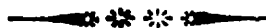


A
PLEA FOR RELIGION
AND THE
SACRED WRITINGS:
ADDRESSED TO THE
DISCIPLES OF THOMAS PAINE,
AND TO
WAVERING CHRISTIANS
OF
EVERY DENOMINATION.



BY THE REV. DAVID SIMPSON, M. A.

He that believeth shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

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While some flattering panegyric is pronounced at my interment, I may perhaps be hearing my just condemnation at a superior tribunal ; where an unerring verdict may sentence me to everlasting infamy. But I cast myself on his absolute mercy, through the infinite merits of the Redeemer of lost mankind. Adieu, till we meet in the world of spirits."

Nothing is so well calculated to convince us of the vast importance of living wholly under the power of the gospel, as seeing great and valuable men dying in such a low and unworthy manner, as many of the first characters of our world have been known to do. The cases of Grotius and Salmasius, of Johnson and Haller, are mortifying instances. Great talents, great learning, great celebrity, are all utterly insufficient to constitute a man happy, and to give him peace and confidence in a dying hour. We know the promises of God are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus : but if the promises be sure, and strongly animating, to the proper objects of them, the threatenings of God are not less infallible, and at the same time are extremely alarming to the proper objects of them. Nothing within the compass of nature can enable a man, with the eyes of a mind properly enlightened, to face death without fear and dismay, but a strong conscious sense, founded on scriptural evidence, that our sins are pardoned, that God is reconciled, and that the Judge of the world is become our friend.



EXAMPLES OF PERSONS LIVING AND DYING, EITHER WITH CONFIDENCE, OR IN THE FULL ASSURANCE OF FAITH.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

"Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

Addison was a very able and elegant advocate for the Bible, in life and death. Just before his departure.

having sent for a young nobleman nearly related to him, who requested to know his dying commands—his answer was—"See in what peace a christian can die!"

He spake with difficulty, and soon expired.—Through grace divine, how great is man! Through divine mercy, how stingless is death!

"He taught us how to live; and, oh! too high
A price for knowledge, taught us how to die."

Leland, after spending a long and exemplary life in the service of the gospel, closed it with the following words:—"I give my dying testimony to the truth of christianity. The promises of the gospel are my support and consolation. They, alone, yield me satisfaction in a dying hour. I am not afraid to die. The gospel of Christ has raised me above the fear of death; for I know that my Redeemer liveth."

Pascal was one of the most humble and devout believers in Jesus that ever lived. Bayle saith of his life, that "an hundred volumes of sermons are not worth so much as this single life, and are far less capable of disarming men of impiety. The extraordinary humility and devotion of Pascal gives a more sensible mortification to the libertines of the age, than if one was to let loose upon them a dozen missionaries. They can now no longer attack us with their favourite and darling objection, that there are none but little and narrow spirits, who profess themselves the votaries of piety and religion: for we can now tell them, and boldly tell them, that both the maxims and practice thereof, have been pushed to the strongest degree, and carried to the greatest height, by one of the profoundest geometricians, by one of the most subtle metaphysicians, and by one of the most solid and penetrating genii, that ever yet existed on this earth."(9)

(9) "This great man, during some of the latter years of his life, spent his whole time in prayer, and reading the Holy Scriptures; and in this he took incredible delight."

Olympia Fulvia Morata, was one of the earliest and brightest ornaments of the reformation. She could declaim in Latin, converse in Greek, and was a critic in the most difficult classicks. But after it pleased God by his grace to open the eyes of her mind to discover the truth, she became enamoured of the sacred scriptures, above all other books in the world, and studied them by day and by night. And when dissolution approached, she declared she felt nothing but “an inexpressible tranquillity and peace with God through Christ.”—Her mouth was full of the praises of God, and she emphatically expressed herself by saying—“I am nothing but joy.”

Lord Russel delivered himself, just before his execution, in the strongest terms of faith and confidence. He said:—“Neither my imprisonment nor fear of death have been able to discompose me in any degree. On the contrary I have found the assurances of the love and mercy of God in and through my blessed Redeemer; in whom I only trust. And I do not question but I am going to partake of that fullness of joy, which is in his presence; the hopes of which do so wonderfully delight me, that I think this is the happiest time of my life, though others may look upon it as the saddest.”

Charles the Fifth having alarmed and agitated all Europe nearly fifty years, retired from the world, and enjoyed more complete contentment in this situation than all his grandeur had ever yielded him. “I have tasted,” said he, “more satisfaction in my solitude, in one day, than in all the triumphs of my former reign; and I find that the sincere study, profession, and practice of the christian religion, hath in it such joys and sweetness as courts are strangers to.”(10)

(10) Louis, one of the late dukes of Orleans, expressed the delight he found in piety and devotion in the following terms; “I know by experience, that sublunary grandeur and sublunary pleasure are deceitful and vain, and are always infinitely below the concep-

Oxenstiern, chancellor of Sweden, was one of the most able and learned men of his time, and yet he was not too great and too wise to be above being taught by the sacred writings. "After all my troubles and toilings in the world," says he, "I find that my private life in the country has afforded me more contentment, than ever I met with in all my public employments. I have lately applied myself to the study of the bible, wherein all wisdom, and the greatest delights are to be found. I therefore counsel you to make the study and practice of the word of God your chief delight; as indeed it will be to every soul that savours the truths of God, which infinitely excel all worldly things."

Selden, the lawyer, whom Grotius calls "the glory of the English nation," was, as Hale declared, "a resolved serious christian, and a great adversary to Hobbes's errors." He was one of the most eminent philosophers, and most learned men of his time. He had taken a diligent survey of all kinds of learning, and had read as much, perhaps, as any man ever did; and yet, towards the latter end of his days, he declared to Usher, that notwithstanding he had been so laborious in his inquiries, and curious in his collec-

tions we form of them. But, on the contrary, such happiness and such complacency may be found in devotion and piety, as the sensual mind has no idea of."

Gustavus Adolphus, king of Sweden, was also eminent for his piety towards God, and has been known to spend hours together in religious retirement. So too Alfred.

George II. during war time, would constantly be in his closet between five and six o'clock in the morning, winter and summer, praying for the success of his fleets and armies.

A remarkable instance of attention to the blessing of the Divine Being we have also in the conduct of lord Duncan. Previous to the action on the coast of Holland, during the awful moments of preparation, he called all his officers upon deck, and in their presence prostrated himself in prayer, before the God of Hosts, committing himself and them, with the cause they maintained, to his sovereign protection, his family to his care, his soul and body to the disposal of his providence; then, rising from his knees, he gave command to make the attack.

tions, and had possessed himself of a treasure of books and manuscripts upon all ancient subjects ; yet “ he could rest his soul on none, save the scriptures.”(1)

Claude was a very considerable man among the protestants who were driven from France by Lewis the fourteenth. When he was taken ill he sent for the senior pastor of the church, to whom, in the presence of all his family, he expressed himself thus :—“ Sir, I was desirous to see you, and to make my dying declaration before you. I am a miserable sinner before God. I most heartily beseech him to shew me mercy, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. I hope he will hear my prayer. He has promised to hear the cries of repenting sinners. I adore him for blessing my ministry. It has not been fruitless in his church ; it is an effect of God’s grace, and I adore his providence for it.”

After pausing a while, he added, “ I have carefully examined all religions. None appear to me worthy of the wisdom of God, and capable of leading man to happiness, but the christian religion. I have diligently studied popery and the reformation. The protestant religion, I think, is the only good religion. It is all found in the holy scriptures, the word of God. From this, as from a fountain, all religions must be drawn. Scripture is the root, the protestant religion is the trunk and branches of the tree. It becomes you all to keep steady to it.”

About a week before he died, with true patriarchal dignity, he sat up in his bed, and asked to speak with his son and family. “ Son,” said he, tenderly embracing him, “ I am leaving you. The time of my departure is at hand.” Silence, and sobs, and floods of tears flowed, each clasped in the others arms. The

(1) This is equally true of that great philosophic soul, Marcilius Ficinus, who was as learned a man as Italy ever produced. After he had read all good authors, he rested in the bible as the only book.

The family all came, and asked his blessing. "Most willingly," replied he, "will I give it you." Mrs. Claude kneeled down by the bed-side. "My wife," said he, "I have always tenderly loved you. Be not afflicted at my death. The death of the saints is precious in the sight of God.—In you I have seen a sincere piety. I bless God for it. Be constant in serving him with your whole heart. He will bless you. I recommend my son and his family to you, and I beseech the Lord to bless you." To his son, who, with an old servant was kneeling by his mother, he said, among other things, "son, you have chosen the good part. Perform your office as a good pastor, and God will bless you. Love and respect your mother. Be mindful of this domestic. Take care she wants nothing as long as she lives. I give you all my blessing." He afterwards said, at several times, "I am so oppressed, that I can only attend to two of the great truths of religion, the mercy of God, and the gracious aid of his holy Spirit.—I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him, against that day.—My whole recourse is to the mercy of God. I expect a better life than this.—Our Lord Jesus Christ is my only righteousness."

Thus died the venerable Claude, in the sixty-eighth year of his age. A. D. 1687.

The Rev. Samuel Walker was a minister of no ordinary rank in the church of Christ. His excessive labours speedily ruined his constitution, and he died at the age of forty-eight. When his dissolution drew near, after much former darkness, but the most assured confidence in God, he broke out to his nurse in this rapturous expression :—"I have been upon the wings of the cherubim! Heaven has in a manner been opened to me! I shall soon be there!"—Next day to a friend who came to see him he said, with a joy in his countenance more than words can utter:—"O had I strength to speak, I could tell you such news

as would rejoice your very soul! I have had such views of heaven! But I am not able to say more."

Hervey was an excellent scholar, and a believer in the bible, with its most distinguishing truths. When he apprehended himself to be near the close of life, and stood, as it were, on the brink of the grave, with eternity full in view, he wrote to a friend at a distance to tell him what were his sentiments in that awful situation. "I have been too fond," said he, "of reading every thing valuable and elegant that has been penned in our language, and been peculiarly charmed with the historians, orators, and poets of antiquity: but were I to renew my studies, I would take leave of those accomplished trifles; I would resign the delights of modern wits, amusement, and eloquence, and devote my attention to the scripture of truth. I would sit with much greater assiduity at my divine Master's feet, and desire to know nothing in comparison of Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

After this, when his dissolution drew still nearer, he said to them about him:—"How thankful am I for death! It is the passage to the Lord and Giver of eternal life.—O welcome, welcome, welcome death! thou mayest well be reckoned among the treasures of the christian! To live is Christ, but to die is gain! Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy most holy and comfortable word; for mine eyes have seen thy precious salvation."

Leechman, late principal of the college of Glasgow, at the close of his life, thus addressed the son of a worthy nobleman, who was designed for the church, and the early part of whose education had been much under the doctor's eye:

"You see the situation I am in: I have not many days to live: I am glad you have had an opportunity of witnessing the tranquillity of my last moments. But it is not tranquillity and composure alone; it is joy and triumph; it is complete exultation."—His features

kindled, his voice rose as he spoke. "And whence," says he, "does this exultation spring?—From that book, pointing to a bible that lay on the table—from that book, too much neglected indeed, but which contains invaluable treasures! treasures of joy and rejoicing! for it makes us certain that this mortal shall put on immortality."

Romaine was a zealous and successful preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and adorned it by a suitable character, above fifty years. In his last illness not one fretful or murmuring word ever escaped his lips. "I have," said he, "the peace of God in my conscience, and the love of God in my heart. I knew before the doctrines I preached to be truths, but now I experience them to be blessings. Jesus is more precious than rubies, and all that can be desired on the earth, is not to be compared to him." He was in full possession of his mental powers to the last moment, and near his dissolution cried out, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty! Glory be to thee on high, for such peace on earth, and good will to men."

These are glorious instances of the power of religion upon the mind, in the most trying circumstances of nature. I know it is fashionable for lukewarm and pharisaical christians, who have a form of godliness, but deny the power, and for *philosophisters* of every description, to treat all such death-bed scenes as delusive and fanatical. I am not, however, ashamed to say, that dissolutions of the above description, appear to me honourable to religion, and desirable above all enjoyments of the world. If this be enthusiasm, may I be the greatest enthusiast that ever existed. Such enthusiasts, thanks be to God, have appeared, more or less, in every age of the gospel-dispensation. They are increasing now in a considerable degree, and they shall abound more and more, maugre all the opposition of infidelity, and the cool moral harangues of a secular and lukewarm clergy. Large numbers of examples might be produced, of a similar kind, from

those who lived before the rise both of methodism and puritanism, besides these we have mentioned ; but the only one I shall introduce here, by way of contrast to the death-bed scenes of Chesterfield, Voltaire, Rousseau, and the other unhappy characters we have recorded, shall be that of the learned and excellent Bedell, the scourge of ecclesiastical corruption, a pattern for prelates and clergymen, and the glory of the Irish hierarchy.—After a life spent in the most laborious service of his Divine Master, when he apprehended his great change to draw near, he called for his sons, and his sons' wives, and spake to them, at several times, as he was able, the following words : —“ I am going the way of all flesh : I am ready to be offered up, and the time of my departure is at hand. Knowing, therefore, that shortly I must put off this tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me, I know also that if this my earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, I have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, a fair mansion in the New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God.—Therefore, to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain ; which increaseth my desire even now to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better than to continue here in all the transitory, vain, and false pleasures of this world, of which I have seen an end. —Hearken, therefore, unto the last words of your dying father. I am no more in this world, but ye are in the world. I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God, through the all-sufficient merits of Jesus Christ my Redeemer ; who ever lives to make intercession for me ; who is a propitiation for all my sins, and washed me from them all in his own blood ; who is worthy to receive glory and honour, and power ; who hath created all things, and for whose pleasure they are and were created.—My witness is in heaven, and my record on high, that I have endeavoured to glorify God on earth and

in the ministry of the gospel of his dear Son, which was committed to my trust, I have finished the work which he gave me to do, as a faithful ambassador of Christ, and steward of the mysteries of God, I have preached righteousness in the great congregation, lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord ! thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart ; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation ; I have not concealed thy loving-kindness and thy truth from the great congregation of mankind. He is near that justifieth me, .. that I have not concealed the words of the Holy One , but that the words that he gave me, I have given to you, and ye have received them.—I had a desire and resolution to walk before God in every stage of my pilgrimage, from my youth up to this day, in truth, and with an upright heart, and to do that which was upright in his eyes, to the utmost of my power ; and what things were gain to me formerly, these things I now count loss for Christ : yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord ; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things ; and I account them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ ; the righteousness which is of God by faith ; that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death. I press, therefore, towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.—Let nothing separate you from the love of Christ, neither tribulation, nor distress, nor persecution, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor sword ; though, as we hear and see, for his sake we are killed all the day long, we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter ; yea, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us : for I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor

things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus, my Lord. Therefore, love not the world, nor the things of the world ; but prepare daily and hourly for death that now besieges us on every side, and be faithful unto death, that we may meet together joyfully on the right hand of Christ at the last day, and follow the Lamb, whithersoever he goeth ; with all those that are clothed in white robes, in sign of innocency, and palms in their hands, in sign of victory ; who came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. They shall hunger no more, nor thirst, neither shall the sun light on them ; nor any heat ; for the Lamb, that is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.—Choose rather, with Moses to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season ; which will be bitterness in the latter end. Look, therefore, for the sufferings, and be made partakers of the sufferings of Christ ; to fill up that which is behind of the affliction of Christ in your flesh, for his body's sake, which is the church. What can you look for, but one woe after another, while the man of sin is thus suffered to rage, and to make havoc of God's people at his pleasure, while men are divided about trifles, that ought to have been more vigilant over us, and careful of those, whose blood is precious in God's sight, though now shed every where like water. If ye suffer for righteousness sake, happy are ye ; be not afraid of their terror, neither be ye troubled ; and be ye in nothing terrified by your adversaries ; which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. For to you it is given in behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for his sake. Rejoice, therefore, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when

his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. And if ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; the Spirit of glory, and of Christ resteth on you; on their part he is evil spoken of, on your part he is glorified.—God will surely visit you in due time, and turn your captivity as the rivers of the south, and bring you back again into your possession in this land: though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations; yet ye shall reap in joy, though now you sow in tears: all our losses shall be recompensed with abundant advantages; for my God will supply all your need, according to his riches in glory, by Christ Jesus, who is able to do exceeding abundantly for us, above all that we are able to ask or think.”

After that, he blessed his children and those that stood about him, in an audible voice, in these words: “God of his infinite mercy bless you all, and present you holy, and unblameable, and irreproveable in his sight, that ye may meet together at the right hand of our blessed Saviour Jesus Christ, with joy unspeakable and full of glory, amen. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course of my ministry and life together. Though grievous wolves have entered in among us, not sparing the flock; yet I trust the great Shepherd of the flock will save and deliver them out of all places, where they have been scattered in this cloudy and dark day: and they shall be no more a prey to the heathen, neither shall the beasts of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and none shall make them afraid. O Lord, I have waited for thy salvation. I have kept the faith once given to the saints; for I know in whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.”

After this, the good bishop spake little more. His sickness increased, his speech failed, and he slumbered

the remainder of his time away, till his discharge came.

Let incredulity itself say, if this was not an admirable close of a laborious and useful life.

One may defy all the sons of infidelity to shew us an example among their brethren, of a life so useful, and a death so great, so noble, so glorious as this of the good bishop.(2)

These are all matters of fact. Most of the persons mentioned were of the first reputation in their respective spheres of action. It would be prudent to review the whole; to compare the several instances; and weigh thoroughly the issue: for though it is not our province to determine the final fates of men, we may, from such comparison, see clearly whose situation is most eligible at the close of life, and whose case stands fairest for future felicity. Extremely weak, therefore, would it be, to let any man sneer us out of our bible, our Redeemer, and our salvation. Did we ever know a person lament, when he came to die, that he had taken too much pains to serve his Creator, and save his soul alive? Did we ever hear of a deist, who gloried, in his departing moments, that he had been favoured with success in making converts to the principles of infidelity? Or did we ever see a sound scholar, who was at the same time, a chaste, temperate, moral, and conscientious man, that lived and died an unbeliever.(3) Instances of a contrary nature we

(2) Be it observed, what use this admirable man makes of the sacred writings.

“ They know not ————

That scripture is the only cure of woe :
That field of promise, how it flings abroad
Its odour o’er the christian’s thorny road ;
The soul, reposing on assur’d relief,
Feels herself happy amidst all her grief,
Forgets her labour as she toils along,
Weeps tears of joy, and bursts into a song.”

(3) Bolingbroke was a man of considerable talents; he lived and died an infidel. But he was a libertine, and much addicted to wo-

have known many, but rarely one which comes up to this description. Persons of an affected liberality of mind, indeed are frequently found, who hector, domineer, and speak great swelling words of vanity, while health and prosperity smile upon them; but they generally lose their courage, and appear to infinite disadvantage, when death and judgment stare them in the face. If their souls be not harrowed up with horror, as in the cases of Voltaire, Newport, Altamont, and others; at best they are sullen, gloomy, disconsolate, like Hobbes and Chesterfield; or, having their consciences scared as with an hot iron, they

men and wine, we therefore wonder not that he rejected christianity, notwithstanding the high compliments which he thought proper to pay it.

Temple too was "a person of true judgment in civil affairs, and very good principles with relation to government; but in nothing else. He was a vain man, much blown up in his own conceit, which he shewed too indecently on all occasions. He seemed to think that things were as they are from all eternity: at least he thought religion was fit only for the mob. He was a great admirer of the sect of Confucius in China, who were atheists themselves, or left religion to the rabble. He was a corrupter of all that came near him, and delivered himself up wholly to study, ease, and pleasure."

Shaftsbury, was "a man of various talents, but a deist, at best, in his religion. He had the dotage of astrology in him to a high degree.—He fancied, that after death our souls lived in stars. He had a general knowledge of the slighter parts of learning, but understood little to the bottom: so he triumphed in a rambling way of talking, but argued slightly when he was held close to any point. He had a wonderful faculty at opposing, and running things down; but had not the like force in building them up. He had such an extravagant vanity in setting himself out, that it was very disagreeable."

Saville, marquis of Halifax, was "a man of great and ready wit; full of life, and very pleasant; much turned to satire. He let his wit run much on matters of religion: so that he passed for a bold and determined atheist, though he often protested he was not one. He confessed he could not swallow every thing that divines imposed on the world. He was a christian by submission; he believed as much as he could.—In a fit of sickness, I knew him very much touched with a sense of religion. I was then often with him. He seemed full of good purposes; but they went off with his sickness."

This is a specimen of the general characters of those who reject the gospel of Christ.

are insensible to the vast realities of the invisible world, brave it out, and sport blind-fold on the brink of destruction, after the manner of Servin, Hume, Emerson, and several of the late French philosophers. But surely a conduct of this kind is highly unbecoming men of wisdom, even upon their own supposition, that death is an eternal sleep. Is annihilation so small a matter, that a man can look upon it with complacency? Hume's conduct was infinitely unnatural. It was the effect of pride and sophistical philosophy. "He had a vanity in being thought easy," as Johnson observes,

"That must be our cure,
To be no more. Sad cure! For who would lose
————— this intellectual being,
Those thoughts that wander through eternity,
To perish rather, swallow'd up and lost
In the wide womb of uncreated night,
Devoid of sense and motion?"

It will be the concern of every wise man, therefore, to take warning in time, to be cautious how he gives credit to the representations of unbelievers, and consider well what the end of our present state of trial will be. It is an easy business to revile and stigmatize the bible. Few things more so. Any smatterer in learning, who hath got a wicked heart, a witty head, and a comfortable flow of scurrilous language, is competent to the task. Examples of this kind we meet with in every neighbourhood. Profound scholars, however, and modest men, have always been incapable of such conduct. What lord Bacon saith of atheism is equally true of deism: "A little philosophy inclineth man's mind to atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about to religion."(4)

(4) Bacon was a serious believer in the gospel of Christ, and hath given us his creed.—In a prayer which he wrote upon a certain occasion, he addresses the Almighty by saying—"Thy creatures have been my books, but thy scriptures much more. I have sought thee in the courts, fields, and gardens; but I have found thee in thy temples."

Our great moral poet too, will teach us the same lesson :

“ A little learning is a dang'rous thing ;
 Drink deep or taste not the Pærian spring :
 There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
 But drinking largely sobers us again.”(5)

What then if Paine, who is both illiterate and immoral, insolent and satirical, ill qualifications for the discovery of moral and religious truth, which consists in purity, modesty, humility, sobriety, and goodness, though otherwise a man of good natural understanding, is an unbeliever in the divine mission of the Son of God? It may be some consolation to remember, that the first characters, who ever adorned our world, in every department of human life, have not been ashamed of the gospel of Christ.—Every man would do well to consider, in these days of abounding licentiousness, by way of supporting the mind against the ridicule of professed deists, that the divines, Butler, and Bentley, and Barrow, and Berkeley, and Cudworth, and Clarke, and Sherlock, and Doddridge, and Lardner, and Pearson, and Taylor, and Usher, and Watts, and a thousand more, were believers : that the poets, Spencer, and Waller, and Cowley, and Prior, and Thomson, and Gray, and Young,

Steel gives us a fine character of this extraordinary person :—“ He was a man who for greatness of genius, and compass of knowledge, did honour to his age and country ; one might almost say, to human nature itself. He possessed at once all those extraordinary talents which were divided amongst the greatest authors of antiquity. He had the sound, distinct, comprehensive knowledge of Aristotle, with all the beautiful lights, graces and embellishments of Cicero. One does not know which to admire most in his writings, the strength of reason, force of style, or brightness of imagination.”

(5) “ The christian religion has nothing to apprehend from the strictest investigation of the most learned of its adversaries ; it suffers only from the misconceptions of sciolists, and silly pretenders to superior wisdom. A little learning is far more dangerous to the faith of those who possess it, than ignorance itself.”

and Milton, and Cowper, were believers: that the statesmen, Hyde, and Somers, and Cullen, and Pulteney, and Howard, and Harrington, and King, and Barrington, and Littleton, with numberless more, (6) were believers: that the moralists, Steel, and Addison, and Hawkesworth, and Johnson, were believers: that the physicians, Arbuthnot, and Cheyne, and Browne, and Boerhaave, and Pringle, and Hartley, and Haller, and Mead, and Fothergill, were believers: that the lawyers, Hale, and Melmoth, and Forbes, and Hailes, and Pratt, and Blackstone, and Jones, (7) were believers; that the philosophers, Pascal, and Grotius, and Ray, and Cotes, and Ferguson, and Adams, and Locke, and Euler, and Newton, were believers. (8) Where is the great misfortune, then, to the interests of religion, if lukewarm christians, of every persuasion, betray the cause they pretend to espouse; and if unbelievers of every description imagine a vain thing against the Redeemer of mankind, and the book which he hath caused to be written for our instruction. Nothing less than demonstration on the side of infidelity, should induce any man to resist the momentum that these venerable names give in favour of the gospel. Many of them

(6) Washington was one of the first of warriors, the first of politicians, and the worthiest of men. He was the delight of an admiring and astonished world; and yet—hear it, O ye minute philosophers of degenerate Europe—he was a serious christian!

(7) It is a pleasure to hear such men as Erskine, the first orator of the age, come boldly forward in favour of the gospel of Jesus. “No man ever existed, who is more alive to every thing connected with the christian faith, than I am, or more unalterably impressed with its truths.”

(8) We are well aware that the truth of christianity cannot be established by authority. But if its truth cannot be so established, neither can its falsehood. Indeed no man can be a competent judge, either of the truth or falsehood of the gospel, who has not turned his attention to it for a considerable time with all seriousness of mind, and with a considerable share of literary information. We may experience its saving power, but we are ill-qualified to defend its veracity.

were the ornaments of human nature, whether we consider the wide range of their abilities, the great extent of their learning and knowledge, or the piety, integrity, and beneficence of their lives. These eminent characters, Bacon, Newton, Locke, Boyle, Ditton, Addison, Hartley, Littleton, Woodward, Pringle, Haller, Jones, Boerhaave, Milton, Grotius, Barrington, and Euler,(9) in particular, firmly adhered to the belief of christianity, after the most diligent and strict researches into the life of its founder, the authenticity of its records, the completion of the prophecies, the sublimity of its doctrines, the purity of its precepts, and the arguments of its adversaries. Here was no priest-craft. These were all men of independent principles, and the most liberal and enlarged minds. They investigated the pretensions of the gospel to the bottom ; they were not only satisfied with the justice of its claims, but they gloried in it as a most benevolent and godlike scheme ;(30) and they all endeavoured, if not by their oral discourses, yet by their immortal

(9) It is said of this great christian philosopher, that few men of letters have written so much as he. His memory shall endure, till science herself is no more. No geometrician has ever embraced so many objects at one time, or has equalled him either in the variety or magnitude of his discoveries. He had read all the Latin classics, could repeat the whole *Æneis* of Virgil by heart ; was perfect master of ancient mathematical literature ; had the history of all ages and nations, even to the minutest facts, ever present to his mind ; was acquainted with physic, botany, and chemistry ; was possessed of every qualification that could render a man estimable. Yet this man, accomplished as he was, was filled with respect for religion. His piety was sincere, and his devotion full of fervour. He went through all his christian duties with the greatest attention. He loved all mankind, and if ever he felt a motion of indignation, it was against the enemy of religion, particularly against the declared apostles of infidelity. Against the objections of these men, he defended revelation, in a work published at Berlin in 1747.

(30) Dr. Alexander was favoured with a religious education, and brought up with a view to the church. By mixing with the world as he advanced in life, he lost his religious impressions. At this time he began to read the writings of Jebb, Lindsey,

writings, to recommend it to the general reception of mankind. It was their study in life, their solace in death.

Why then are so many of our fellow-creatures found to oppose, with such malignant virulence, what these great men have so successfully laboured to establish? The reason, in most cases, is obvious. They will not have this man to reign over them, because he is not to their taste. They oppose the bible because it condemns their practice. For if Jesus be indeed the only Saviour of mankind, and if the declarations of scripture be at all to be regarded, their situation is desperate, and they cannot escape the condemnation which is therein denounced against all such characters. Other reasons, however, may be given for such a preposterous conduct. Abundance of men are so neglected at first in their religious education, and when grown up to maturity are so immersed in the pleasures and pursuits of life, that they never give themselves leisure to examine into the foundation of religion. They are inattentive to it, as if it was none of their concern. This seems to have been the case with Halley. For when he was once throwing out some indecent reflections against christianity, Newton stopt him short, and addressed him in these words, which

and Priestley, and became a confirmed Socinian. In this state of mind he met with the writings of Helvetius and Voltaire. He read them with avidity, and it was not long before he commenced deist. In this state of mind he continued for some years, applauding his own superior discernment, and triumphing in his boasted freedom from the shackles of the gospel. Neckar's book on the Importance of Religious Opinions, however, falling accidentally into his hands, the fame of the author induced him to read it. Here his infidelity received a shock; his mind underwent another change; and he was partly brought back to religion. Some months after this again, Paley's Evidences of Christianity were recommended to him. He bought the book. He read it eagerly twice over in a little time with great care. He was convinced—and is now a zealous and happy christian.

imply that this great astronomer had employed his life in studying only the book of nature :—" Dr. Halley, I am always glad to hear you, when you speak about astronomy, or other parts of the mathematics, because that is a subject you have studied, and well understand : but you should not talk of christianity, for you have not studied it : I have ; and am certain you know nothing of the matter."

Many other persons, possessed of some discernment, observe the hypocrisy of several of the greatest pretenders to religion : they see them no better, and scarce even so good as some, who make less pretensions ; and this becomes an insuperable offence to them. If these discerning men, however, would attend more to their own conduct, and less to the misconduct of others, it would be much happier for them, and more to their honour. Can any thing be more unreasonable, than that the gospel should be made answerable for all the weaknesses, vices and follies of its advocates ? Will philosophy endure to be tried by this test ? The fact is, truth is a stubborn thing, and does not fluctuate with the varying whims and opinions of men. Every person must give an account of himself unto God. Hypocrites have no encouragement from the bible. Why should any man, therefore, make their hypocrisy an objection to that bible ? Let the blame fall where it belongs. The fate of such persons is fixed by the Judge of the world himself. Their false pretensions are utterly disclaimed by him. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many shall say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works ; but then will I profess unto them, I never knew you ; depart from me, all ye that work iniquity.