is not all conspicuous, being hidden in the matter; (as in rose of diamonds, the jewels oftentimes keep us from minding the flower and the enamel;) and appears not great, but because it is not the greatest. Some famous writers have challenged Demosthenes and Cicero to compare with the prophet Esay; in whom they have not only admired that lofty strain, which artists have termed the sublime character, but even that harmonious disposition and found of words, (I mean in their original) which the French prettily call, la' cadence des periodes.

Wherefore, Theophilus, whereas I have formerly acknowledged, that there are some witty men, that speak very disrespectfully of the scripture, I hope, that if you meet with any such, you will consider, that it has among the wits as well celebrators, and admirers, as disregarders. And that you may think this desire of mine the more reasonable, be pleased to consider with me, that there are divers things, which ought to lessen the authority of the disparagers of the scripture, in the case under consideration.

For first, how few of them, think you, are wont to read it in its originals; and how much a less number is there of those, who both know and duly consider all those particulars represented in the past discourse on the behalf of the scripture style? So that in a great many men of parts, their undervaluation of the scripture proceeds not from their having great wits, but from their not having a competent information of what can be alleged for its justification.

But though we should suppose those we speak of not to want information, yet we may well suppose many of them not to be free from vanity and envy; there scarce being any fault so incident to great wits, as the ambition of being thought still more and more so, and the unwillingness, that any compowures but their own, or those they have a hand in, should be celebrated; as if all praises were injurious to them, that are given to any other. It need be no great wonder then, if so excellent a book as the scripture, have as well enviers, as admirers; and if there be divers, who cavil at it, and seem to undervalue it, out of a criminal fondness of the over-ambitioned title of a wit, which they hope to acquire by unherding and keeping out of the road, and owning their being able to slight and disgrace that, which so many others reverence and venerate.

But thirdly, it is sufficiently notorious, that of the opposers of the scripture there is a great part, whose vanity and envy, though no small faults, are not their greatest crimes; but who live so disolutely and scandalously, that the suspicion cannot but be obvious, that such decry the scripture for fear of being obliged (at least for mere shame) to live more conformably to it. And that it were no slander to affirm it to be their interest, not their reason, that makes them find fault with a book, that finds so much fault with them; and they who are sensible of the truth of that of our Saviour, where he says, That many love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil; and that he that doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved; will not be much moved to find conscious malefactors find fault with the statute-book, but will rather look upon these sinners cenfures of the scripture, as apologies they judge necessary to palliate their sins, or as acts of revenge, for their being expos'd in all their deformity to the eyes of the world, and of their own consciences, in the Bible; and consequently will be inclined to think, that their

John iii. 19, 20.
irreligious expressions do rather shew what they would have men believe of them, than what they believe of the scripture, by seeming to slight which, they hope to have their vices imputed rather to a superiority of their reason over that of others, than a servitude of their reason to their passions

[Here I thought to pass on to another argument, but (to express my self in David's words) While I was musing, the fire burned, and my zeal for the scripture, together with the charity it has taught me to exercise even towards its opposers, suffers me not, with either silence or languid refemments, to see how much that incomparably book loses of the opinion of less discerning men, upon the account of their disrepects; who are (whether deservedly or not) looked upon as wits. And therefore to what I have represented to invalidate the authority of these few persons, otherwise truly witty, that undervalue the scripture, I am obliged to add, that besides them, there is a number of those, that slight the scripture, who are but looked upon as wits, without being such indeed; nay, who, many of them, would not be so much as mistaken for such, but-for the boldness they take to own fligiting of the scripture, and to abuse the words of it to irreligious senfes, and perhaps passing from the impudence of perverting inspired expressions, to deliver obscene thoughts. But to knowing and serious men, this pravairating with the scripture will neither discredit it, nor much recommend the prophaner pravairator: for a book's being capable of being so misused is too unavoidable to be a disparagement to it. Nor will any intelligent reader undervalue the charming poems of Virgil or of Ovid, because, by shuffling and disguising the expressions, some French writers have of late been pleased out of rare pieces to compose whole books of what they call, Vers Burlesques, defigned by their ridiculousnes to make their readers sport: and on the other side, to abuse dismembered words and passages of any author to meanings he never dreamed of, is a thing so easy, that almost any man may have the wit to talk at that prophaner rate, that will but allow himself the sauciness to do so. And indeed experience shews, that if this vice itself do not make its practices suspected of the being necessitous of the quality they put it on to be thought matters of, yet at least persons intelligent and pious will not be apt to value any discourse as truly witty, that cannot please the fancy without offending the conscience, and will never admire his plenty, that cannot make an entertainment, without furnishing out the table with unclean meats; and considering persons will scarce think it a demonstration of a man's being a wit, that he will venture to be damned to be thought one. And that which aggravates these mens prophaneness, and leaves them excuilefs in it, is, that there are few of these fools, (for so the wise-man calls them) that make a mock of sin; that have said in their hearts, that there is no God; or that the scripture is not his word; their disrepect to the scripture springing from their vanity, not their incredulity. They affect singularity, for want of any thing else that is singular; and finding in themselves strong defires of conspicuousness, with small abilities to attain it, they are resolved with Erotratus, that fired Diana's temple, to be talked of for having done so, to acquire that considerableness by their facrilege, which they must despair of from their parts. And indeed there want not many, who have so little wit, as to cry up all this sort of people for great wits. And as withies, whilst they are found, grow unregarded trees, but when they once are rotten, shine in the night; so many of these pretenders, whilst they were not very prophan, were (and that justly) esteemed very dull; but now that their parts are absolutely corrupted and perverted, they grow conspicuous, only because they are grown depraved. And I shall make bold to continue the comparision a little further, and observe, that as this rotten
rotten wood shines but in the night; so many of these pretenders pass for wits but amongst them, that are not truly so. For persons really knowing can easily distinguish betwixt that, which exacts the title of wit from our judgments, and that which but appears such to our corruptions. And how often the discourse we censure is of the latter sort, they need not be informed, that have observed, how many will talk very acceptably in derogation of religion, whom, upon other subjects, their partial friends acknowledge very dull; and who are taken notice of for persons that seldom say any thing well, but what it is ill to say. And questionless, there is no small number of these scorners, whose censures of the scripture's style are little less guilty of presumption than profaneness. I have of late years met with divers such vain pretenders, who blufh not to talk of rhetoric more magisterially than Aristotle or Tully would; and superciliously to deride, in comparison of their own writings, and theirs who write like them, not the Bible only, but the most venerated authors of antiquity; and, to use Aesop's words; They speak loftly, they set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh thorough the earth: they speak arrogantly and cenforiously both of God and men; whilst themselves oftentimes undersstand no tongue but their mothers; and are strangers enough to rhetoric, not to know the difference betwixt a trope and a figure, betwixt a prosopopoeia and a metaphor, or betwixt a climax and a metonomy. Nor is our wonder like to cease, to find these transcendent wits, (as they are pleas'd to think themselves) so undervalue the scripture, by considering the rare compositions they despise it for; these being commonly no other than some drunken song or paltry epigram, some fawning love-letter, or some such other flabby trifle, that doth much more argue a dejected soul, than an elevated fancy. Some of these gallants by their tavern songs use the muses like anchovies, only to entice men to drink: another with more solemnity and applause makes the muses (what the French call) the confidents of his amours, prostitutes his wit to evince and celebrate the defeat of his reason, and never considering how apt self-love makes us to magnify any thing that magnifies us, is proud to have wit ascribed him by as bribed as incompetent judges of it; and takes it for as high a proof as desirable a fruit of eloquence, to persuade a vain mistress, that she is handsome and adored, to whom it were eloquence indeed to be able to persuade the contrary. Divers of the Jews are wont to mention the names of deceased sinners, with that brand taken out of the Proverbs, May the name of the wicked rot; but as the filthief swine after their death are salted, and the gammons made of their flesh are served in, all stuffed with bays; so divers, that have lived notorious Epicures, have too often, after their death, not only their names salted (not to say embalmed) with flattering epitaphs, and (I with, seldom, as flattering) funeral sermons; but have their drunken or lustful rhimes extolled with such eulogies by their surviving relomers, that not only good Christians, but good poets cannot but grieve and blufh, thus to see bays, that should be appropriated to, and crown that heavenly gift called poetry, when mindful of its dignity and extraction, it indears to us by our fancies truths, that should have an influence on our affections, (by cloathing excellent thoughts in suitable and winning dresses) prostituted and degraded to make wreaths for those, who have no better title to them, than a few sensual rhimes, where the dictates of Horace are as little conformed to, as the example of David; and the laws of the art little les violated than those of religion. It is pleasant to observe, in how many of such copies of verses, the themes appear to have been made to the conceits, not the conceits for the themes; how often the words are not so properly the clothes of the matter, as the matter the stuffing of the words; how frequently sublime nonsense passes for sublime wit; and (though, according to my notion of it, that is indeed
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indeed true wit, which it is more easy to understand, than it is not to admire it) how commonly confused notions, and abortive or unlike conceptions, are in exotick language, or ambiguous expressions, expos'd to the uncertain adoption of the courteous reader; which the writers are emboldened to expect favourable, by finding men once thought (whether deservingly or otherwise) lofty wits, to have so often the luck of parrots, and of those that talk in their sleep, who are not seldom understood by others, when they do not understand themselves. And very much of kin to their verses is their prose. For though I am far from denying, that those, that have store of wit, may express some of it in an address to a great man, or in writing to a mistress; yet as for such profligate persons I am now speaking of, who rather would be thought wits, than are so, it is easy to discern, that very many of their almost as much flattered as flattering letters of love and compliment are but prologues to, and paraphrases of the subscription, (your humble servant.) Though love be universally thought to make the fancy soar, (lovers like ceeled pigeons flying the higher for having been blinded) and though even the wiser observe, that like war, which is wont as well to raise soldiers of fortune, as to ruin men of fortune, love warms and elevates less wit, though it too often infatuate the great ones: yet a witty lady did not scruple to say frequently, that give her but leave to bar half a score words, and she would undertake to spoil all the fine letters of our amorous gallants. I applaud not the severity of this lady, and think her challenge relishes as much of vanity as skill; but yet, to express the sense of these few words, [I desire you should think I can write well, am a civil person, and your humble servant] being the drift and substance of most of these ceremonial papers; these (oftentimes as tedious as servile) amplificators, with all their emptiness of fine words, do but, like market-people, pay a piece in twenty shillings. In wits not blessed with solid reason and learning, (that is, in most readers) fancy being the predominant faculty, makes them relish those writings most, where fancy unrivalled reigns. And therefore, though I dare not say, that it requires no great parts for those to write high and acceptable compliments, that think nothing fit to be endeavoured in compliments, but to make them acceptable by making them high enough; (flattery and prophanenes) seeming in such compositions what spots are in leopards, blemishes, that make a great part of their beauty) or for a flatterer to persuade those vain persons, that will readily believe a man, even when he doth not believe himself: yet sure it gives much latitude and liberty to a writer, not to be obliged to believe what he says, not say but what he thinks either will be or ought to be believed. And truly, they that exercise their pens on either sort of themes (I mean those that require only new or pleasing fancies, and smooth language, and those that require learning and knowledge pertinently and handsomely exert'd) do, I doubt not, find it much less difficult for writers to delight, where they propose themselves no higher ends, and scruple at nothing they judge condu'cible to that inferior one; than to please, where to do so is but a subordinate end, which men allow not themselves, neither the use of all proper means to attain. Nor do I question but such persons find it far more easy to write acceptably on subjects, where they are not tied to speak either reason or truth; than to write well on a theme, where men are confined to write nothing but what they judge useful, and what they can make good, as considering that they may be called to account by men for what they publish, if not by God, both for their own time and that of their readers. And indeed, when I compare the most applauded trifles of these undervaluers of the scripture style, with the celebrating discourses of it extant in the learned writings of St. Athlin, St. Hierom, Tertullian, Lactantius, Crysostom, Miranda, and others, whose penetrating and powerful arguments defeat not God's enemies, as Samson did the Vol. II. R f Philistines,
Some Considerations touching Philistines, with a jaw-bone of an ass, nor as Shemgar with an ox-goad, (I mean with blunt and delpicable weapons) but as Elias did, with fire from heaven; and whole apologetical defences of the spiritual Jerusalem are glittering and solid, as the wall of the heavenly Jerusalem is described to be of jasper, and the foundations of the wall garnished with all manner of precious stones: when I compare, I say, the composure of our frothy censure with those of the sacred orators; methinks I discern such a difference betwixt them, as I have observed betwixt those justly admired statues I have seen in the Capitol, and the larger sort of babies that we find in the exchange. For the former, besides their vaunting, are so recommended by the worth and permanency of their matter, the excellency of their workmanship, and the nobleness of what they represent, that they are most prized by the best artists, and time is not only unable to consume them, but still increases men's value of them; whereas the latter are little trifles, farce welcome to any but children in understanding, and admired only for a gaudy effeminate drefs, which will quickly either be fullled or worn out; and a fashionabledness which within a short while will perhaps be ridiculous. But supposing at length, that the profane aspirer should be so lucky, or so successful, (for happy I cannot think it) as to attain the so criminally courted notedness, yet will he have no great cause to boast of the purchase, when he seriously considers, that the devil, who seduces other finniers like men, with current coin or sparkling jewels, (something that either advantages their interests, or delights their senses;) hath envied him, like a child, with a whistle; a trifle that only pleases with a transient and empty found; and, that fame is a blessing only in relation to the qualities, and the perfons that give it, since otherwife the tormentened prince of devils himself were as happy as he is miserable; and famousness unattended with endearing causes is a quality so undesirable, that even infamy and folly can confer it; as Memus is little less talked of than Homer; the unjust Pilate is more famous than Aristides the just; and Barabbas his name is signally recorded in scripture, whereas the penitent thief is left unmentioned. And sure the highest favours, that applause can impart, and the being (though never so loudly) cried up for a wit, will hardly so repair the punishment of prophaneness, but that its wretched sufferer will find but small satisfaction in having his name celebrated in other books, whilst it is burnt out of that of life. And as for those (you know who I mean) that aspiring to pomfume glory, endeavouer to acquire it by irreligious writings definated not to see the light, till their authors be gone to the region of darkness; I cannot but admire to see an ambition, that projects beyond the grave, steep short of heaven; and cannot but think those wits the greatest fools, who, to tempt praises they shall never hear, provide themselves torments that they shall ever feel. For though prophaneness, by those that are guilty of it, be too often thought but a small sin, because they look upon it but as a verbal one; yet I could easily represent it under another notion, if I would here repeat what I have discoursed, touching indulgence to reputedly small and verbal fin in another paper, from which thou I will not now transcribe any thing, yet I cannot but wish it were well considered, how affronting speeches concerning God's word are like to be looked upon in that great day, when (to borrow St. Jude's terms) the Lord shall come with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them, (not only) of all their ungodly deeds, which they have ungodly committed, (but) also of all their hard speeches, which ungodly finniers have spoken against him. And indeed these pretrumed peccadillos, though oftentimes in health and propriety they appear not to us to blemish much our consciences, yet when in our distresses, or at the approaches of death, God comes, as the prophet speaks, to search men's hearts as it were with candles, and punish the men that are fettled upon their lies, (which
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(which whilst a liquor is, it may look clear, and be taken for defecated, but a little agitation of the vessel makes it troubled and muddy;) they appear in a terrifying form. For as paper written upon with juice of lemons may wear white (the livery of innocence) whilst it is kept from the fire; but being held to it, black lines do presently appear: so out of many confidences, that seem clear in prosperity, the fire of adversity draws out the latent blacknesses, and makes us read things undiscerned there before. And questionless, if, as the scripture informs us, there are sins, whose cry is able to reach heaven; so loud a crime as the prophaneness I am now speaking of, is likely to do more than whisper there; especially, since it is much to be feared, that many of these scoffers (as they seem to be called in the scripture) which they bear witness to, by cavilling at it, do rebel against the light, and kick against the pricks of their own consciences: such a crime, I say, will be so far from whispering in heaven, that it will rather give an alarm, that will roule up provoked justice; whose inflictions, like stones tumbled down from the towers of an assaulted place, the longer they are in falling on men, the more fatally they oppress them. In which regard perhaps, the feet of our Saviour in the Apocalypse are described to be like unto fine bras, as if they burned or glowed in a furnace; to intimate, that though he be very slow in his march to destroy the wicked, yet he is as sure, when once he pleases to tread them under foot, to crush and consume them. If there be no injury, that more exasperates than contempt, nor no contempt, that more provokes than that, which offends directly and immediately, (the affronters thereby proclaiming, that they are neither ashamed nor afraid of angering) how provoking may we think that crime, which makes God the subject of our derision; and that with so little circuision, as to abuse that word, which he so solemnly declared his mind by to mankind? Plutarch, to manifest how much some idolaters did more incense the Deity than some artists, tells us, he should esteem himself less injured by the man, that should doubt or deny, that there was ever any such man as Plutarch, than by him, that should affirm, that there was such a one indeed, but that he was an old fellow, that used, like the poet Saturn, to devour his children; and was guilty of those other crimes imputed by the Heathen to their gods. Upon a like account, we may esteem God less provoked by their unbelief, that doubt or reject the scripture, than by their prophaneness, that make so sacrilegiously bold with it; since the latter impute to God the inditing of what they endeavour to make men think fit to have sfor made with it. This of prophaneness is so empty and unprofitable a sin, that it scarce gets the practiser any thing but an ill name amongst good men upon earth, and a worse place amongst bad men in hell; by making his enmity to piety so malicious and so disinterested, that he will endeavour to do religion harm, though it be to do himself no good. He is such a volunteer sinner, that he hath neither the wit nor the excuse of declining his conscience in compliment to his sensës; and though he ever makes but an ill bargain, that gets in hell to boot, yet the I would reclaim, come far short of the comparative wisdom of their folly, who to gain so considerable (though yet over-purchased) a possession as the whole world, should part with their own souls. And sure a sin, that is injurious to God’s glory, and is apt to subvert (what he and good men prize next) the dearly purchased, immortal, and invaluable souls of men, and to destroy them for whom Christ died; will not by being verbal, be protected from being heinous. And to those that practise it, I shall recommend the latter half of the epistle of Jude; which, though it seem properly to relate to the Gnosticks, or Carpocratians of his time, will deliver a trembling attention from those that revive the sins there condemned, in ours; and who would do well, by seasonably considering the fate there threatened to their predecessors, to tremble at their crime.

But
Some Considerations touching

But for fear of losing it, I shall not spend more time in endeavouring to disabuse our scorners; whom I should have left to the quiet enjoyment of their unenvied self-admiration, had not their despising the scripture, upon a presumption of their own matchless wit, (like Jeroboam, that forsook that incomparable structure, the temple, where God did so gloriously and peculiarly manifest himself to men, to worship calves of his making) engaged me, in conformity to the wife man's counsel in such cases, to answer the fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit. For my reproofs are addressed to those called wits, but as they are traducers and undervaluers of the scripture, not as they either pretend to, or enjoy, a quality, which I have the justice to esteem, though not the happiness to possess; and which my value for it, and my charity for men, makes me troubled to see arrogated by many that want it, and by too many, that have prostituted it to gratify other people's pride, or their own lufts. How much happier were it for persons of choice parts to employ them, as Bezaleel and Aholiab did theirs, in working for the sanctuary; in adorning the embellishing divinity? The structure will not alone deserve the skilfullest hand, but though it reject not goat's hair, and coloured badger's skins, will admit not only purple and fine twined linen, but gold, silver and precious stones; the richest ornaments, that learning and eloquence can grace theology with, being not only merited by that heavenly subject, but being applicable to it, as much to their own advantage as to that of their theme. We see how ambitious men are, to leave a good name behind them, and appear in the habit of virtue to their own after time: witness the artifices and hypocrites men generally veil or disguise their fins with; and the flattering epitaphs, with which so many vicious persons endeavour to convey themselves to the good opinion of posterity. Now they that write piously, as well as handomely, have the advantage of getting themselves the reputation as well of virtuous as of able men, and besides that double recompence may expect a third (transcending both) in heaven, where they that (in the true scripture sense) be wise, shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever. It is the general complaint and grief of persons truly zealous, that there are many more wits and grandees now-a-days, who, by perverting God's gifts to the service of idols (of pride or pleasure) of their own setting up, resemble the degenerate Jewish church, of whom God complains by Hosea, that she did not know, that she gave her the corn and wine and oil, and multiplied her silver and her gold, which they prepared for Baal; than that (by an humble dedication of their choicest abilities to God's service) imitate holy David and his princes; who having consecrated their gold and silver and precious stones, towards the enriching and embellishing of the temple, perfumed that vail offering with this acknowledgment to God; All things come of thee, and thine own have we given thee. But though now I know divers great persons and great wits amongst us, who very unmindful of that text, What hast thou that thou dost not receive, like those ungrateful clouds that obscure the sun that railed them, oppose the glory of that God, who elevated them to that height: yet I do not at all lose any despair, that as God hath been pleased to make use of several royal pens for the tracing of his word; and to make a perfon, learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, his first secretary; so he will one day engage both the grandees and the wits to strive to expiate, by their devotion and service to the scripture, the injuries, that irreverent parts and greatness have done it. I will not tell you, Theophilus, that an early study of religion would gain to its party most of those many wits, that will be sure to con-

* An appendix to the former digression, inviting one sort of witty men to make amends for the profaneness of another.
tend for whatever opinion is expressed by the wittieft things they can say. But I will
tell you, that a particular consideration, that makes me wish to see witty writers more
generally employ their pens on the behalf of religion, is, that the servises they do
it, endear it to them: for as Machiavell smartly observes, and as the love of parents
and nurfes to children may evince, La natura de gli buoni è così obligata per li beneficii
che essi fanno, come per quelli che essi ricevono. It is natural to men, to be as well en-
gaged by the kindnese they do, as by those they receive. And for the encourage-
ment of the poissesors of great parts, to employ them on religious themes, such as the
holy scripture; I shall repreent to them, that even that immortallity of name, which
worldly writers (for the most part) foilely aim at, is not by pious writers lees found for
being laft sought: their theme contrats not their fame by a true diminution, but only
by comparision to a greater good: their looking upon their own glory but as an ac-
ceffion to God's, not hindering others from praising that wit and eloquence they
praise God with; as beauty made it self admirers, though in vextals, and a rare voice
may ravish us with a psalm; or as the jewels that adorned it, shone with their
wonted luftrre on Aaron's breast-plate; yes, as godlines is profitable unto all things,
hauling promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come; and the
hundred fold now in this time, is very confistent with the eternal life in the world
to come: so is it very possible for the same pious writer to have his name written at
once in both thofe immortal books of life and fame; and (like the inspired poet,
holy David) wear as well here a crown of laurel, as hereafter, τὴν ἀμαρτίαν τὴν δόξαν
κέρασαν, that unfadning crown of glory St. Peter speaks of. And though we are too
generally now-a-days fo sinful, that we scarce relifh any comfopure, that endeavours
to reclaim us from being fo; yet leas licentious and more difcerring times, (which may
be, perhaps, approaching) will repair the omnifions and faftidiousnefs of the prefent, by
an eminant gratitude to the names of thofe, that have laboured to tranmit to others,
in the handifomeft drefs they durft give them, the truths themelves moft valued. And
I obferve, that though Solomon himself delivered fo many thousand fongs and proverbs,
and the nature of beaths, birds, reptiles, and fithes, together with the history of
plants from the cedar of Lebanon, even to the hyfop that springeth out of the wall;
yet thofe three only treatifes, designed peculiarly for the inturction of the church,
surive their loft companions. And as anciently the manna, which the Ifraelites
gathered to employ in their domtefics, lasted not unpurified above a day or two;
but that, which they laid up in the sanctuary to perpetuate or secure God's glory, con-
tinued whole-ages uncorrupted: fo the books written to serve our private turns of
interet or fame are oftentimes short-lived; when thofe, consecrated to God's honour,
are, for that end's fake, vouchfaked a laftingnefs and kept from perifhing. And thofe
many dull and unelocuent glofifes and expositions of the ancient Jews, that the merit
of their theme hath preferved for fo many ages, may affure us, that the scripture
doth often make their names and writings that illuftrate it, partakers of its own pre-
rogative of immortality. Not to mention that (according to that of the Pfalmift,
I have more understanding than all my teachers; because, ικυ τῆς δεικτικὴς ἔστη φασσέον
such an employment of parts doth oftentimes invite God to increafe them; as he
that had moft talents committed to him, for improving them to his Lord's service,
was trusted with more of them; and he, who employed some few cups of his wine to
tertain our Saviour, had whole vefiles of his water turned into better wine. Cer-
tainly, transcendent wits, when once they addict themselves to theological comfopures,
improve and grace moft excellently themes fo capable of being fo improved. They
nead finall time to signalize their pens; for posfessing already in a sublìne degree
all the requisites and appropirates of rare writers, they need but apply that choice
knowledge and charming eloquence to divine subjets to handle them to admiration;
as
as Hiram successfully used the skill he had learned in Tyre, in the building and adorning of God's temple; and Jephthah victoriously employed the military gallantry and art, that had made him considerable in the land of Tob, in defending the cauld, and defeating the enemies of God. Of this truth the primitive times afford us numerous and noble instances; but especially that stupendous wit St. Austin, (whom I dare oppose to any of the wits, that have dared to oppose the scripture) the productions of whose wit in his unregenerate state, and after his conversion to the catholic faith and piety, oblige me to resemble him to Aaron's rod; which (supposing the truth of their opinion, that think it to be the same that Moses used) whilst it was employed abroad, did indeed for a while work wonders, that made it much admired; but when once it came to be laid up in the tabernacle, unconfined to the usual laws of other plants, it shot forth and afforded permanent fruit in a night. But, Theophilus, to recover my self at length from my over-prolix digression, I must remember, that it was objected, that as well divers great princes and great statesmen, as many great wits, dirstesteem, or at least neglect the scripture. And indeed, though I am sorry it cannot, yet it must not be denied, that notwithstanding all the prerogatives of the Bible, there needs not much acquaintance with great men, to shew many of them, that though they deny not God to be the author, deny themselves the blessing of being readers of it, some out of laziness, and others out of pride; both which lurk under the pretext of multiplicity of important avocations. But since your quality, Theophilus, and station in the world, may either make you need to be armed against this temptation, or give you opportunities to assist those that are endangered by it, give me leave, on this occasion, to tell you, that those grandees, that pretend want of leisure for their neglect of the reading of the scripture, must be able to give a rare account of all the portions of their time, to make those pangs for a mis-employment of it, that are laid out towards the purchase of a happy eternity; which it is not over-modest for those to expect from God, that grudge him the rest of that time, of which they are but his tenants at will. But to manifest how unlikely this pretence is to pass current; I shall represent, that in the self-same chapter, where God fashions a king fit to govern his own people, he enjoins concerning the book of the law, that it shall be with him, and he shall read therein, all the days of his life; which the next verse intimates shall be thereby prolonged. And indeed, it often happens, that as Samuel's barren mother for lending one of her children freely unto the Lord, was blest with many others; so the days consecrated to God's service rather improve than impoverish our stock of time. Nay, the king was (in that place of Deuteronomy) not only obliged to read the law, but to write it too: upon which subject, if I mis-remember not, the learnedest of the Rabbies tells us, that the king (as indeed God usually charges eminence of place with eminence of piety) was bound to write it out himself, and that, as king. For though before his ascending the throne, as any other Israelite, he had a transcript of his own writing; yet was there annexed to the acqwest of the regal scepter, a duty of copying with the same hand that sward it. To Joshua both a general and a judge, who was to wield the swords both of Afras and of Bellona, to govern one numerous people, and conquer seven; the words of God are very remarkable: This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein; for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and thou shalt have good success. David was a shepherd, a conqueror, and a king, and had certainly no unfrequent distractions, both before he came to the crown, (whilst he lived a despised younger brother, an envied courtier, a disdainful fugitive, and a disgraced captain) and after, whilst he wore, lost, and regained it: but how little the time employed in the study of the scripture prejudiced his secular affairs,
affairs, his story and successes may attest; and how large a portion of his time that study shared, you may be plentifully informed by himself, and have me the transcribing much of the book of Psalms. He gathered bays both on Parnassus and in the field of honour; and equally victorious in duels and in battles, his exploits and his conquests were such, as (transcending those in romances almost as much in their strangeness as their truth) needed an infallible historian to exact a belief, their greatness and their number would disuade. He added to his regal crown of gold two others (of bays and laurel) which his successful sword and numerous pen, making him both a conqueror and a poet, gained him from victory and the muses. And yet for all this greatness and this fame, that multitude of distractions that still attends them, the (then extant) scripture was so unfettered his study, and he so duly matched in his practice what the Apostle couples in his precept, diligence in business, and fervency in spirit, that it is not easy fitter to resemble him, than to the winged cherubims in the old tabernacle, whom all the gold and jewels, that glittered about them, and all the clouds of incense fumed before them, could never divert from a fixed posture towards the ark of the testimony, that contained the law, and the mercy-seat that represented Christ. And indeed, it is a laying equally ancient and true, that none should know (things better and) better things than princes; for their virtues and their vices participate the eminence and authority of their condition; and by an influential exemplars, so generally fashion and sway their subjects, that as we find in sacred story, that the Jews served God or Beal as their kings did, so profane history tells us, that Rome was warlike under Romulus, superstitious under Numa, and so successively moulded into the dispositions of her several princes; subjects, all the world over, being apt to think imitation a part of the duty of obedience; and being generally but too tenible of the requisiteness of their being like their prince to the being liked by him. A state, like Nebuchadnezzar’s mysterious image, should have the head of gold; and the inferior members of a value proportionate to their vicinity to that noblest part. When once I shall see such monarchies and common-wealths no rarities, and see the addictedness of princes to the study of scripture further the ulterior accomplishment of that part of it, which once promised God’s people, that kings should be its nursing fathers, and their queens its nursing mothers; I shall expect to see the golden age elsewhere than in poets dreams. For I take not absoluteness to be like a plague, whose almost boundless power is confined to do mischief; but I esteem sovereignty little les applicable and effectual to good than ill. Trajan and Constantine were as great and publick blessings, as Nero or Caligula were mischiefs; and virtue on a throne hath not a much les impertinent influence, than crowned vice. And accordingly I shall permit my good wishes for mankind to turn expectations, when I shall generally see sovereigns nobly contend for as great a superiority over each other by their virtues, as they posses over their subjects by their fortune; when I shall see potentates make use of Mars’s sword but to restrain others from abusing it; and kings affect their resemblance to God, les in his unlimitedness of power, than his employment of it. But, to step back into my way, and leaving princes to fitter monitors, lay something to men of either great titles or employments. There is none of these pragmatical persons, that will suffer himself to be so enslaved to his business, but he will allow himself set times, and can daily find leisure for eating, drinking, and other corporal recreations, and frequently for recreations: and certainly, if we valued not our bodies above our souls, we would, in spite of the urgency of secular affairs and employments, revere and set apart some time to feed our souls with their true food, God’s word; else we shall never be able to say of God with holy Jech, I have offended the words of his mouth more than my necessary food. I will not urge, that Daniel, whose
whose vast abilities had a resembling theatre, and who surpassed other statesmen as much in the number and weight of the affairs he had to manage, as in the excellent spirit and dexterity, wherewith he managed them, amidst transactions that busied six-score princes, who loaded him with a weight of business capable to have crushed Atlas, could yet find leisure to study the prophet Jeremiah; because it will be perhaps more proper to mention, that even Machiavel himself, that secretary and reputed oracle of state, could find time, not only to read, but to write plays, (some of which I have seen in Italian) such as I would think excellent, though a person, from whom so much might be expected, had not written them. Let us not then think our business or our recreations a sufficient dispensation from an employment, for which, were they inconstant, they ought both to be declined; since it is both more concerning than the first, and more satisfying than the latter. But that, which is often the true, though seldom the avowed cause of these men's negligence of the scripture, is not their unrelituredness, but their pride; which makes them think it too mean and trivial an employment for one, that is great and wise enough to counsel and converse with princes; and have a vote or hand in those great enterprises and transactions, that make such a noise in the world, and are the loud themes of the people's talk and wonder, to amuse themselves to examine the significations of words and phrases. For my part, I am no enemy to the calling of statesmen; I think their profession as requisite as others in a common-wealth; and should think it very injurious to deny them any part of a purchase they pay their care and time for: nor perhaps have I so little studied the improvements of quiet, as to think my self less obliged than others are to those, whose watchings or protection affords it, or secures it to me. But after all this is said, I love to look upon the world with his eyes, that is justly said to _humble himself_ (when he vouchsafes) to _behold the things that are done in heaven and in earth_; and to take measure of the dimensions of things by the scale his word holds forth. Now in the esteem of him, that hath made all things for himself, and of whom his spirit by his prophet truly says, that the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance; nay, that all nations before him (are) as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity; the importantest employments are the study and glory of God. He created this vast fabric of the world to manifest his wisdom, power, and goodness; and in it created man, that it may have an intelligent spectator, and a resident, whose rational admiration of so divine a structure may accrue to the glory of the omniscient and almighty architect. And as he created the world to manifest some of his attributes, so doth he uphold and govern it to disclose others of them. The revolution of monarchies, the fates of princes, and destinies of nations, are but illustrious instancies and proclamations of his providence. The whole earth once perished by water, to signalize his justice on his enemies; and the whole world shall one day perish by fire, to (exercise that former attribute and) evidence his goodness to his children: for whom his faithfulness to his promises will oblige him to build a glorious mansion for such glorified residents. The angels, some of whom the visions of Daniel represent to us at the helm of kingdoms and of empires, and whose power is so great, that one of them could in one night destroy a force, capable, if divided, to have made half a dozen formidable armies; these glorious spirits, I say, whose nature so transcends ours, that the very devil cannot, without the afflatus of virtue, despise the objects of our ambition by a superiority of nature only; for all their high prerogatives and employments, think the mysteries unfolded in scripture worthy their bowing as well as defer to look into; think not themselves too eminent to be messengers and heralds, of which fond mortals think themselves too eminent to read; and
and (being all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation,) disdain not to think our instruction worth their concern, while we disdain a concern for our own instruction. Nay, the very Messias, whose style is king of kings, and lord of lords, though be not recorded to have ever read but once, did yet read the scripture, and think it worthy his explications and recommending; and well may any think that book worth the reading, that God himself thought worth enditing. When Moses and Elias left their (local, not real) heaven, and appeared in glory to converse with our transfigured Saviour on the mount; their discourse was not of the government of kingdoms, or the raising of armies for subversion of empires; or of those other solemn trifles, which heaven places as much beneath men's thoughts as residence; but of (the inspired book's chief theme) bis decease, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. And after that St. Paul had been caught up to the third heaven, and had been blest and refined with his ineffable entertainment there; I wonder not to find him profess so resolutely, that he counteth all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord, in whom faith cometh by hearing, and that bearing, of the word of God; and who addresseth men to the scriptures, as those which testify of him. And perhaps our Saviour used so frequently to conclude his divine discourses with that just epiphenomena, be that hath ears to hear, let him hear, but to teach us, that there is no employment of our faculties, that more deferves their utmost attention, than the scrutiny of divine truths. That which is pretended to by this discourse, is to impress this truth, that where God is al owed to be an intelligent and equal valuer of things, a man cannot have so great an employment, as to give him cause to think the study of the scripture a mean one; since, thus faith the Lord, Let not the wise-man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty-man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me. For sure, if the knowledge of God be so glorious a thing, the study of that book, whence that knowledge is extracted, and where it is most refulgent, is not a defpicable employment. Which sure (to add that upon the by) it is somewhat injuriously thought by those, who are so industrious and proud in profane histories and other political books, to discover (or even guess at) those intrigues, which commonly but tell us, by what crafty arts a knave coustened a fool. Nor (to mention this by the by) even in relation to his own profession, is the scripture unable to recemence the study of a Christian statesman; for to omit the (perhaps too) extolling mention Machiavel himself makes of Moses amongst the famouslest legislators; the historical part of the Bible being indited by an omniscient and unerring spirit, lays clearly open the true and genuine causes of the establishment, flourishing and vicissitudes of the princes and common-wealths it relates the story of. Whereas other histories (for reasons insisted on in other papers) are liable to great suspicions in the judgment of those, that duly ponder the several narratives made often of the same transaction or event by several eye-witnessees; and that the true secret of counsel is so closely locked up, or so artificially disguised, that to have interest enough to discern (what statesmen mind and build on) the truth and mystery of affairs, one must be biased and engaged enough to be shrewdly tempted to be a partial relator of them. But, Theophilus, I perceive I have slipped into too long a digression; which yet I hope you will pardon as the effect of an indifferet, perhaps, but however a great concern for a perfon, to whom nature, education, and fortune have been so indulgent, that I cannot but look upon his condition as liable to the temptations, which either parts or employments singly, and much more both together, are wont to expose men to.
You may remember, Theophrastus, that among the answers, which, I told you, might be made to those, that objected against the scripture, 'That it is so unadorned, and so ill furnished with eloquent expressions, that it is wont to prove inefficacious, especially upon intelligent readers'; the fifth and last was this, 'That it is very far from being agreeable to experience, that the style of the scripture does make it unoperative upon the generality of its readers, if they be not faultily indisposed to receive impressions from it.

To make good this reply, I must take notice to you, that that part of the objection, which intimates, that intelligent readers are not wont to be wrought upon by the scripture, has been in great part answered already: for I have lately observed to you, that as it may be granted, that some witty men, who have read the scripture, have, instead of admiring it, quarrelled with it; so it cannot be denied, that many persons as eminent for wit as they, have, upon reading it, entertained a high veneration for it. So that I see not, why the celebrations of those wits, that admire it, may not counter-balance the dis-respects of those, that cavil at it; especially if we consider, that as to most of those, that are looked upon as the witty disregarders of the scripture, scarce any thing, so much as the vanity and boldness of owning that they disregard it, makes them (but unobservably) be looked upon as wits.

But to this I shall now add, that whereas the objection speaks of intelligent readers, the greatest part of such have not that quickness, which is wont to make men pass for wits, though they may have other abilities more solid and desirable: and yet that the Bible has a great influence upon this latter sort of intelligent readers, I presume you will easily believe, if you consider how many great scholars, not only professed divines, but others, have by their learned comments and other writings, endeavoured either to illustrate, or recommend the scripture; and how much a greater number of understanding and sober men, that never published books, have evinced the scripture's power over them, partly by their sermons and other discourses, publick and private; and partly by endeavouring to conform their lives to the dictates of it. Which last clause I add, because you can scarce make a better estimate of what power the scripture has upon men, than by looking at what it is able to make them part with. For not to anticipate what we shall ere long have occasion to mention, let us but consider, what numbers of intelligent persons almost every age, without excepting our own (as degenerate as it is) has produced, who have been taught and prevailed with by the scripture, and considerations drawn thence, to renounce all the greatest sinful pleasures, and embrace a course of life, that oftentimes exposes them to the greatest dangers and very frequently to no small hardships.

And indeed there is scarce any sort of men, on which the scripture has not had notable influence, as to the reforming and proving many particular persons, belonging to it; and to the giving them an affectionate veneration for the book, whereunto they owed their instruction. The accounts ecclesiastical history gives us of the rate, at which devout persons, both in former and latter ages, would purchase the Bible, when it was dangerous and perhaps capital to be found possessed of it, would, if I should here repeat them, much confirm what I say, and might equally create our wonder and our blushes. Those sorts of professed Christians, that seem the most evidently to be liable to temptations to neglect or disregard the scripture, are either those, that do, or would pass for wits, or those that live in courts; the former oftentimes thinking themselves too wise to be taught, especially by a book they think not eloquent, and among the latter there being but too many, whose pleasures are so bewitching, or so dear to them, that they like nothing, that would divert, much less divorce them from their pursuit; or else whose business is so much, and perhaps so important,
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important, that they have not leisure enough to learn, or have too much pride to think they need do it. But yet even among those, that have worn crowns either of gold or bays, or (what perhaps some value above both) of myrtle, the Bible has not wanted votaries: for not to repeat the names of those, whom I have formerly mentioned to have been as well lovers of the scripture, as favourites of the muses, among the other sort of men, those that (to speak in our Saviour’s terms) are gorgeously apparelled, live delicately, and are in kings courts, there have been divers persons, upon whom the power of the scripture has been almost as conspicuous, as their station among men. I will not mention that devout treasurer of the Ethiopian queen, who even upon the high-way (whose length neither deterred nor tired his devotion) could not forbear to read the prophet Isaiah, and inquire even of a mere stranger, that passed by alone, and on foot, the meaning of a passage, of whose senes he doubted, nor will I urge any other instances of great men’s studiousness of the scripture, afforded us by sacred story. And therefore I shall not press the example of that great and wise Daniel, whose matchles parts not only cast upon him the highest employment of the world’s monarchy, and disengaged him from the ruins of it; but (what has scarce a precedent amongst the very wiliest statesmen) continued him in as much greatness, as ever he possessed under the predecessor, under the successor; and such a successor too, as made his predecessor’s carcass the ascent to his throne: I will not, I say, at present urge the examples extant in the sacred records of great men’s studiousness of them, because even secular and more recent histories may inform us, that even in courts all men’s eyes have not been so dazzled by the glittering vanities, that are wont to abound there, but that some of them have discerned, and practically acknowledged the prerogatives of scripture. Though I cannot say, that many kings have been of this number, because there have been but few kings in all, in respect of the numbers, that compose the inferior conditions of men; yet even among thefe, and in degenerate ages, some have been signally studious of the Bible; such was that sixth Edward, who imitated the early active piety of Josiah, without imitating his defection from it, and whose short heavenly life manifested, how soon, even amidst the temptations of courts, grace can ripen men from glory. And such was that learned king, whose having more than perfunctorily studied the scripture, his solid defence of divers of its truths against his mis-interpreters have sufficiently proclaimed to the world. Nay, even in those darker times, that preceded the reformation, that excellent Aragonian king, Alphonsius, the honour both of his title and his times, in spite of his contemplations and his wars, could (as himself used to glory) spare time from studies and his distractions, to read the Bible forty times with comments and glosses on it; being not, for all his astronomy, so taken up with contemplation of heaven, as to deny himself leisure to study in his book, that made it, the ways of getting thither. Nor shall I forbear to mention here the last pope, (Urban the eighth) who, when being cardinal, he wanted not the hopes of becoming both temporal and ecclesiastical lord of that proud city, which (as if the were designed to be still, one way or other, the world’s mistress) cloth still rule little less of the world upon the score of religion, than she did before upon that of arms; in the midst of affairs, perhaps more distracting than buffed most-potentates, and honours almost as great as are paid to monarchs, could find room in a head crowded with affairs enough to have distressed Machiavel, for reflections upon the scripture; some of whose portions I have delighted to read in the handsome paraphrases of his pious muse. Which I scruple not to acknowledge, because that though I did, which I do not, look upon every one, that differs from me, as an enemy; yet I should be apt to think, that they can scarce love virtue enough, that love it not in their very enemies; congruously to which we find

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find that Hannibal had statues erected in Rome itself; and though I were so uncharitable and so unexperienced as to think a man, that holds an error, can scarce have any good qualities; yet upon such a kind of score as that, which made David so angry with him, that took away the poor man's single lamb, the fewer commendable qualities I fee in my adversaries, the more scruple I would make to rob them any way of them. Nor hath that very sex, that so often makes divertisements of its employments, been altogether barren in titled votaries to the scripture. Not to mention that Grecian princesses, whose profliyed mufe made Homer turn evangelical, how converfent that excellent mother and resembling daughter, Paula and Euftochium, were in the sacred rolls, is scarce unknown to any, that are not strangers to the writings of St. Hierome; for some of whose learned comments on the scripture we are indebted to the charitable importunity of their requests. And even in our times, that so much degenerate from the primitive ones, how eminent a student and happy a proficient in the study of the Bible, that glory of princes, and the envy of the princes of her time, queen Elizabeth, was, her life and reign sufficiently declare. Her fitter's predecessor, that matchless lady Jane, who had all the good qualities the best patriots could desire in a queen, but an unquestionable title, and in whose sad fate, besides her sex and the graces, that enamour ours of it, her country, philosophy, virtue, and religion, did all sustain a loss, was a conspicuous studier of the inspired books; wherein her prospered seduluousness gave her an understanding much above her age and sex, though not above her virtue. And besides Eudoxia, there have been divers other persons of the highest quality of that sex, and even some of thoése, on whom nature or fortune, or rather beauty or providence had conferred a sovereignty, whom the splendour, the pleasures, nor the avocations of courts could not keep from searching in God's word prefervatives against the contagion of their condition. And partly history, and partly even conversation have sometimes with delight made me observe, how some of those celebrated ladies, whose fatal beauties have made so many idolaters, have devoutly turned those fair eyes, that were, and did such wonders, upon those severe writings that depreciate all but the beauty of the soul, from those flattering ascriptions, that deified the body. And it is not to be marvilled at, that such readers as are not infidels, by reading the Bible once, should be prevailed with to read it oftener; not only because of the inviting excellency of what it teaches, but because its author does so earnestly in it enjoin the study of it, that scarce any can think the neglect of it no fault, save those that are guilty of it. Nor is there so affiduous perusal of the scripture so much to be marvilled at as commended, in persons of that fitter sex, which is perhaps more susceptible than ours of strong impressions of devotion. For sure, if we loved God, I do not say as we ought to love him, but as we can, and do love inferior things, it would hugely endear the scripture to us, that the object of our devotion is the author of that book. When a true flame, though but for a fading object, doth once possess a fervent lover's breast, what a fondness doth his passion for his mistress give him for all things related to her? Her refidences, her walks, her colours, and the least trifles that have belonged to her, exact a kindness that's not due to trifles: though it be but for presenting to his memory its almost only object, and refreshing him with an ideal in the absence of an immediate presence of her. But if the favoured amourist be blest with any lines dignified by that fair hand, (give me leave to talk of lovers in their own language) especially if they be kind as well as hers, how assiduously, and with what raptures do his greedy eyes peruse them, taunting each several expression with its own transport: and finding in each line, at each new reading, some new delight or excellency? This welcome letter grows sooner old than stale; and all his too frequent kisses have worn
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to tatters, (in which he preserves it, if not worships too, as a relic) with still fresh and still in fatiate avidities doth the unweared lover prize that (too often, either deluding or insignificant) writing, above the noblest raptures of poets, and liberallest patents of princes: and (not to urge the superstitious devotion of our worshippers of relics) certainly if we had for God but half as much love as we ought, or even pretend to have, we could not but frequently (if not transportedly) entertain our selves with his leaves, which (as parthelions to the sun) are at once his writings and his picture; both expressing his vast and unmerited love to us, and exhibiting the most approaching or least unresembling idea of our beloved, that the Deity hath framed for mortals to apprehend. It was the devout quarrel of a devout father to some of the choicest composites antiquity hath left us, that he could not find Christ named there; and if, as it is not to be doubted, divers of the devout ladies I was lately speaking of, were of his mind, sure at that rate they are not ordinarily kind to the scripture; where the Prophets and the Apostles, those darker and more clear Evangelists, do so unanimously and affidually celebrate the Messiah, that when I read and confer them, I sometimes fancy my self present at our Saviour’s triumphant entrance into Hierusalem, where both those that went before him, and those that followed after him, sung Hosannah to the son of David.—Wherefore, since even great wits, great princes, and great beauties, have not still by all those temptations, to which these attributes expos’d them, been kept from being also great votaries to the scripture, it cannot charitably be doubted, but that in most ages some pious persons have been able to say truly to God in Jeremiah’s terms, Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was to me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart. And if the perfons I mention have yet few, I can attribute that fewness but to the paucity of wise and good men; and as for perfons of other ranks in ecclesiastical stories, the instances are not so rare of the addictedness of God’s children to his word, but that we might thence produce them almost in throngs, if we had not nobler inducements to the reading of the inspired volume than example; and if it were not less to be venerated, because so many saints have studied it, as because the study of it made many of those men saints, (I mean not nominal, but real ones:) which we need not much wonder at, whilst such a saint as Saint Paul was assures us, that it is all of it divinely inspired, and improveable to the entire accomplish-ment of God’s servants. But, Theophilus, to return to what I was formerly discoursing of, the transforming power the scripture has upon many of its readers; I must subjoin, that though through the goodness of God these be far more numerous than the professed adversaries and contenters of the scripture, yet these make not so great a part of those, that acknowledge the Bible, as it were well they did, because both experience and our Saviour’s parable have sufficiently taught us, that good seed does not always fall into good ground, and that many intervening accidents may, after it has been sown, make it miscarry and prove fruitless. But when you find (as I fear you may but too often) that the scripture has not upon its readers, and especially upon those that are profane, that power, which I seem to ascribe to it, and which it ought to have; you may be pleased to remember, that I plainly suppose in my fifth answer, that those, to whom the scripture is addressed, must not be culpably indisposed to be wrought upon by it. Which that profane persons are, I presume you will easily grant: for when our Saviour said, that if any man will do the will of him that sent him, be shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or no; he clearly intimates, that there is required a disposition as well in the eye of his soul, (if I may so speak) as in the object proposed, to make a man discern the excellency and origination of what is taught, how valuable forever. St. Paul speaking of himself and other
other penmen and teachers of the scriptures, affirms, that they speak wisdom among them, that are perfect, and (though not this world's wisdom, yet) the wisdom of God in a mystery, even that hidden one, which God ordained before the world, unto our glory. But for these scorners, it is no wonder they so fruitlessly read the scripture, without deferring any of this mysterious wisdom, it being a sentence of the scripture it fell, that a scorrer seeketh wisdom, and [findeth it] not, (the expression is odd in the original, but I must not stay to descant upon it;) as the Sodomites could not find the angels, when once they sought them to prostitute and defile them.

But besides profane wits, there are too many other readers, who are (more or less) guilty of opposing the reforming and improving influence of the scripture, upon their own hearts; either upon the score of their not sufficiently believing the truths contained in the scripture, or upon that of their not duly pondering them. That unbelief is the fruitful mother of more sins than are wont to be imputed to it, and that many baptized persons are not free from greater degrees of it, than they are suspected of by others, or even by themselves, I could here easily manifest, if I had not professedly discoursed of that subject in another place. And indeed, there needs but a comparing of most men's lives with the promises and threats held forth in the scripture of no less than everlasting joys and endless torments, to make us believe, that there are multitudes of professed Christians, to whom may be applied what the writer to the Hebrews says of the perverse Jews of old, That what they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it, or (as the Greek will bear) because they were not united by faith to the things they heard. But this is not all, for oftentimes the doctrines of the scripture lose much of their efficacy, even where they are cordially believed, because they are not sufficiently laid to heart. The disparity of the influences of the bare belief and the due perversion of a truth is, methinks, conspicuous enough in men's thoughts of death. For though that they shall die is so truly believed, that it cannot seriously be doubted; yet how doth men's inadvertency make them live here, as if they were to do so always? Whereas when once grace, fickness, the sight of a dying friend, or some other tragick spectacle, hath seriously minded them of death, it is amazing to observe, how strange an alteration is produced in their lives by the active and permanent impression of that one obvious and unquestioned truth, that those lives must have a period; and to see how much the sober thoughts of death contribute to hit men for it: it being so imperious an inducement to deny ungodly and worldly lufts, and to live σωφρόνας και δικαιάς δὲ εὐσεβῶς ἐν τῷ νῦν και ἀθηρῶς, righteously, and godly in this present world, that we must one day leave it; that I admire not much that father's celebrated strictness and austerity, who tells us, that he fancied always founding in his inward ears, that dreadful alarm of, Surgite mortui, Συνέβη σε ad judicium.

Yet notwithstanding the indisposition of many readers to reverence and obey the scripture, and notwithstanding that in divers passages of it, the ornaments of language are (for reasons above specified) purposefully declined; yet we find not, but that the scripture, for all these disadvantages, is by the generality of its readers both esteemed and obeyed at another-guide rate, than any other book of ethicks or devotion. And multitudes even of those, whose passions, or interests, will not suffer them to be in some points guided by it, are notwithstanding swayed by it, to forbear or practice divers things, in cases wherein other books would not prevail with them. As Herod, though the Baptist could not persuade him to quit his Herodias, did yet, upon John's preaching, do many other things, and beard him gladly.—I was going to say, that we may not unfitly apply to the word of God, what divines have observed of God the word;
the **Style** of the Holy Scriptures.

word; for as those accidents, that loudliest proclaimed our Saviour's having assumed our human nature and infirmities, were attended with some circumstances, that conspicuously attested his divinity; so in those passages, in which the majesty of the author's style is most veiled and disguised, there is yet some peculiarity that discloses it. But I shall less scruple to tell you, that in divers of those passages, in which the Holy Ghost (who in the Greek fathers wonted expression does often οὐκ ἐπούλευσεν ἢ μεταφοράς, stoop to our capacity, and, as it were, sink himself down level) seems most to have vouchsafed a condescension to the style of men; and to have commanded his secretaries, as he once did the prophet Isaiah, to write, בִּי-כָּעַסְתּ אַהֲרִי, Be-chereth Enofh, with a man's pen; in divers of those very places, I say, there is something of so awful, and so peculiarly his, that as the sun, even when he descends into the West, remains still lucider than any of the stars; so the divine inspirer of the Scriptures, even when his style seems most to stoop to our capacities, doth yet retain a prerogative above merely human writings. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world, says an Apostle; and God, whose attribute is to be θεοί γόανοι, the knower of hearts, and whose prerogative it is to form the spirit of man within him, understandeth our thoughts afar off. Certainly then, if we consider God as the creator of our souls, and so likeliest to know the frame, and springs, and nature of his own workmanship; we shall make but little difficulty to believe, that in the book written for, and addressed to men, he hath employed very powerful and appropriated means to work upon them. And in effect, there is a strange movingness, and, if the epithet be not too bold, a kind of heavenly magick to be found in some passages of the Scripture, which is to be found no where else; and will not easily be better expressed, than in the proper terms of the Scripture: For the word of God, (says it) is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword; piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Wherefore, that Junius (as himself relates) was converted from a kind of atheist to a believer, upon the reading the first chapter of John; that a Rabbi, by his own confession, was converted from a Jew to a Christian, by the reading of the fifty-third of Isaiah; that St. Austin was changed from a debauchee into a saint, by that passage of the 13th to the Romans and 13th verse; and that another father, whose fear had made him disclaim his faith, burst out publicly into a shower of tears, upon the occasional reading of the 16th verse of the 50th Psalm; are effects, that I do not so much admire, as I do, that such are produced no oftener. And truly, for my own part, the reading of the Scripture hath moved me to more, and swayed me more powerfully to all the passions it would infuse, than the witieft and eloquentest composes, that are extant in our own and f. me other languages. Nay, so winning is the majesty of the Scripture, that many (like those that fall in love in earnest with the ladies they first courted, but out of, what the French call galantry) who began to read it out of curiosity, have found themselves engaged to continue that exercise out of confidence: and not a few of those, that did at first read the New Testament only to learn some unknown language it is translated into, or for some such trivial purpose, have been by the means, that they elected, carried beyond the end that they designed, and met a destiny not ill resembling that of Zacharius, who climbing up into a sycamore growing in our Saviour's way, only to look upon him, passed thence to be his profelyte and convert, and to entertain him joyfully both in his house and heart. And though it be true, that the Church's testimony be commonly our first, yet it is not always our chief inducement to believe the divinity of Holy Writ; its own native prerogatives heightening that into faith, which the Church's authority left but opinion. To which purpose, I remember a handsome observation of some of the ancients; that the Samaritans,
that first believed in Christ upon the woman's report, when afterwards they were blessed with an immediate conversation with himself, they exultingly told the woman, 

now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard him our selves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world. For so, divers, that first believe the scripture but upon the church's score, are afterwards by acquaintance brought to believe the scripture upon its own score; that is, by the discovery of those intrinick excellencies and prerogatives that manifest its heavenly origination. — This sacred book, even where it hath not embellishments of language, doth not want them; being so much recommended by its imperious persuasiveness without them, that it is more ennobled by their needlessnes, than it would be, by their affluence. And if to some passages of scripture we must apply that of St. Paul, (whereby yet he thought to recommend his ministry to the Corinthians) That his speech and his preaching was not with the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in simplicity, and unsearchable wisdom, we may also remember, that he subjoins as the reason, that moved him to use this plain and unadorned way of teaching his Corinthians, That their faith might not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. And truly the efficacy and operations of the Bible, in comparison of those of all other books, duly considered, we may esteem, that as God oftentimes doth in the scripture, what in the scripture he is said to do, draw us with the cords of a man, (passages wreathed with flowers of rhetorick) so is it not unfit, that we should sometimes employ expressions, that carrying away our obedience, our reverence, and our affections in spite of our indifferent dispositions to them, might manifest their derivation from him, who is not tied to such means, as men would think necessary, but can compass his ends as well by as without any. Nor can I often consider the instances experience affords us of the efficacy of many texts, (which some that pretend to eloquence accuse of having none) without sometimes calling to mind, how in the book of nature God has veiled in an obscure and homely stone an attractive nature (unvouchedfased to diamonds and rubies) which the stubbornest of metals does obsequiously acknowledge. And as the leadstone not only draws what the sparklingst jewels cannot move, but draws stronglier where armed with iron, than crowned with silver; so the scripture not only is movinger than the glitteringst human stiles, but hath oftentimes a potenter influence on men in those passages, that seem quite deftirute of ornaments, than in those, where rhetorick is conspicuous.

The conclusion of one part of the discourse, concerning the scripture; and the transition to the next.

I should now, Theophilus, immediately pass on to the other things I am to discourse to you of, concerning the scripture, but that the curiosity wherewith you are wont to take notice of my practices, and to make inquiries after my private opinions, makes me imagine you telling me, that I do often read, and do much oftener commend books of devotion, notwithstanding all the prerogatives I have attributed to the scripture: wherefore to this I shall answer, that I esteem indeed the truths of scripture so important and valuable, that I cannot be troubled to see them presented to us in variety of dress, that we may the more frequently and the more attentively take notice of them. And though some devout compofures are so unskillfully written, as to be much fitter to express the devotion of the writer, than to excite it in the reader; yet there are others so handsomely and so pathetically penned, that a good man can scarce read them without growing better, and even a bad man must be very much so, without becoming less so by perusing them. Nor do I at all design to disparage books of devotion, when I prefer the scripture to them, that being so noble and matchles a work, that a book may attain to a high degree of excellence, whilst it remains inferior to the scripture, and of whose preheminencies I have already on several occasions named divers to you; and therefore shall at present only recommend to your observation this one advantage of the scripture, even as to those things, that are
are also to be met with in other books of devotion; That if the words of the wise be (as Solomon tells us they are) like nails fastened by the masters of the assemblies, the selfsame nail must enter less or deeper, according to the strength of the hand that drives it in; and doubtless, any doctrine believed to come from God, in the same terms it is delivered to us, is like to be entertained with a deeper and obsequious respect; concurrently whereunto, the Apostle, to set forth the Thessalonians reception of the gospel, says, That they received it not as the word of men, but (as it is in truth) the word of God. After which, it is no wonder he could immediately subjoin, that it did also effectually work in them that believed. And though it be very true, that the foreignness and obscurity of some texts will require, as well as the seeming richness of others will bear, their being alluded in words much more numerous than those, whose involved or contracted senses they are to display; yet is it also as true, that men do not unfrequently mistake themselves in thinking to deliver the Holy Ghost’s conceptions in fitter terms than his own, the proper precise expressions of Scripture being oftentimes so pathetical and sinewy, that he, that stretches them, enervates them; and paraphrases, though handsomely, do as much wrong them, as a mixture of silver, though no ignoble metal, does wrong an ingot of gold. And though some texts like pearls lose indeed of their beauty; but operate, and are administered more successfully beaten to powder, or with other cordial ingredients made up into a confection; yet divers facred expressions do like diamonds lose both their sparkling lustre, and engraving faculty, when ground to dust, and lose more in their entireness and form than can be recompened by any addition. And truly, as to my own particular, no book of devotion doth constantly affect me so powerfully as the Bible. And whereas I am of fo nice a palate, that in my esteem composes of that kind still lose at the second reading; in the inspired volume, familiarity breeds not contempt, but reverence (and I like a book, acquaintance still endears). When I first began attentively to read the scripture, and (according to my custom when I read books, whereof I have a promising expectation) to mark in the margin the passages, that seemed to deserve a peculiar notice or reflection, I marked but here and there some verses in a chapter; but when, upon a greater familiarity with the idioms, the sense, and the applicableness of scripture, I came to survey it, I then in some places marked the whole chapter, and in most others left much fewer texts than before unpointed with some mark of reference. And whereas at my entrance I took even the choicest part of the Bible to be at best but like some Indian province, wherein though mines and gems were more abundant than in other countries, yet they were but sparingly to be met here and there: after a competent stay, my enquiring perusals presented it me, if not as a royal jewel made up of gold and precious stones, yet (which is gloriouer) like Aaron’s breast-plate, a sacred jewel, the particular instructions for which, were given by God himself, and which, besides the various number of flaming gems set in fine gold, and placed in a mysterious order, was ennobled by that Urim and Thummim, wherein God vouchsafed to reveal himself to mortals, and was adorned with so much cunning work in gold, blue, purple, scarlet, and fine twined linen, that the contrivance and workmanship lent a lustre to the glittering materials, without being obscured by them. This experiment keeps me from wondering to find in the inspired poet’s description of the man he attributes a blessedness to, that his Chophatz is in the law of the Lord, and in his law will be meditate day and night. For the word other translations render voluntas & studium, ours Englishes delight; and indeed the Hebrew יָעַר will bear both senses, and seems there emphatically to signify a study replenished with so much delight to the devout and intelligent professors of it, that, like the halleluials of the blessed, it is at once a duty and a pleasure, an exercise and a recompence of piety. And indeed, if God's
God's blessing upon the devout Christian's study of that book do (according to the Psalms), open his eyes to discern the ניצן נבל, hidden wonders contained in it; he should, in imitation of him that in the same Psalm says of his God, I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil, be as satisfied as navigators, that discover unknown countries. And I must confess, that when sometimes, with the Apostles in the mount, I contemplate Moses and Elias talking with Christ, I mean the law and prophets symphonizing with the gospel, I cannot but (resemblingly transported with a like motive) exclaim with Peter, it is good for me to be here; and cease to think the Psalmist an hyperbolist, for comparing the transcendent sweetness of God's word to that inferior one of honey, which is like it in nothing more, than in that, of both their suavities, experience gives much advantage over notions than descriptions can.

But, Theophilus, upon condition you will not call this excursion of your own occasioning a fit of devotion, I will no longer detain you on one subject, but forthwith proceed to discourse of those other things, that I am to consider in the scripture, besides the style. For though this be such as I have been representing it, yet I hope we shall in our progress find, that it will be far less fit to apply to this matchless book that of the Heathen poet,

Materiam superabat opus

than that sacred one of the Psalmist, where he as well says, that the king's daughter is all glorious within, as that her clothing is of wrought gold.