

LETTER IV, from the Bishop of Landaff to Thomas Paine.

HAVING finished your objections to the genuineness of the books of Moses, you proceed to your remarks on the book of Joshua; and from it's internal evidence you endeavour to prove that this book was not written by Joshua. — What then? what is your conclusion? — “that it is anonymous and without authority.” — Stop a little; your conclusion is not connected with your premises; your friend Euclid would have been ashamed of it. “Anonymous, and therefore without authority!” I have noticed this solecism before; but as you frequently bring it forward, and, indeed, your book stands much in need of it, I will submit to your consideration another observation on the subject: — The book called Fleta is anonymous; but it is not on that account without authority. — Domesday book is anonymous, and was written above seven hundred years ago; yet our courts of law do not hold it to be without authority; as to the matters of fact related in it. Yes, you will say, but this book has been preserved with singular care amongst the records of the nation. And who told you that the jews had no records, or that they did not preserve them with singular care? Josephus says the contrary: and, in the Bible itself, an appeal is made to many books, which have perished; such as the book of Jasher, the book of Nathan, of Abijah, of Iddo, of Jehu, of natural history by Solomon, of the acts of Manasseh, and others which might be mentioned. If any one, having access to the journals of the lords and commons, to the books of the treasury, war-office, privy council, and other public documents, should at this day write an history of the reigns of George the first and second, and should publish it without his name, would any man, three or four hundreds or thousands of years hence, question the authority of that book, when he knew that the whole British nation had received it as an authentic book, from the time of it's first publication to the age in which he lived? This supposition is in point. The books of the Old Testament were composed from the records of the jewish nation, and they have been received as true by that nation, from the time in which they were written to the present day. Doddsley's Annual Register is an anonymous book, we only know the name of it's editor; the New Annual Register is an anonymous book; the Reviews are anonymous books; but do we, or will our posterity, esteem these books as of no authority? On the contrary, they are admitted at present, and will be received in after ages, as authoritative records of the civil, military, and literary history of England and of Europe. So little foundation is there for our being startled by your assertion, “It is anonymous and without authority.”

If I am right in this reasoning, (and I protest to you that I do not see any error in it,) all the arguments you adduce in proof that the book of Joshua was not written by Joshua, nor that of Samuel by Samuel, are nothing to the purpose for which you have brought them forward: these books may be books of authority, though all you advance against the genuineness of them should be granted. No article of faith is injured by allowing that there is no such positive

positive proof, when or by whom these, and some other books of holy scripture, were written, as to exclude all possibility of doubt and cavil. There is no necessity, indeed, to allow this. The chronological and historical difficulties, which others before you have produced, have been answered, and as to the greatest part of them, so well answered, that I will not waste the reader's time by entering into a particular examination of them.

You make yourself merry with what you call the tale of the sun standing still upon mount Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon; and you say that "the story detects itself, because there is not a nation in the world that knows any thing about it." How can you expect that there should, when there is not a nation in the world whose annals reach this æra by many hundred years? It happens, however, that you are probably mistaken as to the fact: a confused tradition concerning this miracle, and a similar one in the time of Ahaz, when the sun went back ten degrees, has been preserved amongst one of the most ancient nations, as we are informed by one of the most ancient historians. Herodotus, in his *Euterpe*, speaking of the Egyptian priests, says — "They told me that the sun had four times deviated from his course, having twice risen where he uniformly goes down, and twice gone down where he uniformly rises. This however had produced no alteration in the climate of Egypt; the fruits of the earth and the phenomena of the Nile had always been the same." (*Beloe's Transl.*) The last part of this observation confirms the conjecture, that this account of the Egyptian priests had a reference to the two miracles respecting the sun mentioned in scripture; for they were not of that kind, which could introduce any change in climates or seasons. You would have been contented to admit the account of this miracle as a fine piece of poetical imagery; — you may have seen some jewish doctors, and some christian commentators, who consider it as such; but improperly, in my opinion. I think it idle, at least, if not impious, to undertake to explain how the miracle was performed; but one who is not able to explain the mode of doing a thing, argues ill if he thence infers that the thing was not done. We are perfectly ignorant how the sun was formed, how the planets were projected at the creation, how they are still retained in their orbits by the power of gravity; but we admit, notwithstanding, that the sun was formed, that the planets were then projected, and that they are still retained in their orbits. The machine of the universe is in the hand of God; he can stop the motion of any part, or of the whole of it, with less trouble and less danger of injuring it, than you can stop your watch. In testimony of the reality of the miracle, the author of the book says — "Is not this written in the book of Jasher?" — No author in his senses would have appealed, in proof of his veracity, to a book which did not exist, or in attestation of a fact which, though it did exist, was not recorded in it; we may safely therefore conclude, that, at the time the book of Joshua was written, there was such a book as the book of Jasher, and that the miracle of the sun's standing still was recorded in that book. But this observation, you

you will say, does not prove the fact of the sun's having stood still; I have not produced it as a proof of that fact; but it proves that the author of the book of Joshua believed the fact, and that the people of Israel admitted the authority of the book of Jasher. An appeal to a fabulous book would have been as senseless an insult upon their understanding, as it would have been upon our's, had Rapin appealed to the Arabian Nights' Entertainment, as a proof of the battle of Hastings.

I cannot attribute much weight to your argument against the genuineness of the book of Joshua, from it's being said that — "Joshua burned Ai, and made it an heap for ever, even a desolation unto *this day*." Joshua lived twenty-four years after the burning of Ai: and if he wrote his history in the latter part of his life, what absurdity is there in saying, Ai is still in ruins, or Ai is in ruins to this very day? A young man, who had seen the heads of the rebels, in forty-five, when they were first stuck upon poles at Temple-Bar, might, twenty years afterwards, in attestation of his veracity in speaking of the fact, have justly said — And they are there to this very day. Whoever wrote the gospel of St. Matthew, it was written not many centuries, probably (I had almost said certainly) not a quarter of one century after the death of Jesus; yet the author, speaking of the potter's field which had been purchased by the chief priests with the money they had given Judas to betray his master, says, that it was therefore called the field of blood *unto this day*; and in another place he says, that the story of the body of Jesus being stolen out of the sepulchre was commonly reported among the jews *until this day*. Moses, in his old age, had made use of a similar expression, when he put the Israelites in mind of what the Lord had done to the Egyptians in the Red Sea, "The Lord hath destroyed them unto this day." (Deut. xi. 4.)

In the last chapter of the book of Joshua it is related, that Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel to Shechem; and there, in the presence of the elders and principal men of Israel, he recapitulated, in a short speech, all that God had done for their nation, from the calling of Abraham to that time, when they were settled in the land which God had promised to their forefathers. In finishing his speech, he said to them — "Choose you this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served, that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the LORD, to serve other gods." Joshua urged farther, that God would not suffer them to worship other gods in fellowship with him; they answered, "that they would serve the Lord." Joshua then said to them, "Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the Lord to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses." Here was a solemn covenant between Joshua, on the part of the Lord, and all the men of Israel, on their own part. — The text then says — "So Joshua made a cove-

nant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem, and *Joshua wrote these words in the book of the Law of God.*" Here is a proof of two things--- first, that there was then, a few years after the death of Moses, existing a book called The Book of the Law of God; the same, without doubt, which Moses had written, and committed to the custody of the Levites, that it might be kept in the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that it might be a witness against them --- secondly, that *Joshua wrote* a part at least of his own transactions in that very book, as an addition to it. It is not a proof that he wrote all his own transactions in any book; but I submit entirely to the judgment of every candid man, whether this proof of his having recorded a very material transaction, does not make it probable that he recorded other material transactions; that he wrote the chief part of the book of Joshua; and that such things as happened after his death, have been inserted in it by others, in order to render the history more compleat,

The book of Joshua, ch. vi. 26, is quoted in the first book of Kings, ch. xvi. 44. "In his (Ahab's) days did Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho: he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his first-born, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun." Here is a proof that the book of Joshua is older than the first book of Kings: but that is not all which may reasonably be inferred, I do not say proved, from this quotation. --- It may be inferred from the phrase --- "according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun" --- that Joshua *wrote down* the word which the Lord had spoken. In Baruch (which, though an apocryphal book, is authority for this purpose) there is a similar phrase --- "as thou spakest by thy servant Moses in the day when thou didst command him to *write thy law.*"

I think it unnecessary to make any observation on what you say relative to the book of Judges; but I cannot pass unnoticed your censure of the book of Ruth, which you call --- "an idle bungling story, foolishly told, no body knows by whom, about a strolling country girl creeping sily to bed to her cousin Boaz; pretty stuff, indeed," you exclaim, "to be called the Word of God!" --- It seems to me that you do not perfectly comprehend what is meant by the expression --- the Word of God --- or the divine authority of the scriptures: --- I will explain it to you in the words of Dr. Law, late bishop of Carlisle, and in those of St. Austin. My first quotation is from bishop Law's Theory of Religion, a book not undeserving your notice. --- "The true sense then of the *divine authority* of the books of the Old Testament, and which perhaps is enough to denominate them in general *divinely inspired*, seems to be this; that as in those times God has all along, beside the inspection, or superintendency of his general providence, interfered upon particular occasions, by giving express commissions to some persons (thence called *prophets*) to declare his will in various manners, and degrees of evidence, as best suited the occasion, time, and nature of the subject; and in all other cases, left them wholly

to themselves : in like manner, he has interposed his more immediate assistance, (and notified it to them, as they did to the world,) in the *recording* of these revelations ; so far as that was necessary, amidst the common (but from hence termed *sacred*) history of those times ; and mixed with various other occurrences ; in which the historian's own natural qualifications were sufficient to enable him to relate things, with all the accuracy they required." --- The passage from St. Austin is this --- "I am of opinion, that those men, to whom the Holy Ghost revealed what ought to be received as authoritative in religion, might write some things as men with historical diligence, and other things as prophets by divine inspiration ; and that these things are so distinct, that the former may be attributed to themselves as contributing to the increase of knowledge, and the latter to God speaking by them things appertaining to the authority of religion." --- Whether this opinion be right or wrong, I do not here inquire ; it is the opinion of many learned men and good christians : and, if you will adopt it as your opinion, you will see cause, perhaps, to become a christian yourself ; you will see cause to consider chronological, geographical, or genealogical errors --- apparent mistakes or real contradictions as to historical facts --- needless repetitions and trifling interpolations --- indeed you will see cause to consider all the principal objections of your book to be absolutely without foundation. Receive but the Bible as composed by upright and well informed, though, in some points, fallible men, (for I exclude all fallibility when they profess to deliver the Word of God,) and you must receive it as a book revealing to you, in many parts, the express will of God ; and in other parts, relating to you the ordinary history of the times. Give but the authors of the Bible that credit which you give to other historians ; believe them to deliver the Word of God, when they tell you that they do so ; believe, when they relate other things as of themselves and not of the Lord, that they wrote to the best of their knowledge and capacity ; and you will be in your belief something very different from a deist : you may not be allowed to aspire to the character of an orthodox believer, but you will not be an unbeliever in the divine authority of the Bible ; though you should admit human mistakes and human opinions to exist in some parts of it. This I take to be the first step towards the removal of the doubts of many sceptical men ; and when they are advanced thus far, the grace of God, assisting a teachable disposition, and a pious intention, may carry them on to perfection.

As to Ruth, you do an injury to her character. She was not a strolling country girl. She had been married ten years ; and being left a widow without children, she accompanied her mother-in-law, returning into her native country, out of which with her husband and her two sons she had been driven by a famine. The disturbances in France have driven many men from their families to America : if, ten years hence, a woman having lost her husband and her children, should return to France with a daughter-in-law, would you be justified in calling the daughter-in-law a strolling country girl ?

girl? --- But she “crept slyly to bed to her cousin Boaz.” — I do not find it so in the history — as a person imploring protection, she laid herself down at the foot of an aged kinsman’s bed, and she rose up with as much innocence as she had laid herself down. She was afterwards married to Boaz, and reputed by all her neighbours a virtuous woman; and they were more likely to know her character than you are. Whoever reads the book of Ruth, bearing in mind the simplicity of ancient manners, will find it an interesting story of a poor young woman, following in a strange land the advice, and affectionately attaching herself to the fortunes of the mother of her deceased husband.

[*To be continued.*]

Interesting LETTERS of the amiable and celebrated PHILIP MELANCTHON. To which are prefixed, The Life of that Reformer, comprising some account of the Work of the Reformation: together with a view of the General Apostacy of the Christian World, with the opposition occasionally made to the Reign of Antichrist, previous to the Reformation.

To the EDITOR of the ARMINIAN MAGAZINE.

Dear Sir,

IT is really matter of surprize, that the admirable letters of that great and good man, PHILIP MELANCTHON, should be so little known in the Christian World, notwithstanding that for their intrinsic excellence they may perhaps be ranked with any of those of the most illustrious Writers of either ancient or modern times.

It will doubtless be no small recommendation to many readers, to find that they were written during that great revival of religion, which is generally termed the Reformation, by a man, not only eminently wise and useful, but one who was much accustomed to the cross: — a man afflicted with many sorrows, exposed to great dangers, engaged in various labours, and perplexed with many embarrassments, in consequence of his peculiar situation in the church militant.

Melancthon was certainly a man, who with uncommon talents and great attainments, possessed much poverty of spirit, and deadness to the world; much christian charity and true benevolence: and who was distinguished by such meekness of spirit and amiableness of deportment, as has made his memory precious to the church of Christ, and his example worthy of the general imitation of the servants of our Lord.

As his connections were very numerous, and his correspondence extensive, so his letters were written on a variety of occasions, under different circumstances, and addressed to persons of all denominations.