

A FEW
PLAIN REASONS
FOR THE
BELIEF OF A CHRISTIAN.

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*Be ready always to give an Answer to every Man that asketh you
a Reason of the Hope that is in you.*

1 Peter iii. 15.

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INTRODUCTION.

FEW, perhaps, are so ignorant of the history of Revelation, as never to have heard of the attempts that have been made to impede its progress, and frustrate its success. Few are there but must know, that persons have existed, who have laboured by their writings to expose it to contempt, as a fabrication and imposture. But however virulent or acute such adversaries might be, their power of doing mischief was circumscribed; nor was much to be apprehended from the dispersion of those unfounded and fallacious arguments, which, too intricate and subtle for common understandings, were confined to the perusal of men of talents and erudition. They who were liable to be infected with the poison, were before provided with the antidote. Conscious of the failure of the former enemies of Revelation in the

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plan of their attack, the infidels of the present day have had recourse to a different, and unfortunately, a more successful method. No longer trusting to any influence that might be derived from the strength of their arguments, despairing to make converts of those who, from habit and education, were enabled to see through and expose their fallacies, they have turned their arms towards a quarter that promised more success, and assailed a description of persons who, they well knew, were wholly unprepared to make an effectual resistance. By confident assertion, by ridicule, by the grossest and most shameless misrepresentations, and by every artifice that could be practised on the ignorant and unwary, they have too often succeeded in shaking the faith, poisoning the morals, and perverting the understandings, of that middle class, which constitutes so valuable a portion of the community. Nominal Christians only, led away by novelty and the flattering supposition of possessing superior sagacity and penetration, wholly unacquainted with the grounds of their belief, many have fallen into the snare; not from a conviction that Revelation is destitute of sufficient proofs, but merely from having never troubled themselves to enquire into the solidity of the foundation on which it rests

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for support. Indifferent to religion, they originally took it upon trust, and consequently were unable, in the hour of trial, to resist the force with which they were attacked. The evil, therefore, it is evident, has not originated from defect of proof, but from deficiency of investigation. To this cause much of the infidelity of the present times may justly be attributed.

With the hopes of affording some little assistance, in counteracting an evil of such magnitude, the Writer of this Treatise in Defence of Revelation has been induced to make it public. He has drawn up a plain and compendious statement of the principal arguments which are usually adduced to establish the credibility of the sacred writings. Fully aware that many other works on the same subject, far more able and satisfactory than any thing that can come from him, may have already preceded his, he has only to observe, that nothing precisely of the same nature as that which he has here taken upon himself, has ever reached him, or, he believes, his neighbourhood. He has endeavoured to render every argument as intelligible as he could to common capacities; to perspicuity he has sacrificed language, and every other consideration. Almost wholly pre-

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cluded, by a very retired situation, from access to authors, who were necessary to help him on his way, he has been obliged to trust, in great measure, to his own memory, and the scanty assistance which the few books within his reach were capable of affording. His only motive was to convey information to those who stood most in need of it, and who were not likely to receive it from more able teachers.

Should the perusal of this little work tend, in the smallest degree, to confirm the believer, to fix the wavering, or to convert the infidel, the whole aim of its author will be fully accomplished; and he will receive the most pleasing recompence from the gratifying reflection, that he has contributed his part, however insignificant, in support of that cause, with which the best interests of man, both temporal and eternal, are so inseparably united.

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REASONS, &c.

CHAP. I.

On the different Revelations of the Will of God.

MAN, we are informed, was at first instructed by his Creator himself; but afterwards left, for the direction of his conduct, to the light of nature, or reason. This law, inscribed in the heart in the most intelligible characters, supplied the place of all other laws, in the earlier ages of the world. God, however, thought fit to let in divine light upon mankind by various and successive gradations. He was sometimes pleased to make occasional communications to persons whom he selected for that purpose; and at length to separate one particular nation from all others, which he vouchsafed to enlighten by an extraordinary revelation, and to govern by a law which he himself prescribed and appointed for their observance. This law required not only an obedience to the law of nature, which was universally obligatory

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on all mankind, but ordained peculiar rites of religious worship, and those judicial regulations by which their civil government was afterwards to be administered. In succeeding times, prophets, divinely inspired, were occasionally sent amongst them, to correct their errors, and inculcate the necessity of that moral virtue, which had been nearly swallowed up in their unbounded attachment to exterior forms and ostentatious ceremonies.

At length, when the time appointed for this important purpose had arrived, God was pleased to make that full, perfect, and final discovery of his will, which was to be the end and consummation of all former revelations; and to send the Saviour of mankind, not to one favoured nation, as Moses had been, but with offers of salvation for the general acceptance of the whole human race. By this last dispensation, doctrines utterly unknown before, or at best but imperfectly understood, have been made level with the apprehensions of the commonest hearers; duties have been taught which related to men of all descriptions; and the warmest affection for the interests of religion excited in the heart, instead of frigid acquiescence, or undisguised contempt. The nature and attributes of the Deity, the certainty not only of a future existence but of a future retribution, the means by which our infirmities are strengthened, and our approaches to the Almighty renewed by penitence and contrition, and indeed the knowledge of all saving truth, were published to the world through the medium of the Gospel. The precepts
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delivered for the instruction and conduct of private life were such as could not fail to excite and to receive universal approbation; they struck at the root of every sinful and malignant passion, and recommended the practice of every amiable virtue that could soften or adorn the human character.

Such is the account which the scriptures afford us of the dealings of God with man, at different periods and under different circumstances. Every part of this grand scheme, which was to be completed by the mission of the long-promised Messiah, seems to agree in perfect harmony with the rest; every thing preceding appears to have had an uniform tendency to the consummation of the latest and best revelation of Christ and his Apostles. Now this extraordinary communication of divine knowledge, which we commonly call by the name of Revelation, is defined to be a discovery which God has been pleased to make of himself and of his will, in addition to that which he had before made by the light of nature or reason. The possibility of such a discovery, no one who acknowledges an Almighty Power, can be disposed to call in question; and its probability may fairly be inferred, from the general sense which so many different nations have usually entertained of a communication and intercourse between the Creator and his creatures. Hence we may account for the institution of those various rites and ceremonies, which every nation pretended to have received from their different deities; and for that eagerness to consult their oracles on every emergency,

gency, for which the more refined countries of antiquity were always distinguished. A desire, which appears to be thus natural to man, and implanted in his heart for wise purposes, it is not unreasonable to suppose, from the consideration of the goodness of God, that he would vouchsafe to gratify, and to afford him fuller and more satisfactory information on such important subjects, than the contemplation of external objects, or the reflections of his own mind, could, without such assistance, ever have acquired.

CHAP. II.

Reasons for believing the Old Testament.

WHOEVER lays claim to a divine communication, must be able to refer to such proofs as will establish his pretensions. He must produce a character of undoubted integrity, purity, and understanding; he must satisfy us, that he is not a person likely to impose on others, or to be imposed on himself; he must make it evidently appear, that he has no private interests to serve, but that he means only to promote the glory of God and the happiness of mankind. Moreover, it is necessary to examine into the

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the intrinsic merits of the revelation itself, that we may see whether its contents are such; as we may reasonably suppose were likely to proceed from a divine origin. We should naturally look for such a representation of the Supreme Being, and his glorious attributes, as are agreeable to our conceptions; we should expect to find such doctrines and precepts as most readily conduce to human felicity and improvement; and every other circumstance, which could induce us to believe that it originated from that high authority, by which it pretends to have been produced. And lastly, in order to remove every doubt on so important a subject, recourse must be had to those extraordinary proofs of a divine commission, the power of predicting future events, and performing miraculous and supernatural works, which cannot fail to stamp it with the seal of authenticity, and to afford the clearest conviction that it is derived from and attested by God himself.

These are some of the distinguishing marks by which we are enabled to judge of the probable truth of any revelation; and to this mode of trial, the revelations recorded by the sacred writers are willingly submitted. So intimately connected are the dispensations of Moses and Jesus Christ, that the infidel has found it necessary to attempt the overthrow of the former, before he could hope to make any impression on the latter. He was well aware, that if he could succeed in undermining the foundation, the superstructure must of course participate in the ruin. Both dispensations, therefore, must be equally defended;

fended; and both shall now be brought to that test which has been already alluded to, as a fair and equitable mode of deciding on their credibility.

When we reflect on the personal character of the Jewish legislator, we shall soon see the greatest reason for supposing that he was a man endowed with the most estimable qualities. We find him to have been pious, meek, unambitious, and honest. So far was he from aggrandizing his own kindred, that he appears to have left his posterity in the most common stations, without any of that rank and distinction which he enjoyed himself, and which he might have transmitted with so much ease to his descendants. Had he been actuated by the usual motives of worldly wisdom, he would not have permitted the priesthood to be settled on the family of Aaron, nor suffered the command of the people to be transferred to Joshua, who was of another family and a different tribe. So strict was his regard to truth, that he does not spare the recital of his own errors, or those of his brother. Instead of courting popular applause by giving way to the prejudices and failings of his countrymen, he openly rebuked their ingratitude and disobedience, as often as the occasion demanded his reprehensions; and has exhibited them to our view as hardened and rebellious, and apt to murmur and complain on the most trivial occasions. Were we, indeed, to trace him through the whole of his moral character, we should find it such as to claim our admiration, and to command our belief in his veracity. And if we proceed to enquire into his pretensions

tensions to sufficient wisdom and judgment, we must be satisfied, that by being educated in Egypt, the greatest repository of knowledge at that time in the world, he must have been eminently qualified, in respect to human attainments, to fill with propriety the important office to which he had been appointed. The whole tenor of his life, indeed, fully bespeaks his good sense and prudence, as well as the excellence and purity of his moral conduct; and serves as a manifest and undeniable proof that he was not likely to be imposed on himself, or to practice an imposition on others. And in regard to the intrinsic merits of the system itself, so far is it from being contaminated by the prevailing idolatries of Egypt, or any other heathen nation, that we find the Deity described in it in such terms, as we must naturally conceive belong to the Creator and Governor of the world;—we behold him represented as infinite in goodness, wisdom, and power, and expecting from his creatures such a kind of worship and obedience as, we must easily perceive, is a reasonable service, and consonant with our notions of the purity and spirituality of such a Being. Whilst its religious precepts enjoined a gravity and decency of divine worship unknown to or unpractised by other nations, its moral and political institutions were calculated to promote the prosperity and comfort of all who had a claim to its protection and support.

The prophecies that were foretold in the writings of Moses, have been fulfilled with the greatest clearness and precision. He recorded the curse of Noah

on Canaan, and his future servitude to Shem and Japhet his brethren. The Canaanites, the scriptures inform us, were destroyed by the Israelites, who were descended from Shem. He forewarned the people, that "God would raise up, in due time, a prophet from the midst of them, like unto himself, and that to him they should hearken." The history of the New Testament acquaints us, that Jesus Christ, who, like Moses, was not only a prophet, but divinely commissioned to proclaim a new dispensation, derived his birth and lineage from a Jewish family. He has told us, that God promised Abraham that his posterity should be multiplied beyond that of any other man; that "his seed should be as the stars of heaven, and as the sand upon the sea shore;" this, we well know, has been exactly verified; the descendants of a single family have increased to a degree that almost surpasses belief; and are, at this day, though dispersed far and wide, though persecuted with unequalled and unrelenting severity, remarkable instances of numbers and population. He admonished the Jews, that dreadful would be the consequence of their ingratitude and disobedience; that if they forsook the law that had been given them, the LORD would afflict them with plagues, great and of long continuance; history has informed us, that these plagues have been greater and of longer continuance than those which ever beset any other nation. To these might be added a long catalogue of such prophecies as have already had a full and manifest completion; all of which uniformly tend to confirm

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confirm the divine mission of him who originally predicted such remote events.

As to the miraculous operations which are asserted to have been wrought by the Israelitish Leader in Egypt, in the passage through the Red Sea, and in the journey through the wilderness; a slight degree of investigation will be sufficient to convince us, that they may fairly lay claim to probability and belief. No man can reasonably suppose, that if such miracles as Moses recorded never took place, that the imposition could at first have been safely attempted, or afterwards delivered down for the belief of posterity with any hopes of success. We must recollect also, that these accounts were written in the same age in which they are represented to have taken place, and for the perusal of those very persons, who, having been eye-witnesses of the facts, were enabled to contradict the statements, if they had not been founded on truth. The same persons were commanded to transmit these writings to succeeding generations, and to read them carefully and repeatedly, that no material error or misstatement might go down to their descendants. So that, unless the whole body of the Israelites were willing to concur with their leader in fabricating an imposture, for the express purpose of deceiving their successors; or that we can conceive that they could all have been over-reached by his management and dexterity, so as to believe in the reality of a continued series of delusions; we cannot, with any degree of reason, withhold our belief in the existence of those miracles, which,

which, the scriptures assert, were performed by Moses; and consequently must acknowledge, that he has exhibited sufficient and satisfactory proofs, that he derived his commission and office from the hands of **GOD.**

But in addition to the arguments that have been already urged on behalf of the authenticity of the Mosaic writings, we have the numerous testimonies of Heathen historians concurring in their favour. They have declared the common belief of mankind, in regard to the principal events which he has recorded, to be agreeable to the description which he has given of them. The creation of the world out of a chaos, the origin of mankind, their destruction by a deluge, and the re-peopling of the earth from a single family, are asserted in every religious system that has yet been promulgated. This belief, so universally entertained in so many and distant nations, and which has lately received an additional proof from the recent discoveries of the Oriental world, affords the clearest evidence, that the accounts could not well be the contrivance and invention of any individual. And besides, the strong attachment entertained for these writings for so many ages by the Jews themselves, and the great probability of their being able to discover the imposture, if there had been one; the existence of their peculiar mode of worship even unto this day, not only without worldly support, but in the midst of exile, oppression, and persecution; the observance of rites, not only of a most singular but burthensome nature, and which cannot have any possible

possible recommendation, but that of having first been instituted by a divine command; these and many other circumstances afford sufficient ground for the supposition, that had not this people been convinced by the tradition of the same belief, from the times of those who were witnesses of the facts to their descendants of the present day, that such miraculous events did really happen, as plainly pointed out the Divine interference; they would long ago have cast off all regard for a system, which bore so hard on persons of their rebellious spirit and stubborn disposition. The long duration, therefore, of this religion is an argument of great force to prove it to have had a deeper root than any other ever had, the Christian only excepted. Every mode of Heathen worship with which we have been made acquainted, has existed no longer than the power that supported it; when that prop was removed, the whole edifice soon fell to pieces. The Jewish religion, on the contrary, still survives, not only unsupported by any civil establishment, but in opposition to the numerous attempts that have been made to overthrow it. And if, on a fair and impartial enquiry, we are willing to admit the veracity of the Jewish legislator, we have no reason for withholding our belief from those succeeding prophets, who were able to produce the same credentials. Their moral character, like that of Moses, was pure and unfulled; their doctrines, like his, were agreeable to the Divine attributes; their predictions were clearly and fully verified; and their miracles of so striking and unequivocal

quivocal a nature, as to command, from all who witnessed them, immediate conviction. From hence, therefore, it is reasonable to conclude, that they, like Moses, were messengers inspired and sent by God; and consequently, that that part of Revelation which they were commissioned to proclaim, possesses every mark of indubitable truth, which the nature of the thing can possibly admit of. And here, if it be allowable to take that for granted, which, it is hoped, will be soon and undeniably established, the divine authority of Christ and his apostles, their testimony on this subject must be final and decisive. The Evangelists inform us, that our Lord took various and frequent opportunities of referring to the Jewish scriptures, as of Divine origin, and of appealing to them for the proof of many circumstances that related to himself. From the evidence they afforded, he proved that he was the Messiah so long and eagerly expected; out of them he corrected and refuted his opponents; and always laboured to impress his hearers with the belief that they had proceeded from God. The apostles imitated the example of their Master. One of them has assured us, that “all scripture is given by inspiration of God;”* and another asserts, that “prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”†

These are some of the arguments which are commonly made use of, to demonstrate the credibility of that portion of holy writ which goes under the ap-

* 2 Tim. iii. 16.

† 2 Peter i. 21.

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pellation of the Old Testament. The unblemished character of the reputed authors; the intrinsic excellence of the matter itself; the foretelling such events, and performing such wonders, as no one could have effected, unsupported by Divine power; the corroborating testimonies of Heathen historians, as to particular events; the unanimous belief of the Jews; and lastly, the attestation of Christ and his apostles in their favour—form together so strong and decisive a body of evidence, as cannot fail to remove every reasonable doubt, and to satisfy every candid and unprejudiced enquirer.

CHAP. III.

Reasons for believing the New Testament.

HAVING thus endeavoured to establish the credibility of the Old Testament, by arguments of such a popular and intelligible nature as may be easily comprehended by common understandings, I shall proceed to the consideration of that last and noblest scheme of religion, which we find recorded by the writers of the New Testament.

That a person of the name of Jesus Christ appeared in Judea in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar; that he took upon himself the office of a public teacher of religion; made numerous converts to the doctrines he inculcated; performed many extraordinary and miraculous works; and at length suffered death, at the instigation of the Jews, under the Roman governor Pontius Pilate;—are facts, asserted not only by the evangelical writers, but publicly acknowledged by those Jews and Heathens, who were amongst the fiercest and most implacable enemies of Christianity. Taking that for granted, therefore, which has not been denied, let us proceed on an enquiry into the grounds and reasons that we of the present day have, for embracing the doctrines, and submitting to the duties, which are promulgated in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now that these reasons are of the strongest and most satisfactory nature, and fully adequate to the conviction of every rational enquirer, I shall endeavour to establish by a distinct consideration of the three following propositions:—

1st. That the Founder of the Christian Religion derived his commission and office from God.

2dly. That He was not only invested with Divine authority, but was in reality that very Messiah, who had been so long promised, and so ardently expected.

3dly. That the accounts delivered down to us in the New Testament, relative to his life, doctrines, and character, are such as are fairly entitled to our belief.

1st. That

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In order to prove the Divine commission of Jesus Christ, I shall have recourse to the same mode of argument which I before pursued in endeavouring to establish that of Moses, namely, the moral purity of the character of the author; the excellence of the doctrines and precepts he inculcated; the complete accomplishment of the events which he predicted; and the power of working miracles, with which he was invested.

Whatever portion of weight and reputation can be derived to a religion from the character of its author, may be safely claimed on behalf of Christianity, in its utmost latitude. The description given of their Master by his disciples (who had witnessed his conduct, not only in his official capacity as a public teacher, but in the more retired scenes of familiarity and friendship) is such as must tend to exalt him in our estimation to the highest pitch of respect and admiration. They represent him as endowed with such an assemblage of rare and excellent qualities, as were never before united in the same person. They exhibit him as a sinless pattern of piety and virtue; practising, with the most exact and unremitting attention, those sacred duties, the observance of which he so forcibly impressed on all his followers. Easy and pleasant would be the task, did our limits admit of it, of enlarging on his meekness, piety, benevolence, humility, resignation, and fortitude; and of deducing, from a particular recital of such splendid virtues, the fitness of such a person for the
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the important office of a reformer of the world; but it is sufficient to refer to the historians of his life for a more minute detail of that conduct, which so well became the Teacher and example of righteousness. If we compare him with other instructors of mankind, we cannot hesitate for a moment to acknowledge his superiority. The teachers of wisdom in the Heathen schools declaimed on the excellence and fitness of moral virtue; but they were philosophers only in theory, and too often proved themselves as licentious in their practice as the most illiterate of their followers. Mahomet, though the founder of a religion that has taken a deep root, and spread itself far and wide, had not the least shadow of pretence either to purity of sentiment or integrity of conduct. He recommended his doctrines, neither by the mildness of persuasion, nor the energy of conviction, but enforced the observance of them by the sword; and increased the number of his followers by the promise of those sensual gratifications and enjoyments in another world, to which he had wholly abandoned himself in the present. And when we strictly scrutinize into the whole of the conduct even of Moses himself, however excellent, as we have seen, his general character may be, yet was it not without some stain to fully its brightness. Great was his reluctance to obey the orders of the Almighty, when he was appointed to convey the Divine commands to the king of Egypt. Nor did he always put that implicit confidence in the promises of God, which the long experience of his veracity and kindness so evidently demanded.

demand. So great, indeed, were his errors, as to preclude him from partaking of those signal blessings which were reserved for his countrymen in the land of Canaan.

But against Jesus Christ nothing has been offered, that could, in the smallest degree, fix an imputation on his character. The testimonies of his followers have united in its praise; the silence of his adversaries has proved their inability to detract from or to degrade it.

But of all the arguments that conduce to the belief of the divine mission of Jesus Christ, no one is better entitled to our notice, than that which is drawn from the nature of the things contained in his Gospel.

Every one who has bestowed the slightest attention on the New Testament, cannot but have seen, that the doctrines it inculcates are of the most peculiar excellence. It informs us, that God is infinite in all perfections; that he is a pure spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth; that though he be exalted far above all praise, yet that he condescends to accept our prayers and thanksgivings, when offered to him by a sincere and grateful heart;—it teaches us not only the reverence and worship due to our Creator, but that universal benevolence and unbounded charity which we owe to our fellow-creatures;—it represents to us the fallen state of man, and the means by which he may ensure his forgiveness here, and admission to happiness hereafter;—it discovers the true nature and end of the Redeemer's character, and the terms on which our redemption
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may be purchased through such a mediator;—it points out the certainty of a future state of existence and retribution, and declares, that our final allotment of happiness or misery will be decided by our conduct in the present life. These are some of the important *doctrines* which are elucidated and ascertained by the Christian dispensation. And as to the *morality* of the Gospel, that has always been allowed to excel every other system that has yet been offered to the world. Not only does it contain all the most excellent rules that have been recommended by philosophers for the conduct of life, but refines and improves them to the highest state of purity and holiness; it commands us “to be perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect;” to avoid not only the commission of evil, but even its most secret intention or conception. The moral law has said, “thou shalt not kill;” Christ has required us not to give way to violent or unnecessary anger. The same law has forbidden the commission of adultery; Christ has asserted, that “if a man even look upon a woman to lust after her, he hath committed adultery with her in his heart.” In short, “whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are pure, honest, just, and of good report,” we are commanded to put in practice, not from the desire of obtaining human applause, but from a principle of duty and obedience to God.

And if the doctrines and precepts of the Gospel are thus pre-eminent in excellence, well may we claim the same superiority for the different *motives* that induce us to accept it.

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The wisest of the Heathens confessed their inability to hold forth sufficient incentives to their followers, to make them persevere in the duties they recommended; they attempted to advance beyond the narrow limits of the present life, but were soon involved in perplexity and darkness. Though they entertained some faint hopes of a future recompence, they only spoke of it with hesitation and doubt; and admitted the precariousness of any brighter prospect for the virtuous, than that of virtue being its own reward. If we refer to the Mosaic dispensation, we shall find nothing held forth beyond the good things of this life. If the Israelites followed the directions of God, if they humbled themselves before him, and were grateful for his favours, they were comforted with the promise of great temporal blessings; such as, a pleasant and fruitful land, victory over their enemies, length of days, and a long train of prosperous descendants. In these things consisted the reward of their obedience; nor were any positive assurances given them by their leader, that could clearly warrant the expectation of further recompence.*—Nor have the disciples of Mahomet any

* If we take the words of the covenant, which Moses made between God and his people, in their strict sense, they can only have a reference to temporal prosperity; but it must be allowed, that from the tenor of the promises made to their forefathers, the Jews might reasonably conclude, that blessings of an higher nature were to be understood. Many passages might be cited out of the Old Testament, which shew, that they looked for greater and more substantial happiness than the enjoyment of an earthly Canaan.

greater reason to look forward to futurity with certainty or satisfaction. Though the founder of their religion declared his authority to be of supernatural origin, he exhibited no proofs by which its truth could be ascertained; nor left behind him any stronger assurances than his own assertions, that his followers should enjoy even the sensual paradise, with which he dazzled their imaginations.—But far different are the motives that invite the Christian to the performance of his duty. He has not only the path clearly pointed out, in which he is to walk; but is informed to what it leads, and where it is to terminate. He has the consequences of his actions placed before his view, in the most striking colours; he is expressly taught, that the present life is but the dawn of his existence; and that on his good or evil conduct here, will depend his happiness or misery hereafter. If he be willing to accept the gracious terms of salvation that are offered him; if he will strive to go on, “persevering and abounding in the work of the Lord;” he is assured, that his “labour shall not be in vain,” and that there is laid up for him, “in the heavens, a crown that is incorruptible, and never to fade away.” But, on the other hand, if he reject the bounty of God; if he give himself up to the dominion of his passions, and break through those rules which are prescribed for his observance; he is clearly forewarned of the dangers that await him; and taught to look forward to his future portion in that dreadful state, where the “worm never dieth, and the fire is never extinguished.”

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Such is the intrinsic excellence of the matter contained in the Gospel; such are the *doctrines, precepts,* and *motives,* which are held forth as proofs of the Divine origin of that revelation, which Christ was commissioned to proclaim to mankind.

But as a still stronger proof of the Divine energy which attended his ministry, our LORD foretold many extraordinary events, all of which have been exactly accomplished. The same Gospel that contains the prediction of his sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension, records also its full and manifest completion. He promised his disciples, that they should be endowed with power from on high; should be “baptized with the Holy Ghost,” and be enabled to “speak with tongues.” This promise was most wonderfully made good on the day of Pentecost, when these supernatural gifts were bestowed on the apostles. He foretold, that the Gospel should be “preached to all nations” before the destruction of Jerusalem, or within the space of forty years; that the increase of his kingdom should be like “that of a grain of mustard seed;” and that being lifted up, he would “draw all men after him.” This was so strikingly verified, that St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, informs us, that even at that time, only twenty-four years after the death of Christ, “the sound of it was gone out into the uttermost parts of the earth;” and in his Epistle to the Colossians, only twenty-nine years after the same event, that it “was preached to every creature under heaven.” But instead of enumerating the various prophecies

prophecies which were afterwards accomplished, it will be sufficient to notice, under this head, that most celebrated and signal prediction of our LORD, concerning the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, which we find detailed by St. Matthew, in his twenty-fourth chapter. The tragical history of this great event, as we find it described by Josephus from his own observation, so exactly coincides with this amazing prophecy, that it has more the appearance of having been the work of a Christian, who had attempted its illustration, than that of a Jew and an enemy to Christianity. Christ foretold the destruction of the temple in these words, "Seest thou these great buildings? There shall not be left one stone upon another which shall not be thrown down." Josephus informs us, that Titus commanded his soldiers to dig up the very foundations of the temple and city. "He will send forth his armies, and destroy these murderers, and burn up their city." The history acquaints us, that Titus exerted himself to preserve these magnificent edifices in vain, which were destroyed by his soldiers, in direct opposition to his most positive commands. "Thine enemies shall cast a trench around thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side;" we are assured, by the authority of the Jewish historian, that Titus, (though the undertaking was deemed impracticable) succeeded in building a wall of thirty-nine furlongs, having on it thirteen towers, in the space of three days, which so entirely encompassed the city, as to preclude all possibility of escape.

Jerusalem,

Jerusalem, continues the prophecy, shall be “trodden down of the Gentiles;” this so exactly came to pass, that Vespasian commanded the whole land of Judea to be sold to those Gentiles that would buy it; and Hadrian, sixty-three years after, made a law, that no Jew should come into the region round about Jerusalem. Thus it came to pass, says an eminent ecclesiastical writer,* that the Jews being banished thence, and there being a conflux thither of aliens, it became a city and colony of the Romans, and was, in honour of the Emperor, named *Ælia*. The prophecy states, that God would preserve his faithful servants from these impending dangers; “that they who endured to the end should be saved,” and not “a hair of their heads should perish.” If the writers of that age are worthy of credit, we have every reason to believe that the Christians escaped the ruin which came upon the Jews, and that not one of that description perished when Jerusalem was taken. The Jews were not only to see an end both of their civil and religious government, but according to the prediction of Christ, were “to be led captives into all nations.” Titus, we are told by Josephus, took ninety-seven thousand captives, and sent them into Egypt, and the different Roman provinces; from whence they were again dispersed, as we see them at this day, into all the countries and climates of the earth.

From the few instances that have been now brought forward, of the accomplishment of the events that

* Eusebius.

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were predicted by Christ, no man, one should imagine, could reasonably doubt, that he was endowed with the exercise of supernatural power; and that he has exhibited sufficient and satisfactory proof, that he was invested with authority by God himself.

The last argument to which I shall have recourse, to prove the divine mission of Jesus Christ, is one of the most cogent and unanswerable nature—that which arises from the consideration of the miracles which he so frequently performed.

Now the miracles of Christ were great and numerous. He gave eyes to the blind, ears to the deaf, words to the dumb, limbs to the lame, understanding to the lunatic, and life to the dead. These, and many other works of the most extraordinary and astonishing nature, he constantly appealed to as conclusive evidences of his divine authority. Such, indeed, was the effect they produced, not only on his disciples, but even on his greatest enemies, that the chief priests and Pharisees were forced to confess, that “this Man doeth many wonders;” and that “if he was let alone, all men would believe in him.” So numerous were they, that the multitude cried out, “When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than this man hath done.” So great and powerful, that even Herod stiled them “mighty works;” and Nicodemus acknowledged, that “no man could do such works as he did, unless God were with him.” The apostles confidently appeal to the knowledge of their hearers, when they allude to the miraculous works of their Master. “Jesus of Nazareth,”

Nazareth," says St. Peter, "was a man approved amongst you by miracles, signs, and wonders, which God did by him in the midst of you; this, indeed, ye yourselves know." The same apostle appeals also to the knowledge of this by the centurion and his friends; "ye know," says he, "the thing done throughout all Judea, how Jesus, being anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power, went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed with the devil; for God was with him." And lastly, we have the testimony of Christ himself on the same subject, "If I had not done amongst them," says he, "those works which never man did, they had not had sin." When, therefore, we take into consideration the exemplary character of Jesus Christ, the intrinsic excellence of the message which he brought, the exact completion of the events which he foretold, and the wonderful effects of the miracles which he performed; we have surely every reason to conclude, that "God was with him;" and that the religion which he came into the world to institute, has every claim to be regarded as of Divine origin.

2dly. That He was not only invested with Divine authority, but was in reality that very Messiah, who had been so long promised, and so ardently expected.

To enumerate the whole of the prophetic expressions in the Old Testament, that relate to the Messiah, would be to extend the subject to a far greater compass than is consistent with the design of the present treatise. I shall content myself, therefore, with bringing into a short and summary view some of the lead-
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ing particulars of those predictions, which the Jewish doctors, who preceded the time of our LORD's appearance, always applied to the expected Messiah.

GOD, it appears, first opened his intention on this subject in a *general* manner, promising, that the seed of the woman should "bruise the serpent's head."* To Abraham we find a *particular* assurance given, that "in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed;"† and the same renewed afterwards to Isaac‡ and Jacob.§ To the latter the particular tribe of Judah was pointed out, as that out of which the great Deliverer of Mankind was to arise. To David it was revealed, that this illustrious person should be of his family, and "the fruit of his body;"§ to Micah,¶ that he should be born at Bethlehem; to Isaiah,^o that his birth should be miraculous, and his mother a virgin; to the same prophet^s were confided the beneficial effects of his death and sufferings; to Daniel,^r the precise time when he was to be sacrificed; to Haggai,^t Zechariah,^u and Malachi,^c that all these surprising events should be accomplished before the destruction of the second temple; and to the latter, the precedence of a forerunner, who was to give notice of his approach, and "prepare the way before him." To this we may add the exact description of his meek and affectionate manners, of the intrinsic excellence of his

* Gen. iii. 15.

† Gen. xxii. 18.

‡ Gen. xxvi. 4.

‡ Gen. xlix. 10.

§ Ps. cxxxii. 11.

¶ Micah v. 2.

^o Isaiah vii. 14.

^s Isaiah liii.

^r Dan. ix. 24. &c.

^t Haggai ii. 7. 9.

^u Zech. xiv.

^c Mal. iii. iv.

doctrines,

doctrines, the miracles by which his mission was to be confirmed, and every other circumstance relative to his life, death, resurrection, and ascension, as well as to the important office which he was appointed to sustain. Whoever, then, will bestow a candid and attentive perusal on those wonderful prophecies which relate to the Messiah, and compare them with the accounts given by the evangelists of Jesus of Nazareth in the New Testament, cannot fail to be convinced of the precise agreement of the circumstances of the life and character of the latter with those so clearly predicted of the former. And as no other person has yet appeared amongst men, that answered, in the smallest degree, to this prophetic description; and as the Messiah was universally expected to appear in the same country, and at the same time, that Jesus of Nazareth actually did; when we bring all these arguments into one point of view, we cannot hesitate to admit, that the continued series of prophecies relative to this great Deliverer and Saviour have received their completion, and to acknowledge, in the words of holy writ, that “Jesus is the Christ.”*

* To every one desirous of examining for himself on this important subject, it is recommended to compare the 52d and 53d chapters of Isaiah with the 26th and 27th of the Gospel of St. Matthew. So exactly are the predictions of the prophet fulfilled, by the events that are recorded by the Evangelist, that it should seem reasonable to suppose, that no honest infidel could, after such a comparison, remain unconvinced. The effect it had on a celebrated character of the last age, the witty but profligate Earl of Rochester, is well known; though long a professed unbeliever, he was unable to withstand such powerful evidence; and declared himself to be convinced, by a comparison of these different parts of holy writ, of the truth of the revelation of Jesus Christ.—*Bishop Burnet.*

These prophecies were not only applied to the Messiah by the Jewish doctors, but were often appealed to by Christ and his apostles; the latter, indeed, when preaching to the Heathens, generally waved the argument from prophecy, (because their hearers were not so capable of judging of it) and chiefly insisted on that which arose from the numerous miracles which had been wrought by their Master, particularly that most signal one—his resurrection from the dead. But when they had occasion to dispute with the Jews, they constantly referred to the ancient records in their own collection of the law and the prophets, in which so many things were expressly foretold, that had been exactly and literally fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. These prophecies, greatly to the confirmation and advantage of the Christian cause, are extant, even at this day, in the original language; and have been preserved, not only by the friends and supporters of the Gospel, but by its unceasing and most implacable adversaries and opposers.

3dly. That the accounts delivered down to us in the New Testament, relative to his life, doctrines, and character, are such as are fairly entitled to our belief.

When persons relate any matter of fact, it is usual to determine, from the character they bear, the degree of credit that is to be attached to their assertions. When, on enquiry, we find in the witnesses, not only an unblemished integrity, but sufficient knowledge and penetration to ascertain the truth of
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the circumstances they attest; when we are certain, that they could not well be deceived themselves, nor were likely to attempt an imposition on others, we may safely acquiesce in the validity of the testimony thus voluntarily brought forward. Now if we apply these rules to the evangelists and apostles, we shall soon be convinced that they are by no means defective in any such marks of true historians. If we examine into their integrity, we must soon perceive, from the tenor of their writings, that they were incapable of propagating a wilful imposture. Their giving an account of their errors and imperfections, of their mean extraction and employments, their ambitious contentions, and their denial and desertion of their Master in his distress, is an argument of great force in favour of their veracity in other respects. They might have concealed every thing that tended to lower them in the publick estimation with the greatest ease, as it was not essential to the Christian faith that it should be transmitted to posterity. If, therefore, they have recorded transactions that were likely to lessen their own characters, we cannot well require a more satisfactory proof of their strict and impartial regard to truth in every other circumstance which they have asserted in their narratives. And besides, they spoke of such things only as they had seen or heard themselves, or had been informed of by others who had had ocular demonstration. They have plainly shewn, by the general strain of good sense and judgment which runs through their writings, that they were not likely to be deceived by

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imposition;

imposition; and the circumstances they describe are of such a nature, as not to admit of error or delusion. Had they been inclined to impose on the world by the fabrication of a falsehood, they could not have expected to succeed in the deception. They wrote their accounts but a short period after the death of their Master, at a time when multitudes were still alive, who had been witnesses of the different facts which they related, and who, if an opportunity had offered, would gladly have come forward to detect and disgrace them. It is indeed highly improbable, that a set of men should have united to assert, that a person, called Jesus of Nazareth, had come from God, revealed eternal life, confirmed his doctrines by miracles, suffered death, and after three days had risen again from the grave; and after this, that the Holy Ghost had visibly descended on his disciples, on the day of Pentecost, and enabled them to speak all languages; that from thence they had been dispersed through all nations, and had confirmed their preaching by the operation of signs and wonders; it is, I say, not worthy of the slightest degree of credit, that such a narrative should have been attempted by the apostles, or suffered to be propagated by the Jews, (whose interest it was to put a stop to it) had it not been founded on facts, the existence of which had been clearly and publickly ascertained. But even were we to suppose that the apostles were inclined to practice such an imposition, with what possible view could they have been led to attempt it? Men are not often found to do mischief for mischief's sake,
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even when they may do it with impunity. How much more improbable then is it, that men should do it, when so far from having the prospect of advantage before them, they were certain of incurring the greatest danger? Had they wished to acquire the honours or riches of the world, they took the worst possible method that could have been devised to attain them, as the doctrines they taught were in direct opposition to the inclinations of those who were able to promote their private interests. They must have been already convinced, from the fate of their Master, that nothing but evil was reasonably to be expected from preaching a doctrine, which had been to the “Jews a stumbling-block, and which would, probably, by the Greeks, be accounted foolishness.” They must have been well aware, that their perseverance in the same cause would eventually expose them, as it before had Him, to contempt, poverty, imprisonment, and death.

The last argument to which I shall have recourse, to prove the credibility of the apostolic testimony, arises from the agreement of the different writers, as to the material facts which they have related. If several persons, who were dispersed throughout different nations, and cut off from any communication with one another, were to write accounts of the same transactions, and to agree with the greatest exactness in their relation of the principal events they had undertaken to describe; so far would any little disagreement, in regard to matters of an indifferent nature, be from bringing dis-
credit

credit on their testimony, that it would be a convincing proof that they had not invented the story in conjunction. Had they united in propagating the same falshood, they would have taken care to have agreed precisely in the circumstances; had they fabricated separate accounts, they could not possibly have agreed with so much nicety in the material facts. The harmony, therefore, so visible in their narratives in regard to things essential, and their difference in those of a more trivial nature, cannot fail to afford to any reasonable person a good and solid argument for the credibility of the whole.

If, then, the veracity of the sacred writers appear to be unquestionable, it follows, that the New Testament must have come from God, as they have assured us, that they proclaimed it to the world under the directing influence of his holy spirit. How far, indeed, this supernatural influence extended, or in what particular manner it was afforded, the plain unlettered Christian will not find himself concerned to investigate. It will be sufficient for him to be persuaded, that the promise of our LORD to his disciples, was accurately fulfilled, that “when the Comforter should come, he should bring all things to their remembrance, what he had said unto them.” We may safely conclude, that the same Spirit which gave them utterance when they were preaching the Gospel, presided over the accounts which they composed for the instruction of posterity, and enabled them to record, in a faithful and infallible manner, the whole will of God—every thing that was necessary for us to know, believe, or practise, in order to ensure our final salvation.

CHAP. IV.

Reasons for believing the present Scriptures to be agreeable to the original.

IT only remains now to enquire, whether we have or have not sufficient grounds to believe, that the books which we commonly receive under the name of the Scriptures, contain the genuine and authentic writings of those persons to whom they are ascribed. On this part of our subject, it will be sufficient to bring forward an abridgment of such arguments as are usually referred to in support of the affirmative.

Nothing could exceed the care and attention of the Jewish nation to preserve their records from alteration or corruption. By the command of Moses,* the book of the law was deposited in the tabernacle not long before his death, as were the other sacred books, as soon as they were produced. They were afterwards removed by Solomon† into the Temple, which was allotted for the reception of the future compositions of the inspired writers.

If the originals perished in the flames of the Temple, (a fact that has not been ascertained) there can be no doubt but that numerous copies were carefully preserved during the Babylonish captivity, from

* Deut. xxxi. 26.

† 1 Kings viii. 3, 9.

which

which Ezra was enabled to make an authentic selection, and to deposit it, increased by the additional works of the later prophets, in the second temple. Whether the copy which remained in the same sacred repository at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, were the same as that made by Ezra or not, we have no reason to suppose it to have been spurious or incorrect; as we do not find that the later Jews were more negligent in preserving this valuable treasure, than those who had preceded them. We may fairly indeed infer from the silence of Christ on this head, that the writings then received as the works of Moses and the prophets, were pure and unsuspected; for although often induced to reproach the scribes and teachers with the falshood of their doctrines, we do not find that he ever charged them with any wilful attempts to alter or corrupt the sacred oracles that had been committed to their charge. And after the destruction of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jews into different nations, it must be evident, from the vast multiplication of copies, that intentional corruption was no longer in their power. Besides, from that time, the converts to Christianity were equally interested with the Jews themselves, in preserving the source of their doctrines from error and pollution. As Christianity was to be proved out of the law and the prophets, it was the business of Christians to take especial care that they might be able to appeal to such testimony, as could not be denied to be the plain and undisputed word of God.

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The books of the New Testament, being far less ancient, are the more easily proved to be genuine and authentick. It is known that they were written either by the Apostles of Christ themselves, or by those who wrote under their direction; these books were received as such in the apostolical age itself, some of the first Christian writers, as Ignatius and Polycarp, living long enough to see the canon generally received and settled. They were quoted by a long succession of writers, from the apostolical times to the present. They were at a very early period collected into a distinct volume, were soon distinguished by particular titles, translated into different languages, explained by numerous commentaries, expounded in publick assemblies, appealed to by contending sects, and referred to by the greatest enemies of the Christian cause. And when, in addition to this evidence, we take into the account the dispersion of the Christians into so many distant countries, and the numerous copies and translations that must have been in their possession, we cannot but admit the extreme improbability of the success of any attempt, which tended to substitute false books instead of true, or to vitiate the true ones to any considerable degree.

Such are the grounds on which we are called upon to acquiesce in the canon of the Old and New Testaments, and to receive them as containing, without any material alteration, the authentick writings of the sacred authors to whom they are attributed.

CHAP. V.

Additional Reasons for believing in the Divine Origin of Christianity.

IN addition to the arguments already brought forward, I have only to advert to the confirmation that Christianity has often received from the events that have taken place since it was first promulgated. When we consider the rapid and extensive propagation of doctrines, which, so far from according with the common sentiments of mankind, were in direct contradiction to them; when we reflect, that a few plain men, of the lowest origin and education, went forth, armed only with the weapons of faith and truth, to encounter the power of princes, the bigotry of priests, the wisdom of philosophers, and the prejudices of the populace; when we recollect that these things took place, not in a dark age or uncivilized country, but in times and places celebrated for the refinements of elegance and learning; when, I say, we take all these circumstances together, it is surprising that even truth itself, under so many disadvantages, should have had so complete and illustrious a triumph; and can be rationally accounted for by no other means, but that of the extraordinary interposition of Almighty God in its favour and support.

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Another argument which may be urged on behalf of the Christian religion, is drawn from the consideration of the beneficial consequences that have already attended it. Were we to compare the present state of mankind with that of those who lived under the light of nature only, we should immediately perceive the superiority of the former, both civil and religious;—we should be convinced, that the great and visible change which has taken place in the world, has been owing to the observance of a religious system, which has prescribed such duties and regulations to mankind, as are best adapted to their wants, and suited to their convenience;—we should soon be led to acknowledge, that it has paved the way for the establishment of the greatest temporal blessings; that it has left manifest traces of its genial influence on every condition of life, both publick and private; that it has entered into the constitutions of civil governments, and laid the foundation of those laws which conduce to the general order, security, and peace; that it has descended into the retirement of private life, and has heightened those domestick comforts and endearments which form so large a portion of human happiness. These assertions might easily be established by particular proofs, could our present discussion be extended with convenience to so great a length. It will be sufficient, however, to refer those who doubt the superior efficacy of Christianity in bringing about such important improvements, to the times when natural religion was the only source of information; they will then see, that it completely

pletely failed, not only in satisfying mankind as to future prospects, but was woefully deficient in contributing to their present and temporal happiness. On this head, indeed, little occasion has the advocate for Christianity to go back to the former ages of the world. They that will not allow it the credit of having meliorated and improved the condition of man, have had an opportunity of witnessing the effects that have resulted from its open rejection. They have seen men absolved from every religious obligation, and left to their own natural propensities, to guide their conduct towards each other; and the consequence has been such as might have easily been predicted; the venerable fabrick of social order has been shaken to its base, and but for the timely interference of Divine Providence, must have been prostrated in the dust.

The last argument I shall adduce in support of the credibility of revealed religion, arises from the concurring testimonies of the many wise and eminent men who have openly professed their conviction of its truth. Now, although our religion wants not the authority of names, however great and illustrious, to defend it against its adversaries, it may not be wholly useless to bring forward such weighty and efficacious evidence on its behalf. A list of this kind might easily be made out, which would embrace almost all the distinguished characters that have contributed to improve or adorn the world. Let us only refer to a few of our countrymen; let us appeal to the celebrated names of Bacon, Newton, Milton, Boyle, Locke,

Locke, and Addison. These men, perhaps, it will not be denied, were endowed with as much sagacity and penetration, and were as capable of discriminating between truth and fallhood as the most enlightened philosophers of the present day; and yet these men were CHRISTIANS. After a long and serious investigation of its evidences, they avowed their implicit belief in the truth of Christianity; regulated their lives by its doctrines and precepts, and “departed in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through Jesus Christ.” Let him, therefore, who feels himself inclined to doubt on this important subject, call to remembrance the sentiments of those illustrious men, and then put this question to himself—Which is entitled to the greatest respect, their opinion or mine? Who is the most likely to ascertain the truth, they or I? Nothing, surely, but the grossest self-delusion, can dictate any other answer than the true one.

Such is the foundation on which the holy scriptures rest for support. If the arguments that have been alledged have any weight, the inference is simple and apparent. He that shall feel a conviction of their truth, must see the immediate necessity of a diligent application to that study, which it is both his duty and interest, beyond all things, to pursue. In the Scriptures he will find every thing he is concerned to know, displayed in the most striking and lively colours; he will there find the most infallible directions to point out his duty, and the most animating encouragements to the performance of it; he

he will there meet with that knowledge which will render him wise, “ even unto salvation ; ” he will there be instructed in those pursuits, which will essentially contribute to his happiness in time, and which cannot fail to complete it in eternity.



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