

The Scripture Testimony

Examined and confirmed by plain Arguments :

OR, AN

A P P E A L,

TO

REASON and COMMON SENSE

FOR THE TRUTH OF

THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

IN TWO DISCOURSES.

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A NEW EDITION.

LONDON :

Printed by T. Gill, Bartholomew-Clay :

AND SOLD BY T. CHAPMAN, NO. 51, FLEET-STREET ;

AND T. NOTT, LOMBARD-STREET.

1796.

THE
EDITOR'S PREFACE.

THE successive attacks of Infidels, on the Divine Authority of the Old and New Testament, have occasioned the publication of many elaborate defences of Revealed Religion. These publications being recondite and expensive, have not been much perused; and indeed if they had been more generally read, it appears to me, that many of these publications would rather injure than serve that cause which they were professedly designed to promote. For whilst some of these writers contend, in a learned and judicious manner, for the genuineness of those books, which are comprized in the Old and New Testament, they give up their *divine inspiration*; and thus unintentionally betray Christianity into the hands of its enemies. The Infidel from hence may take occasion to say, "The writers of the Bible declared, that they were Divinely Inspired; but, according to your account, they were not; if they could tell one

falsehood to serve the cause in which they were enlisted, why not tell a thousand?"

That the writers of the New Testament believed themselves divinely inspired, is clear from their writings; in which there are many declarations to this effect. (Eph. iii. 4, 5.) *Whereby when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men; as it is now revealed unto his holy Apostles and Prophets by the Spirit.*

And the Old Testament was written by *holy men of God, who spake as they were borne on by the Holy Spirit.* (2 Pet. i. 21.) Origen, who lived in the third century, observes, "That if a man would not confess himself to be an *Infidel*, he must admit the *inspiration* of the *Scriptures*." By Dr. Doddridge it is remarked, "Nothing can be more evident, than that a firm and cordial belief of the INSPIRATION of the *Sacred Scriptures* is of the highest moment, not only to the edification and peace of the Church, but, in a great measure, to its very existence. For if this be given up, the authority of Revelation is enervated,

vated, and its use destroyed: the star, which is to direct our course is clouded; our compass is broke to pieces; and we are left to make the voyage of life in sad uncertainty, amidst a thousand rocks, and shelves, and quicksands."

As Dr. Doddridge believed in the inspiration of the Scriptures, so did Dr. Jennings, and they both considered it as a very important article of their faith. If what the Doctor has said in these Sermons does not directly tend to confirm this doctrine, it does ultimately; and the kind of evidence which he adduces in defence of Divine Revelation, is easy to be comprehended by every class of readers. The method in which he treats the subject is perspicuous; the style is plain and familiar, and the whole is animated by a spirit of seriousness and benevolence. As the tract is of intrinsic value, so I think its republication is by no means unseasonable. If it should convert one Infidel; if it should confirm any who are in a state of suspense and hesitation; if it should excite gratitude to God in the minds of those Christians, whose hearts are established with grace, it will afford satisfaction and
pleasure

pleasure to the Editor, that he has been necessary to its re-publication.

Benjamin Cracknell.

Wareham, July, 1796.

THE AUTHOR'S
P R E F A C E.

THE apparent Increase of Infidelity, or at least of the open Profession of it, of late Years, among such as disrelish the Purity of the Scripture Precepts, cannot but be matter of deep Concern with all, who honour God, who love the Lord Jesus Christ in Sincerity, and who have Compassion on their fellow-Mortals, whose dangerous Condition they see and bewail, while the God of this World hath blinded the Minds of them who believe not. To this pious and charitable Concern it is, doubtless, owing, that I have been earnestly solicited to publish these two Sermons. I hoped to have been excused from publishing any thing more during the now short remainder of my Life; for my Years are too many, and my Time is too much filled up with my stated Business, to admit of that Polishing which is expected in Discourses that appear in Print. But there is a Sort of Importunity which it is hard to resist, and there are Friends to whom one knows not how to deny any thing; and therefore these Sermons, which were preached without the least View to their being made more public, must now venture into the World. I am well aware that some Persons may
judge

judge it to be needless and impertinent to publish these plain Discourses, on an Argument which has been so well, and so much more fully handled in several Books already extant: But it has been alledged that those larger Treatises are seldom read by the common People, among whom the Fashion of Deism, and of contemning the Scripture is very much spread, and has infected even the lower Classes of Mankind; and therefore it has been much desired that these Sermons might be published, in a small Volume by themselves; in hopes that so little and cheap a Book may be read by many, who will neither be at the expence of procuring, nor at the Pains of reading larger Volumes. Some good Success which, I am informed, God was pleased to give to these Sermons in preaching, is an Encouragement to hope that He may also be pleased to make them of Use in reading.

As in this Publication I have gratified the Desire of many of my Christian Friends; so I hope that, in Return, they will gratify my Desire and Request, which is, that they will join with me in earnest Prayer to God for his Blessing on these Sermons, that so they may be some Means of stopping the Progress of Infidelity, of recovering such as are already taken in the Snare of the Devil, and of establishing the Faith of the People of God; and so, though not otherwise, will they also do honour to the Judgement of those at whose Desire they are published.

D. JENNINGS.

SERMON I.

JOHN xxi. 24.

We know that his Testimony is true.

THUS St. John solemnly asserts the truth of what he had written in the foregoing history, concerning the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He had not written these things upon hearsay and uncertain report, but upon his own certain knowledge; they were no other things than what he had *seen with his own eyes, and heard with his own ears, which he had looked upon, or attentively considered, and which his hands had, as it were, handled of the word of life*, as he speaks in the first verse of his first Epistle; and therefore he had the fullest assurance of the truth of the testimony which he had given concerning them. But his form of expression, *we know*, has led some to suppose that this last chapter, or at least the two last verses of it, were written by some other hand, and signed by

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some

some other of Christ's disciples then living, as their attestation to the truth of St. John's Gospel: but I see no reason for such a supposition, since St. John himself uses exactly the same form of expression in his Epistle, "That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you." St. Paul also writes in the same manner, 1 Thess. ii. 18. "Wherefore *we* would have come unto you, even *I* Paul." Perhaps St. John uses *we* instead of *I* in the text, partly to denote the general assent which men give to such sort of testimony as he had given concerning Christ. The testimony of a man of unblemished character, who was an eye-witness of facts, is generally credited; few, if any, will doubt but such a man's testimony, on his own personal knowledge, is true; and such was the testimony which St. John had given, and written in this history concerning Jesus Christ; therefore *we all know*, or it is the common sense of mankind in such matters, *that his testimony is true*. And especially St. John meant to declare his own certainty of these things, as he had done before, chap. xix. 35. "He that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true." St. John was assured, beyond all doubt and hesitation, that his testimony concerning Christ was true: but how are *we* to be assured of it? That is the question which I propose to handle in this discourse. What evidence have we of the truth of the Gospel, upon which we may make these words our own, and say, *we know that his testimony is true?*

true? Now, in discoursing on this point, I shall not confine myself to St. John's testimony, and to those things only which he has recorded in his history of Christ; but I shall take in also the testimony of all the other Apostles and sacred writers, concerning all things which are contained in the Holy Scriptures; and I hope to shew you (to the conviction of any such as may doubt of this testimony; and for the further establishment of the faith of those who believe it) *that it is true*; so that as *they*, the Apostles, ventured their lives and their souls upon it, *we* may safely do so too.

Here, that we may proceed by regular steps in our enquiry into the truth of this testimony, or of the Scripture Revelation, we shall first consider the *probability* of it, and then, secondly, the *certainty* of it; that it is probable to be true, and then that it is more than probable; so that we also may say, upon sufficient evidence, *we know that this testimony is true*.

First, As to the probability of this testimony, or of the Scripture Revelation. We hear of some things which are so utterly improbable to be true, that we do not think it worth while to give ourselves any trouble to enquire about them, but reject them at once as mere fable. So some persons treat the Gospel; but such persons are grievously, and, it may be feared, fatally mistaken; for there is much more probability,

at least, that this testimony is true, than what they think for. For,

1. *It is very certain that we greatly needed such a testimony or revelation from God as the Bible is.* It is certain, I say; however confidently some will assert that the light of natural reason alone is sufficient to teach men all their duty, and to guide them in the way to happiness. Were *that* true, and could it be made to appear to be true, we would give up the Bible at once; for it is not to be thought that God would send us a Revelation which we had no need of. But how plainly does the contrary appear to be true? For look into any heathen nation, where the light of divine Revelation never came, and see what mere human reason did, or has ever done, to make men wise, and good, and holy, to show them their duty, and to prevail with them to practise it. What do we see in any of those nations, but the most senseless idolatries, and most immoral practices? The Apostle gives us the true picture of the gentiles, and of the manner of their life, in the 1 Pet. iv. 3. “They walked in lasciviousness, lusts, “excess of wine, revellings, banquettings, and abominable idolatries,” and so they do still, and so it may reasonably be expected they always will do, until God shall please to send his Gospel among them. Now, can we be so vain as to think that our reasoning powers are so much better than theirs, that if we had been left, as they are, to the mere unassisted light of natural

natural reason, we should have spelt out our duty and our immortal interest better than they have done? No, no, human nature and human reason are much the same all the world over. I doubt not but the most savage nations of heathens have as good natural geniuses among them as are to be found in the politer nations of Christians. What then is it that has made the difference betwixt us and them? Why are not we practising the same senseless idolatries that they do? Why are not we as stupidly ignorant of the things of God, and the duties of morality and religion, as they are? It is doubtless Revelation that has made the difference; it is because God has given us the light of his glorious Gospel, which he has not given to them; otherwise we have no reason to think but we should have been as ignorant as they are. It is a common saying, and a very true one, *there is no argument against matter of fact*: Now the fact is, that there neither is, nor ever was, any nation under Heaven on which the light of revelation had not shined, but what was, in the general, thus stupidly ignorant and wicked. How natural then is the inference? How fair the conclusion? That if we were not favoured with the light of the Gospel, we should have been such as those Heathens are. This then, methinks, might be enough to convince us, that we needed a revelation from God, and that the light of reason only is by no means sufficient to guide men in the way of truth, duty, and happiness.

And further, it should seem that men have generally been sensible of their need of a revelation from Heaven, from the many pretended revelations which have been broached in the world, and the readiness with which they have been received by multitudes of people. Whence is it that the *Alkoran** of *Mahomet*, for instance, which abounds with such senseless rhapsodies and idle tales, has been received as a divine revelation by so many nations? Does not that plainly shew that they are sensible of their need of a revelation from God, to instruct them in their duty, and the way to happiness; and that the light of their unassisted reason is not sufficient for that purpose? and therefore, rather than have no revelation, they will take up with so wretched a forgery; so that, in this matter, we might appeal to the common sense of mankind, that we stand in need of a revelation from God.

Again, another argument to prove our need of such a testimony, or revelation from God, as the Gospel is, may be, that without it we should have no sufficient encouragement to practise our duty, even though we knew it. Suppose the light of reason only could have

* I call it *the Alkoran*, in compliance with custom, though it would be more proper to say, *the Koran*; for the particle *Al*, in the Arabic language, signifies *the*, and *Koran* is a *Reading*, or *that which ought to be read*. But, as several English readers would hardly know what book was meant by that title, I choose to give it the common title which custom has made familiar to us.

showed

showed us, in all cases, what is our duty to do, yet, without those motives and encouragements which the Gospel gives, I know not what should move and encourage us to practise it. What encouragement could sinners have to repent, and return to God and their duty? What ground of hope of the pardon of their sins, and of future blessedness? Surely none that was sufficient, none that would be effectual to move them to religion. Here I might easily show you the insufficiency of the light of nature, and consequently the necessity of a revelation from God, in a great many particulars; but it may be sufficient to instance in these *two, first*, A revelation from God was necessary to give us any reasonable hope of the pardon of our sins. And, *secondly*, To give us any well-grounded hope of a future state of blessedness. These are two of the most animating principles of all religion and virtue, and for both we are plainly beholden to revelation.

First, *A new and super-natural revelation from God was necessary to give sinners any reasonable hope of the pardon of their sins*; and without that there could be no religion in the world; no encouragement to repent and to do any duty at all: but the sinners of this world, if they were not absolutely stupid and thoughtless about their souls and eternity, would sink into despair, as the damned in hell do. Our own consciences will tell us that we are sinners; that we have broken our Maker's law; that we have most ungratefully and shamefully alienated

alienated our hearts from his love, and our lives from his fear, that we have walked contrary to God; and therefore, as he is a just and holy God, our own reason will also tell us that he must needs be highly displeased with us. That we have been sinners against God, is a truth too plain and certain to be contradicted: even the Heathens universally acknowledged it, and few, if any men in their sober senses, have had the front to deny it. But how shall we know whether God is disposed to pardon our sins, and to become reconciled unto us? What encouragement shall we have to repent of our sins, and to return to our duty to him? Will natural reason tell us this? Could we know it without a revelation from Heaven? I do not see that we possibly could: for if we could obtain a certainty of pardon without a revelation, we must either gather it from the essential goodness of God, or from the visible effects of his goodness and bounty to us; but I do not see how we could gather it from either of them. As for the essential goodness of God, we know, our reason will tell us, that justice is as essential to his nature as goodness; and what reason will inform us that God will raise the honour of his goodness on the ruins of his justice? or that he will glorify one of his attributes at the expence, and to the dishonour of another of them? What reason tell us, that if we are sorry for our sins, and repent, so good a Being as God is, will doubtless forgive us? but does repentance satisfy human Governments? Do they not often punish criminals notwithstanding

withstanding they repent? And does not the honour of the Law and Government require that it should be so? And may not the righteous Governor of the World do so too? Forgiveness is to be sure the effect of God's goodness; but what then, does it flow from the necessity of his nature, or from his free will? Most certainly to forgive sin is an act of his will and grace? Has not God a right and a power to punish his rebellious creatures? Certainly he has: and how can reason only tell us that he will ever depart from that right?

Again, can reason tell us *what* sins God will pardon, whether *all*, or only *some*? and how often he will repeat his pardon, in case we relapse into sin, and repeat our transgressions, which is the case with men continually? Or will it tell us on *what terms* God will forgive us, if he will forgive us at all? I can find no satisfactory answers, from the dictates of reason only, to any of these enquiries. It is certain the Heathens, who had not the light of revelation among them, were greatly at a loss concerning all these matters. "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his anger that we perish not?" said the Heathen King of Nineveh, Jonah iii. 9. That was the farthest that reason could go in this matter. Who can tell whether God will be prevailed upon to pardon our sins or not? Perhaps he will, but perhaps he will not; a poor encouragement this to repentance. We cannot then infer, with any certainty, that God will pardon
sin

sin from the goodness of his nature ; because he is *just* as well as *good* : neither can we infer it, with any more certainty, from the visible effects of his goodness which we see in the world around us, and which we ourselves experience in other matters. We plainly perceive, indeed, and we feel, that God is kind and good ; for he loads us daily with his benefits, he gives us rain and fruitful seasons, and many other blessings in this world : but do we not sometimes feel, to our cost, that he is a just God too ? or whence come all our calamities and afflictions ? Had it not been for sin we had known no sorrow. “ Affliction cometh not out of the dust, nor trouble out of the ground * ; ” none of these things befall us without the appointment of God. Must not then our afflictions be considered as manifest tokens of the righteous judgment of God upon us for our sins against him ? However, does not God inflict visible punishment on *some* sinners in this world for their sins ? And can reason assure us that he will not do the same to *all* sinners in the world to come ? and though he defers our deserved punishment for a time, how are we sure that he will never inflict it ? A condemned criminal is obliged to his prince for a reprieve ; but he cannot infer from it that he shall certainly be pardoned : and especially if, after the reprieve, the ungrateful wretch commits new crimes against his prince, (as man, ungrateful man, does against God,)

* Job v. 6.

a reprieve

a reprieve for a time would be but a feeble ground to build his assurance of pardon upon. And no better ground is that on which sinners against God are apt to build their hope of his pardon; namely, because he does not execute judgment upon them speedily, but suffers them still to enjoy the bounties of his providence. So that the farthest reason alone can carry us in our hopes of pardon from God, is only thus far, *who can tell?* it may be God will pardon us, and it may be he will not. *Who can tell but God may repent, and turn away his anger, that we perish not?* But is it not altogether as reasonable to say, on the other hand, *Who can tell but that God will not turn and repent, nor turn away his anger from us, and then we must perish everlastingly?* Blessed be God for his Gospel, for that revelation of his mind, and will, and grace, which clears up all these difficulties, which assures us that “there is forgiveness with him*,” and which shows us the way in which we may obtain it. And now do not you plainly see that a revelation from God was highly necessary for this purpose? Most certainly it was. Man could have had no sufficient motive nor encouragement to repentance and religion without it.

If it should be objected here that the Heathens, who had no such revelation of the grace of God, yet did not despair of his mercy; but many of them had very con-

* Psal. cxxx. 4.

fidant hopes of pardon and of happiness in a future state. I answer, that as to the wiser and more knowing part of them, it is not true that they were *very confident*; but very far otherwise, we hear them, in their writings which are come down to our times, freely acknowledging their great uncertainty about these matters; and I am much inclined to think that what hopes they had were originally derived from revelation. They were all the posterity of Adam and of Noah, to whom God gave a revelation of his grace; and so much of that revelation was continued by tradition, in all their tribes and nations, as to give them some hope that God was inclined to pardon and forgive sinners.

The other instance which I mentioned of the insufficiency of the light of natural reason only to make men wise unto salvation, is,

Secondly, *Concerning a state of future blessedness*. You cannot but be sensible that it is a matter of mighty importance, in order to animate and encourage men to the practice of all duty towards God or man, that they should be well persuaded and satisfied of a future state; that *there is a reward for the righteous*; and that *our labour shall not be in vain*. When Asaph once doubted of a future state, it quite dispirited and discouraged him from all duty and goodness. “ Verily, ’ says he, “ I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my
“ hands

“hands in innocency.” Psal. lxxiii. 13. Take away the doctrine of future rewards, and you cut the nerves of all piety and virtue. “He that cometh to God
 “must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of
 “all them that diligently seek him.” Heb. xi. 6. But now we not only *believe*, but we *know*, or we plainly see with our own eyes, that good and holy men are not rewarded by the bounties of Providence in this life and world, more than the most vile and profligate; but
 “all things here come alike to all, *and* there is one
 “event to the righteous and the wicked*.” Well, but since there is no proper reward to the righteous in this world, may we expect it in another? What can reason tell us? Why, perhaps we may; that is the most it can say to this matter. Who can tell but God may pardon our sins, and exempt us from future punishment? But will he also receive us into his favour, and make us happy for ever? That is a farther doubt, which reason alone can never satisfy. It would be tedious, and almost endless, to recite all the several passages which might be collected from the wisest of the Heathen Writers, in which they express their doubt and uncertainty as to this matter †, “Who knows but
 “death may prove to a man the greatest good,” said one of their most celebrated moralists, Plato; and that

* Eccles. ix. 2, 3.

† The Reader may see a judicious Collection of passages to this purpose, from the best of the ancient Heathen Writers, in Mr. Nathaniel Taylor’s *Preservative against Deism*, Chap. II.

was the most that any of them could say. What a feeble ground of hope, what a poor encouragement to goodness was this? And yet this was all that their reason could discover to them about a future state. Most certainly then we may conclude, that if God did really intend mercy and salvation for any of the sinners of this world, he would let them know, by a revelation from himself, that he is inclined to pardon their sins, and to receive them into his favour, and to make them happy in his presence for ever. There was plainly an absolute necessity of a new revelation, after men had turned sinners and rebels against God, in order to their recovery to holiness and happiness; and in order to excite, to animate and encourage them to all the duties of morality and religion; and therefore upon this one supposition, that God had a merciful design towards any of the fallen human race, a new revelation might most reasonably be expected from him; for we do not see how his merciful design could have been answered without it. This therefore affords one very probable argument that there is such a revelation of the mind and will of God, which he has given unto men.

And now the question is, where this revelation, or testimony from God, is to be found and met with? We say it is in our Bible, the Mahometans say it is in their Alkoran, and there are nations of heathens who have what they pretend to be a revelation from Heaven

ven among them. Let us now enquire which of all these bids fairest to be the true testimony of God. This brings me to a second remark, on the side of the Scripture Revelation, namely,

II. *That it is every way worthy of God.* Since a revelation from God was necessary, and might reasonably be expected, we may fairly conclude that such a revelation is in the world; and it is an argument of strong probability, in favour of our Bible, that it is every way worthy of God: it is such a revelation as we might expect that God would make, if he were pleased to make any at all; for it directly relieves us in all those difficulties which we so much wanted to be informed and satisfied about. It assures us that there is forgiveness with God for sinners in this world, and it directs us to a certain way and method of obtaining it. It shows us how God has most wisely and graciously contrived a way for reconciling and uniting the interest and honour of his goodness and justice; so that he can now pardon sinners and receive them to his mercy, and yet assert and vindicate the honour of his justice and his law; and that was by “setting forth his own “Son to be a propitiation for our sins, laying our iniquities upon him,” and inflicting upon him a punishment which was equal to what our sins had deserved. So the Bible tells us, that “the Lord hath “laid upon him the iniquity of us all*,” that “the

* Isaiah liii. 6.

“ Son of God was made sin for us*,” “ suffered the
 “ just for the unjust†;” that “ he was wounded for
 “ our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities, the
 “ chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with
 “ his stripes we are healed‡.” It directs us to faith
 in Christ, as the way of obtaining the pardon of our
 sins and reconciliation with God; and it assures us that
 whosoever believes on Christ shall be pardoned and
 saved. Now this is the very thing which we so much
 wanted to be informed of, the grand enquiry which
 some of the more thoughtful heathens were so anxious
 about, but in which they were never able to obtain
 any satisfaction. “ Wherewith shall I come before
 “ the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?
 “ Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with
 “ calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with
 “ thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of
 “ oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression,
 “ the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” So
 Balak, a heathen prince, under a pang of conviction
 of sin, inquired about forgiveness, Micah vi. 6, 7.
 Will God forgive me at any rate? If he will, what
 must I do to obtain forgiveness from him? His prophet
 Balaam was not able to resolve him: he could direct
 him to nothing more, nor further, than to “ do jus-
 “ tice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with his
 “ God,” verse 8. But alas! this makes no atonement

* 2 Cor. v. 21.

† 1 Pet. iii. 18.

‡ Isaiah liii. 5.

for sins past; and therefore it must leave it utterly uncertain whether God will pardon or no. It is the Gospel, and that only, that tells us wherewith we may come before the Lord, and find mercy and acceptance with him. That tells us of an atonement which has been already made for our sins, and which God will accept in behalf of all those who believe in his Son Jesus Christ. This is that wherewith we are to come before the Lord, upon which we are to trust, and which we have to plead with him; and then we are promised and assured that we shall find mercy.

Again, the Bible reveals to us a future state, both of happiness and of misery; of happiness to the good, of misery to the wicked; and both are as plainly described as our weak capacities can at present take in.

The laws and rules of duty which the Bible contains are all worthy of God, as they are all agreeable to the perfections of his nature. They are rules of purity, suitable to the holiness of God; they are rules of righteousness, agreeable to his justice; they are laws of kindness suitable to his goodness. How often, and how earnestly, is universal love and benevolence recommended and pressed in the Bible? Love is there made the very sum and substance of all our duty; it is said to be *the fulfilling of the Law*. How worthy then is this law of that God whose nature is love?

Again, the *doctrines of the Bible* are every way worthy of God. They no way contradict, but very much improve and heighten our rational ideas of his nature and perfections: they clearly shew us how the honour of the divine justice and holiness are fully secured, while sinners are pardoned and received to his mercy; and how the seemingly opposite claims of the several attributes of God are all reconciled in our redemption by Jesus Christ. In short, if we compare both the precepts and doctrines of the Bible, with all the notions of God which reason can give us, sure we must own that it looks very like a transcript of the divine mind, for it is every way worthy of God. It is just such a revelation as we wanted, and such as might reasonably be expected that God would give to men. It is highly probable therefore, to say no more at present, that this is indeed a revelation from God.

III. I would observe, and I will boldly venture to say farther, that *there is no other book, or no other system of religion in the world, that pretends to be a revelation from God, which is worthy of him*, and therefore none to be compared with our Bible. As for the old Pagan systems of religion, we are sure they could not come from the only living and true God, because they enjoined men to worship many false Gods. They could not come from a holy God, because they recommended vice and immorality; as drunkenness at the festivals of Bacchus, one of their gods, and lewdness at the festivals

tivals of Venus, one of their goddesses. The moral rules of one Zoroaster, who taught the ancient Persians their religion, are said to be the purest of any of the Pagan systems; but yet his system was sufficiently disgraced from the honour of being a divine revelation, by its allowing of *incest*, of the grossest kind. The only book now extant, which pretends to be a competitor with our Bible, that is worth mentioning, is the Alkoran, or Bible of the Mahometans, which Mahomet pretended to have received by immediate revelation from God: but if you compare this book with our Bible, it will be easy to see which is most worthy of God, and which is most likely to come from him. It is allowed there are in the Alkoran some fine sentences, and some good moral rules and precepts, here and there interspersed; but by far the greatest part of it is such incoherent jargon, such tedious repetitions of the same things, and such nonsensical rhapsodies, as that no reasonable man, who is not blinded by prejudice, can think that it came from God. Besides, there are many flat contradictions in it; some laws delivered, and afterwards contradicted again. The greatest part of the future happiness it promises is quite ridiculous, as, consisting of sensual pleasures, and those of the grossest kind. As to the laws and rules of morality which this book contains, though they may be generally pretty strict and good, yet there is one exception, which is enough to discredit the whole, as to its pretence of coming from God, which is, that the Alkoran
allows

allows of *polygamy*: it permits each man to have *four* wives at once, which we are sure is against the Law of Nature, and therefore it could not come from the God of Nature; since he has made no such provision in nature as *four* wives for each man, nor any thing like it; for there are no more females born than males, nor indeed quite so many*; therefore polygamy is evidently against the Law of Nature; and therefore, I say, the Alkoran, which allows it, cannot be a revelation from the God of Nature. And indeed, the author of this book seems to have been sensible that it would not bear a strict enquiry into its truth and authority; and therefore he forbade his disciples ever to doubt of it, or dispute about it. This method looks very suspicious; this is not like *our Bible*, which exhorts us “to prove all things, that we may hold fast: that which is good.” 1 Thess. v. 21. And it commends the Bereans for their diligently searching into the evidence of that revelation which was brought them by an Apostle of Christ, Acts xvii. 11. And now, can

* This is an observation that has long been made, and any one may satisfy himself of the truth of it by the weekly and yearly bills of births and burials which are published in London; for by them it appears that there are constantly more males born than females by one in about fourteen; which is a wonderful instance and evidence of the care of Providence, in preserving the due proportion of the two sexes to each other, by this surplus of males to balance the waste of that sex above the other, by seas and wars, and some other untimely deaths, which several dangerous trades expose the men to.

it be any matter of doubt with us which of these two, *the Bible* or *the Alkoran*, is the true testimony of God? Upon the whole then, it appears, that as our Bible is every way worthy of God, and is such a revelation as we might reasonably expect from him, so there is no other book, or system of religion in the world, which is worthy of God, or can be supposed to come from him. I now add once more,

IV. *That none but God himself can reasonably be supposed to be the author of our Bible.* If it is not the word of God, whose is it, and what is it? Why, it must then be all a forgery; and a very wicked forgery, to be sure, it would be, for any man or men to write a book of their own heads, and to father it upon God, and tell the world they received it by revelation from him. Now what sort of men will you suppose these writers of the Bible to be, if they were not inspired by the spirit of God? They must be either good men, or bad men. To suppose that any good and honest man would be guilty of such a wicked forgery, is contradiction and nonsense; that could never be. A good and honest man, we are sure, would not say that he had received a revelation from God, when he knew he had not. We are very sure therefore, that if the Bible was not the testimony of God, it was not written by good men. Shall we suppose then that it was written by bad and wicked men? But read the Bible, *search the Scriptures*, and then judge whether that be at all probable. Would
wicked

wicked men have written against all manner of sin, and laid down such pure and excellent rules of holiness as the Bible does? What wicked man would have put such sentences as these into a book of his writing? “The Lord hateth all workers of iniquity* ; the covetous whom the Lord abhorreth†; there is no peace saith my God to the wicked‡. Whoremongers, adulterers, drunkards, and liars, shall have no part in the kingdom of God and of Christ||,” and a great deal more to the same purpose. What wicked man would have prescribed such excellent holy rules as these? “Whatsoever you would that men should do unto you, do you also so to them§. Avenge not yourselves, neither give place unto wrath**. Render not evil for evil, nor railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing††. Give diligence to cleanse yourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God‡‡, for without holiness no man shall see the Lord|||.” Now can you think that any wicked man would ever have written such things as these? Is it at all probable that a company of wicked men would have conspired thus to expose themselves, and to render themselves and their own character odious? Besides, what view could any wicked designing men have in making such a forgery,

* Psal. v. 5.

† Psal. x. 3.

‡ Isaiah xlviii. 22.

|| 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, Rev. xxi. 8.

§ Matt. vii. 12.

** Rom. xii. 19.

†† 1 Pet. iii. 9.

‡‡ 2 Cor. vii. 1.

||| Heb. xii. 14.

and

and palming it upon the world for a divine revelation? For what plan is there in all the Bible of advancing men's secular interest? What scheme of worldly power can be found there? Those who endeavour to ground worldly power on the doctrine of Christ, as the Papists do, alledge the authority of Fathers and Councils to support their claim; for they well know that nothing of that sort is to be found in the Scriptures. Upon the whole then, it is utterly improbable that the Bible was a contrivance and forgery of wicked men: and if neither good men nor wicked men were the proper authors of it, it must surely come from God. And we may conclude, that in composing the Scriptures *holy men of old spoke, and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*

Here let us stop, and recollect how far we are advanced in the argument to prove that the Scriptures are the true Testimony, or Word of God. We have proved that some revelation from God was necessary for man, in his present state, as a guilty, sinful, and ignorant creature; and such all men certainly are. Therefore, upon the supposition, which none of us are backward to make, that God had a merciful design towards any of the fallen human race, a revelation from him might reasonably be expected. We have shewn you that our Bible is every way worthy of God; and that no other book in the world, that pretends to be a revelation from God, has any thing like so good a claim

claim to that honour as our Bible has. We have shown that it could not be the contrivance and forgery either of good or of bad men; and therefore, in all probability, it must be the testimony of God.

Suppose we were to rest the matter here, and that we had not such strong positive evidence of the truth of the Scriptures, as I hope to shew in the next discourse that we have; but it was only highly probable they are the true word of God. They may be true, and it is very probable they are true: suppose this was all we had to say for the Scriptures, what then? Should any of us do wisely and prudently to despise and reject them? Or would it not rather be our wisdom to follow the rule of these Scriptures, and endeavour to have our hearts and lives conformed to them. I remember a little story in a celebrated Author: "A
" lewd young fellow seeing an aged hermit go by him:
" barefoot, Father, says he, you are in a very misera-
" ble condition, if there is not another world: True,
" son, says the hermit, but what is your condition if
" there is*." Suppose there is such another world as the Scripture tells us of a Heaven and a Hell, endless happiness and glory for the good, and endless misery and torment for the wicked; only suppose this should be all true, as most probably it is true, what a desperate risk does the ungodly sinner run? Was the Bible

* Spectator, No. 575.

all a forgery, still the good man, the Christian, runs no risk at all: let that be how it will, he is safe; and his Bible affords him a thousand supports and comforts, and pleasing hopes, to sweeten the present life as it goes on. But suppose this Bible should prove to be the true testimony of God, as I make no doubt but it is, what will become of the profane scorner, the wicked transgressor of the law of God, the despiser of Christ and his Gospel? The Bible says, “The wicked shall
 “be turned into hell, with all those that forget God*,”
 “that he who believeth the Gospel shall be saved, but
 “he that believeth not shall be damned†,” “shall be
 “punished with everlasting destruction from the pre-
 “sence of the Lord, and from the glory of his
 power‡.” Certainly, in a matter of such importance, the safe way is the wisest way. “The fear of the
 “Lord that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is un-
 “derstanding§.” Surely there was great reason for the Psalmist to say, “Have all the workers of iniquity
 “no knowledge||?” Are they fools, or are they mad men, to run such a desperate risk of eternal damnation? To choose so dangerous a road before a safe one, which is also the most easy and pleasant. For
 “Wisdom’s ways are ways of pleasantness, and all
 “her paths are peace**.” “But the way of trans-
 “gressors is hard††,” and dreadful will the end of it be.

* Psal. ix. 17. † Mark xiv. 16. ‡ 2 Thess. i. 9.

§ Job xxxiii. 28. || Psal. xiv. 4. ** Prov. iii. 17.

†† Prov. xi. 15.

But the extreme folly of these sinners will appear in a still stronger light, when we come to consider the certain evidence and proof we have that the Holy Scriptures are the true testimony and revelation of God; which is to be the subject of the next Discourse.

THE END OF THE FIRST DISCOURSE.

SERMON

SERMON II.

JOHN xxi. 24.

And we know that his Testimony is true.

ST. John, who wrote this history of the life, and death, and resurrection of Christ, wrote not upon hearsay, but upon his own certain knowledge; and therefore he was perfectly sure that what he had testified was true. *But how shall we be assured that it is true?* That is the question which I have proposed to handle from this text. In discoursing on which I proposed, not to confine myself merely to St. John's testimony, and to those matters only which he hath recorded in this history of Christ; but to take in also the testimony of the other Apostles and sacred writers, concerning all things which are contained in the Holy Scriptures. Here it was proposed to consider,

First, The *probability* of the truth of this testimony, or of the scripture-revelation; and, *secondly*, the *certainty* of it.

It has been shown in the former discourse, that it is, at least, highly probable that the Scriptures are true; or that they are a revelation sent us by the God of truth, as——because a revelation from God was necessary for men in their present fallen state; and therefore it might reasonably be expected from him,——because the Bible is every way worthy of God; and therefore it bids fair to be a revelation from him,——because no other book in the world, that pretends to be a revelation from God, has any thing like so good a claim to that honour as the Bible has,——and because neither good men nor bad men can reasonably be supposed to be the proper authors of the Bible; therefore, in all probability, it is the testimony of God himself, and those *holy men*, who wrote the *Scriptures*, wrote as they were moved by the *Holy Ghost*. I proceed now,

Secondly, To show the *certainty* of this testimony; or to offer some more certain and conclusive arguments for the truth of the Holy Scriptures. It is not only *highly probable*, but it is very *certain* that *this testimony is true*; for we have the most substantial evidences that we could expect, or even desire, in such a case, to prove to us,
that

that the Bible is indeed the word of God, a revelation which he hath sent us. Here I will begin,

First, *With the character and conditions of the writers of this testimony*, who solemnly declared that they wrote it by the inspiration of God. Now the question is, whether they are to be believed in what they testify? It was shown in the last Discourse that it cannot be supposed that any *good men* would be guilty of so wicked a forgery, as to father their own conceptions and writings upon God, and to say, that they received what they wrote from God, when they knew they did not: and it is as improbable, and indeed impossible, that the Bible could be the contrivance of any *bad men*; for had wicked men framed a book to impose upon the world, under the notion of a revelation from God, we are morally sure they would have made it more favourable to their corrupt inclinations and lusts; and, we may be very sure, they would not have sacrificed their worldly interest, and their very lives to this their testimony, as it is certain several of the writers of the Bible did, if they had known it to be a forgery. The only possible supposition then that can be made, in case the Bible is not a revelation from God, is, that the several writers of it were Enthusiasts, men of a distempered brain, who fancied they were inspired when they were not. Such persons there doubtless have been, whose heads were turned, and who fancied themselves to be inspired, and that they had a revelation from God, when there was

nothing more in it than their own crazy imagination. Now can we suspect that this might be the case with the writers of the Bible? Can we see any reason to surmise that they were such deluded Enthusiasts? Or have we not the best evidence in the world that they were sober, cool-headed men, who knew what they said, and were certain of what they wrote? For this I may appeal,

1. *To their manner of writing, and to the subjects which they wrote upon.* For those sacred writers did not only deliver doctrines from God, and foretel things to come, but they also related, and have recorded several facts and matters of history, which, at the time when they wrote them, could easily have been disproved, if they had not been true. Such as Moses's history of God's delivering the Israelites from the bondage of Egypt, by a long train of miracles, and of his conducting them through the Wilderness for forty years, in a very extraordinary manner. The history which the Apostles wrote of the life, miracles, death, and resurrection of Christ: and they appeal to many hundreds of living witnesses for the truth of what they related; as the Apostle Paul does, 1 Cor. xv. 6. where he says that Christ was seen alive, after his death, by *above five hundred brethren at once*, the greater part of whom were still living at the time when he wrote this. Now this was fair and open dealing, to appeal to hundreds of living witnesses, for the truth of a matter of fact: and
does

does this look like enthusiastic delusion? No certainly, Enthusiasts, and persons of a distempered brain, are apt to deal in whimsical speculations and prophecies, and not in relating plain matters of fact, in which they might be contradicted by living witnesses, if what they say be not true. Again, let me observe to you farther,

2. That as the sacred writers appear to be men of a sound mind, and sober judgment, so *they also appear to be very honest and upright men.* Witness their so often relating their own faults and failings, and those of their dearest friends. For instance, Moses, whose writings make so considerable a part of the Old Testament, how often does he, on one occasion and another, speak of his own weaknesses and miscarriages, and those of his nearest kindred? as, in the third chapter of Exodus, he relates how backward and unwilling he was to obey the command of God, when he called him to deliver Israel. In the latter end of the fourth chapter, he has recorded his own sinful neglect of God's ordinance, in not circumcising his son. In Numbers xx. he relates the story of his own sinful passion, for which *God was angry with him*; and in chapter xii. of that book, he has faithfully recorded the sedition of his own brother Aaron, and his sister Miriam, for which God smote her with the plague of leprosy. Moses was so far from the vanity of most other historians, who commonly labour to aggrandize their own nations, that
a good

a good part of his history is taken up with the account of the perverseness, the stubbornness and the idolatries of his own people Israel. Surely this has very much the air of an impartial and true history.

The same thing is to be observed of the writers of the New Testament, the Apostles of Christ. How freely do they publish their own faults, their pride, their ambition, their emulation, and the like? What a shameful story do they tell of themselves! that, a little before the death of Christ, “there was a strife among
“them which of them should be accounted the greatest”, and how, at the time of his last sufferings, one of their number *betrayed* their Lord, another *denied* him, and all the rest of them *forsook him and fled* †. St. Matthew leaves a censure upon his own life, viz. that he had been a *publican*, which was an office of very bad repute. And so does St. Paul, who writes himself *the chief of sinners*, and who has recorded it in his writings, once and again, that he had been a *blasphemer of Christ*, and an *injurious persecutor of the Church of God*. Now these are such instances of humility and honesty as were never found among impostors, and writers of forgery. They always take care of their own reputation in the first place; whereas it is plain these writers have no regard to their own reputation, but to the honour of God and Christ. Therefore, as Nicodemus said to

* Luke xxii. 24.

† Matth. xxvi. 56.

Christ, "We know that thou art a teacher come from
 "God, for no man can do the miracles thou doist. ex-
 "cept God be with him*." So we have good reason to
 say, concerning these writers of the Bible, we know
 that no man could, at least we are sure that no man
 would, have written such things of their own heads,
 and if they had not been instructed what they should
 write by the spirit of God. Again,

3. *The perfect harmony and agreement of the several
 books of the Scriptures with one another, is a very substan-
 tial evidence that they were not the fruit of men's own
 fancies, but that they were all dictated by one and the same
 spirit.* For suppose the several writers of the Holy
 Scriptures, from Moses to John, who lived in such re-
 mote ages from one another, had written only their
 own several fancies and opinions, it is more than a hun-
 dred to one that they would have often contradicted one
 another; for mens fancies and opinions are as different
 as their faces are, and it may be more so. We should
 then have had one sett of notions and doctrines in one
 book, another opposite sett of doctrines in another;
 whereas the Bible is plainly all of a piece, and the se-
 veral books of it perfectly harmonize with one an-
 other. The doctrines are the same from the beginning
 to the end. The same things which were represented
 by types in the Old Testament, are delivered in plain

* John iii. 3.

words in the New Testament. There is a wonderful harmony and agreement among all the writers of the Bible, which affords a good argument to prove that they were all instructed and inspired by one and the same spirit. We hardly find two other mens writings on the same subject, without some clashing and contradicting one another; whereas in all the vast variety of subjects which the Scripture treats of, there is no such clashing and contradicting; but the sacred writers of both Testaments deliver the same doctrines, and do, in effect, speak the same things. Now it is not to be conceived, it is not in the least credible, that the mere fancies of so many different men should thus harmonize with one another. I remember to have read a few lines of one of our English Poets, in which this argument is beautifully expressed.

Whence but from Heaven should men ur skill'd in arts,
 In different nations born, in different parts,
 Weave such agreeing truths? or how? or why?
 Should all conspire to cheat us with a lie?
 Unask'd their pains, ungrateful their advice,
 Starving their gains, and martyrdom their price.

DRYDEN.

And this hints a further argument to prove that the writers of the Bible were instructed in what they wrote by the spirit of God, viz.

4. *That they could be under no temptation, from any prospect of worldly advantage, to impose upon others, but*
contin

venting that for a revelation from God which was not. For what could they propose by writing a book so opposite to the lusts and natural inclinations of men as the Bible is? and what did they gain by it? What indeed, in this world, but reproach, persecution, poverty and death? and all this they contentedly submitted to and bore, for the truth which they had received and delivered from God. Many of them sealed their testimony with their blood; which is the strongest assurance of honesty and sincerity that men could give in such a case. Could we suppose them *cunning* enough to have contrived the Bible of their own heads, and *wicked* enough to have written it in the name of God; yet what motive could they have so to do? Would they take all that pains only to ruin themselves in this world, and to damn themselves in the world to come? We cannot surely suppose such monsters in nature, as the sacred writers must have been, if the Bible be not the word of God.

Thus we have made it appear,——That the writers of the Bible were men of sound mind and sober judgment;——that they were honest and upright men.—We have observed, that the perfect agreement of the several books of the Scripture with one another, is a very substantial evidence that they were not the fruit of mens own fancies and opinions, but that they were all written under the inspiration of one and the same Spirit.—And further, we have observed that the sacred
writers

writers could be under no temptation, from any prospect of worldly advantage, to impose such a forgery upon the world, as the Scriptures must needs be, if they are not the word of God. From all which there arises a strong argument in proof of the divine authority of the Bible.

A *second* argument may be taken from *the contents of the Bible itself, or from what it contains*. Here many learned men have taken notice of the very language and style in which the Scriptures are written, which seems to have something in it more than human, a certain majesty and grandeur, and emphatical propriety in the very words and language of the Bible, which are very much superior to all mere human writings whatever. But this evidence lies chiefly before those who are skilled in the original tongues, in which the Bible was written; for there is no translation that comes up near to the beauty of the original; and therefore I will not now insist upon it.

But the apparent design and tendency of the Scriptures affords a very considerable argument for the truth of them; for they most evidently tend, throughout, to advance the glory of God, and to promote our conformity to him. That is the sum of what the Scripture aims at in every page. It displays the glory of the several perfections of God, much beyond what the book of nature, or any other book in the world, ever did or could

could do. The Scripture teaches us to admire, to adore and to praise God, as well for all the good that we do, as for all the good that we obtain, or hope for. “Who made thee to differ from another, and what hast thou that thou didst not receive from God *, of him, and through him, and to him are all things. To him be glory †.” So speaks the Scriptures. And as it tends to advance the glory of God, so also to promote our conformity to him, and to recover us from the ruins of our fall: to make us *holy as God is holy*; and thereby to fit us for his presence in Heaven; “To make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the Saints in Light ‡. This is, most apparently, the design and tendency of the Bible from one end to the other. It is a design most worthy of the holy and blessed God, and such, as we cannot but conclude, must come from him.

A further argument for the truth of the Scriptures, taken from the contents of them, may be founded on *the Scripture prophecies, and the punctual fulfilment of them*. What David speaks of the knowledge of God, concerning the conception and formation of his body, may be very well applied to his fore-knowledge of the future events of time, as it appears in the Scripture prophecies, Psal. cxxxix. 15, 16. “My substance
“was not hid from Thee, when I was made in secret,

* 1 Cor. iv. 7. † Rom. xi. 36. ‡ Col. i. 12.

“and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the
 “earth; thine eyes did see my substance, yet being
 “imperfect, and in thy Book all my members were
 “written, which in continuance were fashioned, when
 “as yet there was none of them.” In like manner it
 plainly appears, from the Bible itself, that, “*Whoever*
 “was the author of that Book, he saw the substance
 “and frame of the future events of Providence, while
 “they were secrets to all men; and he wrote them
 “down in his Book, as in time they should come to be
 “fashioned, while as yet there were none of them.”
 And *that* could be no other than the omniscient God.
 We may challenge all other books in the world as God
 challenges the idols of the Heathens in Isaiah xli. 22,
 23. “Let them bring forth and show us what shall
 “happen: shew the things that are to come hereafter,
 “that we may know that ye are Gods.” Now this is
 what the Scripture has done, in abundance of cases;
 from whence we know that it is the word of God. It
 would be much too tedious to mention all the Scripture
 prophecies which have already had their punctual ac-
 complishment: I will only therefore instance in *two* or
three, and they shall be predictions of such future events
 as no human, nor indeed any created wisdom could
 possibly foresee: events that had no connection with
 natural causes, by which they might be guessed at be-
 fore-hand; but such as, to our view of things, were
 merely accidental; or such of which there was no pro-
 bability at the time when they were foretold; or such
 as

as depended on the free will of man in acting, which therefore could be foreseen and foretold by none but that God *who knoweth man's thoughts afar off*. Of this sort is that remarkable prophecy concerning Cyrus; and his restoring the Jews from their captivity, and rebuilding their temple, Isaiah xliv. 28. “Thus saith
 “The Lord of Cyrus, He is my shepherd and shall per-
 “form all my pleasure, even saying to Jerusalem thou
 “shalt be built; and to the Temple thy foundation
 “shall be laid.” Now it is remarkable, that this prophecy was given out long before the captivity of the Jews began, when as yet there was no likelihood of any such thing as that they should be carried into captivity, and their temple destroyed, and need to be rebuilt again. And it is still more remarkable, that this prophecy was given out a *hundred* years, at least, some say *two hundred* years, before Cyrus was born; and therefore, probably, long before his parents were born; and then, who could foretel there would ever be such such a man in the world, and that his parents, who were at liberty to call him by what name they pleased, would call him Cyrus; and that he should be so kindly affectionate to the Jews, though he was a Heathen, as not only to give them free liberty to return to their own land, but to encourage and assist them in building their Temple. None could foresee, none could foretel all this, but God himself. From hence therefore we may surely conclude, that the Scripture, in which all

this was foretold so long before it came to pass, is the word of God.

I might instance again, in that famous prophecy which was delivered by Jacob, concerning Shiloh, or the Messiah, Gen. xlix. 10. "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and to him shall the gathering of the people be." Now at the time when this prophecy was delivered there was no manner of likelihood that the posterity of Jacob should ever have a scepter among them. However, if such an unlikely thing should come to pass, that any of these shepherds, or their posterity should rise to be kings; there was no likelihood that the scepter should be in the hands of Judah; for he had three elder brethren, Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, who, in all human probability, would be preferred before him. When Moses recorded this prophecy, some hundreds of years after it was first given, there was still no likelihood of the scepter's ever being in the tribe of Judah; for Moses, who was then the supreme magistrate under God, was of the tribe of Levi, Joshua, his successor, was of the tribe of Ephraim; and when afterwards God appointed them a king, it was Saul, who was not of the tribe of Judah, but of Benjamin; and yet at length, against all human probability, the tribe of Judah did actually obtain the supremacy; and the scepter did continue in it, in one
form

form of government or another, until Christ came*. So that you see, here was a prophecy of an event, very long before it came to pass, which no human sagacity could possibly foresee. But God, who had appointed it, he foresaw it, and he only could foretel it: therefore the Scripture, in which this prophecy is contained, must needs be the word of God.

We will go on now to mention two or three prophecies of the New Testament, which will as infallibly prove *that* also to be the word of God. As our Saviour's prediction of the destruction of the Temple, and the utter ruin of the Jewish state and nation, when, at the time of his delivering that prophecy, there was no appearance, nor human probability, of any such thing. His prediction of the wonderful spread of the Gospel, after his departure; and the vast increase of his church, which he compares to a *grain of mustard seed*, which grows up, in a few months, to be a large and spreading tree. Now nothing was more improbable, to all human reason, than such an increase of the

* It is not necessary, to the punctual fulfilling of this prophecy, that the persons, in whose hands the scepter was, should be all of the tribe of Judah, as indeed they were not; for the Asmonean Princes, or Maccabees, who were chief Governors upwards of a hundred years, were priests of the Tribe of Levi: but still the Tribe of Judah was the State, and the Government was in it, until Judea was reduced into the form of a Roman Province, which was after the birth of Christ.

church of Christ, after he, the founder of it, had been crucified, as an infamous malefactor: and yet so it came to pass, just as he had foretold it would be. Again, the rejection and dispersion of the Jews are foretold, both in the Old Testament and in the New: and it is also foretold, that in time (the time that God has appointed for that great event) there shall be a general conversion of the Jews; they shall be again received into the church and favour of God; and all “Israel shall be saved*.” Now, though this prophecy is not yet accomplished, yet the steps of Providence which are leading to it are such, and so wonderful, that one cannot but believe that it shall be accomplished in the appointed time. I mean, God’s preserving the Jews a distinct people, separate from all others, though scattered abroad into all lands; and that for so many hundred years together. It is a most marvellous thing, such as no history of any other nation or people in the world can show the like.

Again, the prophecy of the man of sin, which is delivered by St. Paul. 2 Thess. ii. and which is so plainly fulfilled in popery, in every particular of it, amounts, I think, to no less than a demonstration that the Apostle wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. For I am sure no human wisdom or sagacity would have conjectured that such a monster as *popery* should ever

* Rom. xi. 26.

rise out of christianity*. Now from these Scripture prophecies, and many more which might be mentioned, there arises a more substantial evidence of the truth of the Scriptures; or that they are indeed the word of God. And thus you see, in a few instances out of many, that the Scripture has foretold such things as none could possibly foresee, and therefore none could foretell, but God.

Thus we have proved the truth of the Scriptures from the character and condition of the writers,—and from the contents of the Scriptures themselves. I shall add but one proof more, which arises,

Thirdly, from the good effects which the Scriptures have produced. Here let us first take notice of that miraculous testimony which God gave to the word of his grace, by the wonderful success of the Gospel when it was first preached; and then we shall speak of the more stated and ordinary effects of it in other ages.

I. I say the truth of the Gospel was *miraculously* evidenced by the wonderful success of it, when it was first preached by the Apostles. *Miraculously*, I say, for

* See Dr. Benson's Dissertation on the Man of Sin, at the end of his Paraphrase on the second epistle to the Thessalonians; in which it is shown, with convincing evidence, that all the characters of the Man of Sin, in that prophecy, do exactly suit to *popery*: and therefore we cannot doubt but that *popery* was intended by it.

I look

I look upon the success of the Apostles preaching to be a greater miracle than any other which they wrought. I am sure that our Saviour gives it the preference to all the miracles which he himself had wrought, John xiv. 12. He said to his disciples, “He that believeth on me, “the works that I do shall he do likewise; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go to the “Father.” Plainly referring to the conversion of sinners, by their preaching of his Gospel, after his ascension to heaven. Never was there any event of Providence, never any work performed among men, in which there were such evident traces and tokens of a divine power concurring, aiding, and succeeding, as in the wonderful success of the Apostles preaching: hereby God did, in a most surprising manner, give testimony to the word of his grace. Let us here single out a few instances, relating to their preaching and their success, which manifest that the hand of the Lord was with them, as,

1. *Consider what difficulties those preachers of the Gospel had to encounter with.* They were such as made their success exceedingly improbable. For the world was generally sunk into the dregs of idolatry and wickedness; and nothing could be more contrary to the corrupt inclinations of mankind, than the doctrine which the Apostles preached. It was no fine story to please the flesh, and humour sensuality; but quite the contrary, it taught and it required *self-denial* and *mortification*,

tion, and universal purity. This doctrine, therefore, must needs be very unpopular. And further, it would be no little prejudice against it, that the author of this doctrine was but a mean and obscure person, and a man of a very obnoxious character, Jesus, *the son of a carpenter*, who had been accused, by his own countrymen, of treason and blasphemy, and had been condemned by Pilate, the Roman governor, to suffer the most painful and ignominious death. Now, to invite men to become disciples to this Jesus, after he was crucified and dead, how preposterous would it seem? to tell men that they must trust for eternal life and salvation, on one that could not, or however did not, save himself from being put to death, who would not laugh at such a wild proposal? “We preach Christ crucified unto the Jews “a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness*.”

Let it be observed again, That the doctrine and preaching of the Apostles were vigorously opposed by men of figure, and that they were persecuted wherever they came. Then was remarkably fulfilled that prophecy, Psalm ii. 2. “The Kings of the earth set “themselves, and the rulers took counsel together “against the Lord, and against his anointed.” And what hope could the Apostles have of any success of their preaching, under all these disadvantages and discouragements, when their doctrine was so unpopular

* 1 Cor. i. 23.

in itself, and when the whole world, in a manner, stood against them. And further let it be considered,

2. *What sort of men these first preachers of the Gospel were.* If any enterprise ever required men of education and learning, of power and interest, to render it successful, surely this did. But were the first preachers of the Gospel such men? No, far otherwise. Christ commissioned and sent forth a few *fishermen* to preach his Gospel; men of mean rank and condition, without credit or interest, without the authority of power, or the charms of eloquence: these were the men whom Christ sent forth to preach his Gospel, and to set up his kingdom in the world; to confound *Judaism* and overturn *Paganism*. “You see your calling, “brethren,” says the Apostle, “how that not many “wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many “noble are called,” or rather, it should be rendered, “are employed in calling you.” 1 Cor. i. 26. These are the men that are sent to confute the learned rabbi’s and the famous philosophers. Was ever any thing so unlikely, and improbable? The heavenly treasure is placed in *earthen vessels* like Gideon’s lamps in earthen pitchers, “that the excellency of the power might appear to be of God.” 2 Cor. iv. 7. Let us now see,

3. *What success they had.* Here we see the power of God shining out very illustrious, by which he gave testimony to the word of his grace. For, notwithstanding

ing all these disadvantages and discouragements, the success of their preaching was astonishingly great. They made profelytes and converts to the faith of the Gospel by *hundreds* and *thousands* at a sermon; and spread their doctrine in a few years over most countries of the then known world. And the change it wrought in the hearts and lives of men was very wonderful. It was such indeed as was not possible for any power but that of God to effect. Wherever the Gospel came, it transformed *Pagans* into *Christians*. They renounced the religion of their ancestors, in which they had been educated; and “turned from their idols to “serve the living and true God*. All the power of human learning and eloquence, could not stand against the power of the preaching of these poor *fishermen*; and notwithstanding the mighty opposition that was then made to the Gospel, in every country where those preachers came, yet it spread through the world with amazing swiftness. Tertullian, who lived in the next age after Christ, has these words in his apology, which he addresses to the heathen magistrates, “If,” says he, “we were enemies to your state, you might well seek ‘new cities and countries to govern; for you would have more enemies than friends in your empire. We have filled your towns, your cities, your provinces, your castles, your camps, and your courts; only we have left your idol temples to yourselves; all other

* 1 Thess. i. 9.

“ places

“places are full of christians.” Thus was the *little flock* of Christ encreased in a few years; *so mightily grew the word of God and prevailed*. Now we must surely be blind, if we don’t see there was something more than human in all this. And thus was the truth of the Gospel attested from Heaven, by the miraculous success of the first preachers of it. And if the Gospel be true, the whole Scriptures are the true word of God: for Christ “came not to destroy the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfil them *;” and the new Testament gives testimony to the Old, that “all Scripture was given by inspiration of God †;” and “that holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost ‡.”

Thus you see the miraculous success of the first preachers of the Gospel gives a strong evidence to the truth of it, and of the whole Scriptures. Let us also,

II. A little attend to the more stated and ordinary effects of the word of God, which are common to all ages. It is most commonly by means of this word that sinners are converted, that dead souls are revived and raised to newness of life. So it was in ancient times. “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.” James i. 18. And so it is still. “Faith cometh by

* Matt. v. 17.

† 2 Tim. iii. 16.

‡ 2 Pet. i. 21.

“hearing

“ hearing: and hearing by the word of God*.” It is also by this word, that the souls of good people are edified and comforted, that the divine life of grace is advanced, and at length ripened into the heavenly life of glory. As when John the Baptist sent some of his disciples to Christ with this question, “ Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?” Our Saviour returned no other answer, but this, “ Go and shew John those things which you do hear and see, the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them.” Matt. xi. 4, 5. That was enough to satisfy any considerate person, that Jesus was the Christ; for the miracles which he wrought were too great and glorious for an impostor; and besides in them an ancient Scripture prophecy, concerning the promised Messiah, was very literally fulfilled, viz. “ When he, their God, will come and save them, then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped, &c.” Isa. xxxv. 5, 6. “ So, if the question be put, whether these Scriptures are the word of God, is it not sufficient to say? Hereby dead sinners are often raised to newness of life; the eyes of those whom the God of this world had blinded are opened; hearts, which were full of uncleanness, are purified; and poor dejected souls are wonderfully supported and comforted. And can we think that the tree

* Rom x. 7.

“ which bears such good fruit as this, is of any other
 “ planting than God’s? Are these the effects of the
 “ words of men only? No, what man could speak
 “ the dead to life, or the sorrowful and dejected, into
 “ joy and comfort?” But this is what the Bible has
 done in a thousand instances. Therefore such as have
 experienced the power of those divine truths, which
 the Scripture teaches, in their own souls, need no other
 evidence to prove to them that the Bible is the word of
 God. This is that Witness, which St. John speaks of,
 which the believer has in his own heart, 1 John v. 10.
 “ He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the wit-
 “ nefs in himself.” And it is such a witness as no
 bribes can silence, no sophistry of men, or devils, can
 confute: it is the most confirming testimony of all
 others, to the man that has it; who has heard, as it
 were, God speaking to him by his word, to whom the
 word of God has been an effectual means of drawing
 his soul to him. But this witness is like that “ white
 “ stone, with a new name written upon it, which no
 “ man knoweth saving he that receiveth it*.” It is in
 vain therefore to alledge this testimony to unbelievers,
 who have never tasted of the grace of God, nor expe-
 rienced the power of the Gospel upon their own souls;
 but to those who have experienced it, none is so satis-
 factory, none so confirming. As when some of the Co-
 rinthians, who had been converted by St. Paul’s preach-
 ing, were tempted to doubt of his commission to be an

* Rev. ii. 17.

Apostle of Christ, he advises them only to examine themselves, as to the effect of his ministry upon their own souls, 2 Cor. xiii. 3, 5. “ Since you seek a proof
 “ of Christ’s speaking in me, examine yourselves whe-
 “ ther ye be in the faith.” For if Christ had spoken effectually to their souls by St. Paul’s preaching, so as thereby to convert them, and implant in them saving faith, they could not have a better evidence that Christ owned him for his Apostle, and had spoken by him: so, if at any time a doubt is suggested to your minds, about the truth of the Scriptures, examine yourselves as to the effect they have had upon your own souls. Has God, by them, awakened you out of your carnal security? Has he, by them, raised you up to newness of life? Has he, by them, spoken peace and comfort to your souls, when they were in distress and trouble? Has he, by them, sanctified you, and supported you hitherto? What stronger evidence can you have, that these Scriptures are the word of God?

Thus I have finished the argument which I proposed from my text. And now, upon the whole, cannot we make these words our own, and say, “ We know that
 “ this testimony is true?”

For the improvement of this subject let us

First, Reverence and prize the Bible. Read it and regard it, not as the word of men, but of God; as if God himself was speaking to you from Heaven, as he

spoke to Moses, or as Christ spoke to Paul. Read this word of God with reverence, and speak of it with reverence: never turn any of the words of Scripture into a *jest*, nor use them to adorn a piece of wit; but *let the word of God dwell in you richly in all wisdom*. Consider your Bible as the oracles of God; and give it due reverence, for its author's sake. And how should you prize it on account of its vast usefulness? Was there a book written that could teach you a sure and certain way to be rich and prosperous in this world, who would be without it? But this book, the Bible, will teach you much more important and useful lessons than all that; for it will *make you wise unto salvation*. It will teach you how you may be reconciled to God, whom you have so grievously offended; how you may obtain his favour, which is *better than life*, and how you may escape his wrath, which is *worse than death*. This book is your best, and your only sure guide in the way to immortal life and blessedness. Reverence and prize the Bible as the book by which you shall be judged in the last day; when “the books shall be opened (the book of Scripture no doubt for one) and the dead shall be judged out of those things which are written in the books, according to their works*.” Open it therefore beforehand. There you may see what your doom is then likely to be; and if you find that you are in danger of being condemned in the judg-

* Rev. xx. 12.

ment,

ment, and doomed to everlasting punishment, this book will show you how you may *fly from the wrath to come*, and *obtain eternal life*. Or if you can find your own character among the Scripture-characters of the children of God, and the heirs of his heavenly kingdom, how will that raise and enliven your hopes? How will that support and comfort you under all your worldly troubles? How will it sweeten this mortal life, when you can see it flowing on apace to an immortal life of glory? Reverence and prize the Bible therefore, as the grand charter of all your blessings, and of all your hopes; and therefore,

Secondly, Be very thankful to God that you have the Bible. Be thankful that he has been pleased to give us a new revelation, after we had cast off the knowledge of the Most High, and brought such dismal darkness on our minds by sin; that he has given us so clear a revelation of his goodness and love, to encourage our return to him, and our trust upon his mercy for pardon and eternal life; and that he has marked out the way to eternal life, so plain before us, in his word. Be thankful to God, and bless his name, that he has given you such abundant evidence, that these Scriptures are indeed his word; so that you may, most safely, venture your souls and your eternal salvation upon them. Be thankful that you have the free use of the Scriptures; that your lot was not cast either into a Heathen country, where the Bible is not heard of, or into a Popish country,

country, where it is little more than heard of ; where it is locked up from the people, and they are not suffered to read it. How graciously has God distinguished you from Heathens and from Papists. And, especially, if he has been pleased to attend his word with an efficacious blessing to your souls ; if God *has begotten you again by his word of truth*, how are you distinguished from many others who dwell in Protestant countries, who may have the free use of the Bible, but have no heart to use it ; and whose dreadful condemnation it will be, *that light came into the world*, the light of the glorious Gospel shone all around them, “ but they loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil *.” You have reason to regard the Bible as an invaluable blessing, as the greatest and best gift of God next to the gift of his Son ; and without which you would have known nothing of Christ, and of salvation by him. *Thanks be to God for this his unspeakable gift.*

Thirdly, Manifest your high esteem of the Scriptures, and your thankfulness for them, by your diligent use of them. Read and study the Bible, set your hearts to it, for it is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life. Let it be as the man of your counsel, your constant guide in the way of your pilgrimage. Labour to understand what you read ; and pray for the teaching of

* John iii. 19.

the good spirit of God to *open your understanding, that you may understand the Scriptures*; and also, to set home divine truths upon your hearts, that so, “while you
“ behold in the glass of the word the glory of the Lord,
“ you may be changed into the same image from glory
“ to glory*.” Be not satisfied with all the knowledge you can gain by reading and studying, without feeling the power of divine truths upon your own hearts, in your growing conformity to a holy God, your delight in his word and ordinances, your submission to his will, and obedience to his precepts, and in the devout aspiration of your souls after a more intimate communion with him, and a more perfect enjoyment of his presence and love; and so shall your souls be *nourished up in the words of faith, and of good doctrine, until you come unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*; when all darkness shall be dissipated by the light of heavenly glory; and when your faith shall be changed into vision, and your hope into everlasting enjoyment.

• 2 Cor. iii. 18.

FINIS.

