

OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
CONVERSION
AND
APOSTLESHIP
OF
ST. PAUL.

—♦—
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IN A
LETTER
TO GILBERT WEST, Esq.

PHILADELPHIA:
PUBLISHED BY S. POTTER & CO.
No. 55, Chesnut Street.
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1819.

A
LETTER

TO

GILBERT WEST, Esq.

SIR,

IN a late conversation we had together upon the subject of the christian religion, I told you, that besides all the proofs of it which may be drawn from the prophecies of the Old Testament, from the necessary connection it has with the whole system of the Jewish religion, from the miracles of Christ, and from the evidence given of his resurrection by all the other apostles, I thought the conversion and the apostleship of St. Paul alone, duly considered, was of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove christianity to be a divine revelation.

As you seemed to think that so com-

pendious a proof might be of use to convince those unbelievers that will not attend to a longer series of arguments, I have thrown together the reasons upon which I support that proposition.

In the xxvith chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, writ by a cotemporary author, and a companion of St. Paul in preaching the gospel (as appears by the book itself, chap. xx. ver. 6, 13, 14. chap. xxvii. ver. 1, &c.) St. Paul is said to have given himself this account of his conversion and preaching, to king Agrippa and Festus the Roman governor. ‘ My manner of life from my
‘ youth, which was, at the first, among
‘ mine own nation at Jerusalem, know
‘ all the Jews, which knew me from
‘ the beginning (if they would testify)
‘ that after the strictest sect of our re-
‘ ligion, I lived a Pharisee. And now I
‘ stand and am judged for the hope of
‘ the promise made by God unto our
‘ fathers: unto which promise our
‘ twelve tribes, instantly serving God

‘ day and night, hope to come; For
‘ which hope’s sake, king Agrippa, I
‘ am accused by the Jews. Why
‘ should it be thought a thing incredi-
‘ ble with you, that God should raise
‘ the dead? I verily thought with my-
‘ self, that I ought to do many things
‘ contrary to the name of Jesus of Naz-
‘ areth. Which thing I also did in Jer-
‘ usalem, and many of the saints did I
‘ shut up in prison, having received au-
‘ thority from the chief priests; and
‘ when they were put to death, I gave
‘ my voice against them. And I pun-
‘ ished them oft in every synagogue,
‘ and compelled them to blaspheme,
‘ and being exceeding mad against
‘ them, I persecuted them even unto
‘ strange cities. Whereupon, as I went
‘ to Damascus with authority and com-
‘ mission from the chief priests, at mid-
‘ day, O king, I saw in the way a light
‘ from heaven, above the brightness of
‘ the sun, shining round about me, and
‘ them which journeyed with me. And
‘ when we were all fallen to the earth,

‘ I heard a voice speaking unto me, and
‘ saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul,
‘ Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is
‘ hard for thee to kick against the
‘ pricks. And I said, who art thou,
‘ Lord? and he said, I am Jesus whom
‘ thou persecutest. But rise, stand up-
‘ on thy feet; for I have appeared un-
‘ to thee for this purpose, to make thee
‘ a minister, and a witness both of those
‘ things which thou hast seen, and of
‘ those things in the which I will appear
‘ unto thee; delivering thee from the
‘ people, and from the Gentiles, unto
‘ whom now I send thee, to open their
‘ eyes, and to turn them from darkness
‘ to light, and from the power of Satan
‘ unto God, that they may receive for-
‘ giveness of sins, and inheritance a-
‘ mong them which are sanctified by
‘ faith that is in me. Whereupon, O
‘ king Agrippa, I was not disobedient
‘ to the heavenly vision: But shewed
‘ first unto them of Damascus, and at
‘ Jerusalem, and throughout all the
‘ coasts of Judea, and to the Gentiles,

‘ that they should repent and turn to
‘ God, and do works meet for repent-
‘ ance. For these causes the Jews
‘ caught me in the temple, and went a-
‘ bout to kill me. Having therefore ob-
‘ tained help of God, I continue unto
‘ this day witnessing both to small and
‘ great, saying none other things than
‘ those which Moses and the prophets
‘ did say should come: that Christ
‘ should suffer, and that he should be
‘ the first that should rise from the
‘ dead, and should shew light to the
‘ people, and to the Gentiles. And as
‘ he thus spake for himself, Festus
‘ said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art
‘ beside thyself; much learning doth
‘ make thee mad. But he said, I am
‘ not mad, most noble Festus, but speak
‘ forth the words of truth and soberness.
‘ For the king knoweth of these things,
‘ before whom also I speak freely; for
‘ I am persuaded that none of these
‘ things are hidden from him; for the
‘ thing was not done in a corner. King
‘ Agrippa, believest thou the proph-

‘ ets? I know that thou believest.—
‘ Then Agrippa said unto Paul, almost
‘ thou persuadest me to be a Chris-
‘ tian. And Paul said, I would to God,
‘ that not only thou, but also all that
‘ hear me this day, were both almost
‘ and altogether such as I am, except
‘ these bonds.’ In another chapter of
the same book he gives in substance
the same account to the Jews, adding
these further particulars: ‘ And I said,
‘ what shall I do, Lord? And the Lord
‘ said unto me, Arise, and go into Da-
‘ mascus, and there it shall be told thee
‘ of all things which are appointed for
‘ thee to do. And when I could not
‘ see for the glory of that light, being
‘ led by the hand of them that were
‘ with me, I came into Damascus. And
‘ one Ananias, a devout man, accord-
‘ ing to the law, having a good report
‘ of all the Jews that dwelt there, came
‘ unto me, and stood, and said unto me,
‘ brother Saul, receive thy sight; and
‘ the same hour I looked up upon him.
‘ And he said, the God of our fathers

‘hath chosen thee, that thou shouldst
 ‘know his will, and see that Just one,
 ‘and shouldst hear the voice of his
 ‘mouth. For thou shalt be his wit-
 ‘ness unto all men of what thou hast
 ‘seen and heard. **And now why tar-**
 ‘riest thou? Arise, **and be baptized,**
 ‘and wash away thy sins, calling on the
 ‘name of the Lord.’ Acts, ch. xxii.
 ver. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16.

In the ixth chapter of the same book
 the author of it relates the same story
 with some other circumstances not
 mentioned in these accounts: As, that
Saul in a vision saw Ananias before he
 came to him, *coming in and putting his*
hand on him, that he might receive his sight.
 Acts chap. ix. ver. 11. And that when
 Ananias had spoken to him, *immediate-*
ly there fell from his eyes as it had been
scales. Acts *ibid.* ver. 18.

And agreeably to all these accounts,
 St. Paul thus speaks of himself in the
 epistles he wrote to the several church-
 es he planted; the authenticity of
 which cannot be doubted without over-

turning all rules, by which the authority and genuineness of any writings can be proved, or confirmed.

To the Galatians he says, ‘ I certify
 ‘ you, brethren, that the gospel which
 ‘ was preached by me is not after man.
 ‘ For I neither received it of man, nei-
 ‘ ther was I taught it, but by the reve-
 ‘ lation of Jesus Christ. For ye have
 ‘ heard of my conversation in time
 ‘ past in the Jews religion, how that
 ‘ beyond measure I persecuted the
 ‘ church of God, and wasted it; and
 ‘ profited in the Jews religion above
 ‘ many mine equals in my own nation,
 ‘ being more exceedingly zealous of
 ‘ the tradition of my fathers. But when
 ‘ it pleased God, who separated me
 ‘ from my mother’s womb, and called
 ‘ me by his grace, to reveal his Son in
 ‘ me, that I might preach him among
 ‘ the Heathen, immediately I confer-
 ‘ red not with flesh and blood,’ &c.
 Gal. cha. i. ver. 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16.

To the Philippians he says, ‘ If any
 ‘ other man thinketh that he hath

‘ whereof he might trust in his flesh, I
‘ more : circumcised the eighth day,
‘ of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of
‘ Benjamin, an Hebrew of the He-
‘ brews. As touching the law, a Phar-
‘ isee ; concerning zeal, persecuting
‘ the church ; touching the righteous-
‘ ness which is in the law, blameless.—
‘ But what things were gain to me, those
‘ I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubt-
‘ less, and I count all things but loss
‘ for the excellency of the knowledge
‘ of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I
‘ have suffered the loss of all things,
‘ and do count them but dung, that I
‘ may win Christ.’ Phil. ch. iii. ver. 4,
5, 6, 7, 8.

And in his epistle to Timothy he writes thus ; ‘ I thank Jesus Christ our
‘ Lord, who hath enabled me, for that
‘ he counted me faithful, putting me
‘ into the ministry, who was before a
‘ blasphemer, and a persecutor, and
‘ injurious ; but I obtained mercy, be-
‘ cause I did it ignorantly in unbelief.
Tim. ch. i. ver. 12, 13.

In other epistles he calls himself *an apostle by the will of God, by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ*;—and *an apostle not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.*

2 Cor. ch. i. ver. 1. Col. ch. i. ver. 1.—

1 Tim. ch. i. ver. 1. Gal. ch. i. ver. 1.

All which implies some miraculous call that made him an apostle. And to the Corinthians he says, after enumerating many appearances of Jesus after his resurrection, ‘And last of all he was ‘seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.’ 1 Cor. ch. xv. ver. 8.

Now it must of necessity be, that the person attesting these things of himself, and of whom they are related in so authentic a manner, either was an impostor, who said what he knew to be false with an intent to deceive; or he was an enthusiast, who by the force of an over-heated imagination imposed on himself; or he was deceived by the fraud of others, and all that he said must be imputed to the

power of that deiciet ; or what he declared to have been the cause of his conversion, and to have happened in consequence of it, did all really happen ; and therefore the Christian religion is a divine revelation.

Now that he was not an impostor, who said what he knew to be false with an intent to deceive, I shall endeavour to prove, by shewing that he could have no rational motives to undertake such an imposture, nor could have possibly carried it on with any success by the means we know he employed.

First then, the inducement to such an imposture must have been one of these two, either the hope of advancing himself by it in his temporal interest, credit, or power ; or the gratification of some of his passions under the authority of it, and by the means it afforded.

Now these were the circumstances in which St, Paul declared his conversion to the faith of Christ Jesus ; that

Jesus, who called himself the Messiah, and Son of God, notwithstanding the innocence and holiness of his life, notwithstanding the miracles by which he attested his mission, had been crucified by the Jews as an impostor and blasphemer, which crucifixion not only must (humanly speaking) have intimidated others from following him, or espousing his doctrines, but served to confirm the Jews in their opinion that he could not be their promised Messiah, who according to their prejudices was not to suffer in any manner ; but to reign triumphant for ever here upon earth. His apostles indeed, though at first they appeared to be terrified by the death of their master, and disappointed in all their hopes, yet had surprisingly recovered their spirits again, and publicly taught in his name, declaring him to be risen from the grave, and confirming that miracle by many they worked, or pretended to work themselves. But the chief priests and rulers among the Jews were so far from

being converted either by their words, or their works, that they had begun a severe persecution against them, put some to death, imprisoned others, and were going on with implacable rage against the whole sect. In all these severities St. Paul concurred, being himself a Pharisee, *bred up at the feet of Gamaliel*, (Acts vii. 9, 22, 23.) one of the chief of that sect, nor was he content in the heat of his zeal with persecuting the Christians who were at Jerusalem, but *breathing out threatnings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord*, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. (Acts ix. 1, 2.) His request was complied with, and he went to Damascus with authority and commission from the high priest. (Acts xxvi. 12.) At this instant of time, and under these circumstances, did he become a disciple of Christ. What could be his motive to take such a part?

Was it the hope of encreasing his wealth? The certain consequence of his taking that part was not only the loss of all that he had, but of all hopes of acquiring more. Those whom he left, were the disposers of wealth, of dignity, of power in Judea; those whom he went to, were indigent men, opprest and kept down from all means of improving their fortunes. They among them, who had more than the rest, shared what they had with their brethren, but with this assistance the whole community was hardly supplied with the necessaries of life. And even in churches he afterwards planted himself, which were much more wealthy than that of Jerusalem, so far was St. Paul from availing himself of their charity, or the veneration they had for him, in order to draw that wealth to himself, that he often refused to take any part of it for the necessaries of life.

Thus he tells the Corinthians, ‘E-
‘ven unto this present hour we both
‘hunger and thirst, and are naked, and

‘ are buffeted, and have no certain
‘ dwelling-place, and labour, working
‘ with our own hands.’ 1 Cor. xv. 8.

In another epistle he writes to them,
‘ Behold, the third time I am ready to
‘ come to you, and I will not be bur-
‘ thensome to you, for I seek not yours
‘ but you ; for the children ought not to
‘ lay up for the parents but the parents
‘ for the children.’ 2 Cor. xii. 14.

To the Thessalonians he says, ‘ As
‘ we were allowed of God to be put in
‘ trust with the gospel, even so we
‘ speak, not as pleasing men, but God,
‘ which trieth our hearts. For neither
‘ at any time used we flattering words,
‘ nor a cloak of covetousness, God is
‘ witness ; nor of men sought we glory,
‘ neither of you, nor yet of others, when
‘ we might have been burthensome, as
‘ the apostles of Christ. For ye re-
‘ member, brethren, our labour and
‘ travel : For labouring night and day,
‘ because we would not be chargeable
‘ to any of you, we preached unto you the
‘ gospel of God.’ And again in another

‘ letter to them, he repeats the same testimony of his disinterestedness : ‘ Neither did we eat any man’s bread for nought, but wrought with labour and travel night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you.’ 2 Thess. ch. iii. 8. And when he took his farewell of the church of Ephesus, to whom he foretold that they should see him no more, he gives this testimony of himself, and appeals to them for the truth of it : ‘ I have coveted no man’s silver or gold, or apparel. Yea, you yourselves know, that these hands have ministred unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.’ Acts xx. 33, 34. It is then evident both from the state of the church when St. Paul first came into it, and from his behaviour afterwards, that he had no thoughts of encreasing his wealth by becoming a Christian ; whereas by continuing to be their enemy, he had almost certain hopes of making his fortune by the favour of those who were at the head of the Jewish state, to whom nothing

could more recommend him than the zeal that he shewed in that persecution. As to credit or reputation, that too lay all on the side he forsook. The sect he embraced was under the greatest and most universal contempt of any then in the world. The chiefs and leaders of it were men of the lowest birth, education, and rank. They had no one advantage of parts, or learning, or other human endowments to recommend them. The doctrines they taught were contrary to those, which they who were accounted the wisest and the most knowing of their nation profest. The wonderful works that they did, were either imputed to magic or to imposture. The very author and head of their faith had been condemned as a criminal, and died on the cross between two thieves. Could the disciple of Gamaliel think he should gain any credit or reputation by becoming a teacher in a college of fishermen? Could he flatter himself, that

either in or out of Judea the doctrines he taught could do him any honour? No; he knew very well that the preaching of Christ crucified *was a stumbling block to the Jews, and to the Greeks foolishness.* 1 Cor. i. 23. He afterwards found by experience, that in all parts of the world, contempt was the portion of whoever engaged in preaching a mystery so unpalatable to the world, to all its passions and pleasures, and so irreconcilable to the pride of human reason. *We are made* (says he to the Corinthians) *as the filth of the world, the off-scouring of all things unto this day.* 1 Cor. iv. 13. Yet he went on as zealously as he set out, and *was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.* Certainly then the desire of glory, the ambition of making to himself a great name, was not his motive to embrace Christianity. Was it then the love of power? Power! over whom? over a flock of sheep driven to the slaughter, whose shepherd himself had been mur-

dered a little before. All he could hope from that power was to be marked out in a particular manner for the same knife, which he had seen so bloodily drawn against them. Could he expect more mercy from the chief priests and the rulers, than they had shewn to Jesus himself? Would not their anger be probably more fierce against the deserter and betrayer of their cause, than against any other of the apostles. Was power over so mean and despised a set of men worth the attempting with so much danger? But still it may be said, there are some natures so fond of power, that they will court it at any risk, and be pleased with it even over the meanest. Let us see then what power St. Paul assumed over the Christians. Did he pretend to any superiority over the other apostles? No; he declared himself *the least of them*, and *less than the least of all saints*. Ephes. iii. 8. 1 Cor. xv. 9. Even in the churches he planted himself, he never pretended to any primacy or power

above the other apostles ; nor would he be regarded any otherwise by them, than as the instrument to them of the grace of God, and preacher of the gospel, not as the head of a sect. To the Corinthians he writes in these words :
‘ Now this I say, that every one of you
‘ saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos,
‘ and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Is
‘ Christ divided ? Was Paul crucified
‘ for you ? Or were ye baptized in the
‘ name of Paul ?’ 1 Cor. i. 12, 13, 14,
15, 17. And in another place, ‘ Who
‘ then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but
‘ ministers by whom ye believed, even
‘ as the Lord gave to every man ?’ 1
Cor. iii. 5. ‘ For we preach not our-
‘ selves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and
‘ ourselves your servants for Jesus
‘ sake.’ 2 Cor. iv. 5.

All the authority he exercised over them was purely of a spiritual nature, tending to their instruction and edification, without any mixture of that civil dominion in which alone an impositor can find his account. Such was

the dominion acquired and exercised through the pretence of divine inspiration, by many ancient legislators, by Minos, Rhadamanthus, Triptolemus, Lycurgus, Numa, Zaleucus, Zoroaster, Xamolxis, nay even by Pythagoras, who joined legislation to his philosophy, and, like the others, pretended to miracles and revelations from God, to give a more venerable sanction to the laws he prescribed. Such, in latter times, was attained by Odin among the Goths, by Mahomet among the Arabians, by Mango Copac among the Peruvians, by the Sofi family among the Persians, and that of the Xeriffs among the Moors. To such a dominion did also aspire the many false Messiahs among the Jews. In short, a spiritual authority was only desired as a foundation for temporal power, or as the support of it, by all these pretenders to divine inspirations, and others whom history mentions in different ages and countries, to have used the same arts. But St. Paul innovated nothing in gov-

ernment or civil affairs, he meddled not with legislation, he formed no commonwealths, he raised no seditions, he affected no temporal power. Obedience to their rulers, Rom. xiii. was the doctrine he taught to the churches he planted, and what he taught he practised himself; nor did he use any of those soothing arts by which ambitious and cunning men recommend themselves to the favour of those whom they endeavor to subject to their power. Whatever was wrong in the disciples under his care, he freely reproved, as it became a teacher from God, of which numberless instances are to be found in all his epistles. And he was as careful of them when he had left them, as while he resided among them, which an impostor would hardly have been, whose ends were centered all in himself. This is the manner in which he writes to the Philippians: ‘ Wherefore, ‘ my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not in my presence only, but now ‘ much more in my absence, work out

‘ your own salvation with fear and
‘ trembling.’ Phil. ii. 12. And a lit-
tle after he adds the cause why he in-
terested himself so much in their con-
duct, ‘ That ye may be blameless and
‘ harmless, the sons of God in the midst
‘ of a crooked and perverse nation,
‘ among whom ye shine as lights in the
‘ world, holding forth the word of life ;
‘ that I may rejoice in the day of Christ,
‘ that I have not run in vain, neither
‘ laboured in vain. Yea, and if I be of-
‘ fered upon the sacrifice and service
‘ of your faith, I joy and rejoice with
‘ you all.’ Phil. ii. 15, 16, 17. Are
these the words of an impostor desir-
ing nothing but temporal power ? No,
they are evidently written by one who
looked beyond the bounds of this life.
But it may be said, that he affected at
least an absolute spiritual power over
the churches he formed. I answer, he
preached Christ Jesus, and not him-
self. Christ was the head, he only the
minister, and for such only he gave
himself to them. He called those who

assisted him in preaching the gospel, his fellow-labourers and fellow-servants.

So far was he from taking any advantage of a higher education, superior learning, and more use of the world, to claim to himself any supremacy above the other apostles, that he made light of all those attainments, and declared, *that he came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, but determined to know nothing among those he converted save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.* And the reason he gave for it was, *that their faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.* 1 Cor. ii. 1, 2, 5. Now this conduct put him quite on a level with the other apostles, who knew Jesus Christ as well as he, and had the power of God going along with their preaching in an equal degree of virtue and grace. But an impostor, whose aim had been power, would have acted a contrary part; he would have availed himself of all those advantages, he would have extolled them as highly

as possible, he would have set up himself by virtue of them, as head of that sect to which he acceded, or at least of the proselytes made by himself. This is no more than what was done by every philosopher who formed a school, much more was it natural in one who propagated a new religion.

We see that the bishops of Rome have claimed to themselves a primacy, or rather a monarchy over the whole christian church. If St. Paul had been actuated by the same lust of dominion, it was much easier for him to have succeeded in such an attempt. It was much easier for him to make himself head of a few poor mechanics and fishermen, whose superior he had always been in the eyes of the world, than for the bishops of Rome to reduce those of Ravenna or Milan and other great metropolitans, to their obedience. Besides the opposition they met with from such potent antagonists, they were obliged to support their pretensions in direct contradiction to those very scriptures

which they were forced to ground them upon, and to the indisputable practice of the whole christian church for many centuries. These were such difficulties as required the utmost abilities and skill to surmount. But the first preachers of the gospel had easier means to corrupt a faith not yet fully known, and which in many places could only be known by what they severally published themselves. It was necessary indeed while they continued together, and taught the same people, that they should agree, otherwise the credit of their sect would have been overthrown; but when they separated, and formed different churches in distant countries, the same necessity no longer remained.

It was in the power of St. Paul to model most of the churches he formed, so as to favour his own ambition: For he preached the gospel in parts of the world where no other apostle had been, *where Christ was not named* till he brought the knowledge of him, avoid-

ing to build upon another man's foundation. Rom. xv. 20. Now had he been an impostor, would he have confined himself to just the same gospel as was delivered by the other apostles, where he had such a latitude to preach what he pleased without contradiction? Would he not have twisted and warped the doctrines of Christ to his own ends, to the particular use and expediency of his own followers, and to the peculiar support and encrease of his own power? That this was not done by St. Paul, or by any other of the apostles, in so many various parts of the world as they travelled into, and in churches absolutely under their own direction; that the gospel preached by them all should be one and the same*, the doc-

* If any one imagines that he sees any difference between the doctrines of St. James and St. Paul concerning justification by faith or by works, let him read Mr. Locke's excellent comment upon the epistles of the latter; or let him only consider these words in the first epistle to the Corinthians, ch. ix. ver. 27. *But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by*

trines agreeing in every particular,

any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

If St. Paul had believed or taught, that faith without works was sufficient to save a disciple of Christ, to what purpose did he keep under his body, since his salvation was not to depend upon that being subjected to the power of his reason, but merely upon the faith he profest? His faith was firm, and so strongly founded upon the most certain conviction, that he had no reason to doubt its continuance; how could he then think it possible, that while he retained that saving faith, he might nevertheless be a castaway? Or if he had supposed that his election and calling was of such a nature, as that it irresistibly impelled him to good, and restrained him from evil, how could he express any fear, lest the lusts of his body should prevent his salvation? Can such an apprehension be made to agree with the notions of absolute predestination ascribed by some to St. Paul? He could have no doubt that the grace of God had been given to him in the most extraordinary manner; yet we see, that he thought his election was not so certain, but that he might fall from it again through the natural prevalence of bodily appetites, if not duly restrained by his own voluntary care. This single passage is a full answer out of the mouth of St. Paul himself to all the mistakes that have been made of his meaning in some obscure expressions concerning grace, election, and justification.

without any one of them attributing more to himself than he did to the others, or establishing any thing even in point of order, or discipline different from the rest, or more advantageous to his own interest, credit or power, is a most strong and convincing proof of their not being impostors, but acting by divine inspiration.

If then it appears, that St. Paul had nothing to gain by taking this part, let us consider, on the other hand, what he gave up, and what he had reason to fear. He gave up a fortune, which he was then in a fair way of advancing: he gave up that reputation, which he had acquired by the labours and studies of his whole life, and by a behaviour which had been *blameless, touching the righteousness which is in the law*: Phil. iii. 6. he gave up his friends, his relations, and family, from whom he estranged and banished himself for life: he gave up that *religion, which he had profited in above many his equals in his own nation, and those traditions of his fa-*

thers, which he had been more exceedingly zealous of, Gal. i. 14. How hard this sacrifice was to a man of his warm temper, and, above all men, to a Jew, is worth consideration. That nation is known to have been more tenacious of their religious opinions than any other upon the face of the earth. The strictest and proudest sect among them was that of the Pharisees, under whose discipline St. Paul was bred. The departing therefore so suddenly from their favourite tenets, renouncing their pride, and from their disciple becoming their adversary, was a most difficult effort for one to make so nursed up in the esteem of them, and whose early prejudices were so strongly confirmed by all the power of habit, all the authority of example, and all the allurements of honour and interest. These were the sacrifices he had to make in becoming a Christian ; let us now see what inconveniences he had to fear. The implacable vengeance of those he deserted ; that sort of contempt which

is hardest to bear, the contempt of those whose good opinion he had most eagerly sought, and all those other complicated evils, which he describes in his second epistle to the Corinthians, chap. xi. Evils, the least of which were enough to have frightened any impostor even from the most hopeful and profitable cheat. But where the advantage proposed bears no proportion to the dangers incurred, or the mischiefs endured, he must be absolutely out of his senses, who will either engage in an imposture, or, being engaged, persevere.

Upon the whole, then, I think I have proved, that the desire of wealth, of fame, or of power, could be no motive to make St. Paul a convert to Christ, but that, on the contrary, he must have been checkt by that desire, as well as by the just apprehension of many inevitable and insupportable evils, from taking a part so contradictory to his past life, to all the principles he had imbibed, and all the habits he had con-

tracted. It only remains to be inquired, whether the gratification of any other passion under the authority of that religion, or by the means it afforded, could be his inducement.

Now that there have been some impostors, who have pretended to revelations from God, merely to give a loose to irregular passions, and set themselves free from all restraints of government, law, or morality, both ancient and modern history shews. But the doctrine preached by St. Paul is absolutely contrary to all such designs. His writings* breathe nothing but the strictest morality, obedience to magistrates, order, and government, with the utmost abhorrence of all licentiousness, idleness, or loose behaviour under the cloak of religion. We nowhere read in his works, that saints are above moral ordinances; that dominion and property is founded in grace; that there is no difference in moral actions; that any impulses of the

*See particularly Rom. xi. and xiii. and Col. iii.

mind are to direct us against the light of our reason, and the laws of nature; or any of those wicked tenets, from which the peace of society has been disturbed, and the rules of morality have been broken by men pretending to act under the sanction of a divine revelation. Nor does any part of his life, either before or after his conversion to Christianity, bear any mark of a libertine disposition. As among the Jews, so among the Christians, his conversation and manners were blameless. Hear the appeal that he makes to the Thessalonians, upon his doctrine and behaviour among them: ‘Our
 ‘ exhortation was not of deceit, nor of
 ‘ uncleanness, nor in guile: ye are
 ‘ witnesses, and God also, how holily
 ‘ and justly, and unblameably we be-
 ‘ haved ourselves among you that be-
 ‘ lieve.’ 1 Thess. ii. 10.* And to the

* If St. Paul had held any secret doctrines, or Esoteric (as the philosophers call them) we should have probably found them in the letters he wrote to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, his

Corinthians he says, *We have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man.* 2 Cor. vii. 2*.

It was not then the desire of gratifying any irregular passion, that could induce St. Paul to turn Christian, any more than the hope of advancing himself either in wealth, or reputation, or power. But still it is possible, some men may say (and I would leave no imaginable objection unanswered) that though St. Paul could have no selfish or interested view in undertaking such an imposture, yet, for the sake of its

bosom friends and disciples. But both the theological and moral doctrines are exactly the same in them, as those he wrote to the churches. A very strong presumptive proof of his being no impostor! Surely, had he been one, he would have given some hints, in these private letters, of the cheat they were carrying on, and some secret directions to turn it to some worldly purpose of one kind or another. But no such thing is to be found in any one of them. The same disinterested, holy, and divine spirit breathes in all these, as in the other more public epistles.

* See also 2 Cor. i. 12. and iv. 2.

moral doctrines, he might be inclined to support the christian faith, and make use of some pious frauds to advance a religion, which, though erroneous and false in its theological tenets, and in the facts upon which it is grounded, was in its precepts and influence, beneficial to mankind.

Now it is true, that some good men in the heathen world have both pretended to divine revelations, and introduced or supported religions they knew to be false, under a notion of public utility; But besides that this practice was built upon maxims disclaimed by the Jews (who, looking upon truth, not utility, to be the basis of their religion, abhorred all such frauds, and thought them injurious to the honour of God) the circumstances they acted in were very different from those of St. Paul.

The first reformers of savage, uncivilized nations, had no other way to tame those barbarous people, and to bring them to submit to order and government, but by the reverence which

they acquired from this pretence.— The fraud was therefore alike beneficial both to the deceiver and the deceived. And in all other instances which can be given of good men acting this part, they not only did it to serve good ends, but were secure of its doing no harm. Thus, when Lycurgus persuaded the Spartans, or Numa the Romans, that the laws of the one were inspired by Apollo, or those of the other by Egeria; when they taught their people to put great faith in oracles, or in augury, no temporal mischief, either to them, or their people, could attend the reception of that belief. It drew on no persecutions, no enmity with the world. But at that time, when St. Paul undertook the preaching of the gospel, to persuade any man to be a Christian, was to persuade him to expose himself to all the calamities human nature could suffer. This St. Paul knew; this he not only expected, but warned those he taught to look for it too. 1 Thess. iii. 4. 2 Cor. vi. 4, 5.—

Eph. vi. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16. Phil. i. 28, 29, 30. Col. i. 9, 10, 11. Rom. viii. 35, 36. The only support that he had himself, or gave to them, was, 'That if they suffered with Christ, they should be also glorified together.' And that 'he reckoned that the sufferings of the present time were not worthy to be compared with that glory.' Rom. viii. 17, 18. So likewise he writes to the Thessalonians, 'We ourselves glory in you, in the churches of God, for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure; which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which also ye suffer. Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense [or repay] tribulation to them that trouble you, and to you who are troubled, rest with us, *when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, &c.* 2 Thess. i. 4, 5, 6, 7. And to the Corinthians he

says *‘ If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most miserable.’* How much reason he had to say this, the hatred, the contempt, the torments, the deaths endured by the Christians in that age, and long afterwards, abundantly prove. Whoever professed the gospel under these circumstances, without an entire conviction of its being a divine revelation, must have been mad; and if he made others profess it by fraud or deceit, he must have been worse than mad; he must have been the most hardened villain that ever breathed. Could any man, who had in his nature the least spark of humanity, subject his fellow creatures to so many miseries; or could one that had in his mind the least ray of reason, expose himself to share them with those he deceived, in order to advance a religion which he knew to be false, merely for the sake of its moral doctrines? Such an extravagance is too absurd to be supposed; and I dwell too long on a notion, that

upon a little reflection, confutes itself.

I would only add to the other proofs I have given, that St. Paul could have no rational motive to become a disciple of Christ, unless he sincerely believed in him, this observation; That whereas it may be objected to the other apostles, by those who are resolved not to credit their testimony, that having been deeply engaged with Jesus during his life, they were obliged to continue the same professions after his death, for the support of their own credit, and from having gone too far to go back; this can by no means be said of St. Paul. On the contrary, whatever force there may be in that way of reasoning, it all tends to convince us that St. Paul must have naturally continued a Jew, and an enemy of Christ Jesus. If they were engaged on one side, he was as strongly engaged on the other; if shame withheld them from changing sides, much more ought it to have stopt him, who, being of a higher education and rank in life a

great deal than they, had more credit to lose, and must be supposed to have been vastly more sensible to that sort of shame. The only difference was, that they, by quitting their master after his death, might have preserved themselves; whereas he, by quitting the Jews, and taking up the cross of Christ, certainly brought on his own destruction.

As therefore no rational motive appears for St. Paul's embracing the faith of Christ, without having been really convinced of the truth of it; but on the contrary, every thing concurred to deter him from acting that part; one might very justly conclude, that when a man of his understanding embraced that faith, he was in reality convinced of the truth of it; and that, by consequence, he was not an impostor, who said what he knew to be false with an intent to deceive.

But that no shadow of doubt may remain upon the impossibility of his having been such an impostor; that it may

not be said, 'The minds of men are sometimes so capricious, that they will act without any rational motives, they know not why, and so perhaps might St. Paul;' I shall next endeavor to prove, that if he had been so unaccountably wild and absurd, as to undertake an imposture so unprofitable and dangerous both to himself and those he deceived by it, he could not possibly have carried it on with any success, by the means that we know he employed.

First then, let me observe, that if his conversion, and the part that he acted in consequence of it, was an imposture, it was such an imposture as could not be carried on by one man alone.—The faith he professed, and which he became an apostle of, was not his invention. He was not the author or beginner of it, and therefore it was not in his power to draw the doctrines of it out of his own imagination. With Jesus, who was the author and head of it, he had never had any communica-

tion before his death, nor with his apostles after his death, except as their persecutor. As he took on himself the office and character of an apostle, it was absolutely necessary for him to have a precise and perfect knowledge of all the facts contained in the gospel, several of which had only passed between Jesus himself and his twelve apostles, and others more privately still, so that they could be known but to very few, being not yet made public by any writings; otherwise he would have exposed himself to ridicule among those who preached that gospel with more knowledge than he; and as the testimony they bore would have been different in point of fact, and many of their doctrines and interpretations of scripture repugnant to his, from their entire disagreement with those Jewish opinions in which he was bred up; either they must have been forced to ruin his credit, or he would have ruined theirs. Some general notices he might have gained of these matters from the

Christians he persecuted, but not exact or extensive enough to qualify him for an apostle, whom the least error, in these points, would have disgraced, and who must have been ruined by it in all pretensions to that inspiration, from whence the apostolical authority was chiefly derived.

It was therefore impossible for him to act this part but in confederacy at least with the apostles. Such a confederacy was still more necessary for him, as the undertaking to preach the gospel did not only require an exact and particular knowledge of all it contained, but an apparent power of working miracles; for to such a power all the apostles appealed in proof of their mission, and of the doctrines they preached. He was therefore to learn of them by what secret arts they so imposed on the senses of men, if this power was a cheat. But how could he gain these men to become his confederates? Was it by furiously persecuting them and their brethren, as we

find that he did, to the very moment of his conversion? Would they venture to trust their capital enemy with all the secrets of their imposture, with those upon which all their hopes and credit depended? Would they put it in his power to take away not only their lives, but the honour of their sect, which they preferred to their lives, by so ill-placed a confidence? Would men, so secret as not to be drawn by the most severe persecution to say one word which could convict them of being impostors, confess themselves such to their persecutor, in hopes of his being their accomplice? This is still more impossible than that he should attempt to engage in their fraud without their consent and assistance.

We must suppose then, that, till he came to Damascus, he had no communication with the apostles, acted in no concert with them, and learned nothing from them except the doctrines which they had publicly taught to all the world. When he came there, he

told the Jews, to whom he brought letters from the high priest and the synagogue against the Christians*, of his having seen in the way a great light from heaven, and heard Christ Jesus reproach him with his persecution, and commanding him to go into the city, where it should be told him what he was to do. But to account for his chusing this method of declaring himself a convert to Christ, we must suppose, that all those who were with him, when he pretended he had this vision, were his accomplices ; otherwise the story he told could have gained no belief, being contradicted by them whose testimony was necessary to vouch for the truth of it. And yet how can we suppose, that all these men should be willing to join in this imposture ? They were probably officers of justice, or soldiers, who had been employed often before in executing the orders of the high

* The disciples of Christ were not called Christians till after this time ; but I use the name, as most familiar to us, and to avoid circumlocution.

priest and the rulers against the Christians. Or if they were chosen particularly for this expedition, they must have been chosen particularly by them as men they could trust for their zeal in that cause. What should induce them to the betraying that business they were employed in? Does it ever appear that they had any connection with the man they so lied for, before or after this time, or any reward from him for it? This is therefore a difficulty in the first outset of this imposture not to be overcome.

But further, he was to be instructed by one at Damascus. This instructor therefore must have been his accomplice, though they appeared to be absolutely strangers to one another, and though he was a man of an excellent character, *who had a good report of all the Jews that dwelt at Damascus*, and so was very unlikely to have engaged in such an imposture. Notwithstanding these improbabilities, this man I say, must have been his confidant and ac-

complice in carrying on this wicked fraud, and the whole matter must have been previously agreed on between them. But here again the same objection occurs: How could this man venture to act such a dangerous part, without the consent of the other disciples, especially the apostles, or by what means could he obtain their consent? And how absurdly did they contrive their business, to make the conversion of Saul the effect of a miracle, which all those who were with him must certify did never happen! How much easier would it have been to have made him be present at some pretended miracle wrought by the disciples, or by Ananias himself, when none were able to discover the fraud, and have imputed his conversion to that, or to the arguments used by some of his prisoners, whom he might have discoursed with, and questioned about their faith, and the grounds of it, in order to colour his intended conversion!

As this was the safest, so it was the

most natural method of bringing about such a change ; instead of ascribing it to an event which lay so open to a detection. For (to use the words of St. Paul to Agrippa) *this thing was not done in a corner*, Acts xxvi. 26. but in the eye of the world, and subject immediately to the examination of those who would be most strict in searching into the truth of it, the Jews at Damascus. Had they been able to bring any shadow of proof to convict him of fraud in this affair, his whole scheme of imposture must have been nipt in the bud. Nor were they at Jerusalem, whose commission he bore, less concerned to discover so provoking a cheat. But we find that, many years afterwards, when they had all the time and means they could desire to make the strictest enquiry, he was bold enough to appeal to Agrippa in the presence of Festus, Acts xxvi. 26. upon his own knowledge of the truth of his story ; who did not contradict him, though he had certainly heard all that the Jews could alledge

against the credit of it in any particular. A very remarkable proof both of the notoriety of the fact, and the integrity of the man, who, with so fearless a confidence, could call upon a king to give testimony for him, even while he was sitting in judgment upon him.

But to return to Ananias. Is it not strange, if this story had been an imposture, and he had been joined with Paul in carrying it on, that after their meeting at Damascus we never should hear of their consorting together, or acting in concert, or that the former drew any benefit from the friendship of the latter, when he became so considerable among the Christians? Did Ananias engage and continue in such a dangerous fraud without any hope or desire of private advantage? Or was it safe for Paul to shake him off, and risk his resentment? There is, I think, no other way to get over this difficulty, but by supposing that Ananias happened to die soon after the other's conver-

sion. Let us then take that for granted, without any authority either of history or tradition, and let us see in what manner this wonderful imposture was carried on by Paul himself. His first care ought to have been, to get himself owned and received as an apostle by the apostles. Till this was done, the bottom he stood upon was very narrow, nor could he have any probable means of supporting himself in any esteem or credit among the disciples. Intruders into impostures run double risks; they are in danger of being detected, not only by those upon whom they attempt to practise their cheats, but also by those whose society they force themselves into, who must always be jealous of such an intrusion, and much more from one who had always before behaved as their enemy. Therefore, to gain the apostles, and bring them to admit him into a participation of all their mysteries, all their designs, and all their authority, was absolutely necessary at this time to

Paul. The least delay was of dangerous consequence, and might expose him to such inconveniencies as he never afterwards could overcome. But, instead of attending to this necessity, he went into Arabia, and then returned again to Damascus; nor did he go to Jerusalem till three years were past. Gal. i. 17, 18.

Now this conduct may be accounted for, if it be true that (as he declares in his epistle to the Galatians) ‘ he neither
‘ received the gospel of any man,
‘ neither was he taught it, but by the
‘ revelation of Jesus Christ,’ Gal. i. 12. Under such a master, and with the assistance of his divine power, he might go on boldly without any human associates; but an impostor so left to himself, so deprived of all help, all support, all recommendation, could not have succeeded.

Further; we find that at Antioch he was not afraid *to withstand Peter to his face and even to reprove him before all the disciples, because he was to be blamed.*

Gal. ii. 11, 14. If he was an impostor, how could he venture so to offend that apostle, whom it so highly concerned him to agree with and please? Accomplices in a fraud are obliged to shew greater regards to each other; such freedom belongs to truth alone.

But let us consider what difficulties he had to encounter among the Gentiles themselves, in the enterprize he undertook of going to them, making himself their apostle, and converting them to the religion of Christ. As this undertaking was the distinguishing part of his apostolical functions, that which, in the language of his epistles, he was particularly called to; or which, to speak like an unbeliever, he chose and assigned to himself; it deserves a particular consideration: but I shall only touch the principal points of it as concisely as I can, because you have in a great measure exhausted the subject in your late excellent book on the resurrection, where you discourse with such strength of reason and eloquence

upon the difficulties that opposed the propagation of the christian religion, in all parts of the world.

Now in this enterprize St. Paul was to contend, first, with the policy and power of the magistrates; secondly, with the interest, credit, and craft of the priests; thirdly, with the prejudices and passions of the people; fourthly, with the wisdom and pride of the philosophers.

That in all heathen countries the established religion was interwoven with their civil constitution, and supported by the magistrates as an essential part of the government, whoever has any acquaintance with antiquity cannot but know. They tolerated indeed many different worships (though not with so entire a latitude as some people suppose) as they suffered men to discourse very freely concerning religion, provided they would submit to an exterior conformity with the established rites; nay, according to the genius of Paganism, which allowed an

intercommunity of worship, they in most places admitted, without any great difficulty, new gods and new rites; but they no where endured any attempt to overturn the established religion, or any direct opposition made to it, esteeming that an unpardonable offence, not to the gods alone, but to the state. This was so universal a notion, and so constant a maxim of heathen policy, that when the christian religion set itself up in opposition to all other religions, admitted no intercommunity with them, but declared that the gods of the Gentiles were not to be worshipped, nor any society suffered between them and the only true God; when this new doctrine began to be propagated, and made such a progress as to fall under the notice of the magistrate, the civil power was every where armed with all its terrors against it. When therefore St. Paul undertook the conversion of the Gentiles, he knew very well, that the most severe persecutions must be the conse-

quence of any success in his design.

Secondly, This danger was rendered more certain by the opposition he was to expect from the interest, credit, and craft of the priests. How gainful a trade they, with all their inferior dependents, made of those superstitions which he proposed to destroy; how much credit they had with the people, as well as the state, by the means of them, and how much craft they employed in carrying on their impostures, all history shews. St. Paul could not doubt that all these men would exert their utmost abilities to stop the spreading of the doctrines he preached; doctrines which struck at the root of their power and gain, and were much more terrible to them than those of the most atheistical sect of philosophers, because the latter contented themselves with denying their principles, but at the same time declared for supporting their practices, as useful cheats, or at least acquiesced in them as establishments authorised by the sanction of

law. Whatever their cunning could do to support their own worship, whatever aid they could draw from the magistrate, whatever zeal they could raise in the people, St. Paul was to contend with, unsupported by any human assistance.

And, thirdly, This he was to do in direct opposition to all the prejudices and passions of the people. Now had he confined his preaching to Judea alone, this difficulty would not have occurred in near so great a degree. The people were there so moved with the miracles the apostles had wrought, as well as by the memory of those done by Jesus, that, in spite of their rulers, they began to be favourably disposed towards them; and we even find Acts iv. 21. and v. 26. that the high priest, and the council, had more than once been withheld from treating the apostles with so much severity, as they desired to do, *for fear of the people*. But in the people among the Gentiles, no such dispositions could be expected:

their prejudices were violent, not only in favour of their own superstitions, but in a particular manner against any doctrines taught by a Jew. As from their aversion to all idolatry, and irreconcilable separation from all other religions, the Jews were accused of hating mankind, so were they hated by all other nations : nor were they hated alone, but despised. To what a degree that contempt was carried, appears as well by the mention made of them in heathen authors, as by the complaints Josephus makes of the unreasonableness and injustice of it in his Apology. What authority then could St. Paul flatter himself that his preaching would carry along with it, among people to whom he was at once both the object of national hatred, and national scorn? But besides this popular prejudice against a Jew, the doctrines he taught were such as shocked all their most ingrafted religious opinions. They agreed to no principles of which he could avail him-

self to procure their assent to the other parts of the gospel he preached.— To convert the Jews to Christ Jesus, he was able to argue from their own scriptures, upon the authority of books which they owned to contain divine revelations, and from which he could clearly convince them that Jesus was *the very Christ*, Acts ix. 22. But all these ideas were new to the Gentiles; they expected no Christ, they allowed no such scriptures, they were to be taught the Old Testament as well as the New. How was this to be done by a man not even authorised by his own nation; opposed by those who were greatest, and thought wisest, among them; either quite single, or only attended by one or two more under the same disadvantages, and even of less consideration than he?

The light of nature, indeed, without express revelation, might have conducted the Gentiles to the knowledge of one God, the Creator of all things, and to that light St. Paul might appeal,

as we find that he did, Acts xiv. 17. xvii. 27, 28. But clear as it was, they had almost put it out by their superstitions, *having changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things, and serving the creature more than the Creator,* Rom. i. 23, 25. And to this idolatry they were strongly attached, not by their prejudices alone, but by their passions, which were flattered and gratified in it, as they believed that their deities would be rendered propitious, not by virtue and holiness, but by offerings, and incense, and outward rites; rites which dazzled their senses by magnificent shews, and allured them by pleasures often of a very impure and immoral nature. Instead of all this, the gospel proposed to them no other terms of acceptance with God but a worship of him *in spirit and truth*, sincere repentance, and perfect submission to the divine laws, the strictest purity of life and manners, and re-

nouncing of all those lusts in which they had formerly walked. How unpalatable a doctrine was this to men so given up to *the* power of those lusts, as the whole *heathen* world was at that time ! If their philosophers could be brought to approve it, there could be no hope that the people would relish it, or exchange the ease and indulgence which those religions they were bred up in allowed to their appetites, for one so harsh and severe.— But might not St. Paul, in order to gain them, relax that severity ? He might have done so, no doubt, and probably would, if he had been an impostor ; but it appears by all his epistles, that he preached it as purely, and enjoined it as strongly as Jesus himself.

But supposing they might be persuaded to quit their habitual sensuality for the purity of the gospel, and to forsake their idolatries, which St. Paul reckons amongst *the works of the flesh*. (Gal.

v. 19, 20.) for the *spiritual* worship of the *one invisible God*, how were they disposed to receive the doctrine of the salvation of man by the cross of Jesus Christ? Could they who were bred in notions so contrary to that *great mystery*, to that *hidden wisdom of God*, which none of the princes of this world knew, (1 Cor. ii. 7, 8.) incline to receive it against the instructions of all their teachers, and the example of all their superiors? could they whose gods had almost all been powerful kings, and mighty conquerors, they, who at that very time paid divine honours to the emperors of Rome, whose only title to deification was the imperial power; could they, I say, reconcile their ideas to a crucified *Son of God*, to a *Redeemer of mankind* on the cross? would they look there for him *who is the image of the invisible God*, the *first-born of every creature*; by whom and for whom were all *all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers?*

Coloss. i, 15, 16. No, most surely, *the natural man* (to speak in the words of St. Paul, 1 Cor. ii. 14.) received not these things, for they are *foolishness to him ; neither could he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*. I may therefore conclude, that in the enterprize of converting the Gentiles, St. Paul was to contend not only with the policy and power of the magistrates, and with the interest, credit, and craft of the priests ; but also with the prejudices and passions of the people.

I am next to shew, that he was to expect no less opposition from the wisdom and pride of the philosophers. And though some may imagine, that men who pretended to be raised and refined above vulgar prejudices and vulgar passions, would have been helpful to him in his design, it will be found upon examination that instead of assisting or befriending the gospel, they were its worst and most irreconcilable enemies. For they had prejudices of their own still more repugnant to the

doctrines of Christ than those of the vulgar; more deeply rooted, and more obstinately fixed in their minds. The wisdom upon which they valued themselves, chiefly consisted in vain metaphysical speculations, in logical subtleties, in endless disputes, in high-flown conceits of the perfection and self-sufficiency of human wisdom, in dogmatical positiveness about doubtful opinions, or sceptical doubts about the most clear and certain truths. It must appear at first sight, that nothing could be more contradictory to the first principles of the christian religion, than those of the atheistical, or sceptical sects, which at that time prevailed very much, both among the Greeks and the Romans; nor shall we find that the theistical sects were much less at enmity with it, when we consider the doctrines they held upon the nature of God and the soul.

But I will not enlarge on a subject which the most learned Mr. Warbur-

ton has handled so well*. If it were necessary to enter particularly into this argument, I could easily prove, that there was not one of all the different philosophical sects then upon earth, not even the Platonics themselves, who are thought to favour it most, that did not maintain some opinions fundamentally contrary to those of the gospel.

And in this they all agreed, to explode as most unphilosophical, and contrary to every notion that any among them maintained, that great article of the christian religion, upon which the foundations of it are laid, and without which St. Paul declares to his proselytes, *their faith would be vain*, 1 Cor. xv. 17, 20. the resurrection of the dead with their bodies, of which resurrection *Christ was the first born*, Collos. i.

* See 'The divine Legation of Moses, 1. iii.' See also a late pamphlet, intituled, 'A critical Enquiry into the Opinions and Practices of the ancient Philosophers, concerning the Nature of the Soul, and a future State.'

18. besides the contrariety of their tenets to those of the gospel, the pride that was common to all the philosophers, was of itself an almost invincible obstacle against the admission of the evangelical doctrines calculated to humble that pride, and teach them, that *professing themselves to be wise they became fools*, Rom. i. 22. This pride was no less intractable, no less averse to the instructions of Christ, or of his apostles than that of the Scribes and Pharisees. St. Paul was therefore to contend in his enterprize of converting the Gentiles, with all the opposition that could be made to it by all the different sects of philosophers. And how formidable an opposition this was, let those consider who are acquainted from history with the great credit those sects had obtained at that time in the world, a credit even superior to that of the priests. Whoever pretended to learning or virtue was their disciple; the greatest magistrates, generals, kings, ranged themselves under their disci-

pline, were trained up in their schools, and professed the opinions they taught.

All these sects made it a maxim not to disturb the popular worship, or established religion: but under those limitations they taught very freely whatever they pleased; and no religious opinions were more warmly supported, than those they delivered were by their followers. The Christian religion at once overturned their several systems, taught a morality more perfect than theirs, and established it upon higher and much stronger foundations, mortified their pride, confounded their learning, discovered their ignorance, ruined their credit. Against such an enemy what would they not do? Would they not exert the whole power of their rhetoric, the whole art of their logic, their influence over the people, their interest with the great, to discredit a novelty so alarming to them all? If St. Paul had had nothing to trust to but his own natural faculties, his own understanding, knowledge, and elo-

quence, could he have hoped to be singly a match for all theirs united against him? Could a teacher, unheard of before, from an obscure and unlearned part of the world, have withstood the authority of Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Zeno, Arcesilaus, Carneades, and all the great names which held the first rank of human wisdom? He might as well have attempted alone, or with the help of Barnabas and Silas, of Timotheus and Titus, to have erected a monarchy upon the ruins of all the several states then in the world, as to have erected Christianity upon the destruction of all the several sects of philosophy which reigned in the minds of the Gentiles, among whom he preached, particularly the Greeks and the Romans.

Having thus proved (as I think) that in the work of converting the Gentiles, St. Paul could have no assistance, but was sure on the contrary of the utmost repugnance and opposition to it imaginable from the magistrates, from the

priests, from the people, and from the philosophers; it necessarily follows, that to succeed in that work he must have called in some extraordinary aid, some stronger power than that of reason and argument. Accordingly we find, he tells the Corinthians, "That his "speech and preaching was not with "enticing words of man's wisdom, but "in demonstration of the Spirit and of "power," 1 Cor. ii. 4. And to the Thessalonians, he says, "Our gospel "came not unto you in word only, but "also in power and in the Holy Ghost," 1 Thess. i. 5. It was to the efficacy of the divine power that he ascribed all his success in those countries, and wherever else he planted the gospel of Christ. If that power really went with him, it would enable him to overcome all those difficulties that obstructed his enterprize, but *then he was not an impostor!* Our inquiry therefore must be, Whether (supposing him to have been an impostor) he could by *pretending to miracles*, have overcome all those dif-

difficulties and carried on his work with success.

Now to give miracles, falsely pretended to, any reputation, two circumstances are principally necessary, *an apt disposition* in those whom they are designed to impose upon, and *powerful confederacy* to carry on and abet the cheat. Both these circumstances, or at least one of them, have always accompanied all the false miracles, ancient and modern, which have obtained any credit among mankind. To both these was owing the general faith of the heathen world in oracles, auspices, auguries, and other impostures; by which the priests combined with the magistrates, supported the national worship, and deluded a people prepossessed in their favour, and willing to be deceived. Both the same causes likewise co-operate in the belief that is given to popish miracles among those of their own church. But neither of these assisted St. Paul. What prepossessions could there have been in the

minds of the Gentiles, either in favour of him, or the doctrines he taught? Or rather, what prepossessions could be stronger than those which they undoubtedly had against both? If he had remained in Judea, it might have been suggested by unbelievers, that the Jews were a *credulous people*, apt to seek after miracles, and to afford them an easy belief; and that the fame of those said to be done by Jesus himself, and by his apostles, before Paul declared his conversion, had predisposed their minds, and warmed their imaginations to the admission of others supposed to be wrought by the same power.

The single miracle of the apostles speaking with tongues on the day of Pentecost, had made three thousand converts*; that of healing the lame man at the gate of the temple, five thousand more †. Nay such was the faith of the multitude, that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, “that at

*Acts ii. 41.

†Acts iv. 4.

“ the least the shadow of Peter passing
“ by might over-shadow some of them.”
Acts v. 15. Here was therefore a good
foundation laid for Paul to proceed up-
on in pretending to similar miraculous
works: though the priests and the ru-
lers were hardened against them, the
people were inclined to give credit to
them; and there was reason to hope
for success among them both at Jeru-
salem, and in all the regions belong-
ing to the Jews. But no such dispo-
sitions were to be found in the Gen-
tiles. There was among them no mat-
ter prepared for imposture to work
upon, no knowledge of Christ, no
thought of his power, or of the power
of those who came in his name. Thus
when at Lystra St. Paul healed the
man who was a cripple from his birth,
so far were the people there from sup-
posing that he could be able to do
such a thing as *an apostle of Christ*, or
by any virtue derived from him, that
they took Paul and Barnabas to be
gods of their own come down in the

likeness of men, and would have sacrificed to them as such *.

Now I ask, did the citizens of Lystra concur in this matter to the deceiving themselves? Were their imaginations overheated with any conceits of a miraculous power belonging to Paul, which could dispose them to think he worked such a miracle when did he not? As the contrary is evident, so in all other places to which he carried the gospel, it may be proved to demonstration, that he could find no disposition, no aptness, no bias to aid his imposture, if the miracles by which he every where confirmed his preaching had not been true.

On the other hand let us examine, whether, without the advantage of such an assistance, there was any confederacy strong enough to impose his false miracles upon the Gentiles, who were both unprepared and undisposed to receive them. The contrary is apparent. He was in no combination with

* Acts xiv. 

their priests or their magistrates ; no sect or party among them gave him any help ; all eyes were open and watchful to detect his impostures, all hands ready to punish him as soon as detected. Had he remained in Judea, he would at least have had many confederates, all the apostles, all the disciples of Christ, at that time pretty numerous ; but in preaching to the Gentiles he was often alone, never with more than two or three companions or followers. Was this a confederacy powerful enough to carry on such a cheat, in so many different parts of the world, against the united opposition of the magistrates, priests, philosophers, people, all combined to detect and expose their frauds ?

Let it be also considered, that those upon whom they practised these arts were not a gross or ignorant people, apt to mistake any uncommon operations of nature, or juggling tricks, for miraculous acts. The churches planted by St. Paul were in the most en-

lightened parts of the world, among the Greeks of Asia and Europe, among the Romans, in the midst of science, philosophy, freedom of thought, and in an age more inquisitively curious into the powers of nature, and less inclined to credit religious frauds, than any before it. Nor were they only the lowest of the people that he converted.—Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of Paphos, Erastus, *Chamberlain* of Corinth,† and Dionysius the Areopagite, were his proselytes.

Upon the whole, it appears beyond contradiction, that his pretension to miracles was not assisted by the disposition of those whom he designed to convert by those means, nor by any powerful confederacy to carry on and abet the cheat, without both which concurring circumstances, or one at least, no such pretension was ever supported with any success.

Both these circumstances concurred even in the late famous miracles sup-

* Treasurer, or bailiff of the city.

posed to be done at Abbe Paris's tomb. They had not indeed the support of the government, and for that reason appear to deserve more attention than other popish miracles; but they were supported by all the Jansenists, a very powerful and numerous party in France, made up partly of wise and able men, partly of bigots and enthusiasts. All these confederated together to give credit to miracles, said to be worked in behalf of their party; and those who believed them were strongly disposed to that belief. And yet with these advantages, how easily were they suppressed! Only by walling up that part of the church, where the tomb of the saint, who was supposed to work them; was placed! Soon after this was done, a paper was fixed on the wall with this inscription:

*De par le roy d'ense a Dieu
De faire miracle en ce lieu.*

By command of the king, God is forbidden to work any more miracles here. The pasquinade was a witty one, but the e-

vent turned the point of it against the party by which it was made: For if God had really worked any miracles there, could this absurd prohibition have taken effect? Would he have suffered his purpose to be defeated by building a wall? When all the apostles were shut up in prison to hinder their working of miracles, the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, and let them out‡. But the power of Abbe Paris could neither throw down the wall that excluded his votaries, nor operate through that impediment. And yet his miracles are often compared with, and opposed by unbelievers to those of Christ and his apostles, which is the reason of my having taken this particular notice of them here. But to go back to the times nearer to St. Paul's. There is in Lucian an account of a very extraordinary and successful imposture carried on in his days, by one Alexander of Pontus §, who intro-

‡ Acts v. 86, ———— 26.

§ *Vide* the *Pseudomantis* of Lucian.

duced a new god into that country, whose prophet he called himself, and in whose name he pretended to miracles, and delivered oracles, by which he acquired great wealth and power. All the arts by which this cheat was managed are laid open by Lucian, and nothing can better point out the difference between imposture and truth, than to observe the different conduct of this man and St. Paul. Alexander made no alteration in the religion established in Pontus before; he only grafted his own upon it; and spared no pains to interest in the success of it the whole heathen priesthood, not only in Pontus, but all over the world*; sending great numbers of those who came to consult him to other oracles, that were at that time in the highest vogue; by which means he engaged them all to support the reputation of his, and abet his imposture†. He spoke with the greatest respect of all

* Pseudom. Lucian. Varior. p. 765, 766.

† Ibid. 763.

the sects of philosophers except the Epicureans, who from their principles he was sure would deride and oppose his fraud; for though they presumed not to innovate, and overturn established religions, yet they very freely attacked and exposed all innovations that were introduced under the name of religion, and had not the authority of a legal establishment*. To get the better of their opposition, as well as that of the Christians, he called in the aid of persecution and force, exciting the people against them, and answering objection with stones†. That he might be sure to get money enough, he delivered this oracle in the name of his God: “ I command you to grace with
 “ gifts my prophet and minister; for I
 “ have no regard for riches myself, but
 “ the greatest for my prophet‡.” And

* Pseudom. Lucian. Varior. p. 762, 763, 773, 777.

† Ibi l. 762, 768, 773, 774.

‡ Muneribus decorate meum vatem atque ministrum præcipio——nec opum mihi cura, at maxima vatis.

he shared the gains that he made, which were immense, among an infinite number of associates and instruments, whom he employed in carrying on and supporting his fraud. When any declared themselves to be his enemies, against whom he durst not proceed by open force, he endeavoured to gain them by blandishments, and having got them into his power, to destroy them by secret ways; which arts he practised against Lucian himself*. Others he kept in awe and dependence upon him, by detaining in his own hands the written questions they had proposed to his god upon state-affairs; and as these generally came from men of the greatest power and rank, his being possessed of them was of infinite service to him, and made him master of all their credit, and of no little part of their wealth†.

He obtained the protection and friendship of Rutilianus, a great Ro-

* Pseudom. Lucian. Varior. p. 776, 780, 781.

† Ibid. 767.

man general, by flattering him with promises of a very long life, and exaltation to deity after his death*; and at last, having quite turned his head, enjoined him by an oracle to marry his daughter, whom he pretended to have had by the Moon; which command Rutilianus obeyed†, and by his alliance secured this impostor from any danger of punishment; the Roman governor of Bythinia and Pontus excusing himself on that account from doing justice upon him, when Lucian and several others offered themselves to be his accusers‡.

He never quitted that ignorant and barbarous country, which he had made choice of at first as the fittest to play his tricks in undiscovered; but residing himself among those superstitious and credulous people, extended his fame to a great distance by the emissaries which he employed all over the world, especially at Rome§, who did

* Pseudom. Lucian. Varior. p. 768.

† Ibid. 731. ‡ Ibid. 753. § Ibid. 762, 769.

not pretend themselves to work any miracles but only promulgated his, and gave him intelligence of all that it was useful for him to know.

These were the methods by which this remarkable fraud was conducted, every one of which is directly opposite to all those used by St. Paul in preaching the gospel; and yet such methods alone could give success to a cheat of this kind. I will not mention the many debaucheries and wicked enormities committed by this false prophet under the mask of religion, which is another characteristic difference between him and St. Paul; nor the ambiguous answers, cunning evasions, and juggling artifices which he made use of; in all which it is easy to see the evident marks of an imposture, as well as in the objects he plainly appears to have had in view. That which I chiefly insist upon, is the strong confederacy with which he took care to support his pretension to miraculous powers, and the ap^t disposition in

those he imposed upon to concur and assist in deceiving themselves; advantages entirely wanting to the apostles of Christ.

From all this I think it may be concluded, that no human means employed by St. Paul in his design of converting the Gentiles, were or could be adequate to the great difficulties he had to contend with, or to the success that we know attended his work; and we can in reason ascribe that success to no other cause, but the power of God going along with and aiding his ministry, because no other was equal to the effect.

Having then shewn that St. Paul had *no rational motives* to become an apostle of Christ, without being himself convinced of the truth of that gospel he preached, and that, had he engaged in such an imposture without any rational motives, he would have had *no possible means* to carry it on with any *success*; having also brought reasons of a very strong nature, to make it appear,

that the success he undoubtedly had in preaching the gospel was an effect of the divine power attending his ministry, I might rest all my proof of the Christian religion being a divine revelation, upon the arguments drawn from this head alone. But to consider this subject in all possible lights, I shall pursue the proposition which I set out with through each of its several parts; and having proved, as I hope, to the conviction of any impartial man, that St. Paul was not an impostor, who said what he knew to be false with an intent to deceive, I come next to consider whether he was an enthusiast, who, by the force of an overheated imagination, imposed upon himself.

Now these are the ingredients of which enthusiasm is generally composed; great heat of temper, melancholy, ignorance, credulity, and vanity or self-conceit. That the first of these qualities was in St. Paul, may be concluded from that fervour of zeal with which he acted both as a Jew and

Christian, in maintaining that which he thought to be right; and hence, I suppose, as well as from the impossibility of his having been an impostor, some unbelievers have chose to consider him as an enthusiast. But this quality alone will not be sufficient to prove him to have been so, in the opinion of any reasonable man. The same temper has been common to others, who undoubtedly were not enthusiasts; to the Gracchi, to Cato, to Brutus, to many more among the best and wisest of men. Nor does it appear that this disposition had such a mastery over the mind of St. Paul, that he was not able at all times to rule and controul it by the dictates of reason. On the contrary, he was so much the master of it, as, in matters of an indifferent nature, to *become all things to all men**, bending his notions and manners to theirs so far as his duty to God would permit, with the most pliant condescension; a conduct neither compati-

* 1 Cor. ix. 20,——22.

ble with the stiffness of a bigot, nor the violent impulses of fanatic delusions. His zeal was eager and warm, but tempered with prudence, and even with the civilities and decorums of life, as appears by his behaviour to Agrippa, Festus, and Felix; not the blind, inconsiderate, indecent zeal of an enthusiast.

Let us now see if any one of those other qualities which I have laid down, as disposing the mind to enthusiasm, and as being characteristic of it, belonged to St. Paul. First, as to melancholy, which of all dispositions of body or mind is most prone to enthusiasm, it neither appears by his writings, nor by any thing told of him in the Acts of the apostles, nor by any other evidence, that St. Paul was inclined to it more than other men*.— Though he was full of remorse for his former ignorant persecution of the church of Christ, we read of no gloomy penances, no extravagant mortifica-

* Josephus cont. Apion. l. ii. c. 37.

tions, such as the Bramins, the Jaugues, the monks of La Trape, and other melancholy enthusiasts inflict on themselves. His holiness only consisted in the simplicity of a good life, and the unwearied performance of those apostolical duties to which he was called. The sufferings he met with on that account he cheerfully bore, and even rejoiced in them for the love of Christ Jesus; but he brought none on himself: we find, on the contrary, that he pleaded the privilege of a Roman citizen to avoid being whipped. I could mention more instances of his having used the best methods that prudence could suggest, to escape danger, and shun persecution, whenever it could be done without betraying the duty of his office, or the honour of God*.

* A remarkable instance of this appears in his conduct among the Athenians. † There was at Athens a law, which made it capital to introduce or teach any new gods in their state. Therefore, when Paul was preaching Jesus and the resurrection to the Athenians, some of them car-

† Acts xvii. and Josephus cont. Apion. 1. ii. c. 37.

Compare with this the conduct of Francis of Assisi, of Ignatius Loyola, and other enthusiasts sainted by Rome, it will be found the reverse of St. Paul's. "He wished indeed to die, "and be with Christ;" but such a wish is no proof of melancholy, or of enthu-

ried him before the court of Areopagus, the ordinary judges of criminal matters, and in a particular manner entrusted with the care of religion, as having broken this law, and being a setter forth of strange gods. Now, in this case, an impostor would have retracted his doctrine to save his life, and an enthusiast would have lost his life without trying to save it by innocent means. St. Paul did neither the one nor the other; he availed himself of an altar which he had found in the city, inscribed *To the Unknown God*, and pleaded that he did not propose to them the worship of any new god, but only explained to them one whom their government had already received; "Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, "him declare I unto you." By this he avoided the law, and escaped being condemned by the Areopagus, without departing in the least from the truth of the gospel, or violating the honour of God. An admirable proof, in my opinion, of the good sense with which he acted, and one that shews there was no mixture of fanaticism in his religion.

siasm : it only proves his conviction of the divine truths he preached, and of the happiness laid up for him in those blessed abodes which had been shewn to him even in this life. Upon the whole, neither in his actions, nor in the instructions he gave to those under his charge, is there any tincture of melancholy, which yet is so essential a characteristic of enthusiasm, that I have scarce ever heard of any enthusiast, ancient or modern, in whom some very evident marks of it did not appear.

As to ignorance, which is another ground of enthusiasm, St. Paul was so far from it, that he appears to have been master not of the Jewish learning alone, but of the Greek. And this is one reason why he is less liable to the imputation of having been an enthusiast than the other apostles, though none of them were such no more than he, as may by other arguments be invincibly proved.

I have mentioned credulity as an-

other characteristic and cause of enthusiasm, which that it was not in St. Paul the history of his life undeniably shews. For, on the contrary, he seems to have been slow and hard of belief in the extremest degree, having paid no regard to all the miracles done by our Saviour, the fame of which he could not be a stranger to, as he lived in Jerusalem, not to that signal one done after his resurrection, and in his name, by Peter and John, upon the lame man at the beautiful gate of the temple † ; nor to the evidence given in consequence of it by Peter, in presence of the high-priest, the rulers, elders, and scribes, “ that Christ was raised from the dead ‡.” He must also have known, that when all the apostles had been “ shut up in the common
 “ prison, and the high-priest, the coun-
 “ cil, and all the senate of the children
 “ of Israel had sent their officers to
 “ bring them before them, the officers
 “ came and found them not in prison,”

† Acts iii. ‡ Acts v. 18, — 32.

but returned and made this report :
“ The prison truly found we shut with
“ all safety, and the keepers standing
“ without before the doors, but when
“ we had opened we found no man
“ within :” And that the council was
immediately told, “ that the men they
“ had put in prison were standing
“ in the temple, and teaching the peo-
“ ple :” And that being brought from
thence before the council, they had
spoke these memorable words, “ We
“ ought to obey God rather than men.
“ The God of our fathers raised up Je-
“ sus, whom ye slew and hanged on a
“ tree. Him hath God exalted with
“ his right hand to be a Prince and a
“ Saviour, for to give repentance to Is-
“ rael, and forgiveness of sins. And
“ we are his witnesses of these things,
“ and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom
“ God has given to them that obey
“ him.” All this he resisted, and was
consenting to the murder of Stephen,
who preached the same thing, and ev-

enced it by miracles *. So that his mind, far from being disposed to a credulous faith, or a too easy reception of any miracle worked in proof of the Christian religion, appears to have been barred against it by the most obstinate prejudices, as much as any man's could possibly be ; and from hence we may fairly conclude, that nothing less than the irresistible evidence of *his own senses*, clear from all possibility of doubt, could have overcome his unbelief.

Vanity or self-conceit is another circumstance that for the most part prevails in the character of an enthusiast. It leads men of a warm temper and religious turn, to think themselves worthy of the special regard, and extraordinary favours of God ; and the breath of that inspiration to which they pretend, is often no more than the wind of this vanity, which puffs them up to such extravagant imaginations. This strongly appears in the writings and lives of

* Acts viii. 1.

some enthusiastical heretics, in the mystics both ancient and modern, in many founders of orders and saints both male and female amongst the Papists, in several Protestant sectaries of the last age, and even in some of the Methodists now *. All the divine communications, illuminations, and ecstasies to which they have pretended, evidently sprung from much self-conceit, working together with the vapours of melancholy upon a warm imagination. And this is one reason, besides the contagious nature of melancholy, or fear, that makes enthusiasm so very catching among weak minds. Such are most strongly disposed to vanity; and when they see others pretend to extraordinary gifts, are apt to flatter themselves that they may partake of

* See the account of Montanus and his followers, the writings of the counterfeit Dionysius the Areopagite, Santa Theresa, St. Catharine of Sienna, Madame Bourignon, the Lives of St. Francis of Assisi, and Ignatius Loyola. See Also an account of the lives of George Fox, and of Rica Evans, and Whitfield's Journal

them as well as those whose merit they think no more than their own. Vanity therefore may justly be deemed a principal source of enthusiasm. But, that St. Paul was as free from it as any man, I think may be gathered from all that we see in his writings, or know of his life. Throughout his epistles there is not one word that savours of vanity, nor is any action recorded of him, in which the least mark of it appears.

In his epistle to the Ephesians he calls himself *less than the least of all saints* *. And to the Corinthians he says, “he is the least of the apostles, and not meet to be called an apostle, because he had persecuted the church of God †.” In his epistle to Timothy he says, “this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, *of whom I am chief*. Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long suf-

* Eph. iii. 8. † 1 Cor. xv. 9.

“fering, for a pattern to them which
 “should hereafter believe in him to
 “life everlasting †.”

It is true indeed, that in another epistle he tells the Corinthians, “that
 “he was not a whit behind the very
 “chiefest of the apostles,” 2 Cor. xi.
 5. But the occasion which drew from
 him these words must be considered.
 A false teacher by faction and calumny
 had brought his apostleship to be in
 question among the Corinthians. A-
 gainst such an attack not to have as-
 serted his apostolical dignity would
 have been a betraying of the office and
 duty committed to him by God. He
 was therefore constrained to do him-
 self justice, and not let down that
 character, upon the authority of which
 the whole success and efficacy of his
 ministry among them depended. But
 how did he do it? Not with that wan-
 tonness which a vain man indulges,
 when he can get any opportunity of
 commending himself; not with a pomp-

† 1 Tim. i. 15, 16.

ous detail of all the amazing miracles which he had performed in different parts of the world, though he had so fair an occasion of doing it, but with a modest and simple exposition of his abundant labours and sufferings in preaching the gospel, and barely reminding them, “that the signs of an apostle had been wrought *among them* in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds*.” Could he say less than this? Is not such boasting *humility itself*? And yet for this he makes many apologies, expressing the greatest uneasiness in being obliged to speak thus of himself, even in his own vindication †. When in the same epistle, and for the same purpose, he mentions the vision he had of heaven, how modestly does he do it! Not in his own name, but in the third person, “I knew a man in Christ, &c. caught up into the third heaven §.” And immediate-

*2 Cor. xii 12. † 2 Cor. xi, 1. 16—19, 30.

§ 2 Cor. xii. 2.

ly after he adds, “but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me ||” How contrary is this to a spirit of vanity! how different from the practice of enthusiastic pretenders to raptures and visions, who never think they can dwell long enough upon those subjects, but fill whole volumes with their accounts of them! Yet St. Paul is not satisfied with his forbearance; he adds the confession of some *infirmity*, which he tells the Corinthians was given to him as an allay, “that he might not be above measure exalted through the abundance of his revelations †” I would also observe, that he says this rapture, or vision of paradise, happened to him above fourteen years before.—Now had it been the effect of a mere enthusiastical fancy, can it be supposed that in so long a period of time, he would not have had many more raptures of the same kind? Would not his

|| 2 Cor. xii. 6. † 2 Cor. xii. 7.

imagination have been perpetually carrying him to heaven as we find St. Theresa, St. Bridget, and St. Catharine were carried by theirs †? And if vanity had been predominant in him, would he have remained fourteen years in absolute silence upon so great a mark of the divine favour? No; we should certainly have seen his epistles filled with nothing else but long accounts of these visions, conferences with angels, with Christ, with God Almighty, mystical unions with God, and all we read in the works of those sainted enthusiasts, whom I have mentioned before. But he only mentions this vision in answer to the false teacher who had disputed his apostolic power, and comprehends it all in three sentences, with many excuses for being compelled to make any mention of it at all ‖. Nor does he take any merit †o himself, even from the success of those apostolic labours which he principally

† See their works and lives.

‖ 2 Cor. xii. 1.—5, 11.

boasts of in this epistle. For in a former one to the same church he writes thus, "Who then is Paul, and "who is Apollos, but ministers by "whom ye believed, even as the Lord "gave to every man? I have planted, "Apollos watered, but God gave the "increase. So then, neither is he that "planteth *any thing*, neither is he that "watereth, but God that giveth the "increase." And in another place of the same epistle he says, "By the "grace of God I am what I am, and his "grace which was bestowed upon me "was not in vain, but I laboured more "abundantly than they all: *yet not I,* "but the grace of God which was with "me*."

I think it needless to give more instances of the modesty of St. Paul.—Certain I am, not one can be given that bears any colour of vanity, or that vanity in particular, which so strongly appears in all enthusiasts, of setting their imaginary gifts above those virtues

* 1 Cor. xv. 10.

which make the essence of true religion, and the real excellency of a good man, or, in the scripture phrase, of a *saint*. In his first epistle to the Corinthians he has these words, “ Though
 “ I speak with the tongues of men and
 “ of angels, and have not charity, I am
 “ become as sounding brass or a tink-
 “ ling cymbal. And though I have the
 “ gift of prophecy, and understand all
 “ mysteries and all knowledge; and
 “ though I have all faith, so that I
 “ could remove mountains, and have
 “ not charity, I am nothing. And though
 “ I bestow all my goods to feed the
 “ poor, and though I give my body to
 “ be burned, and have not charity, it
 “ profiteth me nothing†,, Is this the
 language of enthusiasm? Did ever enthusiast prefer that universal benevolence which comprehends all moral virtues, and which (as appears by the following verses) is meant by charity here; did ever enthusiast, I say, prefer that benevolence to *faith* and to

† 1 Cor, xiii. 1, 2, 3, 4.

miracles, to those religious opinions which he had embraced, and to those supernatural graces and gifts which he imagined he had acquired, nay even to the merit of martyrdom? Is it not the genius of enthusiasm to set moral virtues infinitely below the merit of faith, and of all moral virtues to value that least which is most particularly enforced by St. Paul, a spirit of candour, moderation, and peace? Certainly neither the temper, nor the opinions of a man subject to fanatic delusions, are to be found in this passage; but it may be justly concluded, that he who could esteem the value of charity so much above miraculous gifts, could not have pretended to any such gifts if he had them not in reality.

Since then it is manifested from the foregoing examination, that in St. Paul's disposition and character those qualities do not occur which seem to be necessary to form an enthusiast, it must be reasonable to conclude he was none. But allowing, for argument's

sake, that all those qualities were to be found in him, or that the heat of his temper alone could be a sufficient foundation to support such a suspicion; I shall endeavour to prove, that he could not have imposed on himself by any power of enthusiasm, either in regard to the miracle that caused his conversion, or to the consequential effects of it, or to some other circumstances which he bears testimony to in his epistles.

The power of imagination in enthusiastical minds is no doubt very strong; but it always acts in conformity to the opinions imprinted upon it at the time of its working, and can no more act against them, than a rapid river can carry a boat against the current of its own stream. Now nothing can be more certain, than that when Saul set out for Damascus with an authority from the chief priests “to bring the Christians “which were there, bound to Jerusalem*,” an authority solicited by him-

* Acts ix: 2

self, and granted to him at his own earnest desire, his mind was strongly possessed with opinions against Christ and his followers. To give those opinions a more active force, his passions at that time concurred, being inflamed in the highest degree by the irritating consciousness of his past conduct towards them, the pride of supporting a part he had voluntarily engaged in, and the credit he found it procured him among the chief priests and rulers, whose commission he bore.

If in such a state and temper of mind, an enthusiastical man had imagined he saw a vision from heaven denouncing the anger of God against the Christians, and commanding him to persecute them without any mercy, it might be accounted for by the natural power of enthusiasm. But that in the very instant of his being engaged in the fiercest and hottest persecution against them, no circumstance having happened to change his opinions, or alter the bent of his disposition, he should at

once imagine himself called by a heavenly vision to be the apostle of Christ, whom but a moment before he deemed an impostor and a blasphemer, that had been justly put to death on the cross, is in itself wholly incredible, and so far from being a probable effect of enthusiasm, that just a contrary effect must have been naturally produced by that cause. The warmth of his temper carried him violently another way; and whatever delusions his imagination could raise to impose on his reason, must have been raised at that time agreeably to the notions imprinted upon it, and by which it was heated to a degree of enthusiasm, not in direct contradiction to all those notions, while they remained in their full force.

This is so clear a proposition, that I might rest the whole argument entirely upon it: but still farther to shew that this vision could not be a phantom of St. Paul's own creating, I beg leave to observe, that he was not alone when he first saw it: there were many oth-

ers in company, whose minds were no better disposed than his to the Christian faith. Could it be possible that the imaginations of all these men should at the same time be so strangely affected, as to make them believe that they saw a “great light shining about them, “above the brightness of the sun at “noon-day, and heard the sound of a “voice from heaven, though not the “words which it spake*,” when in reality they neither saw, nor heard any such thing? could they be so infatuated with this conceit of their fancy, as to fall down from their horses together with Saul, and be speechless “through fear†,” when nothing had happened extraordinary either to them or to him? especially considering that this apparition did not happen in the night, when the senses are most easily imposed upon, but at mid-day. If a sudden frenzy had seized upon Saul, from any distemper of body or mind, can we suppose his whole company,

* Acts ix. 3 xxii, 9.

† Acts xxvi, 14. ix, 7.

men of different constitutions and understandings, to have been at once affected in the same manner with him, so that not the distemper alone, but the effects of it should exactly agree? If all had gone mad together, would not the frenzy of some have taken a different turn, and presented to them different objects? This supposition is so contrary to nature and all possibility that unbelief must find some other solution, or give up the point.

I shall suppose then, in order to try to account for this vision without a miracle, that as Saul and his company were journeying along in their way to Damascus, an extraordinary meteor did really happen, which cast a great light, as some meteors will do, at which they being affrighted fell to the ground in the manner related. This might be possible, and fear grounded on ignorance of such phænomena might make them imagine it to be a vision from God. Nay, even the voice or sound they heard in the air, might be an explosion

attending this meteor; or at least there are those who would rather recur to such a supposition as this, however incredible, than acknowledge the miracle. But how will this account for the distinct words heard by St. Paul, to which he made answer? How will it account for what followed upon it when he came to Damascus, agreeably to the sense of those words which he heard? How came Ananias to go to him there, and say, "He was chosen by God to know his will, and see that just One, and hear the voice of his mouth?"* Or why did he propose to him *to be baptized*?† What connection was there between the meteor which Saul had seen, and these words of Ananias? Will it be said that Ananias was skilful enough to take advantage of the fright he was in at that appearance, in order to make him a Christian? But could Ananias inspire him with a vision in which he saw him before he came?‡ If that vision was

*Acts xxii. 14. †Acts xxii. 16. ‡Acts ix. 10 &c.

the effect of imagination, how was it verified so exactly in fact? But allowing that he dreamed by chance of Ananias' coming, and that Ananias came by chance too, or, if you please that having heard of his dream, he came to take advantage of that, as well as of the meteor which Saul had seen, will this get over the difficulty? No, there was more to be done. Saul was struck blind, and had been so for three days. Now had this blindness been natural from the effects of a meteor or lightning upon him, it would not have been possible for Ananias to heal it, as we find that he did, merely by putting his hands on him and speaking a few words. This undoubtedly surpassed the power of nature; and if this was a miracle, it proves the other to have been a miracle too, and a miracle done by the same Jesus Christ. For Ananias, when he healed Saul, spoke to him thus: "Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, has sent me, that thou

“ mightest receive thy sight, and be
 “ filled with the Holy Ghost †.” And
 that he saw Christ both now and after
 this time, appears not only by what he
 relates, Acts xxii, 17, 18, but by other
 passages in his epistles, 1 Cor. ix. 1. xv.
 8. From *him* (as he asserts in many
 places of his epistles) he learned the
 gospel by immediate revelation, and by
 him he was sent to the gentiles, Acts
 xxii, 21. xxiii. 11. Among those Gentiles
 “ from Jerusalem, and round about to
 “ Illyricum, he preached the gospel of
 “ Christ, with mighty signs and wonders
 “ wrought by the power of the Spirit of
 “ God, to make them obedient to his
 “ preaching ‡,” as he testifies himself
 in his epistle to the Romans, and of
 which a particular account is given to
 us in the Acts of the apostles; signs
 and wonders indeed, above any power
 of nature to work or imposture to
 counterfeit, or enthusiasm to imagine.
 Now does not such a series of miracu-
 lous acts, all consequential to and de-

† Acts ix. 17, 18. xxii. 13.

‡ Rom. xv. 19.

pendent upon the first revelation, put the truth of that revelation beyond all possibility of doubt or deceit? And if he could so have imposed on himself as to think that he worked them when he did not, (which supposition cannot be admitted, if he was not all that time quite out of his senses) how could so *distempered an enthusiast* make such a progress, as we know that he did, in converting the Gentile world? If the difficulties which have been shewn to have obstructed that work were such as the ablest imposter could not overcome, how much more insurmountable were they to a madman?

It is a much harder task for unbelievers to account for the success of St. Paul, in preaching the gospel, upon the supposition of his having been an enthusiast, than of his having been an imposter. Neither of these suppositions can ever account for it; but the impossibility is more glaringly strong in this case than the other. I could enter into a particular examination of all the mi-

acles recorded in the Acts to have been done by St. Paul, and shew that they were not of a nature in which enthusiasm, either in him, or the persons he worked upon, or the spectators, could have any part. I will mention only a few. When he told Elymas the sorcerer, at Paphos, before the Roman deputy, “that the hand of God was upon him, and he should be blind, not seeing the sun for a season; and immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness, and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand †,” had enthusiasm in the doer or sufferer any share in this act? If Paul, as an enthusiast, had thrown out this menace, and the effect had not followed, instead of converting the deputy, as we are told that he did, he would have drawn on himself his rage and contempt. But the effect upon Elymas could not be caused by enthusiasm in Paul, much less can it be imputed to an enthusiastic belief in that person

† Acts xiii.

himself, of his being struck blind, when he was not, by those words of a man whose preaching he strenuously and bitterly opposed. Nor can we ascribe the conversion of Sergius, which happened upon it, to any enthusiasm. A Roman proconsul was not very likely to be an enthusiast; but had he been one, he must have been bigotted to his own gods, and so much the less inclined to believe any miraculous power in St. Paul. When at Troas, a young man named *Eutychus* fell down from a high window, while Paul was preaching, and was taken up dead, could any enthusiasm either in Paul, or the Congregation there present, make them believe that by that apostle's *falling upon him and embracing him*, he was restored to life †” Or could he who was so restored contribute any thing to it himself, by any power of his own imagination? When in the isle of Melita, where St. Paul was shipwrecked, “there came a “viper and fastened on his hand, which

† Acts xx. 9.

“ he shook off, and felt no harm * was that an effect of enthusiasm? An enthusiast might perhaps have been mad enough to hope for safety against the bite of a viper without any remedy being applied to it, but would that hope have prevented his death? Or were the barbarous islanders, to whom this apostle was an absolute stranger, prepared by enthusiasm to expect and believe that any miracle would be worked to preserve him? On the contrary, when they saw the viper hang on his hand, they said among themselves, “ No doubt this man is a murderer, “ whom, though he hath escaped “ the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not “ to live.” I will add no more instances: These are sufficient to shew that the miracles told of St. Paul, can no more be ascribed to enthusiasm than to imposture.

But moreover, the power of working miracles was not confined to St. Paul; it was also communicated to the church-

* Acts xxviii

es he planted in different parts of the world. In many parts of his first epistle he tells the Corinthians, that they had among them many mircalous graces and gifts, and gives them directions for the more orderly use of them in their assemblies§. Now I ask, whether all that he said upon that head is to be ascribed to enthusiasm? If the Corinthians knew that they had among them no such miraculous powers, they must have regarded the author of that epistle as a man out of his senses, instead of revering him as an apostle of God.

If, for instance, a quaker should in a meeting of his own sect, tell all the persons assembled there, “That to some
“ among them was given the gift of heal-
“ ing by the Spirit of God, to others the
“ working of other miracles, to others
“ diverse kinds of tongues,” they would undoubtedly account him a madman, because they pretend to no such gifts. If indeed they were only told by him, that they were inspired by the Spirit

§ 1 Cor. xii 4, 5.

of God in a certain ineffable manner, which they alone could understand, but which did not discover itself by any outward, distinct operations or signs, they might mistake the impulse of enthusiasm for the inspiration of the Holy Ghost; but they could not believe, against the conviction of their own minds, that they spoke tongues they did not speak, or healed distempers they did not heal, or worked other miracles, when they worked none. If it be said, the Corinthians might pretend to these powers, though the quakers do not: I ask, whether in that pretension they were impostors, and St. Paul was also such, how ridiculous was it for him to advise them in an epistle writ *only to them, and for their own use*, not to value themselves too highly upon those gifts; to pray for one rather than another, and prefer charity to them all! Do associates in fraud talk such a language to one another? But if we suppose their pretensions to all those gifts was an effect of enthusiasm, let us consider

how it was possible that he and they could be so cheated by that enthusiasm, as to imagine they had such powers when they had not.

Suppose that enthusiasm could make a man think, that he was able by a word or a touch to give sight to the blind, motion to the lame, or life to the dead: Would that conceit of his make the blind see, the lame walk, or the dead revive? And if it did not, how could he persist in such an opinion; or, upon his persisting, escape being shut up for a madman? But such a madness could not infect so many at once, as St. Paul supposes at Corinth to have been endowed with the gift of healing, or any other miraculous powers. One of the miracles which they pretended to, was the speaking of languages they never had learned. And St. Paul says he possessed this gift *more than them all**. If this had been a delusion of fancy, if they had spoken only gibberish, or unmeaning sounds,

* 1 Cor. xiv. 18.

it would soon have appeared, when they came to make use of it where it was necessary, *viz.* in converting of those who understood not any language they naturally spoke. St. Paul particularly, who travelled so far upon that design, and had such occasion to use it, must soon have discovered that this imaginary gift of the Spirit was no gift at all, but a ridiculous instance of *frenzy*, which had possessed both him and them. But if those he spoke to in diverse tongues understood what he said, and were converted to Christ by that means, how could it be a delusion? Of all the miracles recorded in scripture, none are more clear from any possible imputation of being the effect of an enthusiastic imagination than this. For how could any man think that he had it, who had it not; or if he did think so, not be undeceived when he came to put his gift to the proof?—Accordingly I do not find such a power to have been ever pretended to by any enthusiast, ancient or modern.

If then St. Paul and the church of Corinth were not deceived in ascribing to themselves this miraculous power, but really had it, there is the strongest reason to think, that neither were they deceived in the other powers to which they pretended, as the same Spirit which gave them that equally, could, and probably would, give them the others, to serve the same holy ends for which that was given: And by consequence St. Paul was no enthusiast in what he wrote upon that head to the Corinthians, nor in other similar instances, where he ascribes to himself, or to the churches he founded, any supernatural graces and gifts.—Indeed, they who would impute to imagination, effects, such as those which St. Paul imputes to the power of God attending his mission, must ascribe to imagination the same omnipotence which he ascribes to God.

Having thus, I flatter myself, satisfactorily shewn that St. Paul could not be an enthusiast, who by the force of

an overheated imagination imposed on himself, I am next to inquire whether he was deceived by the fraud of others, and whether all that he said of himself can be imputed to the power of that deceit; But I need say little to shew the absurdity of this supposition. It was morally impossible for the disciples of Christ, to conceive such a thought as that of turning his persecutor into his apostle, and to do this by a fraud in the very instant of his greatest fury against them and their Lord. But could they have been so extravagant as to conceive such a thought, it was physically impossible for them to execute it in a manner we find his conversion to have been effected. Could they produce a light in the air which at mid-day was brighter than that of the sun? Could they make Saul hear words from out of that light, which were not heard by the rest of the company? Could they make him blind for three days after that vision, and then make scales fall off from his eyes, and

restore him to his sight by a word*? Beyond dispute, no fraud could do these things; but much less still could the fraud of others produce those miracles subsequent to his conversion, in which he was not passive, but active, which he did himself, and appeals to in his epistles as proofs of his divine mission. I shall then take it for granted that he was not deceived by the fraud of others, and that what he said of himself cannot be imputed to the power of that deceit, no more than to wilful imposture, or to enthusiasm; and then it follows, that what he related to have been the cause of his conversion, and to have happened in consequence of it, did all really happen, and "therefore the Christian religion " is a divine revelation."

That this conclusion is fairly and undeniably drawn from the premises, I think must be owned, unless some probable cause can be assigned to account for those facts so authentically

* Acts xxii. 9.

related in the Acts of the apostles, and attested in his epistles by St. Paul himself, other than any of those which I have considered ; and this I am confident cannot be done. It must be therefore accounted for by the power of God. That God should work miracles for the establishment of a most holy religion, which from the insuperable difficulties that stood in the way of it, could not have established itself without such an assistance, is no way repugnant to human reason ; But, that without any miracle such things should have happened as no adequate natural causes can be assigned for, is what human reason cannot believe.

To impute them to magic, or the power of dæmons, (which was the resource of the Heathens and Jews against the notoriety of the miracles performed by Christ and his disciples) is by no means agreeable to the notions of those who in this age disbelieve Christianity. It will therefore be needless to shew the weakness of

that supposition: but that supposition itself is no inconsiderable argument of the truth of the facts. Next to the apostles and evangelists, the strongest witnesses of the undeniable force of that truth are Celsus and Julian, and other ancient opponents of the Christian religion, who were obliged to solve what they could not contradict, by such an irrational and absurd imagination.

The dispute was not then between faith and reason, but between religion and superstition. Superstition ascribed to cabalistical names, to magical secrets, such operations as carried along with them evident marks of the Divine power: religion ascribed them to God, and reason declared itself on that side of the question. Upon what grounds then can we now overturn that decision? Upon what grounds can we reject the unquestionable testimony given by St. Paul, that he was called by God to be a disciple and apostle of Christ? It has been shewn

that we cannot impute it either to enthusiasm or fraud ; how shall we then resist the conviction of such a proof? Does the doctrine he preached contain any precepts against the law of morality, that natural law written by God in the hearts of mankind? If it did, I confess that none of the arguments I have made use of could prove such a doctrine to come from *him*.— But this is so far from being the case, that even those who reject Christianity as a divine revelation, acknowledge the morals delivered by Christ and by his apostles to be worthy of God. Is it then on account of the mysteries in the gospel that the facts are denied, though supported by evidence which in all other cases would be allowed to contain the clearest conviction, and cannot in this be rejected without reducing the mind to a state of absolute scepticism, and overturning those rules by which we judge of all evidence, and of the truth or credibility of all other facts? But this is plainly to give up the

use of our understanding where we are able to use it most properly, in order to apply it to things of which it is not a competent judge. The motives and reasons upon which divine wisdom may think proper to act, as well as the manner in which it acts, must often lie out of the reach of our understanding ; but the motives and reasons of human actions, and the manner in which they are performed, are all in the sphere of human knowledge, and upon them we may judge, with a well-grounded confidence, when they are fairly proposed to our consideration.

It is incomparably more probable that a revelation from God concerning the ways of his providence, should contain in it matters above the capacity of our minds to comprehend, than that St. Paul, or indeed any of the other apostles, should have acted, as we know that they did, upon any other foundations than certain knowledge of Christ's being risen from the dead ; or should have succeeded in the work

they undertook, without the aid of miraculous powers. To the former of these propositions I may give my assent without any direct opposition of reason to faith; but in admitting the latter, I must believe against all those probabilities that are the rational grounds of assent.

Nor do they who reject the Christian religion because of the difficulties which occur in its mysteries, consider how far that objection will go against other systems both of religion, and of philosophy, which they themselves profess to admit. There are in deism itself, the most simple of all religious opinions, several difficulties for which human reason can but ill account; which may therefore be not improperly styled *Articles of Faith*. Such is the origin of evil under the government of an all-good and all-powerful God; a question so hard, that the inability of solving it in a satisfactory manner, to their apprehensions, has driven some of the greatest philosophers into the

monstrous and senseless opinions of Manicheism and atheism. Such is the reconciling the presence of God with the free will of man, which, after much thought on the subject, Mr. Locke fairly confesses he could not do, though he acknowledged both; and what Mr. Locke could not do, in reasoning upon subjects of a metaphysical nature, I am apt to think, few men, if any, can hope to perform*.

Such is also the creation of the world at any supposed time, or the *eternal production* of it from God; it being almost equally hard, according to mere philosophical notions, either to admit that the goodness of God could remain unexerted through all eternity before the time of such a creation, let it be set back ever so far, or to conceive an *eternal production*, which words, so applied are, inconsistent and contradictory terms; the solution commonly given, by a comparison to the emanation of light from the sun, not being adequate

* See his letter to Mr. Molyneux. p. 509. v. 3.

to it, or just; for light is a *quality* inherent in fire, and naturally emanating from it; whereas *matter* is not a *quality* inherent or emanating from the divine essence, but of a different substance and nature, and if not *independent* and *self-existing*, must have been created by a mere act of the Divine *Will*; and if *created*, then not *eternal*, the idea of *creation* implying a time *when the substance created did not exist*. But if, to get rid of this difficulty, we have recourse, as many of the ancient philosophers had, to the *independent existence of matter*, then we must admit *two self-existing principles*, which is quite inconsistent with general theism, or natural reason. Nay, could *that* be admitted, it would not yet clear up the doubt, unless we suppose not only the eternal existence of matter, independent of God, but that it was from eternity in the *order and beauty* we see it in now, without any *agency* of the Divine power; otherwise the same difficulty will always occur, why it was not before put into that *order and state*

of *perfection*; or how the goodness of God could so long remain in a state of inaction, *unexerted* and *unemployed*. For were the time of such an *exertion* of it put back ever so far; if, instead of five or six thousand years, we were to suppose millions of millions of ages to have passed since the world† was reduced out of a *chaos*, to an *harmonious* and *regular form*, still a whole *eternity* must have preceded that date, during which the divine attributes did not exert themselves in that *beneficent work*, so suitable to them, that the conjectures of human reason can find no cause for its being delayed.

But because of these difficulties, or any other that may occur in the system of deism, no wise man will deny the *being* of a God, or his *infinite wisdom*, *goodness*, and *power*, which are proved by such

† By the *world*, I do not mean this earth alone, but the whole material *universe*, with all its inhabitants. Even *created spirits* fall under the same reasoning; for they must also have had a *beginning*, and before that *beginning* an eternity must have preceded.

evidence, as carries the clearest and strongest conviction, and cannot be refused, without involving the mind in *far greater difficulties*, even in downright *absurdities* and *impossibilities*. The only part therefore that can be taken, is to account in the best manner that our weak reason is able to do, for such seeming objections; and where *that* fails, to acknowledge its weakness, and acquiesce under the certainty, that our very imperfect knowledge or judgment cannot be the measure of the Divine wisdom, or the universal standard of truth. So likewise it is with respect to the *Christian religion*. Some difficulties occur in that revelation, which human reason can hardly clear; but as the truth of it stands upon evidence so strong and convincing, that it cannot be denied without much greater *difficulties* than those that attend the belief of it, as I have before endeavoured to prove, we ought not to reject it upon such objections, however mortifying they may be to our pride. *That* indeed

would have all things made plain to us; but God has thought proper to proportion our knowledge to our *wants*, not our *pride*. All that concerns our duty is clear; and as to other points, either of natural or revealed religion, if he has left some obscurities in them, is that any reasonable cause of complaint? Not to rejoice in the benefit of what he has graciously allowed us to know, from a presumptuous disgust at our incapacity of knowing more, is as absurd as it would be to refuse to *walk*, because we cannot fly.

From the arrogant ignorance of metaphysical reasonings, aiming at matters above our knowledge, arose all the speculative impiety, and many of the worst superstitions of the old heathen world, before the gospel was preached, to bring men back again to the primitive faith; and from the same source have since flowed some of the greatest corruptions of the evangelical truth, and the most inveterate prejudices against it: an effect just as natural

as for our eyes to grow weak, and even blind, by being strained to look at objects too distant, or not made for them to see.

Are then our intellectual faculties of no use in religion; yes undoubtedly, of the most necessary use, when rightly employed. The proper employment of them is to distinguish its genuine doctrines from others erroneously or corruptly ascribed to it; to consider the importancy and purport of them, with the connection they bear to one another; but first of all to examine with the strictest attention the evidence by which religion is proved, *internal* as well as *external*. If the *external* evidence be convincingly strong and there is no *internal* proof of its falsehood, but much to support and confirm its truth, then surely no difficulties ought to prevent our giving a full assent and belief to it. It is our duty indeed to endeavour to find the best solutions we can to them; but where no satisfactory ones are to be found, it is no less our duty to ac-

quiesce with humility, and believe that to be right which we know is above us, and belonging to a wisdom superior to ours.

Nor let it be said, that this will be an argument for the admitting all doctrines, however absurd, that may have been grafted upon the Christian faith: Those which can plainly be proved *not to belong to it*, fall not under the reasoning I have laid down: (and certainly none do belong to it which contradict either our *clear, intuitive knowledge*, or the *evident principles and dictates of reason*. I speak only of difficulties which attend the belief of the gospel in some of its pure and essential doctrines, plainly and evidently delivered there, which being made known to us by a *revelation supported by proofs*, that our reason *ought to admit*, and not being such things as it can *certainly know to be false*, must be received by it as *objects of faith*, though they are such as it could not have discovered by any natural means, and such as are difficult

to be conceived, or satisfactorily explained by its limited powers. If *the glorious light of the gospel* be sometimes overcast with clouds of doubt, so is the light of our *reason* too. But shall we deprive ourselves of the advantage of *either*, because those clouds cannot perhaps be entirely removed while we remain in this mortal life? Shall we obstinately and frowardly shut our eyes against *that day-spring from on high that has visited us*, because we are not as yet able to bear the full blaze of his beams? Indeed, not even in heaven itself, not in the highest state of perfection to which a finite being can ever attain will all the counsels of providence, all the *height* and the *depth* of the infinite wisdom of God, be ever disclosed or understood. *Faith* even then will be necessary, and there will be *mysteries* which cannot be penetrated by the most exalted archangel, and *truths* which cannot be known by him otherwise than from *revelation*, or believed upon any other ground of assent, than

a submissive confidence in the Divine wisdom. What, then, shall man presume that his weak and narrow understanding is sufficient to guide him *into all truth*, without any need of *revelation or faith*? Shall he complain that *the ways of God are not like his ways*, and *past his finding out*? True philosophy, as well as true Christianity, would teach us a wiser and modester part. It would teach us to be content within those bounds which God has assigned to us, “casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

‡ 2 Cor. x. 5.

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