

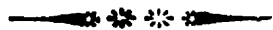
A
PLEA FOR RELIGION

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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“ With us no melancholy void,
 No period lingers unemploy'd,
 Or unimprov'd below ;
 Our weariness of life is gone,
 Who live to serve our God alone,
 And only him to know.”

No man, however, can prove the falsehood of that inestimable book. Difficulties, many and considerable, it contains. We are not disposed to conceal them. It would be very surprizing, if a book so circumstanced did not.(3) But its foundation is built upon the pillars of everlasting truth. Conscientious unbelievers should examine those difficulties with calmness and patience. The whole collective evidence of the gospel is very considerable, and requires time

careless creature ; as, a day or two before, he seemed not in the least affected with his approaching dissolution.”

Barnaby, a physician in London, was intimately acquainted with an atheist. After some time, he was seized with a violent fever, and sent for the doctor. He came, and prescribed several medicines, but none of them took effect. At length he told him plainly, “ Sir, I know nothing more that can be done ; you must die.” Upon this, he clenched his fists, gnashed his teeth, and said with the utmost fury, “ God ! God ! I won't die !” and immediately expired.

(3) “ It would be a miracle greater than any we are instructed to believe, if there were no difficulties in the sacred writings ; if a being with but five scanty inlets of knowledge, separated but yesterday from his mother earth, and to-day sinking again into her bosom, could fathom the depths of the wisdom and knowledge of the Lord God Almighty.”

All arts and sciences abound with difficulties, and a perfect knowledge of them is not to be attained without considerable labour and application ; why then should we expect that theology, the first of sciences, and that to which all others ought to be subservient, should be without its abstrusities, and capable of being understood without labour and application of the mind ? Nay, even that practical religion which is required of the humblest followers of the Redeemer, demands a high degree of attention. Agonize to enter in at the strait gate, is the command of the Son of God. And did ever any labour more in the cause of virtue than Christ and his apostles ?

and application.(4) It is expected that they attend to the consistency, harmony, and connection of all its various parts; the long chain of prophecies undeniably completed in it; the astonishing and well attested miracles that attend it; the perfect sanctity of its author; the purity of its precepts; the sublimity of its doctrines; the amazing rapidity of its progress; the illustrious company of professors, saints, and martyrs, who died to confirm its truth; the testimony of its enemies; together with an infinite number of collateral proofs, and subordinate circumstances, all concurring to form such a body of evidence, as no other truth in the world can shew; such as must necessarily bear down, by its own weight and magnitude, all trivial objections to particular parts. They should consult the best books upon the subject, and call in the assistance of learned and disinterested men, who have made theological subjects their study. They should apply to them as they would to a lawyer about an estate, or a physician about their health. And they should make the investigation a matter of the most diligent in-

(4) There are four grand arguments for the truth of the Bible, the first is the miracles which it records. 2. The prophecies. 3. The goodness of the doctrines. 4. The moral character of the penmen.—The miracles flow from Divine power; the prophecies from Divine understanding; the excellence of the doctrine from Divine goodness; and the moral character of the penmen from Divine purity.—Thus, christianity is built upon these four immoveable pillars, the power, the understanding, the goodness, and the purity of God.—I add further:—The Bible must be the invention either of good men or angels, bad men or devils, or of God.—It could not be the invention of good men or angels, for they neither would nor could make a book, and tell lies all the time they were writing it, saying, Thus saith the Lord, when it was their own invention.—It could not be the invention of bad men or devils, for they would not make a book, which commands all duty, forbids all sin, and condemns their souls to hell to all eternity.—I therefore draw this conclusion—The Bible must be given by Divine inspiration.

quiry.(5) Religion is a serious thing. It is either all or nothing. A few pert objections, started in mixed company, or in a circle of friends over the glass, are indecent and despicable.—Shameful herein is the conduct of many vain babblers. They should be excluded society. When the ancient philosopher An-

(5) Watson's Apology for Christianity, and his Apology for the Bible, are admirably calculated to remove a considerable number of difficulties attending the records of our salvation. Horne's Letters on Infidelity are wisely suited to the same purpose. But he who is able and willing to examine thoroughly the grounds of his religion, should have recourse to Butler's Analogy of Religion, a work well adapted to give satisfaction to inquiring minds, upon the most important of all subjects, religion. Grotius on the Truth of Christianity, is an excellent little work. Doddridge's Three Sermons, on the Evidences of Christianity, seem better suited to the understandings of common readers than almost any other. Lardiner's Credibility; Michaelis's Introduction to the New Testament; Jones's new and full Method for settling the canonical authority of the New Testament; and Paley's View of the Evidences of Christianity; are all works of high reputation. Beattie's Evidences of the Christian Religion, is a valuable small work. Baxter on the Truth of Christianity, is not to be answered. Edwards on the Authority, Style, and Perfection of Scripture, is very valuable. Gildon's Deist's Manual—Kidder's Demonstration of the Messiah—Stillingfleet's Origines Sacræ—Hartley on the Truth of the Christian Religion—Bryant on the Authenticity of the Scriptures—Jortin on the Truth of the Christian Religion—Delany's Revelation Examined with Candour—Paschal's Thoughts on Religion—Young's Night Thoughts, and Centaur not Fabulous—Ditton on the Resurrection—Cure of Deism—Foster's Usefulness, Truth, and Excellency of the Christian Revelation—Clark's Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation—Lally's Principles of the Christian Religion—Paley's Horæ Paulinæ—Squire's Indifference for Religion inexcusable—Locke's Reasonableness of Christianity—Murray's Evidences of the Jewish and Christian Revelations—Chandler's Plain Reasons for being a Christian—Addison on the Truth of Christianity—Watson's Two Sermons and Charge—Syke's Essay upon the Truth of the Christian Religion—Warburton's Divine Legation of Moses—Gregory Sharpe's Two Arguments in Defence of Christianity—Leslie's Short Method with Jews and Deists—Berkley's Minute Philosopher—Randolph's View of our Saviour's Ministry—Clayton's Vindication of the Histories of the Old and New Testament

axagoras had expressed in one of his books a doubt concerning the existence of God, the book was burnt by a public decree of his fellow-citizens, and he himself banished his country. These were heathens.—What would they have said to the *philosophers* of the

—Bell's Inquiry into the Divine Missions of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ—Lively Oracles, by the Author of the Whole Duty of Man—Boyle on the Style of Holy Scripture—Macknight on the Gospel-actions as probable—West on the Resurrection—Littleton on the Conversion of Paul—Le Pluche on the Truth of the Gospel—Socinus's Argument for the Authority of the Holy Scripture—Chandler's Defence of Christianity—Priestley's Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever—Priestley's Evidence of Revealed Religion—These are all works of reputation. Several of them are unanswerable, and all contain more or less matter upon the truth of the Scriptures, that is useful and important.—There is another work which I would recommend to the common reader, because it is so plain, satisfactory, and concise; Jennings's Appeal to Reason and Common Sense for the Truth of the Holy Scriptures. To these may be added, Leland's Deistical Writers—Leslie's Truth of Christianity Demonstrated—and Taylor's Moral Demonstration that the Religion of Jesus Christ is from God—Writings on these subjects of universal importance are very numerous, and it is impossible they can be too much so. It may be questioned whether any objection whatsoever has been made to the great truths of religion and the sacred writings, which has not been fairly and honestly answered in one or another of the above authors. But no writer has taken so much pains to state and answer objections to the scriptures as Stackhouse in his History of the Bible. If the serious reader find himself oppressed with difficulties, he should apply to that work, where he will find them exhibited at length, with such answers as are satisfactory.

It may be recommended to the serious reader to add Knox's Christian Philosophy, where he will find the internal evidence of christianity insisted on at length. That work, however, does not appear to me altogether unexceptionable, though highly valuable. He sets the external and internal evidence of the gospel too much in opposition one to the other. And there is an asperity and superciliousness in his expressions, which ill become the subject on which he writes. It will however do much good by calling the public attention to inward religion.

The purity of the gospel is discussed at length in Newcome's Observations on our Lord's Conduct; Hunter's Observations on the History of Jesus Christ; and Harwood's Life of Christ.

the philosophers, as well in the weight of its authority as in the extent of its utility.”

The principles of natural religion are all solid, and founded in the reason and relation of things. The gospel of Christ is equally solid and rational. It takes in, unites, and confirms every principle of nature, and adds a number of circumstances suited to the fallen condition of man. And it calls upon, it invites, it challenges, it commands us to examine its pretensions with all possible care, accuracy, and severity.

“ Wrong not the christian; think not reason yours;
 Tis reason our great Maker holds so dear;
 Tis reason's injured rights his wrath resents;
 Tis reason's voice obeyed his glories crown.—
 On argument alone our faith is built.”

If the gospel had not been agreeable to the most refined principles of human reason, we should never have found the soundest and most perfect reasoners, that ever appeared upon earth, enlist under its banner (8). That it is not universally received, is by no

(8) We may add, that the most active, useful and benevolent characters in our own enlightened day, have been the firmest believers in the writings of the Old and New Testaments. John Wesley spent his whole life, time, strength, and fortune, in spreading the knowledge of Christ and his word. John Howard was equally active in advancing the same cause, in a way as unprecedented as it was useful. He was a firm believer in the scriptures, and a very serious and conscientious christian.

Bolingbroke tells the world, that the “ resurrection of letters was a fatal period: the christian system has been attacked, and wounded too, very severely since that time. Christianity has been in decay ever since the resurrection of letters.” The late king of Prussia has the same sentiment: “ Hobbes, Collins, Shaftesbury, and Bolingbroke, in England, and their disciples, have given religion a mortal blow.”

These two men are mistaken. They confound pure evangelical religion with superstition. The latter we grant, and we glory in ~~the~~ truth, has received a mortal blow; but the former is as unshakeable as the throne of the Eternal. One of the most extraordinary philosophers of the present age, was the late David Ritzenhouse, of America. Dr. Rush, who is an able philosopher and

means to be ascribed, either to its want of due evidence, or to its being an irrational scheme; but to causes of a very different nature. "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine unto them." This view ought to alarm the fears, and rouse the attention of every man living; but especially of our unbelieving and sceptical countrymen. Rejection of the truths of religion is always in the sacred writings ascribed to a fault in the heart and will, rather than to any defect in the head. "Ye will not come unto me, that ye may have life.—If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.—The wicked shall do wickedly, and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand.—The ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them; but the transgressors shall fall therein." Say not then, that you would believe if you could. Deceive not yourselves by alledging want of evidence. Tell us no longer of the absurdities and contradictions of scripture. The evidence is ample. (9) The absurdities will vanish, the contradictions

a determined christian, observes, when speaking of his decease, that "it is no small triumph to the friends of revelation to observe, in this age of infidelity, that our religion has been admitted, and even defended, by men of the most exalted understanding, and of the strongest reasoning powers. The single testimony of David Rittenhouse in its favour, outweighs the declamations of whole nations against it."

(9) "Reasonable deists cannot but become christians, where the gospel shines." These several passages of the sacred writings account sufficiently for the infidelity of our several deistical writers. Bolingbroke, Voltaire, Gibbon, Paine, and most others, of whom I have had knowledge, seem to have been destitute of the proper state of mind for the investigation of religious truth. "From several conversations, which it has been my chance to have with unbelievers, I have learned, that ignorance of the nature of our religion, and a disinclination to study both it and

will cease, when once your minds are brought into an humble, teachable, and religious frame; when the veil is taken from your hearts, and scales have fallen from your eyes. Deny yourselves, therefore. Cease to live in sin. Mortify your lusts and passions. Part with the pride of false philosophy. Live in humility, purity, and virtue. Be good moral men, conscientious worshippers of God, upon your own principles, sober inquirers after truth, praying for divine direction, and it will not be long before you become believers in Jesus Christ. No moral man can, rationally, wish to reject the gospel; because it is all purity and goodness, and the most powerful means, with which the world was ever favoured, of making us virtuous and good.

“ In his blest life
I see the path; and in his death the price;
And in his great ascent, the proof supreme
Of immortality.”

For, whatever was the cause, it is plain in fact, that human reason, unassisted, failed mankind in its great and proper business of morality; and, therefore, he that shall be at the pains of collecting all the moral rules of the ancient philosophers, and compare them with those contained in the New Testament, will find them to come infinitely short of the morality delivered

its evidence, are to be reckoned among the chief causes of infidelity.”

Allix's Reflection upon the books of the holy scripture, contain a large number of valuable thoughts, and should be read in opposition to all the flimsy objections of the above deists. Kett's Sermons sufficiently invalidate the sophistry of Gibbon. Much satisfactory light has lately been thrown upon the Plagues of Egypt, by Bryant. The Old Testament has been defended against the attacks of Paine by David Levi, a learned Jew, with considerable ability. But of all single books, none is equal to the admirable course of Lectures by Doddridge; a work which no inquisitive christian should be without in his library.